

Ross' Rave: Not so Baaa-d

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“The library has 1.3 million volumes.”

“Wow!”

“If you laid them end to end they would stretch from here to LA.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of books.”

“We have books on nearly every topic you can imagine.”

“Do you have books written in Klingon?”

I move on.

“What’s that?” a sweaty prepubescent asks me as we swarm around a 19th century, hand-operated printing press.

“It’s a Panini machine. You know, for making sandwiches. Like a Foreman grill.”

“Really? They had those back then?”

“Yep.”

You can tell these kids anything. Actually, I don’t really know much about this printing press. It appeared mysteriously after a long exile when we moved into our new building. It’s black and heavy and strategically disassembled to render it safe to prying little fingers.

“Shaun, I need to know more about that printing press.” Shaun works 10 hours a week at the reference desk. He’s a freshman and, were he a cartoon, he’d be an adorable, fuzzy, blonde lamb.

“What printing press?”

“Ah... that one,” I said, pointing to the large cast iron machine 100 feet away.

“Oh, I wondered what that was.”

“It’s a printing press.”

“For reals?”

“Really.”

“There’s probably a property ID number on there somewhere,” I said. “I’m thinking if I had the number, I might

be able to track down some information on it from the facilities office.”

He blinked and grinned at me.

“So, I need you to find the ID tag and write down the number.”

Grin.

“Now!”

“Oh, ok. Where’s the tag at?”

“You mean, ‘Where’s the tag?’”

“Yeah.”

“I’m not sure. That’s what you are going to find.”

“How am I going to find it?”

“Look for it!”

He grinned and pranced off.

Five minutes later, Shaun’s back

“I can’t find it,” he beamed sheepishly.

“I know it’s there, Shaun. I saw it.”

Blink.

“I looked all over. Really. It’s not there.”

“Ok. We’ll both go and look, but I’m warning you, you’ll be embarrassed when I find it.”

I swear I heard the tinkle of a small bell as he trotted along behind me.

“See. I told you,” he said after a half-minute of looking.

“Go back to the reference desk and get one of the emergency flashlights. Maybe we can see it in better light.”

As he bounced away I ran my hand along the hard black metal surfaces. Whose calloused hands pulled these handles? What words emerged from this platen? How many lives were changed from the ideas printed on this very press? Where was that kid!

“I couldn’t find the flashlight, so I downloaded a flashlight app to my phone.” He was very pleased with himself.

“Did you look in the drawer that is labeled, ‘flashlights’?”

“No, but how cool is this!” pointing his iPhone toward the printing press.

“Never mind,” I said. “I found the tag. Write down this number.”

“You want me to go get some paper?” he asked.

“Please.”

I’d just finished reading *The Dumbest Generation*, Mark Bauerlein’s book about digital natives, or twixters, or tweens, or whatever these forever adolescents are called. It was very enlightening.

Did you know that:

- Over 60% of the 40,000 freshmen admitted to the California State University required remedial work in English or math.
- The Census Bureau’s, American Time Use Surveys reports that people between 15-24 years old spend about 8 minutes a day reading for leisure. This includes cereal boxes.
- According to the National Commission on Writing, American corporations spend nearly \$3.1 billion on in-house literacy programs every year.
- Of sites geared to teenagers, 90% were social networking sites.

- The ETS reports that about half the students taking the Information and Communication Technology Literacy test were unable to judge the objectivity of a web site.
- Over 65,000 U.S. students bid for entry into the Intel Science and Engineering Fair. Over 6,000,000 Chinese students did.
- Those with lower literacy skills (about 30% of the population) will skip pages that require reading (as opposed to scanning) or that appear too complicated.
- One out of every three freshmen entering college directly after high school will drop out after the first year.
- You shouldn’t trust anyone under 30.

Bauerlien, who is very good at spotting elephants in the room, argues that despite the alleged techno savvy-ness of our students, electronic wizardry has done little more than perpetuate a self-absorbed, socially retarded, entitled youth culture which is getting dumber by the minute. Ouch.

Shaun trots back several minutes later.

“I couldn’t find a pencil. Hey! Let me take a picture of the tag and I’ll email it to you.”

“That’s ok. I can remember the number.”

“So, it’s not really a sandwich machine? How does it work?”

“I’ve got a book about printing presses in my office. Would you like to borrow it?”

“Yeah. I need something to read on my break.” And off he bounced.

He’ll be ok.