

Lead Story

New York Newsday reported in April that a forty-six-year-old Worcester, Mass., man inexplicably began speaking with a French accent immediately after he was involved in an automobile accident last year. Dr. Majis Moonis told the annual meeting of the American Academy of Neurology that about two dozen cases of "foreign accent syndrome" have been reported in this century, caused by a change in the brain circuit involved with motor control that affects the vocal cords.

The Litigious Society

In March, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Denver dismissed a civil lawsuit by Merrill Chamberlain, who is serving a life sentence for the murder of an Albuquerque, N.M., police officer. Chamberlain had sued the Albuquerque Police Department and the city, claiming that he wouldn't have been guilty of murder if the officer had not allowed him surreptitiously to gain access to his handgun or if the officer had been wearing a bullet-proof vest.

In April, Scott Abrams, twenty-seven, filed a \$2 million lawsuit against the owners and managers of an apartment building for injuries he suffered in 1991 when he was hit by lightning while sitting on the roof of the building during an electrical storm. He said the defendants were negligent in maintaining the rooftop and should have provided signs and brighter paint, among other things. When hit, Abrams was sitting on a ledge on the roof with his feet in a water puddle; rescue workers revived him from cardiac arrest.

In August, Anna Lilienthal, sixty-three, filed a lawsuit against the city of Simi Valley, Calif., for injuries suffered at the city's Fourth of July celebration when a skydiver missed his target and landed on top of her.

In March, the Wyoming Supreme Court on a technicality revived Richard Osborn's lawsuit, sending back for trial his claim that a Casper video store defrauded him. Osborn said he bought the X-rated Belle of the Ball based on a photo on the package featuring actress Busty Belle, but later discovered that Belle was on screen for only eight or nine of the film's sixty-plus minutes. Osborn seeks a refund of the \$29.95 purchase price plus \$55.79 in reimbursement for medicine because he said the stress of not seeing more of Ms. Belle caused an asthma attack -- plus \$50,000 for "pain and suffering."

In February, a federal judge in Washington, D.C., dismissed a lawsuit filed by a sex offender serving time in D.C.'s Lorton Reformatory. Michael A. Johnson had filed the lawsuit for \$12,500 because the prison store had charged him \$6 for a \$5.80 book of twenty twenty- nine-cent stamps.

In February, Kenneth Bruckner of Gering, Neb., filed a lawsuit against the Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Center in Denver, claiming that the cleanser used to disinfect the toilet seat he was using was highly toxic and had caused him permanent burns, neurologic injuries, and urologic and sexual dysfunction. Said Bruckner's attorney,

"What's the world coming to if it's not safe to sit on the toilet and read the paper!"

The Weirdo American Community

The New Yorker magazine reported in April that artist Nancy Rubins's work, appearing at the Kasmin gallery on Grand Street, consisted of a room "nearly filled" with "old mattresses dotted with mounds of partially mashed Entenmann's cakes and suspended a few inches off the floor." No other information about the exhibit was given.

Least Competent Person

Seattle, Wash., police arrested a twenty-seven- year-old man in April after he attempted to deposit a check into his account at a Washington Mutual Bank office. According to a teller, he is the same man who robbed the branch two days earlier.