

A Gallery of Cartoons on Lawyers and Their Language

In the summer of 1992, the editors decided to do something novel for a law journal: publish a collection of the best cartoons that satirize legal language. On our own, we gathered more than two dozen, and then Peg James, of the Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia, generously sent nearly 50 more.

We were surprised by the number of cartoonists who have taken aim at lawyers and their words. In the pages that follow are the editors' favorites.

Humor and legal language, of course, are hardly synonymous. Indeed, some would describe legal language as the exact opposite of humor — dry, solemn, and tedious. As the legal humorist Daniel R. White points out, "Psychologists employing word-association tests have established that 'humor' is among the very last words in the English language to spring to the average primate's mind upon hearing the word *lawyer*."¹

But lawyers' uses of language — and legalese in particular — are favorite topics for humorists, including cartoonists. Why? Because lawyers use language for so many ignoble purposes:

- to obscure logic;
- to badger opponents;
- to intimidate nonlawyers; and
- to say nothing while assuming an air of grave importance.

Thus cartoonists garner laughs by depicting lawyers who transform even bedtime prayers and holiday greetings into gobbledegook.

¹ Daniel R. White, *Introduction*, TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS iii (Daniel R. White ed., 1989).

Are the depictions fair? In a sense, the answer doesn't matter because they reflect public perceptions. So, if nothing else, the gallery suggests just how serious an issue linguistic reform must be in any effort to improve the profession's image.

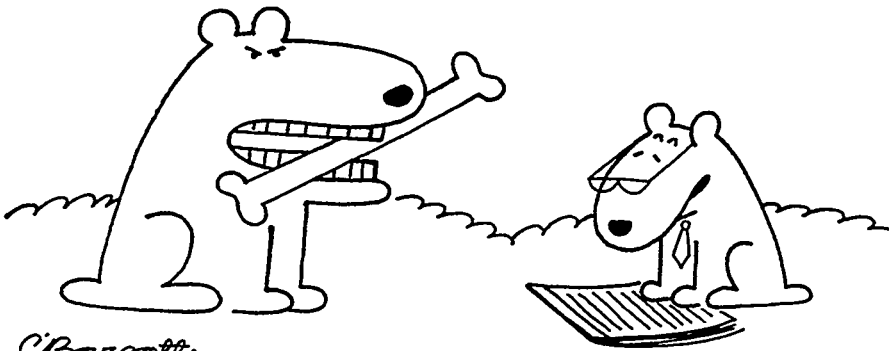
—A. Darby Dickerson



"Oh, pardon me, Mr. Leacock. Did I lapse into legalese?."

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GRRRRR

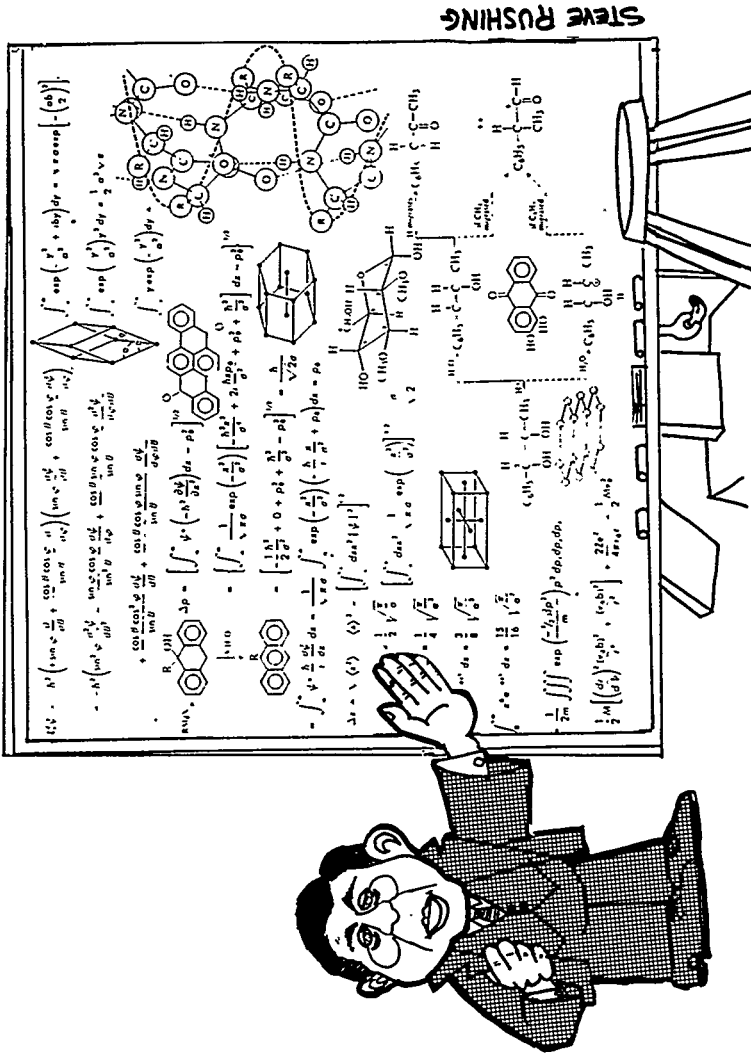


C. Barsotti:

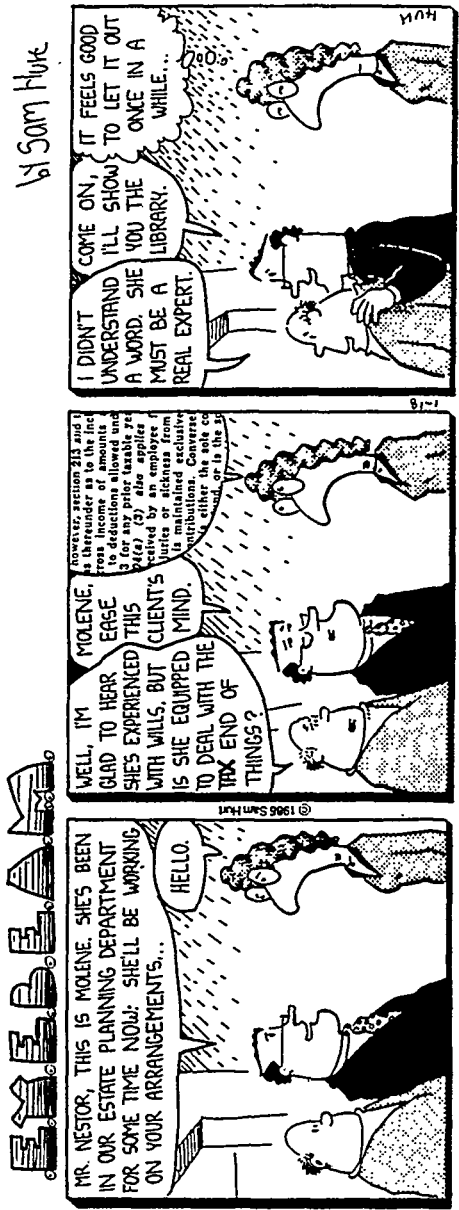
*“Now, now, Ruffy, if you’ll spare me the threats
I’ll spare you the legal jargon.”*



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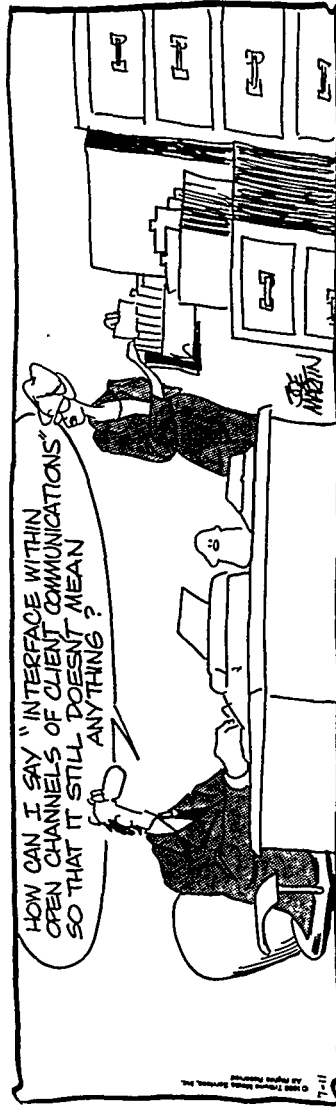
"AND NOW FOR THE DEFENSE'S THEORY OF THE CASE..."



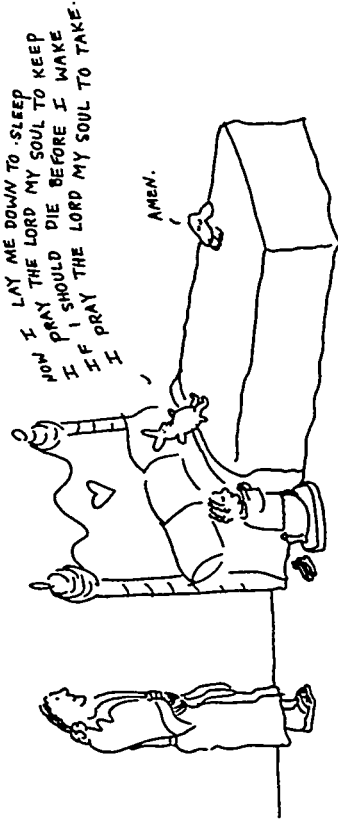
The Mind's Eyebeam ©1986 by Sam Hurt. Reprinted with permission.



“Could you read that last rule change back to me, Helen? I’m afraid I almost *understood* it.”



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Bedtime prayers before Mommy went to law school

AT THE PRESENT JUNCTURE, THIS DAY AND AGE, THIS HOUR, ON THIS, THE PRESENT OCCASION; I, MYSELF, THIS PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL AND ENTITY, ALLEGED TO BE MARY LOUCE HARGROTT, AND SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS "JOYCE" OR "MOMMY" (MOTHER TO THE ALLEGED LIBERTY RESS HARGROTT); BEHOUD, ASSIGN AND CONSIGN, FIX AND ESTABLISH TO AS THE PARTY, THE ABOVE AND AFORE- MENTIONED (SEE PARAGRAPH 1, LINE 3 WORDS 26, 27, 28) WHO SHALL BE REFERRED TO AS THE PARTY, THE FIRST PART FROM THIS TIME FORWARD, IN A LOWERED (AS COMPARED TO MURPHEUS, SOUNDLY AND/OR PROSTRATED POSITION, FOR THE SOLE AND ALLEGED PURPOSE OF DREAMING AND/OR SNOORING, WHICH SHALL REMAIN AND/OR SEEM TO REMAIN THE ADDRESS OF THOSE WHO DO NOT TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS AT THIS TIME), I, MYSELF, THIS PERSON, THIS PARTICULAR INDIVIDUAL, BEING, TOGETHER AND WITH MY CALL UPON, COURT, SEEK TO ENTREAT, AND IMPLORE, BEG, IMPLORE AND PETITION, MAKE BOLD TO ASK, PUT TO THE LORD, DIVINE DEITY, GODSHIP, GODHEAD, OMNIPOTENT AND OMNISCIENT SPIRIT I.E. SUPREME BEING, SOUL, NICKER, THE PER, PROVIDENCE, KING OF KINGS, QUEEN OF QUEENS, LORD OF LORDS, ALMIGHTY ONE, ABSOLUTE BEING, TRUTH IN, MERCIFUL, ALL HOLY, THE PRESERVER, MAKER, CREATOR, AUTHOR AND/OR CREATOR OF ALL THINGS, INMOST AND LOVE, MY, THE AFORE MENTIONED PARTY, OF THE FIRST PART, ESSENTIAL, FUNDAMENTAL, TRUE BEING, INMOST NATURE, CORE, INNER AND ESOTERIC REALITY, VITAL CENTER, ESSENTIAL QUALITY AND SUCHNESS, GUIDDLY PATH, KERNEL, NUCLEUS, INMOST RECESS OF THE HEART, SPIRIT, PRANA, LIFE FORCE; TO TAKE CUSTODY AND GUARD, WATCH OVER, SUSTAIN AND PRESERVE FOR THE SAFE KEEPING OF, AUSPICIOUS AND SECURE AND AFORE MENTIONED ONE, NOW KNOWN AS THE PARTY OF THE PARTY, SHOULD EXPIRE, ENP, CEASE TO LIVE, EXTINGUISH THE MORTAL LIGHT, LEAVE THIS PHYSICAL PLANE, EXPERIENCE MY DEATH, MORTAL COIL, RELINQUISH OR SURRENDER MY LIFE, YIELD THE TO THE TIME I REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS, PASS AWAY, MEET MY END, SHUFFLE OFF THIS MORTAL COIL, FROM THE SLEEPING TO THE WAKING STATE, ROSE MYSELF, WARM AND ENLIGHTENED, HUMBLY ASK THE PARTY OF THE FIRST PART, IMPLORE, BEG, AND BESECH, INVOKE AND ENLIGHTEN, HUMBLY ASK THESE, ALMIGHTY, EVER PRESENT UNIFIER OF ALL BEINGS, PLACES AND THINGS, I, AND GIVES ENDS, LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY, MY, AS IN ME AND MINE, AS IN I, THE PARTY OF THE FIRST PART, OMP, LOWER OR MORTAL NATURE, SPIRIT, ATMA, BUDDHI, VITAL FORCE, ESSENCE AND SUBSTANCE TO; AND EMBODIED BREATH, ANIMATING PRINCIPLE AND TRUE AND SEAT OF CONSCIOUSNESS TO; LIFE, THE DIVINITY THAT STIRS WITHIN, LOWER FLAME AND SEAT WITH AND ACQUIRE FOR (IF IT PLEASES THEE) APPROPRIATE, CAPTURE, SEIZE, ABDUCT AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR, AN INFINITE PERIOD OF TIME, ENTER INTO POSSESSION OF, MY BREATH, GO OUT LIKE THIS, OBTAIN AND RESCUE, PICK UP, GLEAN, GATHER IN, CAPTURED BY THE SAID HOLDER AMEN. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS IT SHALL BE RELINQUISHED BY THE SAID HOLDER AMEN.



Bedtime prayers after Mommy went to law school

Illustration by Mari Stein. Reprinted with permission. Originally from RALPH WARNER & TONI IHARA, 29 REASONS NOT TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL, Nolo Press, Berkeley, CA (3d ed. 1988).

Pepper . . . and Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"As far as I can tell, he's out to lunch."

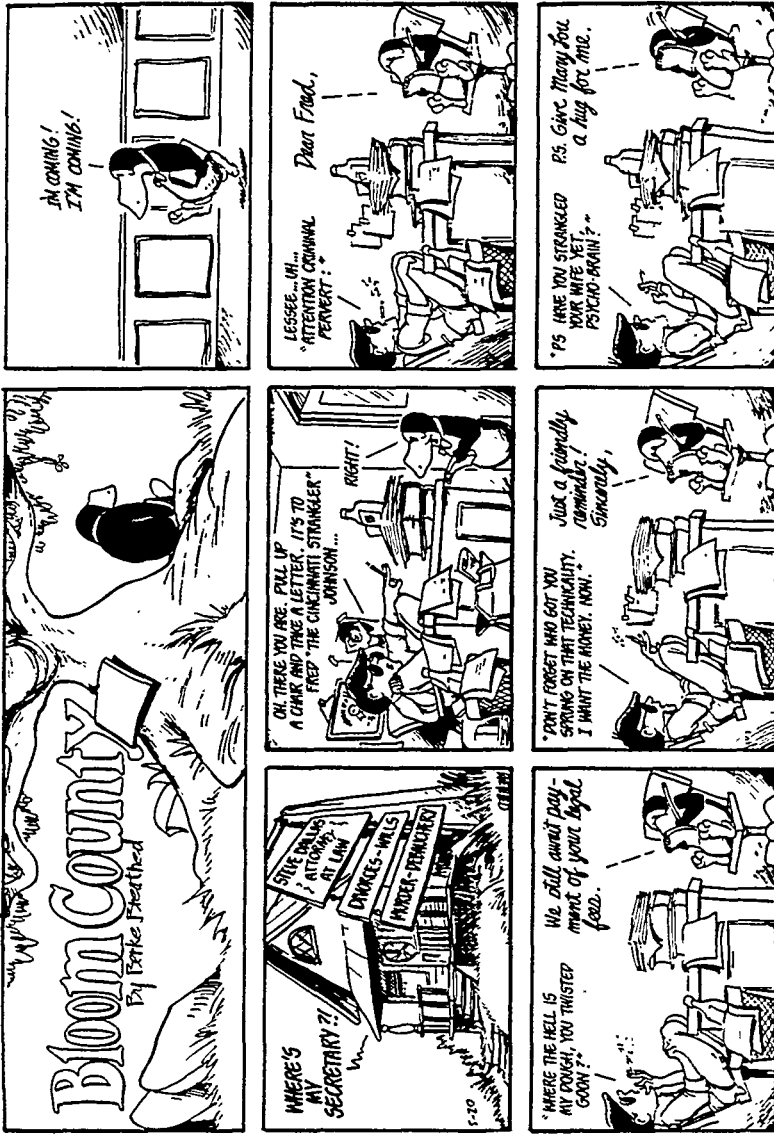
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HERMAN

BY
JIM UNGER



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Bloom County 5-20 DMilk Post



"'Season's Greetings' looks O.K. to me. Let's run it by the legal department."

Drawing by M. Twohy. ©1992 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

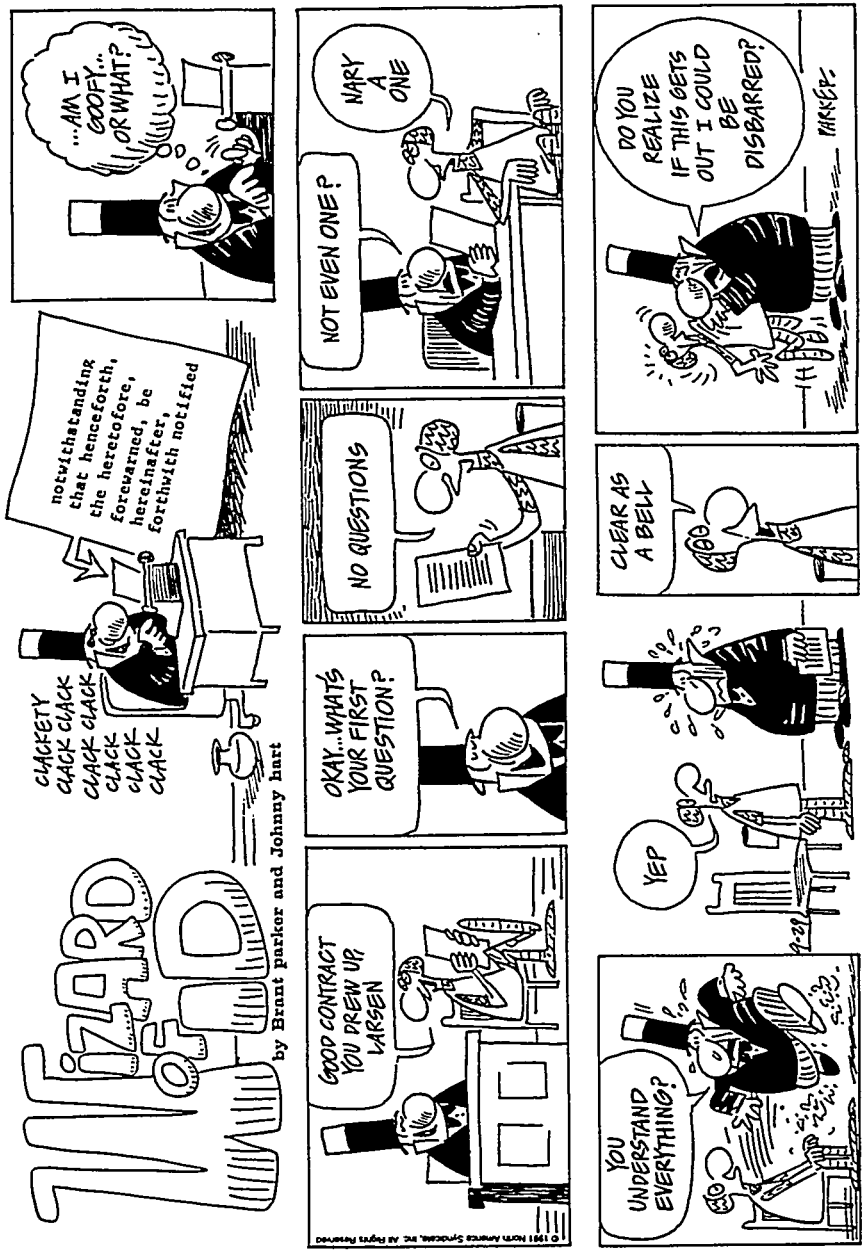
DUFFY®



by **BRUCE HAMMOND**



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**"JUST THROW IN A COUPLE MORE
BOILERPLATE CLAUSES, BEN."**

STEVE RUSHING

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



"So, then . . . Would that be 'us the people' or 'we the people?'"

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