

The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah Satire creator talks about his humor, his wife's cancer and what he won't joke about with Mormons



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A sad basset hound staring from behind the steel bars of a fence, captioned “How it feels watching other states legalize weed.”

Barney the Dinosaur destroying a city, topped by text reading “Utah be like Gosh-zilla.”

Two thumbnail-size beer mugs: “How to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day in Utah without getting a DUI.”

These are a few of the memes found on Utah Satire, an often wickedly funny, sometimes offensive Facebook page that in its two years has amassed nearly 83,000 followers.

No topic is untouchable: fry sauce, Tooele, lousy drivers, multilevel marketers, Provo, crazy weather, alcohol laws and, of course, Mormons. If you've just moved to the state, scrolling through Utah Satire is a good way of getting to know your new home — through what many native Utahns might see as eye-rolling stereotypes. But as the saying goes, a lot of stereotypes are funny because they're true.

“It was my own personal venting thing,” says Nate Kizerian, a shaven-headed, bushy-bearded guy with a perpetual grin. He started Utah Satire in 2015 as a reaction to the terrible driving he encountered while motoring around the valley tending to his window-cleaning business.

It began with a photo he found on the internet of a UHP officer on his laptop and phone. While the cop didn't appear to be driving, Kizerian typed up a caption that riffed on the “Cruisin' down the street” line from N.W.A.'s “Boyz-n-the-Hood.”

“That post really took off, and the page started getting an audience, so I decided to just make fun of Utah. There was already a BYU meme page, so why not?”

(Steve Griffin | The Salt Lake Tribune) Utah Satire
Facebook page creator Nate Kizerian in Bountiful
Friday November 3, 2017.

As with many popular memes, there's a question of appropriating other's people work. Kizerian has lifted the work of Salt Lake Tribune photographers for his memes and been asked to take them down.

“I always try to cite the source or creator,” Kizerian says. “Sometimes people send me things they did not make, and I credit the wrong person. I have respect for everyone’s hard work and I will normally take something down if I’m asked. I’m a lot more careful now than in the beginning.”

Kizerian says most of the memes he posts are his creations. The rest are submitted by fans, whom he credits — except when they don’t want it, which happens mostly with Mormon-themed memes.

“Some people come from very LDS families and they don’t want to cause a rift with their parents,” he says.

He’s gotten some pushback on those from people who accuse him of slamming the LDS Church, but he insists he’s not.

“I make fun of everything. I just don’t think the church should have as much control of the state as they do. With topics like medical marijuana, you’ve got 3 of 4 people in Utah supporting it. I’ve got a lot of LDS friends and they support it.”

But he’s learned to pick his meme battles. “One thing they’re sensitive about, though, are temple garments. I joke about that and they get pissed off. I’ve tried to be a bit respectful because it’s what they believe, so some of those memes I’ve pulled off the page.”

Kizerian also recently discovered that essential-oil people aren’t to be messed with.

“You can’t throw a rock in Utah without hitting someone who sells DoTerra. But I did one on multilevel marketers, and people were so offended and angry. I found this picture of a little girl and wrote, ‘When I grow up I want to try to sell weight-loss supplements, body wraps, and makeup to all my old high school acquaintances on Facebook.’ People lost their minds.”

Utah Satire Facebook page.

One of his most popular memes was inspired by a time-travel trip to Tooele.

“I went to the Walmart and I’d never seen so many damned mullets in my life! It’s like going back to 1980 down there. So I had to make a meme on my phone in the parking lot right away. It was The Most Interesting Man in the World saying ‘I don’t always go mullet watching, but when I do, I’m at the Tooele Walmart.’ And it took off because people really related to it. There ARE a lot of mullets down there.”

Weather memes are even more universal.

“I’ve had 5 million hits on some of those, especially ones related to snow or jokes about Utah weather changing every 15 minutes. I did one where Jackie Chan’s face was blowing all over the place and put ‘How it feels to be in Utah today’ on it and it got millions of hits.”

Utah Satire Facebook page.

Bad Utah drivers are always like-share-comment gold as well.

“That’s our common ground — no matter what people believe about politics or religion, we all know that Utah drivers suck.”

Utah Satire Facebook page.

Making memes has become more than a fun side hobby for Kizerian this year — it's been a way to hold onto his sense of humor while dealing with a life-threatening family illness.

In April, Kizerian's wife, Shalyce, was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer.

To care for her, he had to ease off on his window-washing business. With the income loss and no health insurance, they moved from a rented six-bedroom house where they lived with their three kids and a grandson into a trailer that was donated by a Utah Satire fan — “a complete stranger,” Kizerian says — and parked it in front of his in-laws' house.

Most everything they had was sold to pay for Shalyce's medical expenses.

“I've watched her just melt away,” says Kizerian. “She's lost over 80 pounds. She has good days and bad days and it's a real roller coaster, but she's doing well and it's looking better.”

Kizerian says the cancer and the stress of the past few months have made him realize he's a lot stronger than he thought. “But I'm still a clown all the time and I'll do things that will annoy the hell out of her, like run into the bedroom and be ‘Magic Nate’ and start tearing my clothes off and dancing,” he adds. “She told me the other day that if I really wanted to help her beat cancer, then I should stop dancing.”

Since his wife's diagnosis, Kizerian has taken a step back from the page — but an army of likeminded Utah meme creators has risen up, helping to keep it active.

“I told everyone to post away and make memes and I would re-share them,” he says. “The only thing that kind of sucked were people who tried to turn it into an anti-Mormon page or a preachy atheist page. It’s not an anti-anything page. There are more things to laugh about in Utah than Mormon jokes.”

Examples of those from recent days: gripes about Daylight Saving Time, only-in-Utah Halloween costumes and a cringeworthy photo of Gordon Hayward and his horribly wrenched foot superimposed on a Twister mat.

But Kizerian still makes plenty of his own memes, if only to cheer himself up.

“Trying to keep a sense of humor and go through life normally, that’s been difficult, but negativity is something neither of us need.”



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