

# AllCovered NEWS

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## HIGHLIGHTS TO HELP YOU THIS WEEK

- Tax Scams
- World Probes Air Cargo Price-Fixing
- Air Cargo Services Expand
- Boost Your Business in 2006

Monday, 20 February 2006 --- Edition #476

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## >> SMALL BUSINESS SECTION <<

### TAX SCAMS

#### SMALL BIZ – TAX SCAMS

Whether you're the one being scammed or if you're trying to put one over on the IRS yourself, the tax agency says it's hip to the top tax scams for 2006, otherwise known as the "Dirty Dozen."

If you are part of the group that wants to do the right thing and pay Uncle Sam his fair share, be aware that there's a potential minefield out there when you are putting your W-2s and 1099s together this year.

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>PHISHING</b>                   | Identity thieves have started to pose as the IRS or financial institutions in an effort to "phish" personal information such as Social Security and credit card numbers from consumers. The IRS never contacts taxpayers via e-mail.   |
| <b>ZERO RETURN</b>                | Taxpayers should also be aware of individuals offering tax-saving packages for a fee, according to the IRS.  |
| <b>RETURN PREPARER FRAUD</b>      | If have someone prepare your taxes, be wary of those tax preparers who promise large refunds. Those individuals may be charging you higher fees and skimming from your tax return. The taxpayer ultimately bears the responsibility of making sure their tax return is accurate.   |
| <b>CREDIT COUNSELING AGENCIES</b> | Be careful with credit counseling agencies who may promise to provide financial guidance. Instead, individuals looking for help could find themselves saddled with even more debt and financial headaches.   |
| <b>TAX CHEATERS ON NOTICE</b>     | If you're guilty of one of the tax cheating schemes listed below, you may find yourself facing the scrutiny of the IRS faster than you can say audit.  |
| <b>ZERO WAGES</b>                 | One of the newest swindles on the IRS' radar this year are individuals that claim zero wages on a Form 4852 or a "corrected" 1099. While the system is meant to protect the taxpayer, such as an independent contractor, from an employer, some tax cheats have tried to exploit the system by claiming that he or she did not receive as much as an employer originally reported. |
| <b>FORM 843 TAX ABATEMENT</b>     | With "form 843" scams individuals claim they have never filed a tax return before or that an older return was sent but never received, hoping the IRS will low-ball their estimated tax bill.  |
| <b>FRIVOLOUS ARGUMENTS</b>        | As much as you might want to argue that filling out a Form 1040 goes against both the Fourth Amendment right to privacy and the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination -- forget it. The IRS says these arguments have tried and failed in   |

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|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | court.  |
| <b>ABUSE OF CHARITABLE DEDUCTIONS</b>   | While giving to charity is a great way to get a tax break, a growing number of individuals are taking advantage of the situation. Instead of making a simple donation, some cheats have moved income or assets into tax-free organization, but maintained control of the money, according to the IRS. |
| <b>OFFSHORE TRANSACTIONS</b>  | Tax cheats are still prone to hiding income in offshore bank and brokerage accounts. In the fiscal year 2005, the IRS reported 68 individuals were convicted for promoting or using different schemes to avoid paying taxes   |
| <b>TRUST MISUSE</b>   | Many trusts do not deliver lower income taxes, higher deductions or gift taxes. Speak with a professional before transferring any funds.  |
| <b>EMPLOYMENT TAX EVASION</b>   | Employers aren't innocent either. Some business owners have not collected federal income or other employment taxes from workers. The IRS warns that those employers would face payment of those back taxes as well as penalties and interest.   |
| <b>'NO GAIN' DEDUCTION</b>  | Some claim deductions that equal their adjusted gross income, propped up by phony court documents.  |
| MORE: <a href="http://money.cnn.com/2006/02/07/pf/taxes/tax_scams/">http://money.cnn.com/2006/02/07/pf/taxes/tax_scams/</a> |   |

|  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>TAX BREAKS</b>  | <b>PERSONAL BIZ – 6 TAX BREAKS</b> |
| Take advantage of legitimate tax breaks to cut your 2005 tax bill.   |                                    |
| You can legally cut your tax bill with deductions... you just have to make sure they are legal. The link below offers six deductions individuals often miss. |                                    |
| MORE: <a href="http://money.cnn.com/2006/01/12/pf/taxes/tax_breaks/index.htm">http://money.cnn.com/2006/01/12/pf/taxes/tax_breaks/index.htm</a>              |                                    |

**TECH BIZ – TECH TOYS YOU CAN EXPENSE:**

MORE: [http://www.cnet.com/4520-11737\\_1-6418793-1.html?tag=nl.e724](http://www.cnet.com/4520-11737_1-6418793-1.html?tag=nl.e724)

**SMALL BIZ – HEALTH – DO WE HAVE TOO MUCH CHOICE?:**

As we reported last week, Health Savings Accounts are growing quickly... giving consumers more choice with their health insurance than a one-size-fits-all program. President Bush's proposed expansion of health savings accounts depends on a premise that Americans want more financial choices in their lives. Experts point to a lack of participant activity within 401(k) plans as a sign that many Americans already feel overwhelmed by financial options.

MORE: <http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/business/13816339.htm>

**FLYING CAR FINALLY REALITY?:**

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Aeronautics Department has decided to take on the challenge of a flying car. With today's new materials and technologies MIT says it can build a car/plane. The "Transition" would fly up to 500 miles (830 km), get 30 miles per gallon flying or 40 mpg on the road. If demand justifies production the "Transition" will fly by 2008.

PICTURES: [http://news.zdnet.com/2300-9595\\_22-6040379-1.html](http://news.zdnet.com/2300-9595_22-6040379-1.html)

MORE: <http://news.com.com/Students+at+MIT+give+flying+car+a+shot/2100-11389-6040007.html?part=dht&tag=nl.e433>

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
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## >>>> TRUCKING SECTION <<<<

### TRUCKING – ATA WANTS TRUCK SPEED LIMITED

The American Trucking Associations wants new Class 7 and 8 trucks governed at 68 mph when they leave the factory.

"There has been a growing sense within the trucking industry for the need to slow down the large truck population as well as all traffic," says Bill Graves, ATA President and CEO. "With speeding as a factor in one third of all fatal highway crashes, it makes all the sense in the world to work to reduce this number."

Todd Spencer of the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association thinks this is a publicity stunt. "This is not about safety at all. Most accidents that involve trucks don't take place on roads that have high speed limits. They take place in city congestion where speed is not a factor."

MORE: <http://www.etrucker.com/apps/news/article.asp?id=51782>

MORE: <http://www.thetrucker.com/showstory.aspx?id=10652>

**TRUCKING – ANTI-IDLING DEMAND GROWS:** Trucking companies are investing more in idle reduction technology, and the demand for it will steadily increase, according to the American Transportation Research Institute, the trucking industry's not-for-profit research organization. 36% of survey respondents with sleeper cabs use on-board idle reduction technology. Such devices as direct-fired heaters, auxiliary power units/generator sets and battery-powered air conditioners all conserve fuel and reduce pollution by reducing the need to idle the main engine.

REPORT: <http://www.atri-online.org>

MORE: <http://www.etrucker.com/apps/news/article.asp?id=51755>

**TRUCKING – DIESEL DOWN:** The US national average retail price of a gallon of diesel decreased 2 cents for the week ending 13 February to \$2.476, or 49 cents more than in the same week of 2005.

MORE: <http://www.etrucker.com/apps/news/article.asp?id=51752>

## >>>> SECURITY SECTION <<<<

**SECURITY - CANADA WANTS MORE X-RAY:** More X-ray scanning equipment is needed at major land border crossings to stop weapons from being smuggled into the country, say Canada Customs union officials. The union said land crossings are less scrutinized as Customs' 11 X-ray trucks used for detecting contraband in containers are being used largely at sea ports in Halifax, Vancouver and Montreal.

MORE: <http://ottsun.canoe.ca/News/National/2006/02/13/1439705-sun.html>

**SECURITY – OHIO COMPANY IMPLANTS RFID TAGS IN EMPLOYEES:**

MORE: <http://news.ft.com/cms/s/ec414700-9bf4-11da-8baa-0000779e2340.html>

## >>> AIR & OCEAN SECTION <<<



### AIR – WORLD PROBES AIR CARGO PRICE FIXING

The rumors and phone calls started Tuesday... and as the information comes out it appears officials in Europe, the US and Asia are going after air cargo carriers and mainline airlines that move cargo.

At least 16 airlines have now been drawn into a widening

**AIR CARRIERS**

investigation by United States and European Union officials of whether there has been collusion in the air cargo industry to fix prices on surcharges for fuel, security and insurance.

British Airways has been raided twice.

Spokespersons for the European Commission, the US Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation refuse to provide details about the probe.

**--- HINT OF WHAT'S COMING ---**

One of the foreign airlines targeted, SAS Cargo, says the EU has alleged that cooperation among airlines began in 2000 and involved agreements about surcharges imposed by airlines to offset certain external costs.

Among the costs, according to a statement from SAS, are surcharges on fuel, added security after the 9-11 attacks in the US and premiums for war-risk insurance after the start of the war in Iraq.

**--- WHAT HAPPENED ---**

Raids were conducted at the offices of several airlines and others admitted they had been contacted or issued subpoenas from authorities.

The US would say only, "The antitrust division is investigating the possibility of anticompetitive practices in the air cargo industry."

The European Commission would say only that the raids were a preliminary step in investigations into suspected cartels and it does not mean the companies raided are guilty of anti-competitive behavior.

**--- WHAT IT MIGHT COST ANY GUILTY ---**

Under EU law, the commission can fine companies accused of operating a cartel as much as 10% of their annual sales. Normally fines are 2% to 3%.

Price-fixing, if proven, could also bring fines and other penalties in the US.

MORE: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060215/ap\\_on\\_bi\\_ge/air\\_cargo\\_probe](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060215/ap_on_bi_ge/air_cargo_probe)

MORE: [http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000101&sid=aHFkKqLL\\_o88&refer=japan](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000101&sid=aHFkKqLL_o88&refer=japan)

MORE: <http://www.atwonline.com/news/story.html?storyID=4050>

MORE: <http://news.airwise.com/story/view/1139942166.html>

MORE: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000102&sid=aEemxQBxOqn8&refer=uk>

MORE: <http://www.newsday.com/business/nationworld/wire/sns-ap-air-cargo-probe.0.3864814.story?coll=sns-ap-business-headlines>

**TARGETED**

- Air Canada
- Air France – KLM
- Asiana
- American
- British Airways
- Cargolux
- Cathay Pacific
- Japan Airlines
- Korean Air Lines
- Lan Chile
- Lufthansa
- Nippon Cargo
- Polar Air Cargo
- Singapore Airlines
- United
- UPS

**AIR – FORENSICS USED IN CARGO PROBE:** The global probe into price fixing by the air cargo industry will rely heavily on computer software advances in areas like data scanning, say forensics experts. "In a raid, we make a perfect copy of the hard disc and then use software to reveal documents that had been deleted," said Adam Bates, KPMG's Global Head of Forensics. "Technology is becoming more and more important to combat fraud. That's the biggest development." "E-mails are the key to any investigation; people forget that when they delete e-mails, they're still there somewhere."

MORE: [http://in.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=technologyNews&storyID=2006-02-15T195523Z\\_01\\_NOOTR\\_RTRJONC\\_0\\_India\\_236792-1.xml&archived=False](http://in.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=technologyNews&storyID=2006-02-15T195523Z_01_NOOTR_RTRJONC_0_India_236792-1.xml&archived=False)

**AIR – CARGO PROBE REACHES ASIA:**

MORE: [http://money.cnn.com/2006/02/15/news/international/air\\_cargo.reut/?cnn=yes](http://money.cnn.com/2006/02/15/news/international/air_cargo.reut/?cnn=yes)

**AIR – CANADA DIGGING IN AIR CARGO:**

MORE: [http://today.reuters.com/investing/financeArticle.aspx?type=governmentFilingsNews&storyID=URI:urn:newsml:reuters.com:20060215:MTFH27766\\_2006-02-15\\_15-59-05\\_N15209434:1](http://today.reuters.com/investing/financeArticle.aspx?type=governmentFilingsNews&storyID=URI:urn:newsml:reuters.com:20060215:MTFH27766_2006-02-15_15-59-05_N15209434:1)

**AIR – LUFTHANSA WILL COOPERATE:**

MORE: <http://www.joc.com/20060214/sections/air/w75281.asp>

**AIR – CATHAY CARGO UP IN JANUARY:** Cathay Pacific carried 91,366 tons of cargo in January, up 21.9% from January 2005. The airline says its freight traffic was boosted by a 14.4% increase in capacity with two additional freighters joining its fleet and new services commencing to Shanghai, Dallas and Atlanta. Also aiding January's jump was cargo moving ahead of the Chinese New Year.

MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28198](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28198)

**AIR – AIR FRANCE KLM CARGO UP:** Air France-KLM, the world's biggest airline by

revenue, reports third-quarter profit more than tripled as a recovery in cargo revenue and surging passenger numbers helped to offset a sharp increase in fuel costs. The cargo business, Europe's second-largest after Lufthansa Cargo, boosted third-quarter earnings by 18.1% to 98 million euros (\$117.6 million).

MORE: <http://www.joc.com/lede/20060216/sections/air/w62643.asp>

**AIR – THAI AIR ORDERED TO GROW AIR CARGO:** Thailand's Transport Ministry has ordered Thai Airways International's management to boost the state-owned airline's share of the air cargo market to 50% in an effort to help the country meet its goal of becoming a regional aviation hub. Thai currently has 30% of the market. The Ministry wants Thai to add to its cargo fleet.

MORE: <http://www.tmcnet.com/usubmit/2006/02/13/1366899.htm>

**AIR – AIR CARGO GIANTS FOCUS ON EASTERN EUROPE:** DHL has bought the leading Czech express service PPL CZ s.r.o. TNT has acquired the overnight provider ISH Nocni Express, which has operations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. These are just two examples that demonstrate growing interest in the Eastern European market on the part of the dynamic fast-moving logistics industry. As the economies of eastern Europe grow between a 4% and 12% annual rate, international air cargo companies and logistics companies are targeting the area for rapid expansion.

MORE: <http://www.aircargonews.com/060213/logisticszone.html>

**AIR – EMIRATES EXPANDS IN AFRICA AND RUSSIA:** Emirates SkyCargo has signed major agreements in Africa and Russia to expand service. Nairobi's Astral Aviation will work with Emirates to expand odd-sized machinery shipments using Astral's Antonov AN 12s. In Russia, Emirates will cooperate with the Volga Dnepr Group's AirBridge Cargo to serve the huge demand for pharmaceutical products from the Indian subcontinent and carry large odd-sized shipments such as machinery and equipment to offline points in Russia.

MORE: [http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/business/2006/February/business\\_February213.xml&section=business&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/business/2006/February/business_February213.xml&section=business&col=)

**AIR – CARGOLUX STARTS INDY SERVICE:** Cargolux has begun a weekly service between Luxembourg and Indianapolis, designed to largely serve the pharmaceutical industry. Operated by Boeing 747-400 freighters, the new service departs Luxembourg every Friday, arriving in Indianapolis on the same day. The flight then continues to Los Angeles and returns to Luxembourg arriving Saturday evening.

MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28246](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28246)

**AIR – NWA & UNIONS EXTEND TALKS:** A federal judge has given bankrupt Northwest Airlines and the unions representing its pilots and flight attendants until Friday, February 24 to reach deals. The extension delays by seven days a ruling on Northwest's motion to void its contracts with labor groups that have yet to make concessions deals.

MORE: <http://news.airwise.com/story/view/1140165328.html>

**AIR – US INTERNATIONAL AIR FREIGHT UP 3.7% IN 2005:**

MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28316](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28316)



## BOOST YOUR BUSINESS IN 2006

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### **TRADE – CARGO CLAIMS ON 1-IN-100 SHIPMENTS**

Getting an idea of how many goods are currently lost or damaged in transit is difficult to pin down because ocean freight insurers, shipping lines, ports, rail lines and trucking companies are not eager to advertise such statistics. Transit industry sources point out that the rate of loss or damage is low when you consider that most shipments are handled between 40 and 80 times during a move from an Asian factory to a US store.

"What I see, based on my experience working with the big-box retailers, is that for every 100 containers, I would expect to have one claim," says Steve Ferreira, founder of Ocean Freight Refunds. "The claim could be for a loss, damage, shortage or pilferage, or even a hole in the container that causes damage to part of the shipment."

"I'm noticing that a lot of my customers, more so than ever, are purchasing marine insurance to protect themselves."

The explanation for the trend has little to do with any increase in the number of goods getting lost or damaged. Instead, Ferreira believes it has more to do with price protection in the rare event something does go wrong.

MORE: <http://www.wwd.com/issue/article/104359?src=rss>

**TRADE – AUS CUSTOMS FACING AUDIT:** Australian Customs has announced an independent review of its controversial cargo management system. The Integrated Cargo System lets sea and air importers receive early clearance for goods to move through Australian ports. Problems with the system, when it began operating in October last year, created a backlog of shipping containers and significant delays for industry.

MORE: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200602/s1569849.htm>

### **OCEAN – MORE ASIAN SHIPMENTS MOVE EAST**

Cargo ships loaded with sports shoes, cutlery and other Asian imports are increasingly bypassing US West Coast docks for longer voyages to thriving seaports in the southern United States.

The shifting trade flows encourage government and private investment at ports feeding into the quickly expanding South and are driving job gains at docks, warehouses, trucking firms and other businesses.

"We have had a major shift . . . from the West Coast for bringing in Asian imports for the East," says John Martin, a ports consultant.

MORE: <http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/sub/shippingtimes/story/0,4574,185933,00.html>

**OCEAN - WILL US SEE PORT CONGESTION IN 2006?:** In the middle of the slow season for container imports, the US's major retail container ports are operating without congestion but could face challenges ahead, according to the February Port Tracker report from the National Retail Federation and Global Insight. "Looking ahead to the coming 2006 peak season, we see continued challenges to system performance due to continued growth in trade that will start again within the next two months," says Paul Bingham, an economist with Global Insight. "There will continue to be rail capacity constraints and trucking concerns, but with quick decision-making and rapid mitigation steps, we hope the industry will be able to repeat the overall success we saw in 2005 and keep any terminal or network congestion to a minimum."

MORE: <http://www.logisticstoday.com/displayStory.asp?sNO=7708&OASKEY=BreakingNews>

**OCEAN - CHINA PORT VOLUME UP 18.6% IN 2005:** China's ports handled 6.89 million TEUs in 2005. China has more than 40 major ports, all of which have an annual cargo throughput capacity of over five million tons.

MORE: <http://www.forbes.com/business/feeds/afx/2006/02/16/afx2531102.html>

**OCEAN – STRONG START TO 2006 IN SO-CAL:** Los Angeles-Long Beach began the year with a double-digit increase in containerized imports, indicating that the diversion of cargo to other ports has stabilized and the ports are returning to a more normal growth pattern. Trans-Pacific capacity will rise 14% this year. Throughput at the ports was up 11% over January 2005.

MORE: <http://www.joc.com/20060217/sections/ocean/w67690.asp>

**OCEAN – P&O APPROVES DP-WORLD BID:** Shareholders in British shipping company P&O have voted overwhelmingly in favor of a takeover bid from Dubai's DP World. DP-World's \$6.8-Billion cash bid for P&O will make it the world's second- or third-largest ports operator. Hutchison Whampoa of Hong Kong is first, followed by Singapore-based PSA International, but the combined throughputs of the two ports companies could surpass that of PSA.

MORE: <http://www.joc.com/20060213/sections/ocean/w87419.asp>

**OCEAN – DP WILL RUN SIX US PORTS:** Now that Dubai's DP World has successfully bought P&O, DP will run six ports in the US... in New York, New Jersey, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and Philadelphia. DP World said it won approval from a secretive US government panel that considers security risks of foreign companies buying or investing in American industry. The US Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States 'thoroughly reviewed the potential transaction and concluded they had no objection', the company said in a statement. Last month, the White House appointed a senior DP World executive, David Sanborn of Virginia, to be the new administrator of the Maritime Administration of the Transportation Department. Mr Sanborn worked as DP World's director of operations for Europe and Latin America.

MORE: <http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/sub/shippingtimes/story/0,4574,186128,00.html>

**OCEAN – US CONGRESS PLAYS POLITICS WITH DP-WORLD & PORTS:**

MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28419](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28419)

**OCEAN - 11 INDIAN PORTS TO GET FACE LIFT:** The government of India is proposing to deepen the entrance channels and strengthen the berths of all the 11 major ports except Kolkata port in the country. Akula Rao, a development advisor to the ports says, "Our ports entrance channels' draft is between 10 meters and 12 meters, except those of Mumbai and New Mangalore. These channels are able to allow only smaller vessels of up to 65,000 DWT (dead weight tonnage). In the present global scenario, these smaller vessels are becoming outdated as shipping companies are turning to bigger vessels to reduce freight charges. Keeping this development in mind, the government is taking up this project." Port drafts will be increased to 14 meters (46 feet).

MORE: <http://www.business-standard.com/common/storypage.php?storyflag=v&leftnm=imnu2&leftindx=2&lselect=1&chklogin=N&autono=215139>

**OCEAN – TACA EXTENDS RATES:** Carriers of the Trans-Atlantic Conference Agreement will extend their bunker rates unchanged through April 15.

MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28248](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28248)

**OCEAN – YANG MING TO CALL PORTLAND:** Yang Ming Marine has decided to begin calling at the Port of Portland, Oregon, switching calls from Vancouver, British Columbia, and Zim Integrated Shipping Services will decide soon whether to call there, according to a report in the Portland Oregonian.

MORE: <http://www.joc.com/lede/20060214/sections/ocean/w6536.asp>

**OCEAN – MORGAN STANLEY LOWERS ASIAN CARRIER RATINGS:** Evergreen Marine, China Shipping Container Lines and other Asian shipping lines had their stock ratings and earnings estimates cut by Morgan Stanley, which cited a decline in cargo rates. The broker lowered its recommendations on Evergreen, Yang Ming and China Shipping to 'underweight' from 'equal-weight', analysts including Jim Lam wrote in a report yesterday. Shares of Orient Overseas were cut to 'equal-weight' from 'overweight', the report said.

MORE: <http://business-times.asia1.com.sg/sub/shippingtimes/story/0,4574,186121,00.html>

**OCEAN – MATSON STARTS US-HAWAII-CHINA SERVICE:** US Jones Act shipping line Matson has begun its new weekly US West Coast/Hawaii/Guam/China service, marking its

return to the transpacific trade after an absence of over 35 years and the end of its 10-year vessel operating alliance with APL.  
MORE: [http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW\\_story.asp?news=28322](http://www.americanshipper.com/SNW_story.asp?news=28322)  
MORE: <http://www.joc.com/lede/20060215/sections/ocean/w25631.asp>

**> > > > > JUST FOR FUN <<<<<<**

(These are shared by readers – Please share yours. Thanks. Mike)

**WISDOM**

Being a veterinarian, I had been called to examine a ten-year old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog's owners, Ron, his wife, Lisa, and their little boy, Shane, were all very attached to Belker and they were hoping for a miracle.

I examined Belker and found he was dying of cancer.

I told the family we couldn't do anything for Belker, and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home.

As we made arrangements, Ron and Lisa told me they thought it would be good for the four-year-old Shane to observe the procedure. They felt as though Shane might learn something from the experience.

The next day, I felt the familiar catch in my throat as Belker's family surrounded him. Shane seemed so calm, petting the old dog for the last time, that I wondered if he understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away. The little boy seemed to accept Belker's transition without any difficulty or confusion.

We sat together for a while after Belker's death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives.

Shane, who had been listening quietly, piped up, "I know why."

Startled, we all turned to him. What came out of his mouth next stunned me. I'd never heard a more comforting explanation.

He said, "People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life -- like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?" The four-year-old continued, "Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay here as long."

May we all have the wisdom of a four-year-old boy.

If you have curious, interesting, funny or thoughtful items to share in "Just For Fun", Email them to [mike.miller@allcovered.net](mailto:mike.miller@allcovered.net) . Thanks.

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