

Beach Reflections

Essays

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In the local newspaper for Harrisonburg, VA, I've noticed that at least once a month, their editorial staff members run a column called "Random Thoughts". This column consists of several items which are not long enough to write an entire article about, combining them into one larger article. I ran into several such items while at the beach, so I wrote a "Random Thoughts" article of my own.

One such item is an interesting fashion trend I witnessed at the oceanfront: lifeguard gear. If I had a dollar for every lifeguard swimsuit and boogie-board used by a non-lifeguard, I would have come home in a new BMW. Now, I have nothing against fashion or trendy clothing, but this fashion statement seems a tad dangerous. Imagine swimming in the ocean, and something happens, like jellyfish, sharks, nuclear war, whatever. You see someone wearing a lifeguard swimsuit and holding an orange board with a white cross on it, so you instinctively grab the board. The person branded as a lifeguard then freaks out and starts banging you on the head with the board, calling you a thief! Perhaps that example is a bit far-fetched, but my point is that unless you can sufficiently save someone's life, don't dress like you can. Let's leave the lifeguard gear for real lifeguards and let them do their job.

Along the fashion lines, I also noticed T-shirts for sale in every window with advertisements for West Coast Choppers (WCC), a high-priced custom motorcycle company in Long Beach, California. Now, people buy Harley-Davidson gear all the time, but those people can almost always ride a motorcycle, and they usually own a Harley or ride one frequently. This can be attributed to the fact that real H-D clothing can only be purchased from a real H-D gear store or dealership. However, WCC shirts can be bought anywhere, and most people wearing them can't afford a WCC bike, don't even know what a chopper is, can't ride a motorcycle, and probably will never touch a bike in their lives. Is it just me, or does it seem pointless to get a biker's shirt if you're not a biker?

As I was walking down Atlantic Avenue, I saw at least 50 "beach supply/souvenir" shops in a 10-block distance. All of these stores carry the exact same merchandise, and there are usually five stores of the same name somewhere on the oceanfront (Sunsations particularly, they have a store at least every two blocks across the entire oceanfront area). I can see having one of these stores every two or three blocks, but the multitude of cloned stores I saw is just ridiculous. A monopoly is bad for business, but isn't a gross excess of competition also bad for business? You'd have to keep someone on payroll whose sole job is to keep tabs on the prices of your competitors! It's like gas station price-wars, the consumers get great prices, but the profits suffer.

Another victim of cost-cutting is the cleanliness of public restrooms on the oceanfront. It appears that the janitors who used to clean these have evaporated, replaced by overpowering air fresheners. Standing 20 feet from the door, I could clearly smell the fragrance of chemically-generated flowers. When I walked inside, the floral smell nearly knocked me unconscious. After my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I saw the most horrific bathroom floor I've ever seen. It looked like the toilet drains discharged into the floor drains. Over the course of three days, I kept checking the bathrooms, and THEY DIDN'T CHANGE! The bathrooms looked the same every time I glanced in them. Apparently the manager who oversees them decided that fumigation was an acceptable alternative to actually cleaning them.

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