

## Gerry's News Digest 13: Independence Day, boxing and privacy in the internet (July 4, 2008)

Hi, this is Gerry and this is my News Digest for Friday, 4th July 2008. It's a public holiday in the States. It's their Independence Day, when they celebrate gaining their independence from the British in 1776. They managed this after fighting a successful war against the forces of King George III. We will hear the name of George III and his son, the Prince Regent and later George IV when I talk about boxing, the first of my topics for today's show. I thought boxing was out of fashion as a modern sport, but it seems I was wrong. Young men from upper-class backgrounds in England are taking up the sport again. And I'd like to talk a bit about the internet, not for the first time I know. This time I'd like to say something about the question of privacy [1] and the protection of one's reputation [2] on the world wide web. Finally, there's a story about a South African woman who is using publicity about her ex-husband in her effort to get a good divorce settlement [3].

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Who's interested in boxing these days? I thought people had long decided that boxing is a dangerous sport, and that the spectacle of two men trying to seriously hurt each other for the amusement of the crowd was uncivilized and should have no place in our modern world. By the way, when I was at school I had to learn to box, but my best friend was allowed off [4] that. His father was a doctor and he wrote a letter to the school to say that he refused to give permission for his son to box because it was physically dangerous. This was unusual in those days - the rest of us just put on the gloves and tried to hit each other. I have to say that I wasn't very good, although like most young boys of 10 or 11, I enjoyed the idea of fighting. In fact I was the second smallest boy in the school, and so the only boy that I was allowed to fight was the only boy who was more or less my size. He was the smallest boy in the school. I think the boxing gloves were almost bigger than we were. It must have been a very funny sight - two skinny [5], weedy [6] little boys, with huge boxing gloves trying to hit each other, but really being more concerned about not being hit themselves.

So I thought boxing didn't really have a future. I had heard of people doing boxing training in order to get fit, but that didn't involve any serious fighting. I had seen that there are now professional women boxers, but I thought they were pretty freakish, one of those minority sports on TV that you get at unsocial hours on specialist sports channels. But I was apparently wrong. There is a new trend in amateur boxing [7], in England at least.

Now, boxing in England has a long tradition and I was reading a review [8] of a book the other day about the history of boxing. The history began in Regency [9] England - that was the time when the future King George IV took over the throne because his father George III went mad and was unable to fulfill his duties as king. This was at the beginning of the 19th century and it was a time of wild ideas - think of the French revolution, the Napoleonic wars and the beginning of the Romantic period in the arts. It was also a time in Britain of aristocratic excesses - the rich young aristocrats of the time were heavily into parties, fashion, drink and drugs. And an interest in fighting seems to have been part of this. According to this book that I was reading about, a third of the young noblemen of the time were taking boxing lessons from professional fighters. The professional fighters at the time were known as "bareknuckle [10]" fighters because they fought with no gloves, and practically no rules. The aristocrats supported these fights and the fighters, but they also liked to do some fighting themselves. And it seems that something similar is happening in London today.

On the BBC website I read a fascinating story that was entitled: The gloves are toff (t, o, double ff). And that's quite a clever play on words. If you say that the "gloves are off", it means that the fight is getting serious. It's a bareknuckle fight. People often say things like "It was a very tough negotiation. The gloves were off." Then the word 'toff' is an old word for describing a rich, upper-class man. And the story on the BBC website was how boxing has become again a fashionable sport for the rich. Today, it's the new elite: the bankers and the "fat cats" from the City of London - who are interested. The story described a fight at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in Hyde Park, London between Ollie "The Berkeley Bomber" Slack and James "Mufty the Mayhem" Mathias. The place was packed with ladies and gentlemen in evening dress. The young princes, William and Harry were both there. The 'gentlemen' fighters that night both work in the City of London, and they were fighting for - well for what? Not for money. In fact the evening was organized for charity. This is how the Berkeley Bomber described his motivation: "No one can ever know unless they've done it, what it's like to stand in the ring and the bell goes, and the ref goes: 'Box'. You can run away from a street fight, but you can't jump out of the ring." He seems to be drawn to boxing, the story reported, because he sees it as the ultimate test. "When the bell goes a boxer is alone with nothing to defend himself with but his strength and his wits [11]."

What seems to be the case is that there are some people who need more physical challenge and risk than they get in their normal working lives today. While most of us in the western world can enjoy a life that has become more comfortable, healthier, and safer compared to what our ancestors experienced, there are some who still need some form of risk, some real, physical excitement in order to convince themselves they are really living. This may take the form of

off-piste skiing, free-fall parachuting, motor-biking, or in this case boxing. What about you? Do you have a taste for the extreme?

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The other thing I read recently that got me thinking was an article about the internet and privacy. Here in Switzerland, there was a short piece of news about how employers find out about their employees or about job applicants by googling [12] them. If you are under the age of 30, there is probably something about you on the internet, and there may be something about you when you were young and perhaps not being very responsible. In the old days, most people would probably never find out about you, but the internet has changed all this. So is it right that employers can find out some stuff about you that you might prefer that was well forgotten?

The article I read in a British newspaper made a number of points about the internet and the issue of privacy. Firstly, there is the point that "once it's on the net, it's there for ever". The writer of the article was wondering whether there should be some sort of system whereby data are automatically deleted after a year or so, unless a specific effort is made to save them. Secondly, there is little protection of a person's reputation. A man, for example, who was apparently very angry with his ex-girlfriend, opened a Yahoo account in her name, posted [13] nude photos of her and her e-mail address. Under US law in particular, there is very little you can do to either prevent someone from posting something about you, or to have it deleted or to bring any action [14] against the person who put it there in the first place. American law-makers have been more concerned with preserving the freedom of expression on the internet rather than issues of privacy. If it's a matter of copyright, on the other hand, they intervene very quickly. So the article suggested that privacy rights should be treated more like property rights. In Britain apparently the courts will consider such attacks like that one I mentioned on the young woman's reputation under the principle of "betrayal of confidence", i.e. passing on private information without permission.

I just wonder what the situation is going to be like in, say, in 20 years. The internet has only really been a central part of our lives for about 10 years. Just think how much information and so on is already available, and every year it's increasing exponentially. How can we cope with so much information? The second thing that worries me is what's it going to be like for people in the public eye [15] in future? Future politicians, for example. Just imagine what photos or gossip [16] might have been stored on the internet about the student escapades of Bill Clinton or George Bush if the internet had been around when they were students. Perhaps we'll be more tolerant in future about youthful misadventures [17], but it's still, it seems to me, a discouragement to people who would like to enter public service if everything they have ever done in their lives can be published and used against them. If you have any view on this, remember that you can post your comments on the website at [www.podclub.ch](http://www.podclub.ch). Perhaps you even think we should delete your comments after a year or so.

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Finally, the other side of the privacy question is the use of publicity in order to shame somebody [18] into doing the right thing. I read about a South African woman who's divorcing her husband and has tried to publicly shame him into paying her maintenance. She wrote big posters with his name on them and stuck them on her car for people to read. One poster said the following:

"If my soon-to-be-ex-husband thinks he can: bed down cheap women, buy them underwear, wine and dine them in the best restaurants, take them on five-star holidays, take 'excite' tablets for erectile dysfunction, go out boozing each night AND not pay me my maintenance [19] as ordered by the court, and think I will take no action, he has another think coming."

That's some angry woman. We say in English that hell has no fury like a woman scorned [20]. And if what she says is true, then we can only wish her luck.

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As I said last time, this is my last show to be recorded here in Switzerland. In a couple of weeks I'll be moving back to Wales and then I'll be speaking to you from there. I look forward to sharing my thoughts and impressions about my new home after the summer break. After the summer I'll also have some podcasting company. There are going to be new podcasts in different languages in addition to me with my Diary and my News Digest. There'll be more information on the website.

So until August 18, have a great summer and take care!

[1] privacy: the freedom to do things without other people watching you or knowing what you are doing

[2] reputation: what people think of you, your "good name"

[3] divorce settlement: a formal agreement after a divorce concerning finances, care of the children and so on

[4] was allowed off: was given permission not to do (it)

- [5] skinny: very thin
- [6] weedy: very weak
- [7] amateur boxing: boxing for no financial reward (opposite: professional boxing)
- [8] review: an article written by a critic in a newspaper or magazine about a book, a film, etc.
- [9] regency: a time when a country is not ruled by the King (or Queen) but a representative (a regent, for example the Prince Regent) because the King is ill, or too young to rule
- [10] bareknuckle: (literally) "naked fist", the knuckles are the bones in the hand where the fingers bend
- [11] his wits: his intelligence, his brains
- [12] googling: looking something up on the internet (using Google, for example)
- [13] posted: uploaded (used especially for uploading a comment or an entry onto a blog or a forum, etc.)
- [14] bring an action: take legal steps (go to court) (compare: "take an action" which means simply to do something)
- [15] in the public eye: in a job or a situation where the media are watching you all the time
- [16] gossip: when people talk to each other about other people, usually telling bad stories about other people that are perhaps not true
- [17] youthful misadventures: things that go wrong when you are young
- [18] shame somebody: make somebody feel bad or ashamed about something
- [19] maintenance: the money that the court orders the divorced man (usually) to pay to his ex-wife on a regular basis, often to help support his children
- [20] hell has no fury like a woman scorned: even the worst anger in hell is not as bad as the anger of a woman treated without respect