

# Loud media distortions may sometimes be followed by a whimper of truth

Ronald L. Caravan



If we are willing to read a little between the lines of the content delivered by today's mainstream news media, we easily observe two prime factors determining the information delivered to us prime time. In today's fragmented, competitive media marketplace, news organizations are principally obsessed with capturing our attention. They are also evidently obsessed with their well-documented liberal bias (quite contrary to the typical neutrality self-portraits).

It is not uncommon for these media motivators to converge, resulting in the next sensational story informing us about the latest conservative "outrage." It is equally common that long after the shouting has faded, distortion is confirmed and a little bit of truth quietly comes out.

This is precisely the cycle that unfolded with respect to the "news" story widely reported in February concerning well-known evangelist Jerry Falwell's warning to parents that Tinky Winky, one of the Teletubbies seen on public television, reflects pro-homosexual elements. The children's program is produced in England and is shown in this country on PBS stations.

A "parents alert" in Rev. Falwell's Na-

tional *Liberty Journal* reported that Tinky Winky "has become a favorite character among gay groups worldwide." Elements of the character considered to reflect this orientation include his purple color (a gay-pride color), that he carries a purse (viewed as effeminate), and the antenna over his head shaped like a triangle (a gay-pride symbol). The *Liberty Journal* item said these symbols "are no doubt intentional and parents are warned to be alert to these elements."

It was not only reported that the Tinky Winky analysis was a product of Rev. Falwell's invention, he was also subject to considerable ridicule (in the television news-reader's tone and facial expression if not the words) as well as editorial criticism (*U.S.A. Today* and others). Responding to the media attention, the evangelist insisted that speculation about pro-gay symbolism among the Teletubbies did not originate with his publication but that he was merely "passing on what the national media had already established."

As those who care about integrity could have predicted, Rev. Falwell told it straight and the national media uproar turned out to be entirely out of perspective. This was summarized in an item published in the May, 1999 edition of *Brill's Content*, a magazine devoted to reporting on accuracy in the media (and a magazine that would hardly be accused of reflecting political conservatism). The short piece in *Brill's* was titled, "Tinky Winky Trouble - Falwell was unfairly slammed for 'outing' the character."

"At least a dozen media outlets had dubbed the character 'gay' months before the *National Liberty Journal* even mentioned the critter," Brill's editor Bridget Samburg reported. "On July 20, *Time* magazine reported on transsexual behavior moving into the mainstream: 'Even Teletubbies... features Tinky Winky, a boy who carries a red patent-leather purse.' On December 28, *People* magazine noted that 'gay men have made the purse-toting Tinky Winky a camp icon.' And in January, a month before the *NLI's* article was printed, *The Washington Post* pronounced Ellen DeGeneres and her girlfriend Ann Heche 'Out' and Tinky Winky 'In' as the new gay icon."

More often than not, such media distortions involve subjects of much more importance than a cartoon character. One of the most serious and spectacular examples was the alleged "October Surprise" conspiracy that tarnished the 1980 presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan. The story went that Reagan's campaign staff had secretly conspired with Iran to delay the release of 52 American hostages until after the election in exchange for future weapons sales, a deal that supposedly insured that President Jimmy Carter would gain no political edge from a hostage release just before election day.

Reports surrounding the alleged conspiracy were printed and broadcast for weeks. A congressional investigation was launched simply on the basis of the unsubstantiated accusations (arguably an inves-

tigation motivated by media hysteria). Eventually, the entire conspiracy theory collapsed under the weight of its own lack of truth. (Oswald LeWinter, a primary source of the allegations, later admitted to House investigators that he actually made everything up.)

The mainstream media, obsessed with this "story," was eventually criticized appropriately, but not in the mainstream. The March 1993 issue of the *American Journalism Review*, over five years after Reagan had left office, declared in a big red cover headline, "Reagan Won on His Own!... How the press bought the October Surprise that wasn't."

The *AJR's* eight-page exposé, authored by Steven Emerson, outlined in detail "how the press didn't let the facts get in the way of a good story." Among other things, Mr. Emerson reported that "the evidence shows that many journalists were not merely duped by bad sources - an occupational hazard for any reporter - but that some reporters, editorial writers and news organizations ignored contradictory evidence, relied on sources without any corroboration and, in some cases, did not report available evidence that showed their sources were lying."

Apparently the truth, as it is said, will eventually come out. When it is about the mainstream news media, however, it predictably sneaks out with very little mainstream attention, and so long after the fact that little can be done about damage caused by distortion.

## Life Goes On

### Deja dreaming

Fred Wilbur



The old recurring witch dream of my childhood showed up again. It's been decades and I missed the old girl.

The remake was a different setting but I felt the witch's power while moving toward a dark corner in a some unfamiliar building. I used to fear her power would draw me in to my doom as I stood in rubbery powerlessness before I awakened. But this time I thought I'd take her on.

I've never seen her clearly or with the same appearance. Sometimes she was an old blanket or a chair, and during her last visit she was a coat rack. I told myself in my dream I was no longer a child but a wizard myself, a powerful spell caster on my own, so I moved into her power zone to show her who was boss.

Uh, oh! The old bat was still strong. I stopped my advance and left the shadowy building. I awoke a little ashamed of going for a tie, but I'm gaining wizard-power rune by rune and I want a rematch.

Sigmund Freud wrote his famous dream analysis, I think, after becoming a British citizen in 1938. After years in Vienna he left Austria in advance of Nazi domination. His dream studies strongly influenced psychology and, with limited practitioner, still does today.

I thought his dream analysis was like a political inquest where shallow faults are condemned by deep corrections of moral certitude to justify a conclusion. We used to call that "making mountains out of mole-hills."

I think a dream is just a dream and those of either lunatics or Puritans are of no greater or lesser significance than anybody's. Curiosity compelled me to do some research. Several recurring dream

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accounts from local contributors follow:

A girl dreams she is in her bed sleeping and is awakened by familiar noises. She senses it is the familiar monster man in the hallway between her parents' bedroom and hers. The ceiling of her bedroom elevates to infinity to accept the monster's prodigious height.

She peers into the hallway and is seen by the monster. The hallway has expanded, too. Atop the monster's head is a crate-like wooden rack filled with stones that the monster throws at her each time she looks into the hallway. She runs back to bed as the monster breaks into her room throwing more stones, and she awakens.

A girls' parents are having a large party. There is a scream and an intruder appears among the guests. He is dressed in white chef's attire carrying a kitchen knife and a boiling teapot, which is whistling. The girl runs outside followed by the plodding intruder carrying his utensils, the pot still whistling. The girl exults in her speed and elusiveness, doing figure eight's around the sluggish threatening figure who is trying to scald her.

In her dream she says to herself this is a "piece of cake." Suddenly she notices her legs are fatiguing and she is barely eluding her pursuer, at which point she attempts to hide beneath her mother's lilac bush next to the house. She hears her pursuer approaching and muttering, "I can hear you breathing." She awakens.

A man is walking up a hill on the main street of a small local village. He is going to a private home where a lady registers automobiles for a hobby. The home is lavish with solid maple walls inside and out, and has a huge fireplace and indoor pool. Several people are milling around, presumably customers or family.

The registration lady won't accept a fee but the man gives her a check anyway for her service. Suddenly he notices that except for his underwear he has lost his clothing. He remembers mysteriously he lost his clothes walking up the hill. Although no one appears to notice him he feverishly searches everywhere for clothing but even the clotheslines in backyards have only bed sheets. He awakens.

I don't know if Freud concluded about recurring dreams, but the responses this article's intensive research provoked was that almost all dreams are disasters. Yet Hamlet in his soliloquy says, "To sleep, perchance to dream," as if "perchance" means something to look forward to. But Hamlet

was a melancholic to whom even disaster was a reward.

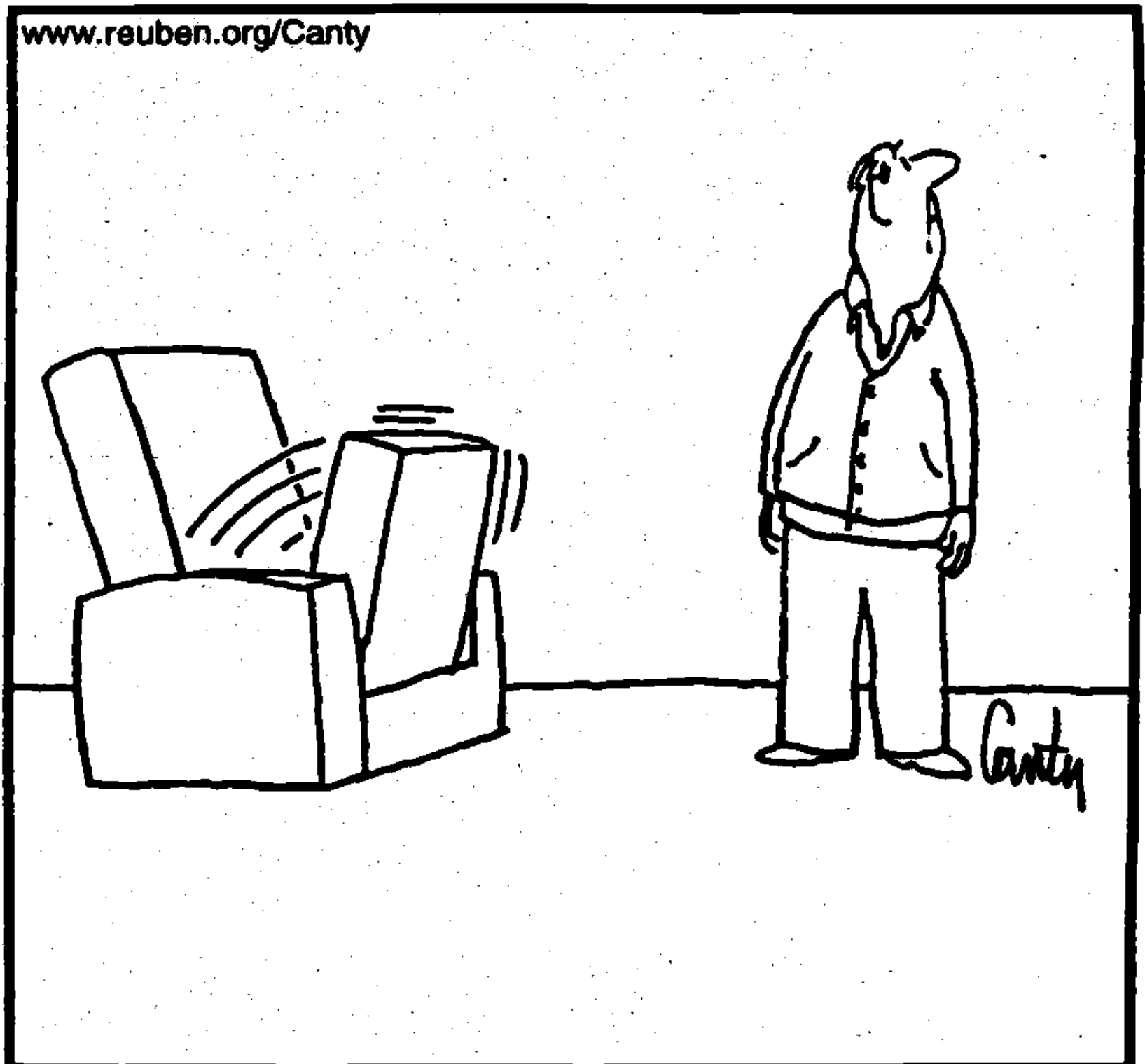
As dreams unfold, you know as well as I if you're in the middle of the fairway on a beautiful day and take your eyes off the ball, it will shift to a countertop in a diner where you have to move the salt and pepper and stand on a stool to hit the ball through the back door.

There is unanimous agreement that the worst curse the cuckoo mind can pull is the trap door. It springs to foreclosure on any fancied liaison. You and Raquel Welch are ascending a ladder to your private tree house, (substitute Paul Newman if you wish for the other gender). Alone in the tree house just as it appears this adventure may go into high gear, a lumber truck rumbles up to the tree and two dozen guys get out and start their chainsaws.

To those who say life is hell, I say life is the conscious promise of heaven. Dreams are hell.

## ALL ABOUT TOWN

[www.reuben.org/Canty](http://www.reuben.org/Canty)



### Town of Granby offices begin summer hours

Town of Granby offices will begin summer hours starting the week of June 1. All offices will be closed on Fridays during June, July, and August.

- The deputy supervisor's office will be open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

- The town clerk's office will be open Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 8

a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Tuesdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.

- The court clerk's office will be open from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

- The assessors and code enforcement office will be open from 9 a.m. to noon, Monday through Thursday.

