

Snake Oil

Or:
**The Story Of Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster
And How The History Books Went Missing**
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I've been asked to tell you the story of Sammy. Well, I say Sammy, I mean to say all his friends called him Sammy. Well, that is, I'm sure his friends *would* have called him Sammy if he'd had any friends, because everybody in town called him Sammy but his parents, but he didn't have any friends. Like I say, I'm sure if he'd had any friends, they would've called him Sammy. Only his parents, his egotistical stuck-up parents, didn't call him that. Well, I mean to say I assume his parents were egotistical and stuck up, I don't rightly know 'cause I never did meet 'em, see, they never came into the store or anything, they just seemed to me to be egotistical and stuck up, 'swhat I mean to say. Can't think of any other reason why a set of parents'd saddle a defenseless infant with a name of Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, which is what this couple did, so like I say, stands to reason they're pretty stuck up. Well, I say "are," I don't know as that's actually right, 'cause this's been a lot of years, and they may be dead by now, I don't rightly know. I mean to say they *could* be dead, they could be live for all I know. Anyway they named their kid Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, and everybody called him Sammy, and I'm supposed to tell you his story, so here goes.

Well, I mean to say, everybody *knew* his name, it's just that no one used it, no one went around saying "Hey, Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, you wouldn't happen to know the time right now, would you?" or "Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, that surely is one mighty fine shirt you got on right there, yessir!" Stands to reason, doesn't it? Long-winded name like that, you're gonna want to find *some* kind of shortcut, or you're still gonna be looking for the end of it come sundown and you're liable to miss dinner, 'swhat I mean to say. So anyway, with no more ifs, ands, or preamble, let me tell you the story of Sammy and the missing history books.

Oh – well, I guess I never mentioned the missing history books, did I? They were just some books, see, some books the school here in Greasepit, Nevada got sent out from some big place in New York City, some big place back there in New York City that makes history books. Well, I mean to say, they make books. I guess they could make some kind of books besides history books, they could make algebra books, or geometry books, or kid's picture books, or I guess they could make just about any kind of books you can think of. I don't rightly know, I just know they made these history books this story is about. Well, the story isn't about the history books, per se and as such, so to speak, it's the story about Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, or Sammy as everybody but his parents called him.

Well, like I said, I never met his parents, and I don't rightly know what they called him, but I assume they didn't call him Sammy, or they would have named him Sammy, see? Stands to reason that if you name your kid something awful like Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, you aim to use it, you know what I mean? I imagine Sammy was late to dinner most nights, 'cause if they didn't get a good head start calling his name out the back door, dinner'd be cold by the time he got there, 'swhat I mean to say. Anyway the story of the books that went missing from the school library in Greasepit, Nevada is as follows, herewith and to wit:

Well, I guess I should say something about how the town got called Greasepit. Well, I mean to say it gets called Greasepit 'cause that's its name, Greasepit, Nevada. What I mean to say is I should mention how it *got* the name Greasepit. See, there was this crossroads. Well, I say crossroads, I mean it was more like a crosspaths. It was just this little spot in the middle of a vast expanse of gravel and rocks and boulders and hills and, well, you get the

picture – look around. What do you see? Yeah, gravel and rocks and boulders and hills and not really a whole lot else, right? Well, like I say, there was this crosspaths out in the middle of nowhere, just the place where the railroad crossed the highway, and not much else. Well, I mean to say it was the place where the railroad, if it had gotten built, *would've* crossed the highway, if the highway'd gotten built. I mean to say, it was the place where the trail made by the surveyor team for the railroad, when they went through, making plans for the railroad, crossed the trail made where the team from the highway people come through making all *their* big plans, and I mean to say if anything had ever come of the plans, there would be a town here now, 'cause towns just naturally grow up where there's a crossroads. Well, it would've been a crossroads if they'd both gotten built, and then there'd be a town here. I guess just the railroad could've gotten built, and not the highway, or the highway could've gotten built, but not the railroad, and there wouldn't be a town here, because nobody in their right mind builds a town where there's no crossroads, you know what I mean? What? Really? Oh, really? Excuse me, I'm trying to tell a story here. Oh, yeah? Well, you're ugly and your mama dresses you funny! The reason, as I was *just* getting to when I was so *rudely* interrupted, the reason, I say, that there is a town here at all when there is no crossroads is tied up in the story of the name of the town, which is Greasepit, which is the story I started out to tell, if you recall. Well, I mean to say, it's not the story I *started out* to tell, that's the story of how Sammy stole the books from the school library, but on the way there I got caught up by this other story, the story of how Greasepit came to get the name Greasepit, which is also the story, if you'll just be patient, *sir*, of how the town came to be located where there is no crossroads.

Well, there is a crossroads here now, but the town was here first, and the reason there *is* a crossroads here is 'cause there was a town here, and people needed a way to get here, so they just naturally made some roads. Kind of the backwards away around to it, but it worked. I mean to say, there *is* a town here now, and there *is* a crossroads here now, and I guess in the long run, so to speak, in the big picture, it doesn't really matter, as such and per se, so to speak, which came first, the chicken or the egg, or in this case the town or the crossroads. It works. I mean to say there's a town here and people can get here and that's what matters. Ok, so the story of how the town got the name Greasepit:

See, there was this manufacturer's representative, as he liked to call himself, or traveling salesman as other folks would've referred to him. Well, peddler is what he was, he had this stuff called somebody or other's magic elixir or some such, well, I mean to say it wasn't called somebody or other's; it was called Smith's or Jones's or Abernathy's or some such, but I don't rightly know what, and it wasn't called a magic elixir, but that's pretty much the claim that got made about it. Ok, snake oil, is what it was, and he was a snake oil salesman, and he had this cart and this mule. Well I say *this* cart and *this* mule, I mean to say he had *a* cart and *a* mule, not that I've got his cart and his mule right here where I can point at them and say *this* cart and *this* mule, that was just a figure of speech, is all that was. I mean to say he had *a* cart and *a* mule, and he was a wandering snake oil salesman.

And the way he worked, see, was he would set up his cart, and it had opening sides on it, and he would open up the opening sides, which were made to open up and display his snake oil, or Abernathy's Patent Tonic or whatever it was called, in shelves on the inside, and he would get up on top and he would commence to shout about his snake oil. Well I say he'd shout about his snake oil, I mean to say he'd shout out whatever it was that he called it, Smith's Special Stomach Medicine, or whatever it was. I don't think people would've come flocking to see him, standing up there in his top hat and frock coat, if he was shouting "Snake oil!! Snake oil for sale!! Get your snake oil right here, step right up folks!! Snake oil!!" Stands to reason doesn't it? No, he'd get up there in his top hat and frock coat and shout about Jones's Powerful Special, or whatever it was called.

Well, I say top hat and frock coat, I don't rightly know what he wore. I was never there, but it was a long time ago, and there were traveling snake oil salesmen in the world and it just stands to reason he wore a frock coat and a top hat. I don't rightly know, as such and per se, so to speak. Anyway, I do know that he stopped at what he thought was a crossroads, only it was just a crosspaths. Well, not even a crosspaths then, just a trail where the railroad surveyors had gone through, because the highway crew hadn't come through yet, because there were no

highways, because there were no cars yet, and why would they have built a highway if there were no cars? Stands to reason-- *Sir!* There are *ladies* present! Will you *kindly* keep a civil tongue in your head?! Tsk, tsk, tsk!

Moving on, there's this crossroads, or a place, at any rate, where there ought to be a crossroads, or there would be a crossroads, if there were any reason for a road to come through here going one way and another to come through going another way, and if they were to cross here, then there'd be a crossroads, and there's this traveling snake oil salesman, and he's standing up on top of his cart behind his mule in his top hat and his frock coat, calling out the virtues of his particular snake oil as opposed to anybody else's snake oil. Well, that's the picture we're going to work with anyway.

So there he is up there bellowing away, and his mule up and dies on him. Well, I say it dies on him, I don't mean to say it dies *on him* so to speak and per se, that's just a figure of speech, is all that is. I mean to say it dies, not on him, but in the middle of the road. Well, in the middle of where the road would be if there was a road, which there wasn't. So now his mule is dead, and he's up there calling out the virtues of his snake oil trying to get people to come and buy some, but there's no one around his cart 'cause there is no one. I mean to say there is no one within ten miles of his cart, and they can't hear him. The ones that *are* there, I mean to say, but *aren't* within ten miles. So he figures all his snake oil's gonna go bad on him. Well, I say on him, I don't mean it would go bad *on him*, 'cause he didn't have it on him, he had it in the cart, but it was going to go bad in the cart, and he couldn't get anybody to come and buy it, 'cause there wasn't anybody, so he up and dumps it out in the road, or where the road would be, if there was one, which there wasn't, and he makes this big grease pit, and then he walks away into the desert. Probably died out there, I don't rightly know, as I wasn't there, but he walked off into the sunset and never came back.

Well, then this other manufacturer's representative, or traveling salesman, so to speak, well, peddler, is what he was, he sold pots and pans and such, and I imagine he sold all kinds of other stuff too, I don't rightly know-- yes, sir, that's right: I wasn't there! Will you kindly SHUT UP!! Thank you. As I was saying, there was this other guy, and he came up from one direction in his cart with all his pots and pans and whatever else he might have that he sold out of his cart, and there was this other guy yet, and he was a traveling preacher man, and he came up from the other way, and they couldn't get around the cart with the dead mule, and so they just sort of stopped there, and the first guy sold pots and pans to the other guy, and the other guy baptized the first guy, and they just sort of made a town, 'cause people came from all directions and couldn't get past 'em, and that town got called Greasepit, Nevada, see, on account of the big grease pit where the guy dumped out his snake oil and went away. Well, not where he went away, there wasn't any grease pit where he went away, just where he dumped out his snake oil, but then he did go away after that, is why I said that. Well, I mean to say, there could've been a grease pit where he went away, or where he went to, anyway, I don't rightly know, 'cause I don't know where he went, but there wasn't any grease pit the last place we *know* he was, or where we can *surmise* he was, as he went away.

Anyway, that's why the town got called Greasepit, Nevada, is because of the snake oil and the fact that it's in the state of Nevada. And don't go looking on maps for Greasepit, either, 'cause it's too small. Not the map, the town, although the map's too small to have the town of Greasepit on it, too, for all of the matter of that.

So now, here we are in the town of Greasepit, Nevada, and we know why it got called that. Well, I mean to say, it gets called that 'cause that's its name, but we know *why* that's its name. Well, I mean to say, I always did know why that was its name, but now you do, too, if you paid attention, and if you're not paying attention, just go away. All right, then good riddance, I say, good riddance to bad rubbish. Where were we?

Oh, yes, the history books, I guess the time has come to talk about the history books. Well, I mean to say, I already did talk about the history books a little, but it's time to get back to them, now, and to tell the story of how and why Sammy stole them. Well, I say Sammy, I mean to say Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, but everybody called him Sammy, on account of all the reasons we went over above and beforehand.

See, there was this lady, well, I say lady, I should say woman, on account of I don't know how lady-like she might've been. Well, I mean to say, she could've been a lady, per se and as such, for all I know, but I *don't* know,

'swhat I mean to say, so I should say woman. So there was this woman, and her name was Mrs Thoroughgoode, and I surely do thank all that's good and right about the universe that her daughter Matilda Ezmerelda Thoroughgoode never fell in love with Sammy, or Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, as his name rightly was, 'cause I shudder to think what they might've named their kids. Anyway, there was this woman, Mrs Thoroughgoode, and she was the librarian for the Greasepit School District.

Well, Greasepit School District is what they call themselves, but it seems kind of stuck-up and egotistical if you ask some folks, not naming any names or anything, but some folks, and by that I mean one of the bunch of us right here, and I don't mean any of *you*, might think it's stuck up and egotistical to call yourself a School District when there's only that one building right over there next to the gas station. No, not that one, that one's a porta-poop. I mean the one on the other side, the big one. Well, I say big, I mean to say it's bigger than the porta-poop. Sort of. Anyway, that's the Greasepit School District, right there, is what that is, and Mrs Thoroughgoode was the librarian. I don't mean to say her first name was Mrs, but I don't know what it was, so I'll just call her Mrs, is why I said that. Well, her name could've been Mrs, for all I know, but it could've been Alice or Betty or Carol or something, too. Stands to reason, 'swhat I mean to say. Well, I don't think her name was Something. Something Thoroughgoode wouldn't be a very lady-like name would it? That was just a figure of speech, is all that was.

Anyway, she ordered some history books from this big history book place in New York City, well, this big book place, but we already covered that. When they got here, they came on a truck. Well, I mean to say, there weren't that many of them, there wasn't a whole truck-load of 'em, but the ones there were came on a truck, is why I said that. I mean they didn't come by airplane or boat or train. Well, train'd be mighty difficult to come here by, on account of the railroad never did get built, and airplane or boat'd be pretty difficult, too, 'cause there's no airport or canal, either. Well, I mean to say, it'd be pretty difficult to get here by airplane 'cause there's no airport, and it'd be difficult by boat 'cause there's no canal. There being no airport wouldn't make it hard to get here by boat, and no canal wouldn't make it hard by airplane, but there isn't either one here. Airport or canal, I mean to say, not airplane or boat. Well, there's no airplane or boat here, either. Anyway, the books came by truck, the history books that Mrs Thoroughgoode ordered for the school library from this big history book place that might not be a history book place, 'cause they might make all kinds of other books, but I don't rightly know.

When the truck got here, the truck man stopped at the gas station right there, on account of he didn't really know where he was, or if he'd gotten here yet. Well, I mean to say, he knew he'd gotten *here*, but he didn't know where *here* was. Well, I assume he knew he'd gotten *somewhere*, but he did stop to ask where he was, so it stands to reason he didn't know where it was that he'd gotten, just that he'd gotten somewhere that might or might not be the right place, so he stopped at the gas station to ask where he was, and that's when total disaster struck.

Well, I say disaster, I mean Sammy, or Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, as his name actually was. While the truck was stopped, so the truck man could ask where he was – well, he knew where he was, he was standing right there in front of the station, but he didn't know where the station might be, 'swhat I mean to say, didn't know what the place might be called, and he was hoping it was called Greasepit, Nevada, 'cause he wanted to be done with it and get to the next place, so he stopped to ask, and while he was asking, his truck was just standing there in the station lot waiting for him. Well, it stands to reason, doesn't it? It wasn't any kind of robot truck that could go off on its own, or there wouldn't have been a truck man to stop and ask directions, and the truck would have had to stop and ask its own directions, wouldn't it?

So it's just standing there. Well, I say *it's standing* there, I mean to say it *was* standing there, not that it *is* standing there now. If it was standing there now, we could all just go over there and watch Sammy take the books out of the back of the truck, and I wouldn't have to tell this story, now would I? 'Cause that's what he did, is he took the books out of the back of the truck, on account of he didn't like history. Well, I say he didn't like history, I mean to say he just plain didn't like school. He plumb hated school, is the fact of the matter of it. Didn't think there was anything about school that was worth his time, except he would've liked to dip Matilda Ezmerelda Thoroughgoode's pigtails in the inkwells, if there'd been any inkwells, and if Matilda Ezmerelda Thoroughgoode

had worn her hair in pigtails. Matty, she got called, Matilda Ezmerelda Thoroughgoode, that is, she got called Matty, and I think Sammy, or Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, as his name was, thought she was pretty cute. I think he would've like to dip her pigtails in ink, not 'cause there was any ink for him to dip 'em in, but because that's what I did way back when I-- I mean, uh, um, er, I just think. . . *harumph!* Moving right along.

So anyway, Sammy got up there in the back of the truck, or Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster, that is to say, he got up there in the back of the truck and he stole those history books from that big place back in New York City, see? And that's the story of Samuel Charles Noah Dickens Webster and how he stole the new history books, both of 'em, and put 'em down the privy in back of the schoolhouse. He would've put 'em down the porta-poopie there by the station, but it wasn't there then, so he took 'em over to the schoolhouse, and he put 'em down the privy in back, and that there's both the long and the short of it, so to speak and per se, for all of the matter of that.