

Jan. 19, 2015

We're living in a golden age of young-adult literature, when books ostensibly written for teens are equally adored by readers of every generation. In the likes of Harry Potter and Katniss Everdeen, they've produced characters and conceits that have become the currency of our pop-culture discourse—and inspired some of our best writers to contribute to the genre. To honor the best books for young adults and children, TIME compiled this survey in consultation with respected peers such as U.S. Children's Poet Laureate Ken Nesbitt, children's-book historian Leonard Marcus, the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature, the Young Readers Center at the Library of Congress, the Every Child a Reader literacy foundation and 10 independent booksellers. With their help, we've created two all-TIME lists of classics: 100 Best Young-Adult Books and 100 Best Children's Books. The top 25 in each category are presented here; for the full lists, visit time.com/youngreaders.

GILLIAN FLYNN
Author of *Gone Girl*

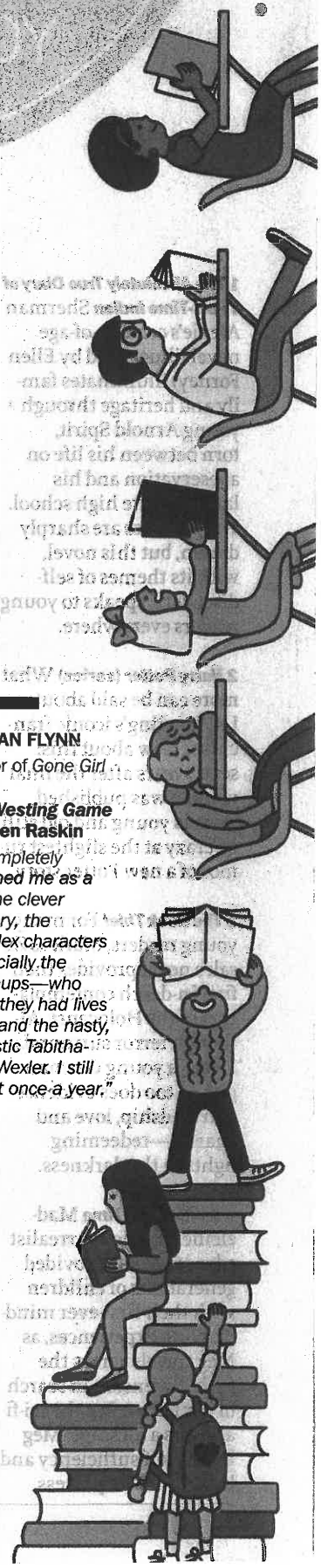
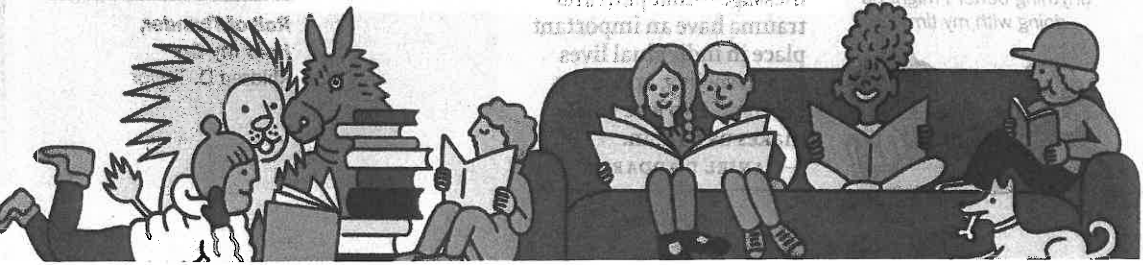
The Westing Game
by **Ellen Raskin**

"It completely charmed me as a kid: the clever mystery, the complex characters (especially the grownups—who knew they had lives too?) and the hasty, fantastic Tabitha-Ruth Wexler. I still read it once a year."

MARTIN AMIS
Author of *The Zone of Interest*

Goodnight Moon by **Margaret Wise Brown (author)** and **Clement Hurd (illustrator)**

"I must have read *Goodnight Moon* to my children several thousand times, and I was never bored by it. The book has its own soporific poetry—and it quite often worked."



TOP 10: YOUNG ADULT

AGES 12 AND UP

1 *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* Sherman Alexie's coming-of-age novel (illustrated by Ellen Forney) illuminates family and heritage through young Arnold Spirit, torn between his life on a reservation and his largely white high school. The specifics are sharply drawn, but this novel, with its themes of self-discovery, speaks to young readers everywhere.

2 *Harry Potter (series)* What more can be said about J.K. Rowling's iconic franchise? How about this: seven years after the final volume was published, readers young and old still go crazy at the slightest rumor of a new Potter story.

3 *The Book Thief* For many young readers, Markus Zusak's novel provides their first in-depth contemplation of the Holocaust. Although terror surrounds Liesel, a young German girl, so too does evidence of friendship, love and charity—redeeming lights in the darkness.

4 *A Wrinkle in Time* Madeleine L'Engle's surrealist adventure has provided generations of children with their first-ever mind-blowing experiences, as Meg travels across the fifth dimension in search of her father. But the sci-fi also has a message: Meg learns self-sufficiency and bravery in the process.

5 *Charlotte's Web* Readers are still drawn to the simplicity and beauty of arachnid Charlotte's devotion to her pig pal Wilbur. Though family farms may be less common than they were in 1952, E.B. White's novel remains timeless for its enduring meditation on the power of friendship and of good writing.

6 *Holes* Louis Sachar's story of a family curse, fancy sneakers and poisonous lizards moves forward and backward through time, telling of how Stanley Yelnats IV ended up in a juvenile prison camp. It's an introduction to complex narrative, suffused with fun, warmth and a truly memorable villain.

7 *Matilda* With apologies to the lovable *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, this may be Roald Dahl's most compelling read for young

people. Poor Matilda feels thwarted and ignored by her family—a sense that many preteens share. They don't share her magical powers, but that's the enduring appeal of this escapist frolic.

8 *The Outsiders* Published when author S.E. Hinton was just 18, this coming-of-age novel offers proof that even the youngest writer can provide valuable insight. Her striking look at Ponyboy and gang life in the 1960s has resonated for decades with readers of all kinds, whether they identify more with the Greasers or the Socs.

9 *The Phantom Tollbooth* In a witty, sharp fairy tale that illuminates language and mathematics through a picaresque story of adventure in the Kingdom of Wisdom, Jules Feiffer's whimsical drawings do as much as Norton Juster's plain-language interpolations of complex ideas to carry readers through Digitopolis and the Mountains of Ignorance.

10 *The Giver* Lois Lowry's tale of self-discovery in a dystopian society has a memorable central character, Jonas, and an indelible message—that pain and trauma have an important place in individual lives and in society, and to forget them is to lose what makes us human.

—DANIEL D'ADDARIO

MICHAEL LEWIS
author of *Flash Boys*

The Hardy Boys
by Franklin W. Dixon

"As a kid I lived on a steady diet of *The Hardy Boys* and *Archie* comic books, without the slightest sense there was anything better I might be doing with my time."



AND
15
MORE

Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret
Judy Blume

To Kill a Mockingbird
Harper Lee

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
Mildred D. Taylor

YOUNG ADULT

AT HEART

BY MEG WOLITZ



Anne of Green Gables (series)

L.M. Montgomery

The Chronicles of Narnia (series)

C.S. Lewis

Monster

Walter Dean Myers

The Golden Compass

Philip Pullman

The Diary of a Young Girl

Anne Frank

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

E.L. Konigsburg

Looking for Alaska

John Green

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Mark Haddon

Little House on the Prairie (series)

Laura Ingalls Wilder

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane

Kate DiCamillo

Wonder

R.J. Palacio

The Once and Future King (series)

T.H. White

FOR THE COMPLETE LIST, GO TO time.com/youngreaders

CONTRIBUTING BOOKSELLERS: BOOK PEOPLE (AUSTIN); BOOKS AND BOOKS (CORAL GABLES, FLA.); ELLIOTT BAY BOOK COMPANY (SEATTLE); POLITICS AND PROSE (WASHINGTON, D.C.); ROWELL'S BOOKS (PORTLAND, ORE.); PRAIRIE LIGHTS (IOWA CITY); SKYLIGHT BOOKS (LOS ANGELES); SQUARE BOOKS (OXFORD, MISS.); THE TATTERED COVER (DENVER); THE STRAND (NEW YORK CITY)

YOUNG ADULT AT HEART

BY MEG WOLITZER

When novelist Meg Wolitzer began writing *Belzhar*, her first book for a YA audience, she turned to Sylvia Plath and *The Bell Jar*

THE FIRST TIME I READ Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, it was an emotional, chaotic experience. Her narrator has a nervous breakdown while a college student and attempts suicide, as Plath had. The story is so viscerally real and imaginable that I, then a teenager, was immersed. Plath, who recovered from her breakdown but committed



suicide at age 30, left behind one powerful novel, many brilliant poems, a good deal of short fiction and voluminous journals. But it was in *The Bell Jar* that she used the detailed landscape of a novel to look bravely at her illness, and she compelled readers to look with her.

Flash-forward several decades. I had embarked upon writing a young-adult novel

in which *The Bell Jar* plays a part. *Belzhar* (pronounced *bel-jhar*, a play on Plath's title) is about a troubled girl, Jam Gallahue, who tragically loses her boyfriend and is sent to a therapeutic boarding school where she's placed in a class that reads only one writer over the whole semester. This year, the teacher has decided they will read Plath.

Plath told the truth in *The Bell Jar*—I don't mean only the autobiographical truth, though that was part of it—but also a larger truth about how emotional suffering can

Plath (left, circa 1957) and Wolitzer (pictured during her college years) both studied at Smith College. Both have written about women's struggles to define themselves



PLATH: BETTMANN/CORBIS; WOLITZER: COURTESY MEG WOLITZER

make people feel isolated under their own airless glass jars. Because of this truth, young readers like me were deeply affected and in some ways transformed. Had Plath been a famous suicide but not such a fine writer, her reputation would likely have fizzled out after her death. But she was uncommonly good, so she stuck. Teenagers read her when I was that age, and I sense that many teenagers still read her now.

And so, for research purposes, I read Plath again. But now, instead of responding only to the young narrator's detachment and despair, as I had long ago, I also found myself, to my surprise, responding to the woman Sylvia Plath would never become. The writer who would never continue to mature with age. The mother who would never see her children off into the world. The person who wouldn't have the chance to live a long life.

Younger me tended to take the short view, feeling everything along with the narrator as it happened and never thinking about that nebulous thing called the future. But now, as a middle-aged woman, I definitely took the long view. It occurs to me that not only readers but also writers often fall into the habit of taking either the short or the long view when they work. I'm a novelist whose fiction has mainly been for adults; my most recent adult book, *The Interestings*, lavishes a lot of time on its characters when they're young. Then it keeps going, following them from age 15 all the way into their 50s—an age I can

relate to well these days, as my children have left home, and I must remind myself to schedule my yearly mammogram.

But *Belzhar*, a novel about adolescents written for adolescent readers (although these days plenty of adults read YA too), takes place over the course of only one semester at boarding school. And while *The Interestings* is told from multiple points of view, *Belzhar* hews close to its narrator, letting her tell her story in a particularly close-grained way. Jam is someone who needs to talk, who is breathless and single-minded; making her a first-person narrator

struck me as the best way to convey her voice, her needs, her absolutely certain convictions about what had happened to her.

I couldn't help but think, when writing this novel, of the two versions of me who had read *The Bell Jar*. Maybe there were two versions of me who should be writing *Belzhar*: one who was still close to the intensity of adolescence, for whom everything felt fresh and raw. That version, which still exists inside of me, took care of the parts in which I needed to drag up feelings buried in the over-stuffed dresser drawer that is adolescence: What it's like to make first-time emotional, romantic, even sexual decisions. What it's like to manage the overwhelming new sensations and thoughts that invade you. What it's like to feel rejected. What it's like to realize that everyone is essentially on their own.

But then the older version of me had to put the whole thing into context, to remember that circumstances can change if you give them enough time, even if my narrator can't know it. I wanted the older me to be somewhere in the mix of this YA book, though not to give Jam a goody-goody artificial voice of reason. Books aren't morality plays; they don't all need lessons. But given that *Belzhar* takes place in a special class at a special boarding school, it seemed appropriate that there would indeed be some kind of essential lesson conveyed. And that's the point at which Mrs. Q stepped in: Jam's

elderly teacher, a woman who knows quite a bit about how things can change. Without realizing it at first, I became part Jam and part Mrs. Q; shuttling between someone who takes the short view and someone who takes the long view.

At book readings, audience members often ask how writers create characters. People want to know: Have writers actually experienced what their characters experienced? And if not, where do their ideas come from? My best answer is that ideas come about through the long, slow process of living. Even if a character's experiences aren't your own, you are citizens of the same world, and you've had your own experiences and witnessed other people's too. While all that's been going on, empathy has quietly been forming; it's almost a chemical process.

And if you're a writer, you've also been reading. A lot. And while *Belzhar* isn't a rip-off or a retelling of *The Bell Jar*, it reflects on Plath's novel and owes a debt to it. It's not that you want to imitate the book you admire; you just want to do your version of what that writer did; you want to tell the truth, fiction-style.

There are quite a few of us former teenagers—women in the middle of their lives (and some men, for sure)—who have never forgotten what it felt like to read *The Bell Jar* for the first time. So what are we supposed to do with all that leftover feeling?

Me, I decided to write a book.

JESMYN WARD

Author of *Men We Reaped*

The Hero and the Crown
by Robin McKinley

"When I was around 8, I discovered this book at my local book fair. I charmed one of my cousins into buying it for me, and then I devoured it. The heroine is an illegitimate princess who hunts dragons in an attempt to find a place for herself in her father's kingdom. The heroine is tough, stubborn and smart, taking on a world bent on making her less than she is. I empathized."



TOP 10: CHILDREN

AGES 3-11

1 *Where the Wild Things Are* Maurice Sendak's adventure has inspired generations of children to let out their inner monsters, showing how imagination allows for an escape from life's doldrums. It's also a moving testament to family love: when young Max returns from his reverie, his mother has saved him a hot dinner.

2 *The Snowy Day* The journey of Peter through a snowbound New York City made for a milestone as a successful children's story focused on a black protagonist, it broke down barriers many white editors may have never noticed. But Ezra Jack Keats' book is memorable too for the sheer beauty of its color-lage illustrations.

3 *Goodnight Moon* Somewhere a child is being put to sleep right now to Margaret Wise Brown's soothing, repetitive cadences. While the lines may be etched in every parent's memory, Clement Hurd's illustrations, with their quirky hidden jokes, provide amusement on the thousandth reading.

4 *Blueberries for Sal* Robert McCloskey's block-printed illustrations show just how similar families of different species can be, as child Sal and a baby bear covet Maine blueberries on a berry hunt with their respective mothers. It's an

instructive read for any kid who's ever felt a bit like a wild animal, or par-boy turned self-centered young man. It's been interpreted along environmentalist and religious lines, but all can agree on the beauty of its underlying theme of generosity.

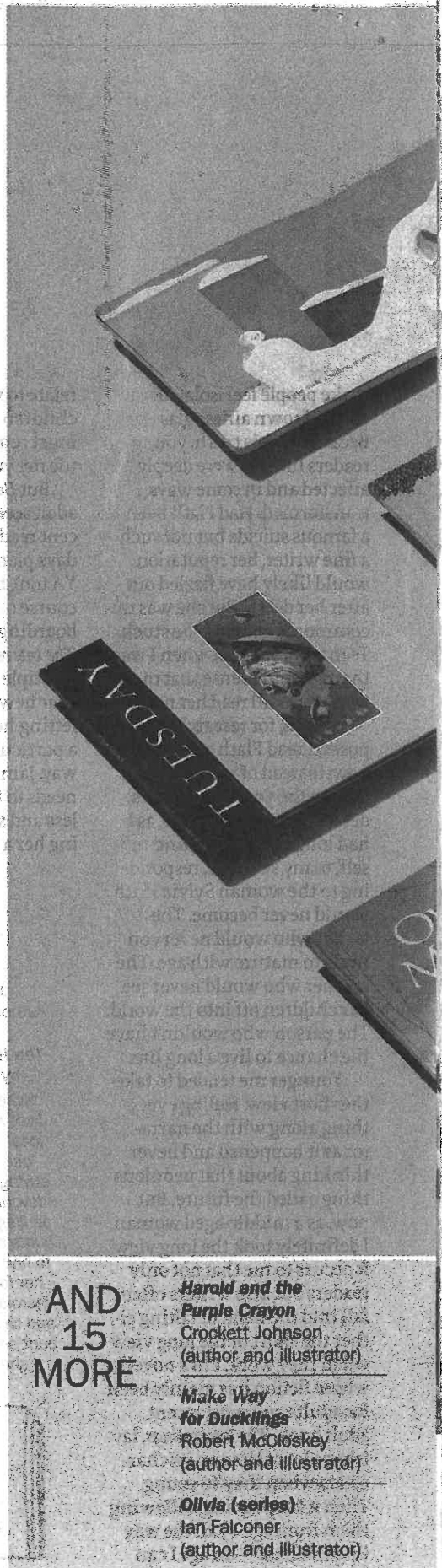
8 *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith's ironic, witty book, which revises the story of the pigs as an exculpatory memoir by the wolf—who claims he's not so big and bad at all—is a welcome corrective to more saccharine tales. It also introduces young readers to the notion of dueling perspectives.

9 *Tuesday* Who needs text? Not illustrator David Wiesner, who also "wrote" the very few words that make up his tale. His stunning, propulsive watercolors show flying frogs on a surreal adventure. Reading may be fundamental, but here the pictures do almost all the talking.

10 *Where the Sidewalk Ends* Silverstein wasn't just good at tales of leafy self-sacrifice. His loopy poems have been speaking to kids' concerns and sparking their imaginations for decades. Any child who's ever fantasized about playing "hug o' war" instead of tug-of-war will find a kindred spirit in these pages. —D.D.

7 *The Giving Tree* It's hard to imagine a story more poignant than Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*. **DAVE EGGERS** Author of *The Circle*

Adèle & Simon and Adèle & Simon in America by Barbara McClintock
"McClintock's artwork is ridiculously beautiful, and because readers are asked to find objects that Simon has lost during various trips—including turn-of-the-century Paris and the USA—the books reward very close attention."



AND
15
MORE

- Harold and the Purple Crayon**
Crockett Johnson
(author and illustrator)
- Make Way for Ducklings**
Robert McCloskey
(author and illustrator)
- Olivia (series)**
Ian Falconer
(author and illustrator)



Madeline (series)
Ludwig Bemelmans
(author and illustrator)

Anno's Journey
Mitsumasa Anno
(author and illustrator)

Frog and Toad (series)
Arnold Lobel (author and
illustrator)

Click, Clack, Moo
Doreen Cronin (author),
Betsy Lewin (illustrator)

The Story of Ferdinand
Munro Leaf (author),
Robert Lawson (illustrator)

**Don't Let the Pigeon
Drive the Bus!**
Mo Willems
(author and illustrator)

The Lorax
Dr. Seuss
(author and illustrator)

Corduroy
Don Freeman
(author and illustrator)

I Want My Hat Back
Jon Klassen
(author and illustrator)

Miss Rumphius
Barbara Cooney
(author and illustrator)

Brave Irene
William Steig
(author and illustrator)

**Alexander and the
Terrible, Horrible, No
Good, Very Bad Day**
Judith Viorst (author),
Ray Cruz (illustrator)

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Photograph by Andrew B. Myers for TIME

Hey Baby, Can I Get You a Beer?

What I learned about making people laugh on the set of *America's Funniest Home Videos*



WHEN I WAS IN SECOND grade, I asked my parents what the Vice President did. They told me that the second most important person in the country didn't have any responsibilities whatsoever. For the next five years, I told people that when I grew up, I wanted to be the Vice President.

So when Tom Bergeron announced he was stepping down as the host of ABC's *America's Funniest Home Videos* (AFV) after 14 years, I applied. I could be on network TV every week, introducing a few clip packages while making tons of money and getting invited to lots of parties—many of which, admittedly, would have guest lists consisting of cats or men with ice packs on their groins.

I walked onto the AFV stage feeling surprisingly nervous, so I asked Bergeron for advice on how to be funny when hosting a family show. "Relax, have fun and remember your role is to service the videos. Which sounds dirtier than I intended," he said. In other words: make jokes that sound edgy but are actually safe because they don't make sense.

To prepare, I watched Bergeron tape a show, during which I noticed many surprising details, like the fact that the show is an hour long. It turns out I'd never actually seen *America's Funniest Home Videos*, which made me even more anxious. When the show ended, I walked out to great applause, which—along with the bright lights and my loud, distracting heartbeat—made it hard to remember which cameras to look at, though I'm pretty sure there wasn't one in my shoes. Then I brought two audience members up for a game called "Pick the Real Video!" in which I asked them if I was about to show a clip of a housefly stuck to a frozen hot dog, a penguin swimming in a hotel fountain or a leprechaun falling down an escalator. One of the contestants picked the leprechaun. The show is not called *America's Smartest Home Video Watchers*.

Vin Di Bona, the show's creator and executive producer, told me he's leaning toward hiring someone famous and talented. Still, he said, while I was unpolished, I had some of that Bergeron magic, compared with the blunter skills of previous host Bob Saget. "He had to have laughter to know it was right," he said. "You didn't need that. You just presented and moved on." Yes. That is exactly what I was trying to do. I was not just being quiet because all the jokes I could think of with a fly, a penguin and a leprechaun were racist.



Di Bona, however, thought I might be a better fit as a writer. So a few weeks later I spent an afternoon working for head writer Todd Thicke, who has been with the show since 1989. He has the same good looks and deep voice as his brother Alan Thicke and nephew Robin Thicke and, I'm guessing, other Thickees. I sat at a table with three other writers, looking at walls covered with index cards, on which were written things like "A boy comments on how to impress the ladies in the car. Then suddenly screams in a panic when he sees a spider" and "A dog shows its teeth and growls while a woman rubs its butt with her foot indoors." This was going to be easy.

We stared at a screen and watched the very best 10% of submitted videos, as culled by screeners who I'm assuming

work in Chinese prison camps. And they were still insanely boring—just cute pets, cute babies and uncute tweens dancing in their bedrooms. It took 90 minutes before we saw the first guy get hit in the testicles, which was the first time we laughed. "It's weird," I said. "As soon as someone gets hurt, people laugh." Writer Mike Palleschi looked around the room and said, "I think that's our fault."

The writers had an amazing ability to predict, within just a few seconds, what would happen in the clips we watched, all of which provided me with valuable life lessons: don't wear socks on kitchen tile; don't run near the buttocks of an obese woman; use extreme caution when weight lifting at home alone; don't leave flour in an area accessible to toddlers. Since AFV is a family show, the writers can't use a lot of the best stuff, like a baby smiling widely after tasting a beer. "You can barely give a monkey a cigarette, no less a baby a beer," said Erik Lohla. "The world has changed," agreed Jordan Schatz.

So to make the clips seem more exciting, they combine them using clever frames like "Failed football entrances vs. babies knocked over by sneezes." Thicke also set us to work creating alternative meanings for NSFW besides "not safe for work" that he could print below clips. At first I tried to write for clips we'd seen, such as "nice sprinkler fart, wanker" for the guy with the sprinkler stuck in his pants and "new style feline wevenge" for the cat who attacked a dog, but the other writers simply searched for new topics in their 25-year database of clips. They found me lots of guys falling off stripper poles for "never strip for women," but Thicke thought that it wasn't in great taste. And they didn't seem excited about my suggestion that we take absolutely any clip anyone submitted and just write "no sense from within."

It's been several months, and I haven't heard back about either job. Luckily, I have some pretty adorable footage of my son that I'm sure will win \$10,000. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY TOMASZ WALENTA FOR TIME; GETTY IMAGES (3)