

*by leo carolez*

I called him a curmudgeon. I could have said grouch or crank, but curmudgeon was the right word for this mean-muggin', grumpy-ass, old-school celly of mine. He tilted his head like a confused dog and asked, "What'd you call me?" He was livid and for a moment I thought I should lace-up, but it passed as he asked to see my dictionary. I passed it along happily.

It is my secret (secret?) weapon. A tome as old as the Rosetta Stone. It had its hey day pre-internet, but in prison it is still our Google; our go-to for correct spellings, pronunciation, and definitions but to me it is much more than that.

I was watching an old Sopranos episode where Tony orders his Delmonico bloody from the waiter at a restaurant. What the hell is a Delmonico, I wonder? No way would something like that be in my Merriam-Webster's Dictionary...or would it? It was not. Time to call for back up, call for the big guns: The American Heritage fifteen pound leather-bound behemoth and sure as shit there it is: The Delmonico or "club steak" is a small, boned steak from the front section of the short loin of beef--named after Lorenzo Delmonico. The same dictionary, same page even, also tells me Mr. Delmonico (1813-1881) was a swiss born American restaurateur who popularized European cuisine in NYC and is considered the father of the restaurant as an institution in American cities. Wow. So cool. What seemed like just an innocent query has given me a history lesson and better understanding of food in America.

Now, I am dangerous. Not only do I know how to spell Delmonico, but I am a treasure trove of interesting trivia--which you never know when you **might** need to deploy. I feel learned or that I am part of a secret society privy to inside information. Is this what smart people feel like?



As I mentioned, they're not all the same. I commend all of them, but there are a few Navy SEALs among you. I endorse the big Kahuna, the old grandad, the always ready to deploy and obliterate ignorance: The American Heritage hardcover unabridged version. It's an anchor, heavy and overbearing. Its size and scope intimidating and yet beautiful in design and structure. I love the act of man-handling it out of my property box and hearing the tremendous thump as it hammers my desk. I open it and it regales me with details and photos; maps and diagrams. It is so much more than its contemporaries it's like milk to milshakes--sure you share some qualities, but truly, there is no comparison. Oh, is that why they call it a crew neck sweater and oh, look at that, that's how they look. God, you're impressive. My teacher, my muse, my stand-by, my everything.

In many ways you are alive, you grow as our language tends to do and die as words often might. You are fluid and dynamic, always evolving with the zeitgeist (another good good word I owe to you). You've never let me down...until today.

As I handed you over to my celly he promptly used it to snake me across the face with a literal knowledge bitch slap. I am left befuddled in a pool of my own blood on the floor. "Not so sanguine now, are you?" He remarks smugly. I am not sure he is using that right, I think to myself, but only respond "Touché celly, touché."



**CONVICT CHRONICLES: caged america**

**by Leo Cardez**

