

Aged Wine or Whine?

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Getting old is no fun. Aside from the constant reminders I get while playing softball or basketball, now I'm even starting to feel old at work.

A few weeks ago, I needed someone to witness a will signing with me. One of our younger employees was enjoying a lollipop, so I said, "Hey Kojak, can you give me a hand?" She stared at me with a completely puzzled look on her face – clearly she had never heard of the 1970s lollipop-loving detective, nor Aristotelis "Telly" Savalas, the actor who portrayed him. Thankfully she had heard of his famous goddaughter, Jennifer Aniston.

What's more depressing is when the very pillars of your elementary education are simply thrown out the window. First, the International Astronomical Union decided at their XXVIth General Assembly held in 2006 that Pluto is no longer a planet. Discovered in 1930 by Clyde W. Tombaugh and named after the Roman god of the underworld (not Mickey Mouse's dog, contrary to popular belief), Pluto became the 9th planet in our solar system and was believed to be the largest object orbiting the sun beyond Neptune.

As technology advanced, astronomers discovered that Pluto is only one of about 70,000 icy objects in roughly the same orbit around the sun, now known as the Kuiper Belt. Then, in 2005, Mike Brown discovered Eris, an object larger and further away from the sun than Pluto. Accordingly, the IAU yanked Pluto's planet status and deemed it a "dwarf planet." They also established three criteria for a planet – an object must: (1) orbit the sun; (2) have enough gravity to pull itself into a sphere; and (3) "clear its neighborhood," meaning it must either consume or repel objects in its orbit, which Pluto did not do.

Now, the British government has revoked the spelling mantra that generations of schoolchildren have learned: "i before e, except after c." Citing too many exceptions to the rule, teachers have been advised not to use it when instructing their students. The teachers learned of this after thousands of primary schools in the U.K. received the "Support For Spelling" document, which says the rule "is not worth teaching" because it doesn't account for words like 'sufficient,' 'veil' and 'their.'

It's unsettling that the textbooks of my youth are not just out of date, but entire chunks have to be torn out.

One of the benefits of getting older, however, is being able to complain about younger generations. I enjoy grumbling about how these whippersnappers today all need haircuts, they need to pull their pants up and they need to shave. That's why I love the new law passed by the City Council of Brooksville, Florida.

The burg just north of Tampa implemented a new dress code that requires city employees to observe "strict personal hygiene." The dress code makes it mandatory for city workers to wear underwear, however, the underwear cannot be exposed. Clothing cannot be "sexually provocative" or contain foul language. Finally, employees cannot have piercings anywhere except their ears and they must use deodorant. Repeat offenders of the new rules can be fired.

How a group of astronomers can unilaterally agree to declare Pluto no longer a planet and how the Queen can repeal a grade school grammar rule is beyond me. Therefore, I have decided to do away with the periodic table and I will now only recognize the element of surprise.