

## NEWS OF THE WEIRD

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### Great moments in capital punishment

Prosecutors in Portland, Ore., took the death penalty off the table for Tremayne Durham in July, accepting a minimum-30-year prison term for an "aggravated murder" over a business deal. Durham agreed to plead guilty when prosecutors relented to his additional demand of two pig-out meals (featuring KFC, Popeye's

and Haagen Dazs right away, and pizza and lasagna on the day the judge accepts the plea). Prosecutors said they hated appearing to cater to the whims of a murderer, but eyeing the expense of a long trial and lengthy appeals, as well as the turmoil for the victim's family, they agreed. In August, the judge accepted the deal. ■

### Can't possibly be true

► Though it has been on national cable TV since mid-July, ratings have not been spectacular for the G4 channel's show, "Hurl!" leaving many Americans unaware of precisely how far standards of taste have fallen. "Hurl!" contestants are forced to gorge themselves, then are purposely, rapidly, twirled and shaken on carnival-type rides, with the last player to retain his stomach contents declared the winner. Wrote a Washington Post reviewer, it's "for people who found 'Fear Factor' much too nuanced."

► A Dallas entrepreneur recently created a programmable device for those busy, busy parents who actually need to be reminded that they brought their tots with them in the car (lest their child become one of the several hot-car deaths a year in America). Provided that they're not too busy to set the system up, an alarm alerts them if they exit the car without the baby. Said one Texas woman interviewed by NBC News, "As a mom, you can get really distracted." ■

### Inexplicable

► A rule for federal lawsuits (Rule 8a) requires the initial pleading that commences the case to be "short and plain," and another (9b) requires it to be to the point, with several pages usually plenty to give the other party notice of what he's being sued for. In June, federal judge Ronald Leighton summarily tossed out the initial pleading of Washington state attorney Dean Browning Webb, whose client is suing GMAC Mortgage, because Webb had submitted 465 pages, with meticulous detail, including 37 pages quoting e-mails, and 341 pages asserting claims that freely repeated each other on points they had in common.

► Rocky Twyman of Washington, D.C., started Pray at the Pump, a brief, scattered national campaign in June to urge prayer to bring down gas prices. A colleague in St. Louis claimed his prayer sessions caused the price drop in July, pointing to his use of the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" (and his new verse, "We'll have lower gas prices").

► In July, Salinas, Calif., Mayor Dennis Donohue, frustrated at this year's dramatic surge in gang violence, kicked off a campaign to urge a citywide fast, which he said was a proven technique in achieving social justice. ■

### Unclear on the concept

► In a July ceremony, Minneapolis Police Chief Tim Dolan honored SWAT officers for their bravery and professionalism during a December middle-of-the-night raid of a house that supposedly contained a gang's guns. However, it was the wrong house, and the bewildered, frightened resident started shooting back. Said Dolan, "The easy decision would have been to retreat (but the team did not take the easy way out.) The house got riddled with bullets, but no one was hit, and the chief later apologized but still felt that it was "a perfect example of a situation that could have gone horribly

wrong, but did not because of the (team's) professionalism."

► Victor Rodriguez, 21, about to be arrested on a domestic assault charge in Bridgeport, Conn., in June, turned to his 9-foot-long pet python and, as police approached, shouted to the snake, "Get them!" (It remained motionless.)

► In July, Josef Fritzl, the man who imprisoned his daughter and her children for 24 years in a dungeon in their home in Amstetten, Austria, told his own jail's officials that he needs daily exercise outside because he hates being cooped up in his cell. ■

### Oh, yeah, tough guys

► Lamont Cooke was arrested by a SWAT team in Vernon, Conn., in July after spending the last year on the run from Philadelphia and Maryland authorities, who wanted him for charges of kidnapping and murder. According to the arresting U.S.

marshal, Cooke surrendered quietly, except that he wet his pants.

► A police task force in Orem, Utah, arrested a 21-year-old gang member in June, catching him riding a tricycle that he had just stolen from a little girl. ■

### Least competent criminals

The man (dressed as a woman) got away after an attempted robbery at Joe's Cafe, in Metairie, La., in July, but he lost money in the deal. As a ruse to get a clerk to open the cash register, he handed over a \$5 bill to pay for two doughnuts, and,

with the register then open for change, pulled a gun and demanded the contents. The clerk immediately became hysterical, screaming, and the robber, frightened, fled the restaurant without his \$5 or his doughnuts. ■

### Update

Stripper Susan Sykes, 47, known as "Busty Heart," was rejected in July as a contestant for the NBC show "America's Got Talent," as the judges were unappreciative of her ability to crush empty beer cans with her enormous breasts. As News of the Weird

reported, Sykes was sued in 1997 by an Illinois strip-club patron who claimed a serious neck injury after Sykes, in a little audience-participation, playfully trapped his head between her breasts while she danced. Eventually, the lawsuit was dropped. ■

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