

12/16/11

Marianas Variety editor Zaldy Dandan beat me to it, writing in his "Variations" column in today's issue about looking things up in reference books rather than on the web. My respect for the *Britannica* came only later in my life - I grew up with the junior version of it, as I recall, and even at that, provided my children with *World Book* instead.

I had already written something along similar lines for this week's column. But Zaldy takes an approach that is somewhat different from mine, so I'm going to include mine anyway. I had written: The amount of information the web can bring to one's fingertips never ceases to amaze me. As a trained librarian, my instinct is to look things up in dictionaries, encyclopedias, specialized reference books, ask experts. In fact, I occasionally forget that I can often find the answers to "I wonder why" or "what is" on the web - that my questions don't all require the delayed gratification of thumbing through hefty reference books, drawn-out searches through piles of paper, endless phone calls, any more, that I no longer have to accept continuing ignorance on some subject or other.

Though *Wikipedia* is a great resource, it should not be considered the ultimate answer since not all its entries have been "refereed" - approved by experts. In fact, one very useful guide to Google searching < <http://mashable.com/2011/11/24/google-search-infographic/> > warns that "using *Wikipedia* for a research paper is a deadly academic sin" - though acknowledging that it is a good source of general information.

It is, however, restrictive to use only the web to satisfy one's information needs. Sometimes books can provide depth that no web entry provides. Sometimes, the information hasn't been put up on the web, and still can only be found in printed form. Sometimes in-person sources provide information based on experience that neither book nor web can offer. Then, too, not all of the "answers" found on the web are unequivocal, clear cut; some are downright contradictory. It may be ok that many of the younger generation are no longer familiar with telephones wired to the wall; it is not ok for them not to be familiar with standard reference books and how to use them, with other information resources.

In keeping with the idea of reducing the world's "stuff" as well as the local legislature's search for new revenue come these suggestions from *The Story of Stuff* (discussed at some length in the 11/25 column): (1) taxing items according to how far they've had to travel to get to the market. That would, among other good things, encourage local production - particularly of food stuffs. (2) "a progressive tax on resource consumption that would allow free use of basic needs, while taxing higher quantity use." The example given is for drinking water to be free, while water to wash a car, or water the lawn, would be taxed. Not sure how one would do that, but the basic idea makes sense.

An over-all means of reducing waste proposed in the book: redesign production systems so fewer resources are used in making the product to begin with, redesign the product itself so it will last longer, so it is repairable, so that its parts and materials are re-cyclable or adaptable to other uses, so the product itself is re-cyclable. The goal, though, is not to re-cycle more, but to waste less, so that eventually, there will be no waste.

In the meantime, midst the pressure to buy presents, to spend for the holiday, it is well to remember that too much "stuff" serves no purpose - it only accumulates, creating litter, pollution,

environmental and ecological degradation and global warming - besides being a drain on the budget.

Short takes:

- TV news reporter Tina Sablan informed me that KSPN did indeed cover Constitution Day - it was the top story of the day and its reporter did an interview with Sam McPhetres about the significance of the day and the document, aired some historic photos, and recited the preamble.
- Whatever happened to Public Law 15-127, which banned fireworks except sparklers, caps, or snakes unless they were authorized by the Fire Chief, or set off under the direct supervision of either the CNMI or US government officials? The holiday season is supposed to be one of peace, joy and tranquility. The bombs being set off - at least in my neighborhood - don't qualify as permitted fireworks, and certainly don't contribute to anyone's peace and quiet. One would hope that it isn't that we have the Fire Chief to thank for the noise, but that enforcement of the law is lax.....
- In case you may have wondered, the Younis Art Studio ads for a bread baker, a pastry baker and bakery helpers that have been appearing in the *Marianas Variety* don't mean the paper is about to serve fresh rolls and cakes to its staff, but that YAS intends to open a bakery next door. No date has been set, nor could I find out what kinds of baked goods would be sold. Interesting development!
- New insight into hiring off-island haoles: if they mention that they're interested in new places, travel, adventure, they're a better bet than those who are only looking for whatever job is available.....Experience in certain agencies has shown that the former are likely to be far more flexible, adjust to the local life-style far more easily than the latter.
- According to the agenda for its session on Tuesday, 12/20/11, the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation is slated to consider a resolution that would approve the wearing of "island formal" attire for its sessions. Presumably, that means short-sleeved shirts with open collars. If that is approved - and who would vote against it? - maybe a similar resolution will be forthcoming for full House and Senate sessions? It would be long overdue - and should lead to a major reduction in the consumption of power in the legislature, and thus to a major reduction in its power bill, since members might finally demand that the thermostat be set at a more comfortable level.
- And speaking of major reductions, whatever happened to the reduction in the size of the House that is supposed to take place due to the 2010 census report of a declining population in the CNMI? According to my calculations, the 120 days after the latest census that the CNMI Constitution provides may elapse before the legislature is required to re-apportion seats in the House of Representatives falls on December 23, 2011. Release of the census report was announced in a press release from the office of the governor on August 25, 2011.
- The unexplained lack of color in the last several issues of the *Saipan Tribune* doesn't help, but in this case doesn't matter either: the ad for ALAI Winter Camp that has been appearing in the *Trib* bears no contact information whatsoever. No phone number, no cell number, no e-mail address, no location indicator, no names, nada. That's a strange way to run a business - on the part of the paper or the camp sponsors.....
- Outspoken *Trib* op-ed writer John DelRosario has a colorful, occasionally flaky, way with words, at times. But in today's column, "Destructive federal laws in the NMI", he's got them all

right. DelRosario, former publisher of the paper, is referring to the federal takeover of immigration, and the minimum wage law. "...we collectively cringe at the net effects slammed against families by a political decision from Washington that simply failed to consider the economic consequences of ill-conceived federal statutes," he writes. Amen!

- Also noteworthy is the letter by another frequent writer to the *Trib*, Winnie Atalig, which spells out in considerable detail - but quite objectively, without recrimination or exaggeration - many of the doubts and concerns faced by people in the CNMI at the moment. It is indeed, as she says, scary.

- Inimical as I find numbers, I should have known better than to try tackle mathematical questions, as I did in relation to foreign investor taxation in my last column. Judging from some readers' responses, it is apparently not a foregone conclusion that the measure would benefit the CNMI, as I had stated it would.

- There will be no column next week. May I wish one and all a happy holiday!