

the boss lady's editorials

2005
EXPANDED
EDITION

a decade of
editorials, philosophy,
essays & insights
from Janet Kuypers



the
boss
lady's
editorials



**EXPANDED
EDITION**

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p h i l o s o p h y
e s s a y s & i d e a s

Janet Kuypers
Scars Publications & Design
A m e r i c a 2 0 0 5

“I think I just want to be someone
that makes people think.”

— magazine interview, Discover U, v2 issue 7, 12/09/03

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Table of Contents

asterisk items were also in the "What I Say" Book editorials

part 1

current work

the boss lady's editorial	
Deciding our Life and Death.....	6
When Does Life Begin?	11
Let's Decide Who To Kill	16
Drugging Ourselves Into A Stupor	20
Letting Free Speech Slide.....	22
Presidential Problems.....	24
The Liberal Media.....	27
Cindy Sheehan's 16th Minute of Fame.....	30
Did We Vote Our Rights Away?	32
We're in a War: Is This World War III? Or Are We In a Holy War?	34
Which World Will It Be?.....	38

philosophy monthly	
Understanding the World of Prejudice.....	41

what i say:	
the boss lady's editorial	
Veggies of the World Unite	42

philosophy monthly	
Trials & Tribulations with Morals	44

the boss lady's editorial	
Swallowing Where Meat Comes From.....	48

the editor's two cents	
The Freedom Pendulum Swings 'Round the Globe	49
the boss lady's editorial	
I Pledge of Allegiance... What do I Pledge my Allegiance to?	50
Beauty First	52

editorials	
Life, Liberty, and Blocks of Cheese	55

the boss lady's editorial	
Video Games, Violence, Porn & Death.....	56
Sexism in a Nutshell	58
The Assumption of Healthcare	63
Natural and Human Disasters:	
Katrina and 9/11	64
Working in your Spare Time	68
Government Inefficiency	69

philosophy monthly	
By Reason if Insanity	72

Performance Art	
Questions in a World Without Answers (the political debate)	74

part 2 classic work

editorials

Do People Want Justice, Or Just a Good Hanging?	76
Balancing the Budget.....	78
A Letter To Our Polticial Leaders	81
Boomers Beware: Who Pays the Price for Taxing the Rich?	84
DNA Versus Emotion	86
Capital Gains — Or Losses?	88
The Illness of volunteerism	89
Let The Government Tell You When You're Ready?	92
What Are Flexible Ethics	94
Get The Government Out Of Broadcasting ..	96
The Wrath of Valentine's Day	98
Welcome To corporate America	100
Diversity, Plolitican Correctness and Creativity.....	110

what I say:

the boss lady's editorials

Keep My Sanity	113
"Type A" Person	114

what I say: editorial

Child Molesters & the Government: Big Brother is Watching	116
--	-----

editorials

Medicine	118
Pornography	120
Children Flying Airplanes and More Government Red Tape	126
Poetry	128
About the Aurora Borealis	129

Philosophy Monthly

Modern Day Footbindings and the Oppression of Women	130
Letter On Religion	132
Kids Can Be Cruel: The Effect of Peers on One's Full Potential	136

what I say:

the boss lady's editorials

When Credibility doesn't Matter	138
---------------------------------------	-----

essays

The Christian Coalition and the Religious Right.....	139
Victim Blaming	140

...

Index	142
About the Author	144
Final Note	145
Colophon	146
Previous Publication Credits	146
For Sale	147
Books/CDs published	148

part 1...

Deciding our Life and Death

Do you have a will? No, we don't want you to donate your riches to this magazine after your death, but we were wondering about letting people know what should be done with us after we die. The frightening thing is that we've had to start discussing what should people do if we *almost* die. That's what our medical community has allowed us to do— we've had to start thinking about when we think we have to let go and stop playing God, so to speak.

Medicine has allowed us to prolong our life, and our medical community has created enough devices to help prolong our lives when we are gravely ill. I was in a car accident years ago where my condition was so bad that I was in a coma for eleven days, unable to breathe on my own. At the hospital, they kept an Intracranial Pressure Monitor on my head to monitor the swelling of my brain. They inserted a Vena Cava filter into an artery, so that a potential blood clot from my being sedentary so long would not travel to my heart and kill me. They piped a nutritional liquid into me for weeks until I could eat on my own. They waited until the last minute before giving me a tracheotomy — I started breathing on my own the morning before they were going to slice my throat open so I would no longer need a tube to help me breathe.

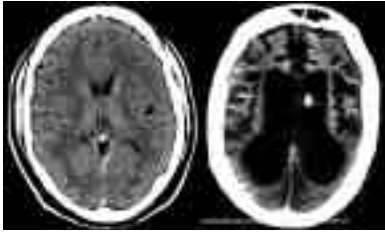
Science and medicine are wonderful for helping save a life.

But the question begs itself: is there a point when our medical feats go too far in trying to preserve our lives? I ask this because we have seen two deaths recently, Pope John Paul II, who decided to not have a lot of machinery and who decided to just let his time pass, and Terri Schiavo, after she did not make it known what she would want to happen to her, then fell into a coma in 1990, suffered severe brain damage. In 1991, Terri was in a persistent vegetative state (PVS), which is an incurable condition, and on March 18, 2005, her feeding tube was removed, which led to her passing away March 31, 2005.

Everyone has stood by Pope John Paul II's wishes, and we can never know what Terri Schiavo's wishes were. The best we can do is look at the evidence to come to the most rational conclusion.

...

Let's start with some background: on February 25, 1990, Terri Schiavo (wife to Michael, daughter



CAT scans (on left: normal brain, on right: Terri Schiavo's CAT scan).

higher cortical function.

Schiavo was discharged to the College Park Skilled Care and Rehabilitation facility on May 12, 1990. The court appointed Michael Schiavo as Terri's legal guardian without objection from the Schindlers in June, and Terri Schiavo was transferred to Bayfront Hospital for further rehabilitation. She went home to her family in September 1990, but partially because of being overwhelmed with Terri's needs, she was sent back to the College Park facility. Michael even then tried experimental treatments for his wife in California, but returned to Florida with her in January 1991.

Since she was hospitalized (in 1991), Michael studied nursing to better care for his wife, later becoming a respiratory therapist and an emergency room nurse. After three years of trying to help her, he became quite imposing on the people caring for her, to give her more attention. Michael Schiavo accepted the diagnosis of an irreversible persistent vegetative state, sometimes referred to as a permanent vegetative state, and stopped forcing treatment on his wife.

The problem with seeing someone in a permanent vegetative state, is that in this state they can have wake cycles, you can see them move their eyes and sometimes occasionally make a noise (though incoherent). Seeing these things leads people to believe that the patient *must* somehow be functioning. This was how Terri's parents believed that she was functioning, even though not only courts, but all medical opinions (other than the opinions of doctors without all of the information about the patient, on the Schindlers' request), disagreed. The courts sided with the medical authorities, and not the parents of Terri Schiavo. Her parents said she made child-like attempts to speak, but no one else ever heard these things (apparently Terri only tried to talk around her parents...). Since 1991 the Schiavo's personal physicians and six different court-appointed physicians have concluded that Schiavo is in a persistent vegetative state (a state of wakefulness without awareness). Her parents repeatedly said she tried to speak or deal with others, but doctors continued to state that her level of brain damage makes responsiveness impossible, and that her behavior represents reflex or instinctive actions (behaviors that makes people *think* she is trying to communicate, when she is incapable of anything at all).

I could go on about what doctors said... Dr. Ron Cranford in 2001 stated that Terri Schiavo "has no electrical activity in her cerebral cortex on an EEG (electroencephalogram), and a CT (computerized tomography) scan showed massive atrophy in that region." Dr. Leon Prockop even noted that Schiavo's scan exhibits the "most severe brain damage as I've ever seen", and Dr. Walter Bradley said that he "doubts there's any activity going on in the higher levels of her brain".

In 2002, they even did another CAT scan to see if any therapy would work on her, and they *still* found severe cerebral atrophy. That and an additional EEG in 2002 still showed no measurable brain activity. If you look at CAT scans, you can see that close to eighty percent of Terri's brain was destroyed

due to the loss of oxygen in her 1990 accident. The only portion of her brain intact was the stem, which controlled her basic functions, like breathing, or keeping a heartbeat. She could live on her own, but she needed a feeding tube to survive.

I tell you what the doctors repeatedly said, because people look at Terri and believe that she *has* to have some cognitive function. I keep reiterating this point, because in a permanent vegetative state, looks can be deceiving.

Her parents made many requests to keep her alive, and Michael, on ABC News's *Nightline* on March 15, 2005, said that her family expressed willingness to keep Terri alive by multiple extreme measures, including quadruple amputation if needed. This is why he explained that he had to keep custody of Terri, to avoid having her blood family doing harsh things to her in their effort to keep her alive.

Michael knew after a few years of trying desperately to help Terri that there was nothing that he or the medical community could do. Michael even started to move on with his life (meeting a woman and having two children, after his wife had been, for all intents and purposes, gone for fifteen years), but because of the way he feared her parents may treat her, Michael remained married to her, and her guardian.

It sounds harsh. But when you're married to a woman who becomes so injured that there is nothing medically that can be done for her, when you fear that other members of her family will treat her like a guinea pig in a vain effort to make her better, you may be forced to make the same kind of decisions.

...

Now, I've been going on about how Michael's a good guy, despite hearing every Republican under the sun talk about how he started dating and had children with another woman, and how he wanted the over 1 million dollars awarded in a malpractice suit for himself. But when it comes to the money, Michael has stated that only fifty thousand is left (because money was spent under a judge's supervision on medical care for Terri). Michael also said that if the Schindlers stop further legal action referring to Michael and Terri, he would donate whatever his inheritance may be to charity, but the Schindlers would not take him up on his offer and leave them alone.

And Michael has stated that he has not divorced Terri because he would lose guardianship over her, and he wants to make sure he can carry out her final wishes. He didn't accept money offers from other sources (one was for ten million dollars) to give up custodian rights, and he didn't divorce her, so that he could make sure Terri's final wishes were carried out.

Well, he seems to have an answer for everything.

I hear of Republicans (you know, like the likes of Sean Hannity) talk about the individual research they have done, where they have talked to a few nurses who think Terri had cognitive function.

Wait, nurses may try, but they don't have enough education to be a doctor, and I'd guess they may take the same stance as any individual who saw Terri occasionally flinch, and assume she was cognizant with them.

Wait, I'm sounding rude. Forgive me.

Wait, don't forgive me. I'm making a point here. Republicans across the board here are all for preserving her life, by not "playing God" and removing the feeding tube, when they may have been playing God for fifteen years by unnaturally keeping her alive. Republicans can't talk to me about not playing God. That's all they do sometimes.

When looking at the evidence I could find about her case, it seemed that Michael was able to



answer everything, and consider Terri's best interests (though we've never heard beyond a reasonable doubt what Terri's finally wishes *were*, because he claims she only told him once, and there is no printed record of her beliefs).

But he may possibly choose to not let people know all of the truths. For example, a bone scan was revealed, which showed evidence of multiple fractures all along her legs and two in her ribs, and it looked like there was a possible blow to the head which caused her originals fall. People wondered if there was a history of beatings between of Michael on Terri, but some understand that when someone is bulimic there is nutritional loss, causing fragile and more brittle bones, which can commonly lead to fractures like the ones in Terri's bone scan. Courts wouldn't listen to the bone scan testimony, because it had nothing to do with the post-accident condition of Terri.

Oh, so now we get to the part of this fiasco where the government involved itself. You see, the government would never have come into this if Terri's parents didn't protest so much. That sounds rude, but making the decision to end lives like this is not uncommon, that decision is made quite regularly in this country, but the Schindlers protested Michael's legal guardianship of his wife, and they protested his decisions for years.

So I tried to listen to other stories, but I don't know how many of them my husband discussing that the Schindler family didn't visit her at *all* when she was first injured, but only after they heard that Michael was granted guardianship that they started to protest and fight for rights over their daughter.

Now, I have no way to prove that statement at all — it may be completely wrong. We tried to learn about the Schindler family visitation history, but all we could find was that the Schindlers have been in battle with Michael for a decade — which is five years after her accident and problems began. So I guess this means that we can't take that bit of news seriously, until we can prove it. But I can continue looking for other media forms, which may be accurate. When I tried to to search for more information:

Michael admitted on Larry King Live (probably more accurate) that he didn't know what Terri wanted (I thought he said he knew her wishes?). His lie about Terri's wishes is the basis of the court's approval of euthanizing Terri (oh, so maybe he *wasn't* for her death, the way people assume he was trying to get her death over with).

In both a 2003 court affidavit and her March 22 cable appearances, Carle Sauer Iyer said that Terri was "alert and oriented" while she cared for her (from April 1995 to July 1996), "saying such things as 'mommy,' and 'help me.'" Iyer said, "Michael Schiavo was focused on Terri's death. Michael would say 'When is she going to die?' 'Has she died yet?' and 'When is that bitch gonna die?' ". And when Terri was not doing well, "He would blurt out 'I'm going to be rich,' Iyer also believed that "Michael injected Terri with Regular insulin" to make her sick. In her affidavit, Iyer also said that when she called the police, she was terminated the next day. She even said in an FNC interview that when Terri had a urinary tract infection, Michael "would be excited, thrilled, even hoping that she would die soon."

Judge Greer dismissed Iyer's charges, saying that affidavits given by both Carle Sauer Iyer and Heidi Law (another nurse who cared for Terri Schiavo) were "incredible to say the least" and that "either in the testimony nor in the medical records is there support for these affidavits."

Basically, although nurses talked of Michael behaving rudely and seeing responsiveness in Terri,

Judge Greer found no substance in their charges and dismissed them.

Now, when Terri's tube was ordered removed by the courts, the Department of Children and Families filed a petition that contains 30 new allegations of "abuse, neglect or exploitation" between the Schiavos. But then again, the DCF said the allegations only came through its anonymous abuse hot line, so no proof could ever be made of the claims.

It seems that all subsequent proofs for mistreatment of Terri is all clouded in a lack of evidence.

I could go on... Barbara Weller, an attorney for Terri Schiavo's parents (of course no one else heard this...), said Terri cried and yelled out that she wants to live after being told her life-sustaining feeding tube would be removed by court order. Or... Dr. Hammesfahr said that not only has Terri never had a heart attack, she also never even had a cardiac arrest (her heart never stopped). I'm sure doctors would agree with *him*...

I don't know *who* to side with. We can say that Michael was a criminal according to Florida state law, because he was in an adulterous relationship. But beyond that, we have no proof of anything, and we just have to rely on our own ethical and moral opinions.

Which is an interesting though, because USA Today ran an editorial April 3rd of 2005, where Paul Rogat Loeb started by talking about Terri Schiavo, then segued into the concept of abortion. Their theory was that "You'd think this (right-to-die) belief ... would also raise support for maintaining the right to abortion," while historically abortion laws have become more stringent over the years, and the number of abortions has (on average) actually gone down over the past decade.

Is USA Today trying to get people up-in-arms about one subject while talking about another? They're starting to sound like me then, going off on one tangent to another, while trying to cover one issue. But the answers to the questions the Schiavo case raises may only be ones we as individuals can answer on our own — for our *own* lives. That's why I asked in the beginning of this editorial if you know what you want done if something like this happens to you. Because people don't question Pope John Paul II when he makes a choice about the upcoming end of his life, because he let people know. Maybe we should know what we want for ourselves, too.

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<http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>, <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own>, <http://poetrypoem.com/poeticpieces>, and <http://www.everyauthor.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=2844#2844>.

When Does Life Begin?

I never want to bring this topic up. Everyone seems to have an opinion on it, and no one wants to believe in views from the other side.

Wait, I should probably explain what I'm talking about here. When I listen to talk radio, I hear Republicans all for the death penalty (I won't go there), but they are so against abortion. They find a way to justify killing something that has been alive and has done something wrong, but they can't justify stopping a fetus — a collection of cells, in the first trimester — from coming to term and becoming a full-fledged life (even if they can't get food, they can at least breathe on their own). Now, the only reason I could guess these people think abortion is wrong is because people believe that a fetus (which cannot live on its own) has more rights than a living female human being, so it should tax its host — I mean, potential mother — until it can become a life.

Oh, wait, that's what people argue about. When does it become a life.

...

Wow, I was just so slanted with all of that. And the thing is, no one can really talk about how they feel about the subject of abortion, because everyone will use religion as their foundation, or personal experience from something traumatic happening to them, and everyone gets quite heated about the subject.

I know where I stand, but I can't just go around ranting about my beliefs and expect everyone to understand and accept my views. And I know that if we want to talk about this topic, I can't let me personal biases get in the way of rational thought. So, I better start looking for the history of all of this, and get some facts and evidence to get to the heart of this matter.

First things first, the concept of abortions isn't new.

Abortion induced by herbs or manipulation was used as a form of birth control in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome and probably earlier. Abortions were common in the Greco-Roman world in which Hippocrates lived, even if the Hippocratic oath states that no assistance should be given to women who choose the end their pregnancy. Fast forward to the Middle Ages in Western Europe: abortion was generally accepted in the early months of pregnancy. However, in the 19th century, opinion about abortion changed. Abortion laws began to appear in the 1820s in the US, forbidding abortion after the fourth month of pregnancy (similar to the middle ages...). In 1869 the Roman Catholic Church prohibited abortion under any circumstances, and most abortions in the US had been outlawed by 1900. Since then, and since abortion practices have been safer for the woman's health, attitudes toward abortion grew more liberal in the 20th century. By the 1970s, abortion had been legalized in most European countries, the United States and Japan. Since the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* ruling, several state legislatures passed restrictive abortion laws in hope that the Supreme Court would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, but in 1992 the court reaffirmed the ruling to allow women's rights.

As of late, U.S. abortion opponents have been more militant in their opinion (often encouraged by Roman Catholics and other militant Christian groups), first in the organized blocking of access to clinics which provided abortion services, to sometimes bombings or assassinations.

Which lead, lucky us, to now, where people try to ban third trimester abortions (calling them partial birth abortions), but our leaders have stopped these practices because it goes against the constitutionality of the Supreme Court's decisions. We're at the point now where we have people bombing

medical clinics that do legal abortions saying that they are giving a “gift to Jesus” by killing people,

In other words, we're in a mess, it's like we're Roman gladiators fighting in the Colosseum, but we're not willing to listen to other people or agree to live fairly and peacefully together. So, we can be like some, and get our swords out, ready to fight to the death (fight to the death to ban abortion? *That* sounds so wrong...), or we can come to the bottom line rationally.

...

As I started researching, I started reading notes like “*Roe v. Wade* has corrupted the law by defining the innocent unborn child as a nonperson.” Sara Diamond wrote in *Abortion Politics*, that “Christian Right leaders ... want to keep up the drum beat about ‘abortuaries’ and a fetal ‘holocaust’.”

I read on Mr. Israel Steinmetz' site <http://www.mrdata.net/state> “that the abortions (murders of the unborn) are continuing at the rate of FOUR THOUSAND ABORTIONS PER DAY in the USA.” I knew they used all caps to make that figure sound startling, so I researched percentages for populations around the country for abortions, and saw that the US's abortion rate was below the worldwide average, and that the US was not even listed as having the highest abortion rate (never mind if abortion is legal at all in the countries analyzed).

You see, this is why I have to do the research. Because anyone will say anything to try to make situations sound terrible.

Then I read an AP article titled “Federal appeals panel: Web site targeting abortion doctors is protected speech” ... Now, to quote this AP article, “The defendants maintained they were political protesters collecting data on doctors,” but after the verdict came through, the circuit court judge Alex Kozinski still called the Web site “blatant and illegal communication of true threats to kill.”

Yeah, there's a lot of hatred out there. I'm going to have to put on my hip-wader boots to get through it all — I mean, even though President Bush is a Roman Catholic who himself opposes abortion, he has said that real Christians don't murder. And even former President Clinton is quoted as saying “No matter where we stand on the issue of abortion, all Americans must stand together in condemning ... tragic and brutal act(s)” such as sniper killing doctors at abortion clinics.

Hmmm. So I think we all agree that killing someone for doing something you don't agree with is not a way to make anything better. But if I'm going to figure this out, I'm going to have to come up with pros and cons about abortion to get somewhere.

Pro lifers say that human life begins at conception. Pro Choicers say that “personhood” at conception is a religious belief, and not a provable biological fact.

Well, that seems pretty straightforward. But the two sides argue on so many points... Pro lifers say that the right to life must be protected, so abortions should be made illegal. Pro choicers say that laws never stopped abortion, but only relegated it to back-alleys using unsafe practices. Pro lifers say that abortion is morally wrong, but pro choicers note that most Americans reject the absolutist position that it is always wrong to terminate a pregnancy — in some situations, it can even be seen as the morally “right” decision. Pro lifers remind us that a fetus is a separate and distinct human being from its mother, but pro choicers say that the fetus is totally dependent on the body of the woman for its life support and is physically attached to her by the placenta and umbilicus.

Wow, that reminds me that a fetus can't live on its own, and has to tax its host — I mean, potential mother — until it can become a life.

Sorry, I *can* stop the list of differing opinions between pro choicers and pro lifers, but I need to mention one more (that I've noted before): pro lifers think an abortion is wrong because it is taking

human life, but pro choicers note that pro lifers say that about abortions, but not about the death penalty. To pro lifers, are people who are convicted of murder are no longer human?

And speaking of these “titles” these two groups have for each other, calling yourself a “pro life” group makes them sound much holier than they actually are (you know, if these are the same people that are for the death penalty), and calling the other side is “pro choice” implies that choicer have the right to choose anything — like choosing murder, which is what the pro lifers say they are doing.

It's great to see how both sides can work so hard to give themselves names that people can misconstrue as both good *and* bad.

Okay, seeing these differences didn't help me out much, so I thought I'd go to Planned Parenthood to see what information *they* had about abortions. Now, they have a lot of information about retaining women's rights, like: Laws against abortion kill women, but forcing abortions into non-sterile-non safe procedures, because making abortions illegal doesn't stop abortions. And having abortion legal is healthier for the woman, and it allows the woman to be more than an incubator. But the point I found most noteworthy was that a free society, there is nothing more personal and private than this, and making abortions illegal is the most extreme invasion of privacy. I like their government thoughts on this: “If government is permitted to compel a woman to bear a child, where will government stop?”

Then again, did I just choose to go to a place that is so slanted for women's rights that I'm missing the big picture? I was told to look further into the foundations of Planned Parenthood, and I found out that Margaret Sanger was the founder of Planned Parenthood, and probably also the one who inspired Adolph Hitler in his views of eugenics,

You think I'm kidding? The woman who's actions later formed groups which merged into Planned Parenthood advocated abortions on Afro-Americans in order to eliminate what she called “socially undesirable people.” She even referred to blacks, immigrants and indigents as “...human weeds,” “reckless breeders,” “spawning... human beings who never should have been born.”

No lie.

Don't believe the nature of this woman? Sanger believed that, for the purpose of racial “purification,” couples should be rewarded who chose sterilization (is *that* starting to sound more like something that Hitler would have loved?).

So I guess there *are* always two sides to every coin...

But while looking for information, I stumbled across John Ku (who in 2005 is working toward his Philosophy PhD at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, who has also written “Objections to Objectivism”), who pointed out that “the view that abortion is murder has implications that hardly any Pro-Lifer would be willing to accept.” Considering the number of abortions performed in a year, this would equate the “problem” with abortions to the Holocaust, because “bombing of abortion clinics would be unquestionably justified” and killing abortion doctors would be preventing their future murders. But pro-lifers distance themselves from these extremists who kill in the name of the unborn.

John Ku jumps to a fantastic conclusion in his writing “A Challenge to Pro-Lifers”, by stating, “Where then is the trouble with killing abortion doctors? The trouble is that abortion is not murder.”

He said *what*? He didn't defend it. He jumped to a conclusion. But in his defense, he wrote that if an abortion doctor is killing innocent persons, then “he should be punished. But if he should be punished, then one must judge that the belief that abortion is murder is unreasonable, and therein lies the dilemma. Either one admits that the view that abortion is murder is false and unreasonable or one must endorse or at the very least, condone the killing of abortion doctors.”

Hmmm. Well, statistically, abortion doctor *aren't* considered murderers, meaning the belief that abortion is murder is unreasonable.

...

Well, that's the view of our laws. It doesn't get to the ethical heart of the matter, the stuff we're all so willing to blindly argue over without facts. Maybe we can come to a better conclusion if we know as many facts as possible, so we can arrive at a good educated opinion.

...

Since John Ku, who wrote about the problems with Objectivism, helped me out on my last point, maybe I should look for an objectivist (you know, to balance the references here...) for thoughts on the issue. I found on the web site <http://www.abortionsisprolife.com/> (which seems to be a screaming Objectivist site), a lead quote on abortion by Ayn Rand: "I cannot project the degree of hatred required to make those women run around in crusades against abortion. Hatred is what they certainly project, not love for the embryos, ... but hatred, a virulent hatred..."

My husband read that quote and said that if this "collection of cells" is just an embryo, then he asked why a loved one of ours felt so depressed over the miscarriage, if it is only an embryo.

And all I thought when he said that was that there was a difference between finding out you're pregnant and deciding to carry something to term to start a human life and have a child, and finding out you're pregnant and deciding to halt the production of the embryo so that it wouldn't become that human life. When it comes to a woman trying to become pregnant, as soon as their pregnancy is discovered they are gratefully planning and anticipating their child after their pregnancy. They start buying clothes for their eventual child. They decide on a name. They decorate a room for them. They anxiously await their future child's arrival. To these parents, they have ascribed meaning to this "embryo," they have given it an identity before it could ever breathe on its own.

I would guess that for someone who had no intention to get pregnant (whether or not preventative measures to stop pregnancy is irrelevant), an unwanted/unplanned pregnancy wouldn't leave them waiting with baited breath for an eventual child. That potential mother wouldn't be "personalizing" this potential child (by giving it a name or buying them clothes or stuffed animals or decorating a room for them); they would never attach themselves to the idea of this pregnancy becoming a child.

And although historically women can feel a sense of loss after having an abortion (because they are stopping a potential life), their sense of loss is extremely different from someone who was anticipating a child, who had a miscarriage.

So yeah, it's an emotional issue all around. And Leonard Peikoff noted, "Abortions are private affairs and often involve painfully difficult decisions with life-long consequences. But, tragically, the lives of the parents are completely ignored by the anti-abortionists. Yet that is the essential issue."

And you know, I tried to use a quote from Ayn Rand before (but it didn't help out much at all), so let's see if she had a better stance on this issue with this: "Rights do not pertain to a potential, only to an actual being. A child cannot acquire any rights until it is born." (Hmmm, maybe she *did* have something appropriate to say about this subject...)

In the first trimester, the status of the embryo is the focus of this discussion. The embryo has everything that can *become* a human, but it is only religious beliefs that call this embryo a person. I think it's also interesting that historically (even from the Middle ages, or when laws first came into effect in the US in the 1800s), laws against abortions *only* applied to after the fourth month. Considering science now, doctors can keep incredibly premature fetuses alive, but no science even today can sustain a

first trimester fetus until it can function on its own. At that point, there is *just no way* that a fetus could ever function on its own without the dependency of its mother to help it get to the point of being able to exist as a life form on its own. Leonard Peikoff also noted that “an embryo is a potential human being,” and we all know that the embryo can (as long as the woman choose it) develop into a human child. But in that first trimester, it is something that cannot function on its own at all — and we can’t assume that the embryo *is* what it wants to become. According to Mr. Peikoff, “we must acknowledge that the embryo under three months is something far more primitive” than an infant.

So maybe *this* starts to answer the question of when life begins. Most agree the notion of life beginning at inception is based solely on religious beliefs (which are always not provable). If you adhere to these beliefs, then you’ve already decided. But to those who don’t use a religion as their moral compass, or for those who whose to use logic and science and reason, it could also be difficult to condone abortions at second or third trimesters — because the potential mother has known that she is hosting a potential life form, and has waited until after the point where it is medically possible to keep the premature baby alive. But at a point where this potential life form is still a mass that cannot under any circumstances survive on its own without a mother helping it to grow, the question becomes more obvious that it is all in the hands of the woman — and it is their right to decide if they choose to carry the fetus to term, so that it can become a life of its own. But before that fetus is ever capable of understanding choice, the choice is all in the woman’s hands.

Let's Decide Who To Kill

It seems that I get riled up when I listen to talk radio, and I want to argue with their points. But I'm usually in a car and don't have my cell phone on me — and I know that if I tried to call I'd never get through and just waste a lot of minutes on hold using my cell phone while driving (a safe thing to do, isn't it?). But I was listening to The Deborah Rowe Radio Program on WLS AM a night or two ago, the day the Supreme Court decided that it wasn't right to allow capital punishment to minors (through age 17). And Deborah Rowe (the splendid Republican that she apparently is) thought it was totally wrong that the Supreme Court allowed this, when there are perfectly horrendous teens out there that she deems deserving the death penalty.

I'm sure these same Republicans believe that a fetus shouldn't be killed (they're against abortion), but they're okay with killing people who have already been living a while.

Makes sense.

I heard Deborah Rowe going on about how it is right to kill these youngsters, after some of the details of their disgusting crimes are revealed. One caller even said on the radio that they were religious, and killing people is used a lot in the Bible.

And I thought, sure, in the Old Testament, but not the New Testament.

Then I head him say that he was a Roman Catholic.

So then I wondered why he was adhering to the Old Testament's "eye for an eye" mentality (which I think *all* of us feel sometimes...), and not to the Christian New Testament, where Jesus told his followers to not listen to the words of his Father, but to listen to what He has to say.

I don't claim to be religious, but can't we all see fallacies in his argument?

After I heard these right-wingers talking about how right it is to kill kids when they feel that they deserve the death penalty, I thought I'd look at the Judge's rulings myself, and also look into newspaper accounts of the ruling.

From the *Washington Post*, staff writer Charles Lane wrote on March 2, 2005 quoted Justice Anthony M. Kennedy's opinion:

"From a moral standpoint, it would be misguided to equate the failings of a minor with those of an adult, for a greater possibility exists that a minor's character deficiencies will be reformed," Justice Anthony M. Kennedy wrote in the opinion for the court.

Wow, at eighteen, people in this country are old enough to drive, vote, kill people in war as a soldier, and even get the death penalty. But they're not old enough to legally drink. Oh, wait, I'm sorry, I'm bring up other subjects again. Let me get back to the judge.

"Our determination," Justice Anthony M. Kennedy added, "finds confirmation in the stark reality that the United States is the only country in the world that continues to give official sanction to the juvenile death penalty."

Ah, then we're looking for that global scale again, which President Bush laughed at Senator Kerry for bringing up.

But then again, a global scale might not be a bad idea. I mean, think about it: we allow our teens to do things, but restrict them from doing other things. In European countries, you can have a soft drug like marijuana, and you won't be put in the stockades for it. I think they also don't impose the same strictness when it comes to drinking ages. I just think it's funny that the United states allows peo-

ple as they grow *some* rights, but not others.

How are kids supposed to grow and learn without a consistent set of rules to live by? And we're the country with more violence than any other country. How strange...

Damn, there I go, rambling off on another tangent again. I guess there's just so much that bothers me about how we run things here.

So let me get back to the death penalty thing. Stephen Boykewich of *the Moscow Times* wrote that while Justice Kennedy went on for 3 pages about international views of the death penalty for minors and mentioned that this was only support to his final decision to lift capital punishment for minors, Justice Antonin Scalia in his dissent wrote that "the views of other countries and the so-called international community take center stage." Scalia then said the decision was "the subjective views of five members of the Court and like-minded foreigners."

Hmm. Getting a little heated at the Supreme Court.

In Justice Kennedy's notes about international law, he noted that we are the only country that allows the death penalty for minors. I know some acts committed by minors can be utterly heinous, but if they don't have the adult mind to understand what they've done, do we have a right to kill them for it? Besides, it will probably end up costing less just to keep them in prison for life.

Yes, that's what I said. Keeping them alive even costs less.

And no, I didn't come up with that on my own. Sunfyre of <http://www.sunfyre.com/deathpenalty.html> wrote a long explanation of why this is true:

"The typical death penalty conviction must go through several levels of appeal. All these appeals must be heard by the courts in virtually every case. Attorneys are paid dramatically more than prison guards. One prison guard is responsible for several prisoners, where one prisoner on death row typically employs several attorneys and legal staff for many years, all while still using your tax dollars in prison. Life sentences are rarely appealed. The typical life span in prison is about two dozen years, many of the most violent prisoners get murdered in prison."

That's not the only source I could find. Phil Porter noted in *The Economics of Capital Punishment*, that: A Duke University study found... "The death penalty costs North Carolina \$2.16 million per execution over the costs of a non-death penalty murder case with a sentence of imprisonment for life."

Sacramento Bee, March 18, 1988: "The death penalty costs California \$90 million annually beyond the ordinary costs of the justice system."

"A 1991 study of the Texas criminal justice system estimated the cost of appealing capital murder at \$2,316,655. In contrast, the cost of housing a prisoner in a Texas maximum security prison single cell for 40 years is estimated at \$750,000."

"Florida calculated that each execution there costs some \$3.18 million. If incarceration is estimated to cost \$17,000/year, a comparable statistic for life in prison of 40 years would be \$680,000." (The Geography of Execution... The Capital Punishment Quagmire in America, Keith Harries and Derral Cheatwood 1997 p.6)"

Okay, I've got one more, and I think this is a good source. The Close Up Foundation looked into Capital Punishment in the United States, and Sharon C. Smith wrote and compiled this information:

"A death row inmate will have gone through the long and complex process of a two-stage trial, automatic review of sentence by state appellate courts, possible review in the federal courts, and a clemency hearing. All of this requires paid counsel for the trial and appellate processes. Then, of course,

death row maintenance is expensive. Even with the restrictions placed on habeas claims of prisoners, a prisoner will see years go by between sentencing and actual execution.”

And the Close Up Foundation also noted that “it is true that it is currently more expensive to sentence a murderer to death than to LWOP (life without parole - *ed.*)...”

Well, those are some statistics for you. Although I’d wonder if so many people are put into prison than executed, there may be a chance that prison costs will be forced to go up, I don’t know.

And people can even complain that instilling the death penalty and capital punishment is Democracy at work, if we vote death penalty legislation, then a jury votes for death, it’s the people speaking. But Sunfyre of <http://www.sunfyre.com/deathpenalty.html> even had an answer for that: “It is democracy at work, only not the democracy Thomas Jefferson envisioned...Governors push the death penalty to get elected, District attorneys push it to get elected, high priced defense lawyers get more press.” He goes on to say that these “necessary evils of politics” help to harbor this desire for killing people convicted of crimes.

The point? ...Oh, I think the point was to talk about the death penalty being lifted for all under the age of eighteen by the Supreme Court. And there I go, extrapolating to how the death penalty is bad for everyone.

How obnoxious of me.

But I think, if we’re going to talk about lifting capital punishment for minors, we should talk about the pros and cons of that. I guess a pro is with the argument that if someone under eighteen commits a crime, they are not mature enough to know the scope and ramifications of what they have done. The pro is that if we allowed capital punishment to minors, then we would be allotting a mature — and severe, and final — punishment to an immature being.

Okay, good pro there. How about the cons for lifting capital punishment to minors?

Um... I can’t think of any.

Wait, I was listening to the Deborah Rowe show, where they were talking about how the lifting of capital punishment on minors was wrong. She talked about the heinousness of crimes committed by some minors.

Yes, capital punishment — killing people — gets rid of the heinous crimes, doesn’t it.

Wait, let me check the records... Capital punishment *doesn’t* deter people, I mean, it is a definite deterrent to stop the accused from committing the crime again to just kill them, but I don’t think capital punishment really deters people from committing crimes. Want proof? Fine (you guys are picky for wanting explanations).

Here’s a stat from the Uniform Crime Reports, Oct. 3, 1993. U.S. Department of Justice, F.B.I.: “The murder rate in the U.S. in 1992 was 9.3 murders per 100,000 population. 16 States had a murder rate higher than the national average. Of those 16 all but one, the sixteenth, was a death penalty State.” So states with higher murder rates were also states that allowed capital punishment. Interesting.

The Christian Courier’s Wayne Jackson even stated in an article (thought we’d go the religious route even on this one) that there was “an appeal of sorts to the Scriptures, allege that capital punishment is incompatible with the teaching of Jesus.” But when it came to whether or not capital punishment was a deterrent, Jackson pointed out that “no one can ever know how many potential murderers have refrained from taking human life due to their fear of prosecution, conviction, and ultimate execution.”

Good point, Jackson.

Evangelist Ted R. Weiland even wrote in *Capital Punishment: Deterrent or Catalyst?* that “when felons, such as Ted Bundy, can postpone their execution for prolonged periods of time by means of America’s appellate system, criminals are encouraged in their unlawful behavior rather than deterred.” He even thought about the rationale of the would-be criminal: “the prison system isn’t so bad. Heck, it’s three square meals, a bed, as much television as I want and I don’t have to work for a living!” And if they’re sentenced to the death penalty? “I have the appellate courts to rely upon. And, if my case is not overturned, how many years on death row will it be until they actually execute me. By then I’ll be an old man...” which may leave the odds in their favor.

He mentioned Ted Bundy. And you know, I heard of a study done showing that murder rates went down after Ted Bundy’s execution, so people thought there was a deterring factor in capital punishment. They then later figured out that the drops in murders were only in areas they analyzed, which were areas that also happened to get really cold, bad weather. In other parts of the country the murders rates did not change at all. Some even wondered after analyzing this study if *weather* was a better deterrent for murders than the death penalty.

While looking for more evidence about capital punishment, I figured that since I’m going out on these religious limbs here, I’ll even point out that ReligiousTolerance.org pointed out another good issue: “With the exception of professional hit-men, very few people are in a rational frame of mind when they kill others. It may be hopeless to expect any form of punishment to act as a deterrent.”

Wow, I keep hearing all of these rational arguments against the deterrence of these crimes, as well as the abolishment of capital punishment to minors. All I *do* know is that it doesn’t act as a deterrent, it costs less to keep people in prison for life, and, well, kids are just that — kids. If we don’t let them vote, or even die for our country by service in the military — why should we punish them like an adult for doing something terribly wrong?

Drugging Ourselves into a Stupor

You know, I'm looking at the headline of this and thinking this is supposed to be some sort of "marijuana is bad" editorial, and it's not. I swear.

Let me break into this with personal stuff... Because of depression, which my doctor believed was the foundation for my trouble sleeping, I started taking Paxil a few months ago to calm my mood swings. It worked — even when I was taking 12.5 mg daily in the first week of testing with it (before going to 20 or 25mg, which is still a light prescription), I noticed that I didn't get angry at things going wrong any longer (not the way I did before). And yes, things still aggravate me, but now it seems that I just start to think (when I encountered a problem) that the difficulty is more of a stupid inconvenience than something I should angry at and respond by internally blowing up.

Not bad, I guess. Take the generic to save money, and stop outwardly being such a bitch. Granted, I have to take a pill every day, but it's otherwise a good deal. Not one thing I've noticed since I've started taking Paxil is that I have absolutely no interest in working on my next novel (which I've already completed the first part of). I mean, *no* interest. Zero.

Now, I don't know about creativity being stifled with anti-depressant drugs. All I could think was that my nephew was put on Ritalin for a short while when he was in school. He was the type of boy who climbed everything, and often tried to pull stunts like hanging upside-down from a ledge on a fort he had, hoping the beams would hold him in place. Often they wouldn't and he'd fall, or he might try to pull a stunt and not realize there's a loose nail sticking out of the wood he's climbing with. It seemed like he was getting hurt a lot from rambunctious play, and he didn't pay attention in school classes. I don't think my nephew was depressed, but they decided to give him Ritalin to help him in classes, and his mother was amazed how he suddenly became more focused.

Now, I didn't really tie these two stories together (anti-depressants and creativity), until I read the article in the *Wall Street Journal* that asked about the world giving a good number of children Ritalin because they wouldn't focus in a classroom and their behavior wasn't appropriate.

There are attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder support groups that believe that often people who may have (according to the *Wall Street Journal*) "classic ADHD traits such as impulsiveness, a penchant for day-dreaming and disorganized lives," are people who accomplished so much in their lives — and their abilities and accomplishments may have been in part *due* to their behavior.

People believed to have had ADHD: Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Salvador Dali, and Winston Churchill.

I know, I know, you can think Salvador Dali was only capable of surreal pieces like "The Persistence of Memory, 1931" (you know, the melting clock print that everyone in college years ago seemed to have on their dorm room walls), but he was actually extremely talented painter and created a wide variety of extraordinary pieces. And I don't think anyone can say anything bad about the ability of Churchill or the wonder of Albert Einstein. I mean, think about it: what if Edison was drugged and told to sit and pay attention to the teachings of others, instead of inventing on his own?

I think it was after I read the article in the *Wall Street Journal* that I made the possible connection between my writing and the Paxil. So I started searching the Internet for information. No one could say anything definitely, and I know I have a low prescription, but I read this line from a man named

Barry, who posted this in <http://www.rxlist.com/rxboard/>:

"The most brilliant and successful people have suffered from depression since the beginning of humanity. Albert Einstein and Abe Lincoln come to mind. Makes sense, actually. Think positive, as it can be responsible for great creativity."

Is he suggesting that depression may be a symptom of those who are truly creative? I don't know the answer, and I don't think anyone can prove what he says.

But today, I think I'll start taking half of my prescription dosage, and see if my creative juices start flowing again.

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Letting Free Speech Slide

Okay, I'd like to take a little poll. Who out there values the fact that we have freedom of speech in the United States?

Okay, we probably all like that, or else we wouldn't get together as a bunch for artists and poets and writers. So I'll ask the next question in our poll: Do you like the fact that the U.S. Government is so involved with newspaper stories that it approves all newspaper articles published?

Well wait, that doesn't happen. Especially when people have deduced how "liberal" the media is, when the government is oozes so much Republicanism. So I guess that freedom of speech thing adheres to newspapers as well, and that's probably a good thing, because people can read a variety of viewpoints and come to their own conclusions.

Um, good thing teens don't read the newspaper often. Because only half of our teens believe (according to the John S and James L Knight Foundation and the University of Connecticut \$1 million, two year-long survey) that newspapers should be allowed to publish stories that did not have the government's approval.

Yes, we need big brother to approve our stories before we publish them, to make sure they ... to make sure they what? Make sure they don't cause a panic, or a riot? Or to make sure they don't make people think?

The BBC news reported that according to this survey "a significant number of US high-school students regard their constitutional right to freedom of speech as excessive." And "Over a third ... felt the First Amendment went "too far" in guaranteeing freedom of speech, press, worship and assembly."

This survey even concluded that a lot of teens (falsely) believed the Government had the right to censor the internet — and about two thirds of the teens polled falsely believed that burning the U.S. flag was illegal

MSNBC reported via an AP article that teens seem to even have a more censorial and restrictive in their views than elders, as only 87% of teens polled, versus 99% of adults polled, felt that people should be allowed to express unpopular views.

Wow, that 13% of teens better not get in our way, we might express something they don't like.

But that's okay, we let them have the right to voice their opinions. That's the American Way.

The survey results reflected an indifference to the First Amendment, as teens seems to think it was "no big deal." The director of the Journalism Education Association, said in the report that "this all comes at a time when there is decreasing passion for much of anything."

And you know, they may be right. People do seem to be dispassionate nowadays. Teens have become detached after being a product of the MTV generation, and after playing so many video games for so many hours of the day instead of caring about the news. or what happens around you.

I mean Hell, if they don't have anything to say, maybe they don't mind losing their rights.

The sad thing is that teens seem to take free speech for granted, which seems to reflect the way the Republican party has taught everyone to think after 9/11. Consider that after Bin Laden taught people who hated American to learn to fly airplanes to the could hijack them and drive them into economic and governmental buildings (iconic representations of the United States). After the morning of September 11th, President George Bush was determined to find a way to stop this from happening

again — which, for him, included the Patriot Act, which expands the ability of states and the Federal Government to conduct surveillance of American citizens, and isn't limited to terrorism. Greg Downing wrote in *A Historical Argument Against the Patriot Act*, that “under the Patriot Act anyone suspected of terrorist affiliations can be arrested and detained without solid evidence to prove their affiliations.” It even allows foreign and domestic intelligence agencies to more easily spy on Americans. The Patriot Act authorizes the use of “sneak and peek” search warrants. According to *The Nation*, “The Patriot Act was so named to imply that those who question its sweeping new powers of surveillance, detention and prosecution are traitors.” But PBS' *Frontline* even noted that since its inception, the Patriot Act “has come under harsh criticism from both the political left and the right as a threat to Americans' rights as guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights.”

I know I'm going on. I'll stop. But I could name more...

Either way, Americans all felt the need to fly and continue their work on their own terms, despite the threat of terrorist takeover of their airplanes. Americans were willing to take longer at airports for security reasons, even though some have found that women get body checked more often. I mean, I had to lose a pair of cuticle clippers because I was nearsighted enough to not realize that they could be used as a violent weapon on a flight back from Hawaii. But we'll deal with these things, to ensure our safety.

I think I've said this before, but people have claimed that they were willing to relinquish their freedoms to ensure their safety.

Which leads me to the Benjamin Franklin quote:

“The man who trades freedom for security does not deserve nor will he ever receive either.”

So where does that lead us? To hope for our rights that people keep taking away from us? To continue to write, to voice our opinions, to be heard? We've been letting free speech slide, like we're on a toboggan ride on a snowy hillside in the dead of a February winter. Can we put our feet out to the sides, to try to stop this ride before it gets too fast and we hit the bottom?

Presidential Problems

You know, I thought I got all of the election talk out of my head after the last editorial, but I keep seeing things now that remind me of the mess we might be in because of November '04.

Oh, this is the part where I'm supposed to mention in detail what I'm talking about, or mention specific details to make my case.

Okay, here goes.

I mentioned in a performance art show recently that the thing that scared me most about the Bush campaign was that he had a television advertisement that ended saying that this country relies on **Freedom** (*what this country was founded on, good sign*), **Family** (*the stuff I suppose that is supposed to lead to healthy procreation, the furthering of our species*), **Faith** (*Yes, President Bush, you have to throw a religious connotation in there somewhere*), and **Sacrifice** (*You want us to do what? That doesn't sound like the capitalist in you, you know, the stuff we're supposed to be founded on...*).

I mention this to you, while reminding you in the last editorial that when the President found out that he won reelection, he told a cabinet member or two that it was now time to start working on **his** plan (*Whatever **that** may be... I'm starting to get frightened thinking about it...*), but it reminded me of a quote I read in the *Ayn Rand Column* from the **Los Angeles Times**, in a column called *Our Alleged Competitor*, and I quote:

And whenever anyone asks a nation for sacrifice, it is not progress that he will achieve.

Okay, sorry, this might be the part where I'm supposed to keep putting these pieces together here... Let me see what I can do.

I look around me, and I see two political parties fighting for a goal, and their platforms sound similar. I know you think they're not, and on the surface they don't seem to be. But say, for instance, you don't want troops in Iraq. Kerry might have seemed like a better choice. In debates, however, he said that although he didn't like the fact that we were there, he knew that we had to be there.

What?

Let me think about this. He has said on record that he supported the idea of using force as a threat to Saddam Hussein. Then he said on record that even though they now know that he didn't have nuclear missiles or WMDs, he still would have supported us going over there to get Hussein out of power. Then he even said in a Presidential debate that he doesn't like the idea that our troops were there (that he supported bringing to Iraq in the first place), but he couldn't just pull the troops, and couldn't give a timeline to anyone about when troops would be able to leave.

Hmmm. Sounds like Bush's plan.

Sounds like two sides to the same coin - they may be opposite sides, heads and tails, *but they are the same damn coin*.

They're the same damn coin and we're not given a real choice of anything different here in America.

In *Post-Mortem*, 1962, another **Los Angeles Times** column from Ayn Rand, she even went so far as to say

There was only one political program offered to the voters: the status quo — and only two kinds of leadership: those who wish to leap or those who wish to crawl into the same abyss.

Yeah, she wrote that in a column in 1962, but has the sentiment changed at all, forty-two years later? (*I know 42 is supposed to be the meaning of life according to the **Hitchhiker's Guide**, but we haven't solved our political problems in that many years, and it looks like our situation may only be getting worse.*)

Everything that was presented to the people by Bush and Kerry in their scripted debates were generalities that either side could take to mean whatever they chose, so both parties could think they did a wonderful job. And after every debate, and after every media moment each candidate had to spout their views or rip on their opponent, all of the media talking heads in the liberal media like MSNBC (I know it stands for Microsoft NBC, but I prefer to think of it as Multiple Sclerosis NBC...), or CNN, or Headline News, or even the slightly less liberal Fox News, they leaned toward a victory of Kerry (ah yes, liberal media, hindsight in this election has shown us how unbiased you *really* are...). But they'd have reporters at both parties always stating that their candidate won, spouting the usual rhetoric necessary to make people believe they are telling the truth.

Of course both parties would claim they won. Could we draw the same conclusion? Probably not, because nether party really talked about differing goals or programs. If Kerry was against having troops in Iraq, he didn't mention morally why, and he didn't give Americans anything to really sink their teeth into - I mean, he didn't give us a core set of beliefs and values that we could support because it was different from President Bush's core set of beliefs.

He didn't do it.

If we knew the moral differences between our political candidates, we might have had an easier time being able to make our political choices. People say they liked Bush - but why? Because we don't feel safe anymore, and we need his guidance (I think that dictators like to keep their power by playing on fear to make then feel needed by their minions, and the past three years have been a Republican plea to remind people that the Republican cabinet will make the people safe).

Other people say they liked Kerry - but why?

Honestly, tell me why.

And don't use the "because he's not Bush" answer either. I'm looking for real moral values and differences here. (It's hard to come up with differences when your two choices were both Yale graduates, which are actually very distantly related. *Yeah, these are your two choices...*)

Okay, Kerry said he had a plan, but we never got any details about it. And you know, that makes me think about when I was little, and me and my friend Sheri would play. We didn't play house, but we played office - we had desks, and I had a control panel of switches and stuff that my sister put together into a console that could go on our desk, so it could look like we were doing important work. We'd talk on the fake phone, and we'd flip the little toggle switches on the fake console panel we had, so we could be getting work done. So we could be doing something. So we could be getting ahead.

But looking back, we were only playing. We *didn't* have a plan. We acted like we knew what we were doing, but we didn't know what those little switches and buttons on our fake console panel did, we didn't even question where those switches and buttons led to, and we pushed those buttons anyway in bliss, *getting things done*.

What things? No answer.

Kerry is a senator that wanted to jump in and start flipping the toggle switches to alter the fabric of the American life. And the thing is, I couldn't tell you if he would do a better job of pushing the right buttons to make America work well.

I couldn't tell you because I had no idea of what he'd do.

And I don't know if *he* knew, either.

MTV and pop stars and rap stars and actors were telling you to vote. Some of them we even saying to vote for the Kerry/Edwards ticket. I mean Hell, if Bruce Springstein is for the Democratic ticket, *all* of today's youth should be a Democrat, because the guy that produced the #1 rock album *Born in the USA* 25 years ago **has** to know what is best for the country.

MTV might have been telling the youth to vote. But although the world likes to think the youth doesn't think, I think the youth (along with the adults) want a set of values they can hold on to and make sense of.

And although they had a problem with Bush (because, you know, Bush is sending their peers to go to a war people don't think we should be in, why are we liberating people on the other side of the world when there are people in our own country that need to be rescued from poverty, lack of jobs or education, or rescued from the sexism or racism that holds them back from their true potential?), because they don't like seeing President Bush making all political choices based on his idolatry of his Christian savior, they want a real alternative. Kerry said he's the one for you, but he didn't explain why or how.

He left you connecting the political pieces.

And more importantly, he left you picking up the moral pieces.

That was the problem.

Not because there's a moral problem to opposing Bush's plan, but because no moral ground was laid out for the people to understand. Bush had a ton of talk radio personalities (and yes, a few of the television personalities too) agreeing with people daily, live, for hours about how Bush is the **right** choice. He *morally makes more sense*. How we *need* him.

And people heard this political moral line, and they took it. Hook, line and sinker.

Whether or not we agreed with the moral choice people made, some people made a moral choice. I made my moral choice on Election Day at the polling booth, and my choice was based on the fact that I couldn't stand to vote for either candidate. I voted for someone else, and I voted on my conscience. I voted knowing my choice wouldn't win, but I voted knowing I could sleep comfortably with the fact that I made the *right* choice at the polls that November day.

If only everyone knew of the morals at stake in this Presidential election, maybe the candidates would have told us what we needed to hear to make an informed decision. Maybe then this election would have turned out differently.

So then I pulled back to think about this.

Hmm. Okay, so what can that tell me? Keep looking, Janet, and think about what these urban areas have in com-

mon and how they effect the government.

Hmm.

Wait, an idea is growing in my head. Let me think this through: Democrats want to expand government programs, and helping to poor, which usually mean more taxes. But who can afford that? Maybe the people who make more money, *in the cities*, who have to contend with more poor people around and want to give them some sort of relief so... So these poor people aren't in the way of the rich city-dwellers, working and making money.

No, that can't be it.

I know this is my editorial, but stop being so opinionated, Janet.

Hmm.

Okay. I'll get back to thinking more objectively here. Sorry.

I think I've got it, but bear with me on this one.

Consider that people in the major cities (like Chicago, or New York, or L.A.) contend with poor people and want to see something done to help them. It may mean more taxes, but this will help these people, and they are willing to pay something extra to help these people out. And heck, if everyone is willing to pitch in just a little, we'd all help and make things better for people in need.

Wow. For a second I felt like I was talking for some relief fund for the starving Ethiopians (or Ethernopians, as Stan Marsh of *South Park* calls them), and not for people in the United States. (Did I sound like I was from the Red Cross or something when I wrote that last paragraph?)

But that might be a good argument. If people can give money to help people in trouble for other things (poor people in Third World countries, or people caught in Florida hurricanes who lost their homes), people could be willing to help the needy poor people of *this* country. And the Democratic Party has become quite the altruistic party, wanting people to give to help other people.

The comforting thing, however, is that the majority of this country doesn't like giving up their belongings without getting anything in return. The majority of people in this country know that just handing money to people does not help them get out of their problems, because government-granted money should only be a temporary solution to people's problems, to help them get on their feet and start creating and producing on their own again.

You know, I don't really know if that's what the majority of people think. I know that's what *I* think, and I just hope that many other people think that way too.

And of the two arguments I posed for why the big city states are liberal, I really prefer to think that the second reason is more accurate.

But then that leaves me with the question I had at the beginning of this editorial: if we've inferred that the media is liberal, then we have to ask *why*.

Hmm. Let me think.

Let me think of where the media comes from.

California. And New York.

Two liberal states.

Do you think the media, stemming from liberal states, could be so objective that it would ignore what it sees all around it — like homeless people trying to get a meal while these broadcast journalists

are trying to commute to work at the television station? Like seeing people resorting to drugs and alcohol because they've got nothing else, and what little cash they can get is not enough for a new suit for an interview they can't get for their dream job?

Do you think these people, who commute (possibly in a gas-guzzling expensive SUV) from their nice city flat to their nice city job, see these destitute people daily and want to help them?

You know, to make this world a better place?

Do you think these people would see the squalor and see that there is a political option that would help these people out, through the Democratic Party?

Hmm. Now that I'm thinking about this line of thinking for the media being more liberal, the more I'm getting this idea.

But I guess the thing that bothers me about the notion of the "liberal media" is that a select few locations can decide the way all major (or network) television news leans (instead of being even and just news). And yeah, we've also got newspapers and magazines to get news from, but the other problem is that we're a bunch of Stupid Americans, and it's a Hell of a lot easier for us to get the news from turning on the free news from our television instead of *paying* for print media and actually having to *read* it.

'Cause reading the news, is, like, work.

So the thing that bugs me is that most people get their news from the liberal news, and people assume it's not biased, and people almost accept it as the world of God. Do we want people assuming these slanted views are affects of true reporting? Do we want people drawing their conclusions about our world form these slanted views?

Can anyone make an informed decision about anything when they don't receive all if the information objectively?

Cindy Sheehan's 16th Minute of Fame

Casey Sheehan joined the army in 2000, and was killed in battle April 4, 2004. After his death, his mother Cindy decided to protest the war, actually meeting with President Bush once before deciding to camp at his Crawford, TX vacation home for a month to protest the war.

I had to check the dates her son was in battle, because she only started her protest after his death. He wasn't drafted, but if he had just gone to battle, I might understand the promptness for her protest to the war. But she *didn't* protest the war, or her son choosing to fight for his country, *for four years*. It was only after he died that she decided to vocally protest the war.

Now, she may have not wanted to protest a war her son was currently fighting in, because she wanted to lend moral support to him while he was alive and fighting. But it's funny, if she wanted to keep people alive who were in this war unjustly, wouldn't you have heard any comments from her *before* her son died, while she still had a chance to save him from possibly dying?

Her protests and questions started with a meeting with the President. But when leftist organizations joined her (hoping for more media attention and more of a battle cry), it quickly turned into her criss-crossing the country protesting the war, and eventually being in a White House protest, where Sheehan and others chose to ignore requests from the police (like, you can't take up space sitting on the sidewalk in front of the White House), probably with the hopes of being arrested, to get more media attention.

I wonder if this was Sheehan's 16th minute of fame, though, after learning that her bus that she drives around to protest in, carries PR professional, make up artists and hair stylists. Now, you may see her on camera during protests wearing wrinkled or town clothes, or her hair may look tousled or disheveled, but people have *seen* her in the van moments before, getting "prepared" to look this way — like a grass-roots protester.

If this were true, how could she have the money to pay for these people, and this transportation? Well, liberal activist Ben Cohen (of Ben & Jerry's) has been spending lots of money to help Cindy become the poster child — sorry, the poster mom — for all those grieving about an unjust war.

And you wonder why I say this is her 16th minute of fame... Well, she has even recently sided with **International Answer** and **United for Peace** to call for an end to *all* war — not just in the middle east (that war she was protesting to begin with), but, to quote Erick (from *peace.redstate.org*), "she also wants us to end the military occupation of New Orleans". Yes, she has sided with liberals, who want out of the war, and now she's complaining about the Government's help in New Orleans (which is all the liberals screamed for when Katrina first hit).

Erick also noted that "ANSWER... (is) a front organization for the Communist Party," which seems to go against anything this country has ever stood for. Seems strange, that Cindy Sheehan has decided to be bedfellows with the type of people her son chose to battle to defeat.

Wow, opinions are getting mixed with her now. WHO does she support? WHAT is her message? It must be confusing for her, trying to jump on the appropriate bandwagon for her spotlight. But if she keeps it up, the people who ran to her support and brought her to the edge of the envelope will wonder why she jumped...

P.S.: I heard Roe Conn on WLS 890AM radio on 09/28/05 say that people said that Cindy Sheehan looked like convicted murderer Norman Porter. And this is funny on many levels to me,

because the “once escaped” Norman Porter lived for over 15 years (hiding from the law, but not the world), under the fake name J. J. Jameson, and was a poet right here in Chicago. J. J. read regularly where I do performance art shows, and people actually liked his poetry. People also didn't mind the fact that he was a loud mouthed, arrogant man. I intentionally kept my distance from him.

When he was captured (after C J Laity made him “poet of the month” at www.chicagopoetry.com), news teams rushed to where I read poetry, and everyone there said the usual “I can't believe this about him. I never would have expected it...” If only I wasn't late, knowing his personality, I would have told them this *doesn't* surprise me *at all* about him.

Did we Vote our Rights Away? or should we force Christianity on the United States?

The Election has passed.

Apparently the people spoke: after hearing MTV and rap stars plead to the youth to get Bush out of the office after not finding Bin Laden and pulling the wool over the country's eyes to fight a man his dad couldn't kill when Bush I was in office over a decade ago, Republicans (probably via talk radio) had every conservative in their cars listening to the radio get pumped up to help them keep their religious demigod in office for another term. Don't think I'm right? Listen to MTV. Listen to talk radio.

Well, people listened to the rap stars, saying "Bush is Bad," and people listen on the radio say that we have to stay with this Republican leader. If you're a Democrat, it doesn't matter if you *like* Kerry (I heard someone interviewed on *the Daily Show* say that 'Although Kerry is a douche bag, he's better than Bush'), just vote for the Democrat party. And any Republican listening to talk radio heard only of the perils of what Kerry would do to this country if he were elected, and people nowadays don't understand what war is like (no, we've had a different image of war ever since we let reporters in for live action coverage of war situations, starting with Viet Nam, we've been able to see the gore of it and we want out). And everyone listening to talk radio heard conservative radio hosts like Sean Hannity calling every military veteran and every supporter of his beliefs "a good American" (because letting the government tell you it's okay to kill a lot of people people makes you a good American, that's the standard they're going by...). Those listeners to the radio shows don't need to agree with everything Bush ever says, but it is good for the American people to keep him in for another four years.

Great. But what does this mean for us *now*?

The first thing I heard Bush say to select people in his cabinet after he knew he won reelection was that now that he won, 'now we can work on getting everything done in my plan.'

He said my plan? Bush's plan? What plan does he exactly *have* for America?

And I know he talked to Kerry in that next-morning phone call, and Kerry told him that this was a divided nation, and he has to work on uniting everyone, so the country doesn't continue to segregate itself along political lines.

And yes, Bush's acceptance speech talked about bringing this country together so we could all get what we wanted. And yes, when Colin Powell, the first black man in the Secretary of State position, retired (which he claimed he would do before the election ended), Bush asked Dr. Condoleezza Rice to take over as the Secretary of State (and people don't mention that she is the first woman — let me correct that, the first black woman, ever in this cabinet position). And yes, for attorney general Bush nominated Alberto Gonzales, a son of migrant workers. I'm sure that if a Democrat was president and this happened, the media would be all over the wonderful things this president is doing for equality, but its never mentioned in a Republican is president.

Well, I suppose *some* points sound good for him. And I don't know what the people in the military would say, that we still have forces in harms way in Iraq. I'm sure that all are proud, but I'm sure that some still think it's right they are there, while some think it's wrong and want their loved ones to come home.

And depending on what news station you're listening to with live feed from the military stationed

there, you'll hear the same diversity in answers from our military there. I know that some don't want to be there any longer, but they signed up for the military and they won't go against their Commander in Chief.

So is the answer to bring them back? Or would bringing them home prematurely prove to the Middle East that we *will* back down prematurely, allowing the country to fall to ruin again so that their forces can become stronger again to attack us?

...

I suppose I could start talking about improving the economy now, but what I see now in my colleagues and friends now more than anything else are worries about religion and losing our rights because Bush was reelected. Now, I know they want to expand powers under the Patriot Act, which includes:

Outside view: Patriot Act problems:

- ...Like the "sneak-and-peek" provision, allowing secret search warrants that do not require the police to notify the person being searched.
- Another provision allows the government to obtain secret intelligence court orders, without any probable cause linking the target of the order to suspected criminal activity (that makes me personally feel safe).

You think they'll only use the Patriot Act for terrorism-related crimes? Don't be so naive: the administration has been using the Patriot Act to prosecute cases that have nothing whatsoever to do with terrorism.

- By eliminating the notion of "due process," the Government can now attack people in **non**-terrorism crimes.

The library book you rented can be monitored by your precious government. Angel Stewart, writing for <http://www.houseofconfusion.com>, even stated that "The Patriot Act makes the Thought Police a real possibility... A crucial part of the checks and balances of the American system has been disabled."

The Patriot Act has allowed the unnecessary surveillance of innocent people. Did you hear John Kerry saying in one of the Presidential debates that thousands of hours of surveillance tapes that have never been watched? Well, if the government is undermanned for these innocent-people-surveillance tapes, who can we get to watch us in private?

I think the Patriot Act can even legislate against anyone distributing information that is outside of the norm - which means that if **Children, Churches & Daddies** doesn't watch it's back, we could be violating the Patriot Act by producing this magazine.

Wow, I feel so safe now. I can go to sleep with comfort and ease now.

I suppose I shouldn't get on my soap box about the Patriot Act, but I should be thinking about friends I have talked to who have considered leaving the country because Bush was reelected. They considered it because they are sure now that rights as their same-sex partner will not be granted to them.

I know, I know, I heard Bush say that he believes there should be rights given to same-sex partners, even if it is not by considering their union a "marriage." But when my friends heard that Republicans wanted to make a Constitutional Amendment to make marriages *only* between a man and a woman, and when they heard that I think 14 states made state laws defining a marriage as only between a man and a woman, their worries escalated. When one of them is ill and hospitalized, they need permission from anyone else to be with the one they love in their time of need.

My friends considered Canada when considering leaving the country, and John (cc&d's web lan-

guage master for Perl Scripts, and the author of last month's editorial) noted that hits to Canada's web sites for immigration skyrocketed after the election results came in.

Hell, I even heard of a web site that would find a country you could defect to, depending on what political views you held.

John knew someone in the military — a lesbian in the Navy, more precisely — and she stressed that the white man (people like John) have no idea of what discrimination is. That cards are stacked against you when you love someone that is not what God defines as a proper mate. Hell, the cards are stacked against you when you're a woman, or if you are anything other than Anglo-Saxon (sorry Black, Latinos, sorry Chinese, Native Americans...), and the way this country is now being run, the cards are stacked against you if you don't believe in a Christian God (sorry Jews, Hindis, Muslims, sorry atheists... you're screwed too, because you don't fit our perfect mold).

All of these things that are expected of people, they're starting to sound like we're looking for our Arian state.

You know, I've heard people say that Bush is like Hitler, and that seems ludicrous to me. But when looking at definitions, I wonder how close to a fascist he actually is.

...

I don't suppose I helped answer any questions about what to think now that a President has been chosen. Maybe we'll remain as confused about how we can get ahead in our world as we did *before* the election. Is there a way we can find our answers ourselves and not rely on the president to do our thinking for us?

We're in a War: Is This World War III? Or Are We In a Holy War?

We're in a war.

Well, technically, we're not.

We haven't been in a war since World War II.

I know, I know, we had the Korean War and the Viet Nam War. I even saved *The Daily Illini* newspaper when the headline said fourteen years ago that we were at war in the middle east. But the thing is, only Congress can declare a war. We have not been in a war, although our leaders have allowed our troops to come into harm's way repeatedly over this past half century.

But if newspapers need to call sending our troops to kill and be killed a war so that people can be okay with what our government is doing, then so be it (there's nothing I can do about that). But in all honesty, the two World Wars are our last wars. And I've heard people referring to this war in Iraq, coupled with the War on Terror, as World War III.

Well, besides the fact that we're technically not in a legal war, I'd have to figure out what even *makes* a war a "World War."

I mean, think about it — what is the definition of a World War? It would have to be that it's a war with all (or most) of the principal nations of the world. Meaning that yes, the United States would have to be in it, but considering that world War II had Japan and the United States and half of Europe, I don't think that the U.S. against Iraq (with help from England and maybe ancillary forces from Poland and Australia) constitutes a World War.

So although I think we can safely rule out us being in World War III, I wonder if I can rule out people calling this a Holy War.

• • •

Over the past few years, I have noticed a resurgence of religious beliefs seep into the United States' government, thanks (I suppose) to President George W. Bush. It has only been since 2000 that there have been people talking about whether or not "In God We Trust" should remain on our money, or if the line "Under God" should be removed from the Pledge of Allegiance. Although civil marriages are now considered legal, marriages have historically been used for religious purposes, and there have been a number of states passing laws to only define a marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

I'm not going to tell you that removing "In God We Trust" from our money is our way of neglecting the beliefs of the founders of this country (yes, because they were all quite religious). I'm not going to tell you that "Under God" was not originally in the Pledge of Allegiance, and that Dwight D. Eisenhower's Congress amended the Pledge by *adding* the line "Under God" to the Pledge in 1954 to show Americans was better than those Godless Communists we were opposed to. I'm not going to tell you that gay couples in permanent relationships deserve the same benefits married couples receive, whether or not people consider it a marriage.

I wouldn't tell you that. You're intelligent enough to come to your own conclusions.

But I mention these things because of a war President Bush started that a lot of youth had no interest in fighting. It seems that to keep people fearing life and needing him as President, Bush started a war on a homeless enemy — meaning, there are no borders to fight, and there is no land conquest. The War on Terror is an ideological war, and as long as people have different opinions, there will always be an enemy to President Bush, and we will always be fighting.

Also, consider that if the economy is doing poorly because of the fall of the dot com industry in the end of the '90s, one way a president can help pick the economy back up is to actually go into war. ...How would a war help?

Yeah, I wonder that myself.

People say that going into war does a few positive things for the U.S. economy. One, it forces the country to increase its production of weaponry and things needed for the military in war. As silly as it sounds, we'll need tanks made, and we'll need bullets mass produced, and I guess we'll need all of the other crap that goes into making a well-equipped army. This increased need created jobs. Two, it rallies a country together for a common cause, and there is always strength in unity. Third, when the military goes off to war, the jobs of the people going to war will also have to be filled — creating an additional temporary surplus of jobs.

Now, I can get that part. I can't quite figure out where those extra jobs go for the soldiers when they come back from war. I don't know who the missile-creators and the bullet manufacturers will work for when the war is over (as they'll lose work too). I also can't understand how we get ourselves out of debt, after the president has created a debt to get us out of economic trouble.

I guess I'm not an economist, so I can't justify all of those issues away.

And, as silly as this sounds, I'm only one person, and I probably couldn't stop our country from going to war, just because I see some points that I can't resolve about the meaning of it.

Oh crap, I guess I'm getting side-tracked. What I was saying was that President Bush got us into this notion of the unending War on Terror (I feel like I should change the font or something when I write that, so you can feel that a low echoey voice is saying that ominously - let's try **War On Terror...** Hey, was that any better?), but that probably wasn't enough for President Bush, because people were catching on and saw no end in sight. So he turned to a country his Dad fought in the early 1990s and we didn't have UN. sanctioning to kill the bad leader, a country he thought he could get easily, and he could make it sound like a moral thing we're doing by attacking Iraq to get to Saddam Hussein.

So we've slipped into a war to *liberate* a country, not to protect ourselves (which is supposed to be the only reason this country goes to war). Suddenly our reasoning for stepping into wars has changed.

And our **War On Terror** is no longer a battle to get the enemy that killed thousands of innocent people in a civilian setting in the United States. President Bush even said (and this was mentioned in the debates) that he is not interested in looking for Bin Laden. That's because the **War On Terror** has become a battle to fight an ideology.

If you ask Bin Laden... Well, I'm sure you won't get the chance, but if you want to guess at his opinion, Bin Laden is screaming over there that we Americans *just don't get it*, that they hate what we represent and what we believe and how we live, and that this is a **holy war**.

I don't ever remembering stepping into a holy war.

But wait a minute. Define **holy war**. I'm near the Websters' 1975 (sorry, all I have is an older dic-

tionary with me today) *New Collegiate Dictionary*, and it defines **holy war** as

holy war n: a war waged by religious partisans to propagate or defend their faith.

Hmm. Fascinating. You think the **War On Terror** is not a holy war? Maybe *we* don't think so. But think of how President Bush thinks of this war, that this is something that is a fight for our values (not necessarily as stated in our Constitution). Think of what Bin Laden thinks of it as. These people hate our values and ideas, because they do not adhere to their religion. They will fight to the death for their cause. They will mass kill the innocent to make a statement, because they think that killing those who don't believe as they do is moral and just.

Yeah, to them this **War On Terror** and the war in Iraq is a holy war.

Yes, this *is* a different kind of war. And we haven't learned how to fight it differently yet. The beginning of mass media in our country coincided with the advent of political correctness. In recent years we have become concerned with how not to piss anyone off in any situation, and since that time and the advent of television, and the soon-after advent of video reporting on wars, people have been able to witness the destruction of wars, and they have started to violently protest *against* wars. People never saw how bloody the World Wars were (you know, because we weren't there, they didn't have images flashing on wide-screen TVs of the gore and death no one can tolerate to look at now), and that may be why we can no longer condone fighting a bloody, unjust war.

Sorry, war is unjust. It is menacing. We get angry when we see our prisoners treating hostages poorly? Well, they're **hostages** in a **war**. I think the point *is* to treat them unjustly. We get angry when we see the U.S. military being too angry or violent at enemies. Yeah, you're right, liberals: they *should* keep a perfectly cool head at all times when people who look innocent could pull out a gun from between their legs to kill you at any time, or people could set off a bomb on their body to kill the both of you. You don't need to *really* worry about getting an enemy, because we're now supposed to be a politically correct military machine (think of a kinder, friendlier army, so to speak). Don't like it? Then don't be in the God-damned war.

Because that's what war is, holy or not.

•••

Does it matter if we are the ones considering this a Holy War? Does it change the end result — does it matter to the families of the one who dies in battle? Does it matter to the people in the Middle East whom we apparently are “saving” from an evil dictatorship? Does it matter to the al-Qaida who want to get rid of Capitalism and individual rights, if we manage to hold them back for a while? Does it matter to those of us who don't think it is America's place to be in this war? Does it matter?

Which World Will We Be?

I'm not much of a history buff (I don't even remember much from my high school American history classes), but when I think back to our history, I know that in America we decided to take charge in the Industrial Revolution, and we decided to be the first to fly an airplane, and we excelled in car production, and we excelled in many markets to push us ahead to become one of the most powerful economic countries in the world.

Wow, we're pretty powerful.

And I look around me now, and I consider things like our high health costs... Well, I don't know if malpractice suits drive up the cost for seeing a doctor, and I don't know if different prices for people with health insurance and people without health insurance make a difference in the price of health care, and I don't know if people who *have* health insurance go to the doctor more because, Hell, their health insurance pays for it, well, I don't know if any of that drives the cost of health care up. People complain that prescription drug costs are too high, and I see that drug manufactures (first of all) spend billions of dollars in research just to *create* the drug. But then these drug manufacturers are expected by our government to give some of their drugs away freely to third world countries who can't afford these drugs.

How will they be compensated for their billions of dollars in investment, if they can't rely on the customers in the most productive country in the world to help them cover costs?

I don't know. All I **do** know is that there are many sides to any issue, and there are always more victims than we claim to see with every problem. We have to see every side to come to a rational conclusion.

I know we have an insanely high poverty rate in this country (you know, for being the productive country that we're supposed to be). I also know that even the poorest homes living off welfare in this country still have on average two television sets in their homes. I know that the majority of teens in America now apparently expect to have their own cell phone (hmmm... I know I grew up in the age before cell phones seemed to be glued to everyone's head, but I was raised without talking on the phone all the time to everyone, probably because my parents had rules that restricted me as I grew up so I could be a rational adult).

The standard of living has also risen *so dramatically* in this country, that everyone seems to expect everything handed to them on a silver platter.

What does this have to do with solving our problems in America?

Well, all I keep thinking is that we keep asking for more, and people aren't willing to work for more.

Okay, you think I'm nuts for thinking that. But let me give an example. John told me he heard that teens complain about not being able to get a job out of school. But the career counselors have told these teens that it might be easier for them to get a job if they remove all of the metal from piercings in their face, that they need to project the appropriate business image to get jobs. And the teens seem to be saying, 'If they can't accept me for who I am, then I don't want a job from them.'

Fine, kids. At that rate, *nobody* will offer you a job.

And they wonder why jobs are so hard to find.

Let me give you another example: President Bush wants to protect our borders from potential terrorists, and at the same time he wants to grant temporary work visas to illegal immigrants, so they can work in our country and he can keep tabs on them. (Apparently he doesn't mind Mexicans coming to the States to work jobs and mail half of the money they make back to Mexico, all without having to

pay any taxes to our government.) Maybe, if people are unwilling to get a job, we shouldn't pay them government benefits for being unemployed, and we can make those low-paying jobs available that people will be forced to take (you know, because they need the money). Maybe if young Americans stopped expecting the world to love them the way they were and pay them a lot of money, they'd be willing to really start *working* for a living.

I know, I'm ranting. Sorry.

No, actually, I'm not sorry, because I've been trying to look at the direction our country is going, and I've been trying to make sense out of what little history I know, and what I'm learning is starting to scare me. I think over time we have become much more expectant of things we may not deserve, because we haven't worked for it. I see jobs being outsourced to other countries because companies are actually getting tax benefits from our government to help third world countries by employing people there. At the same time I hear people say that they know that used American cars seems to have more problems than used foreign cars, that even the quality of American automobiles has comparatively gone downhill. And at the same time, I look at the electronics we purchase and see they're not made by U.S. companies. Listen to your stereo with your Sony electronics, or watch videos or television with your Panasonic. Use your LaMachine to prepare your food. Hell, don't even drink water from the States, but from Evian (I'm sure the French liked calling their company the word "naïve" spelled backwards...).

Maybe we *have* been naïve; maybe we can't see the price of the Euro is rising against the dollar, and that Japan has taken over in the electronics market.

And we sit here and think that we can get people back to work when the economy is doing poorly after people without investing experience dropped their life savings into a dot com market that was walking on a high tight rope wire with no net when it fell in the late 1990s. But we're doing things right now like getting rid of excess metals used for our building and manufacturing (which we think would cost too much to melt down to reuse), which is often shipped to China, where they melt it down so they can build high rises.

China in part is building more high rises with America's excess materials. Because they're willing to work with it, instead of being snotty and saying it would be too much work.

Wasn't it America's work ethic that got us so far ahead in the first place?

Now it seems we have become the overweight uncle you see once a year at family Christmas get-togethers, who wants to lean back in the easy chair after stuffing his face with decadent food they didn't prepare (because, of course, someone else prepared it *for* them), and talk between commercial breaks from the football game about how they were once the high school quarterback and they led their team to victory and were so popular - back then.

We as Americans are getting to the point where we're not producing all of the materials and products to keep our economy moving ahead of everyone else, but we're shipping our refuse to other countries (who use it to get ahead), and we're educating students from other countries here with Visas so they can take their American-educated brains back to their home country to charge us high prices for the products they've created.

We're seeing ourselves lose jobs in the world economy, we're *training* people from other countries so they can get ahead of us, and because we seem to expect every material possession in life, we're purchasing things from outside this country, beyond our means. We're letting what money we have slowly trickle out of this country.

And then we're putting ourselves in debt, to get more material possessions.

We're complaining that we want more, but we haven't earned it.

In the title of this editorial, I was asking which "world" this country would be. I was asking, because I was wondering if we were going to be a leading country, or if we would become like the third world countries, who have been taking our refuse to get ahead. I asked, because at the rate we're going, with our inability to compete in the world market and our inability to work (ah, let the illegal Mexicans do the work we don't want to do for cheaper, so we get cheaper produce in the grocery store...), with the government losing tax revenue because of illegal immigrants working in the United States, we're on a slippery slope that could slide our country downhill.

How far downhill? Well, if we can't produce, it won't be long before we become a third world country.

Yes, it is possible

I know, I know, you just heard me say that poor families with a home (or a crappy government apartment) still has access to television (and probably access to all the liquor and all the smokes and all of the illegal drugs they want), but we could become a country of people who have the basics, but not much else, because we don't have jobs and can't afford it. And don't have the drive to get out of the downward cycle we've gotten ourselves into.

Yes, it is possible

But if it *is* an eventual possibility, how do we get off that path down the mountainside and into the canyon hole?

I don't know.

Maybe we start by not credit carding ourselves into debt so our kids can have their own cell phones that they go over their minutes with every month. Maybe we just stop credit carding ourselves into debt, to have everything that we always want and can't afford (whatever happened to people using credit cards as 30 day interest-free loans, and paying the balance in full every month?). And, maybe we start *really* valuing things we can produce in this country, instead of letting our hard-earned money go to businesses from other countries instead of keeping our money in our economy.

Maybe we stop expecting our government to do everything for us. As I've said before:

You keep asking everyone to wipe your noses for you.

Well, pick up the dam tissue and do it yourself.

We have to stop *asking* for things and start *working* for things.

We didn't get to the moon first because we didn't work. The Wright brothers didn't learn to fly because they didn't work. And yeah, we wouldn't have drugs to help people with arthritis like Celebrex if drug companies didn't put up the resources - and do a lot of work (yeah, even the drug companies want to be paid for all of their hard work, if we want to continue getting all the things we could ever want...).

Nothing is accomplished without an extraordinary amount of work. We didn't excel in the world without a lot of work. And to stay ahead, we have to work - either to get better in these existing markets, or in creating new markets - so that we can still excel and stay on top.

Understanding the World of Prejudice

We went out for drinks with our friend Zach, and he was talking about Prejudice. He was saying that he didn't think it was prejudice if a white father didn't want his daughter to marry a black man, because he would agree with the white father there. And he was saying that he wasn't prejudice. He said he didn't have a problem with white people dating or marrying black people, but it was just the he wouldn't want *his* white daughter to marry a black man.

And we looked at each other after he said that, and we said no, sorry, that's prejudice.

He *refused* to believe it, because he had black friends, and he had no problem with racial mixing for dating or marriage.

But we said, but you *do* have a problem with it for your own daughter.

He said that his feelings weren't prejudice, they were just a preference.

And I thought: Prejudice is an unfounded preference, I think...

Let's think about the actual definition of the word. You don't want your white daughter to marry a man because he is *black*. You're not judging them as a person, you are **pre** judging them based on the color of their skin. I checked it out in the dictionary:

from Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary*:

Prej-u-dice \ˈprej-ed-əs\ n **a** (1): preconceived judgement or opinion (2) an opinion or leaning adverse to anything without just grounds or without sufficient knowledge **b**: an instance of such judgement or opinion **c**: an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supported characteristics.

And yeah, I think someone who decides they didn't want their daughter to marry a black man would be making that judgment without sufficient knowledge about that person (other than knowing the color of their skin). I don't know if you'd consider it "hostility" against that individual, but you might consider it an irrational attitude.

Veggies of the World Unite

I'd like to tell you something about myself that usually scares most red-blooded Americans. I don't want you to think I'm going to try to brainwash you, I don't want you to think I'm going to give you a lecture. Just brace yourself, and hear me out.

I'm a vegetarian.

Okay, okay, don't fly off the handle, I know you think I'm some sort of wacko that's going to throw paint at you or chain myself to a tree. I swear, no such activities ever cross my mind (except in occasional circumstances that differ greatly from saving the planet, except for when I chose to not consume orange juice from concentrate not because of the flavor but because orange juice from concentrate uses orange harvested on rain forest land destroyed for our consumer needs for a cheaper product...).

If you don't think I'm crazy for telling you I'm a vegetarian, well, thanks. But most everyone else seems to, and I honestly don't know why. I've chosen to think about what I put in my mouth and why I put it there, and for that I'm considered crazy.

Here, let me explain how I got to this point.

I was travelling around the East Coast by car for New Year's one year (seeing the ball drop in New York was cool...), I think it was three years ago. And I noticed that whenever we stopped for fast food, I was eating a chicken sandwich (Yes, this one odd little point is relevant in the story, just read on). I was avoiding red meat for my cholesterol, but I was the first to say that those chicken sandwiches at McDonald's or Burger King tasted *so* bland. At one point in our trip we stopped at a hotel in the Pocosins for a night, and the hotel was a series of cabins instead of the usual high-rise. So as we were going to our room, outside, we found a cat — well, she found *us*, because she came right to our hotel door and purred like mad at us. She had a collar on, so we knew she belonged to someone, someone probably travelling as well. She was a very friendly cat, an affectionate cat. So when we started to open the door to our hotel room, I said to the cat (why do we talk to animals anyway? It's not like she ever would understand what I was saying), "Do you want to come in?" I thought she would stay outside and we could go into our rooms and that would be that. But she turned around and marched right into our room before us.

So we had a new visitor.

We played with the cat, we even took pictures of the cat, seeing that we had our cameras, being on vacation and all. And the cat knew humans. The cat responded to humans. The cat understood joy and pain. I could see that in what little interaction I had with the cat.

Eventually we figured we better let the cat outside, she's going to need to go to the bathroom, and besides, her family is probably looking for her. So we let her go.

And we got in the car the next morning and started to drive home, still ten hours away.

And then we approached lunch. We were stopping at a fast-food joint, I think Burger King.

And then I made the connection.

We in America look at certain animals as thinking, and certain animals as glorified plants. But it's really only how we've been raised to think of these animals, the distinctions are only in our minds. That cat I saw the night before was a living, feeling creature. And in China that cat would have been hanging in the front window of a store, considered a delicacy.

And in India the cow is sacred.

So I said, let me try to not eat meat for a little while. You know, if I feel the urge to eat meat, I can have a chicken sandwich once every two weeks.

But let me try this, to see how I feel about it.

And with every day that passed, I wanted the consumption of meat out of my life more and more. I also knew that I had to learn to like vegetables more, or else I'm going to get *really* tired of having spaghetti every day. But wither way, I knew I made the right decision.

It was a strange decision for me to make. I had never thought of being a vegetarian before. I don't know why it popped into my head at that moment — why I decided to make this kind of change then. I always knew that cats and dogs were eaten in other cultures. I always knew that the cow was sacred in India. I always knew that meat was eaten the most in America — because of our global overabundance of wealth (and our overabundance of gluttony).

So I decided to try it. And I've never looked back.

Okay, now comes the onslaught of questions, I'm sure. So, do you try to convert others? So, do you harass hunters and people who wear fur coats?

Well, I don't think so... I don't have issue with others eating meat, and I don't try to change anyone's minds about eating meat. I might have issue with it internally, but I try to not let that show. When people ask me questions, I explain things to them, and maybe they learn something.

Maybe they'll learn the value of not eating meat as much as the average American does (my husband, the hunter, used to eat meat a lot — but now he only eats anything with meat in the ingredients only once every two or three days, and I have *not* tried to sway his opinions at all). Because maybe when people learn from me, they may see the value in my choices.

So, okay, maybe I *do* want people to change, but I'll only do it with knowledge.

So sue me for wanting to make the world a better place, or making our lives better...

Trials & Tribulations with Morals

After seeing the ball drop in New York January 1 1995, we stopped in the Poconos on our drive back home to Chicago. As we went into our cabin in the Poconos, another guest's cat (even wearing their owner's neon collar) walked up to our door and pretty much invited itself in. We actually played with this cat for almost an hour, knowing it was someone else's cat, and I started thinking about this cat as it played in our hotel room.

I looked at this cat and thought, 'You know, in other parts of the world you're considered a delicacy.'

I sat for a second, and then I thought, 'And in some parts of the world, the cow is sacred.'

This was probably about the time when we decided that we had to let the cat out of our hotel room so it could get back to its owners. And I thought for a minute, and I knew that, well, I could never kill a cow or a chicken or a turkey or anything. But then I quickly reminded myself that *that* was the beauty of capitalism, that we can work on what we *want* to do, and *pay* other people to do everything else.

And after a second, I thought, well, maybe I don't want to *paysomeone* else to kill the animals for me. And that's when I decided to become a vegetarian.

Why did I tell that story? Well, because when I tell people I'm a vegetarian, people ask me, "Can you eat eggs or milk or cheese?" And I respond by saying, "Ah, I'm all for the animal's torture, just not their death." Translation: although they don't treat cows well to get milk and make cheese, and they don't treat chickens well to get eggs, I am willing to have that. I just can't tolerate letting animals die so I can have a roast beef sandwich or a Chicken McNugget from McDonald's (which, by the way, is made with all the remnants from parts of the chicken you'd *never* eat unless it was fast-cooked and lost all of its flavor, and then mashed back together and have spices added to it so it would taste like meat again).

So this is how I have lived, as a vegetarian, for almost ten years, by having a stir fry and adding an egg to the mix to hold flavors together there, or by enjoying a good deep-dish pizza with extra cheese (but no meat), and maybe adding a topping, like a good amount of garlic.

And yeah, just under the ten-year mark I learned of some more bad news for us vegetarians. I thought we were in the clear on this test, but the majority of cheeses that are produced (like Kraft cheese), use rennet to help process the materials that end of making cheese.

Oh, and rennet is an enzyme derived from calf's stomach lining.

Yeah, I know they could be getting the enzyme from the calf (you know, the baby cows they keep restrained so the baby cow meat will stay tender) they're killing for veal, so...

Wait, I don't want them making veal either.

The thing is, cheese can be made with vegetarian products, and it actually costs less to make it that way. I think big name companies just use the products they're used to in making cheese, and it doesn't matter to them that a vegetarian option not only costs less, but is also more moral.

Why bother being more moral when you could spend *more* money, and help contribute to more animal deaths?

So in the last few months (well, since right before Thanksgiving 2004), I've been trying to remove most cheeses from my diet as well.

But adding a good slice of Farmer's cheese to a vegetarian sandwich makes it *taste* so much better.

And I know that having some of the animal derivatives in dairy products can be helpful for the human dietary needs (if they don't eat a highly specific diet as a vegan), so I've tried to figure out if there is a way I could continue to being moral and still eat well.

My husband John took me to the store *Trader Joe's*, where they have listings of what kinds of cheese don't have rennet in them. Found some fresh mozzarella, and since John eats meat, he had no problem with eating the rennet-derived fresh mozzarella in our fridge, so we could have caprice salads. And we bought shredded rennet-free cheese, so that we could go to our favorite local pizza parlor and ask them to use our own cheese when making their pizza (which, by the way, tasted great, and our cheese when reheated melted better than their original cheese). And it was nice to know that where we went to get sliced Farmer's cheese, they didn't use rennet in the production, so *it* was safe for me too.

And I know to the meat eater it sounds like I'm whining, but... But I guess that's what you get when you have to be moral like this.

Sorry, that was blunt and rude of me. It's just hard.

It's just hard when I can't eat Cheese Doritos or Cheese Pringles, or eat nacho cheese at a bar. Or have cheese fries. Or if a place happens to serve a veggie patty hamburger, you have to make sure they don't add cheese to the burger. And don't get focaccia bread or Asiago cheese bagels because of the cheese. And remember, pesto sauce uses cheese in it. And Parmesan cheese is right out, which people add to spices and mixes. And the Brie and hard cheese my husband and I had for a romantic evening are foods I can no longer eat.

God, is this poor wench bitching. She's complaining that she can't eat the *Brie* has already has in her fridge.

Sniff sniff. Bitch moan.

I have to say that so I know how trivial this may sound to the meat eater. But when you decide to make a moral decision like this, these little things are a big deal when most of your diet is altered in this meat-eating country.

The United States is the country where fast food restaurants have decided over the years to make it expected to have French fries go with their Whoppers or Big Macs. Where over the years fast food places have decided to expand the amount of processed meat in their menus (consider things like the Bacon Double Cheese Burger). Consider the notion that all drinks and all orders of fries have been made larger and larger over the years (Hell, a man tried to eat *only* McDonald's for one month straight, and whenever he placed an order, he had to answer "yes" whenever he was asked if he would like to "supersize" his meal).

This is the society we live in. A society that has gotten used to having an excess of everything, and when we in America don't have to worry about killing the animal to get the prime rib steak on our plates, we have a much easier time forking over the cash and diving in.

There I go, ripping on people again.

Sorry, I get on my irritating moral high ground, &... well... I get snippy.

I mean, I have much less of a problem with meat eaters who *understand* the entire process of how this meat gets on their plate than I do for the average person. I'm married to a meat eater, but he was a hunter since he was a child, and has, after killing his animal, brought it back home, skinned it, cut

it up and prepared it for food.

I've got to have some respect for that.

I understand that we have gotten to the top of the food chain, and we *can* kill animals for food if we need it. But I also remind myself that we're at the top of the *intellectual* chain too, and we don't *have* to kill others in order to eat.

So, I still have to say that if someone can understand the process of killing that animal for food, they have earned my respect.

And Hell, I wasn't looking for this in my potential meat-eating husband when I was single, but I like thinking of this story of when John was hunting deer. He used a rifle, and was able to kill the deer. Then he heard that he could use a handgun, but he might not be able to aim as well with it. So he tried it, and when he was able to hit and kill every deer with one shot, he decided he would learn archery, to use a bow and arrow to hunt deer.

Which he did, and did wonderfully.

He did this because he didn't want it to be too easy for him to just randomly kill an animal. He wanted the animal to have a chance in the struggle. So he restricted his abilities, until he could get better at his hunt.

I think of this, and then I think of my past, where I worked for a food magazine publishing company, where magazine editors would have meal tastings (with meat) from different restaurants for reviews. An associate editor (whom I won't name, you know, because I don't like picking on people without giving them a chance to respond...) said that she would never eat rabbit for a meal tasting, in her words, "because a bunny is cute."

And I thought, 'Oh, so since cows and chickens are ugly, they're *okay* to eat. Good philosophy.'

This is the mentality that kills me. This is the mentality that makes me sick of how people don't keep a cohesive set of values in their lives. This makes me think of people who are whores, contracting Herpes from sleeping with the wrong men, who then later cover their lives up to get married in the Catholic church, and have the gall to wear a white dress.

And I'm afraid this is the mentality of a *lot* of people in today's over-consumption society, where we don't have to think about what we're doing with our lives. We have become a people that thinks it's okay to purchase things on credit cards, and just pay the minimum balance every month, just so we can have that second SUV (which in my book is a Sub Urban Vehicle, or something that is *only* for the people *less* than urban, or something *lower* than urban, or something *below* urban). There is a mentality that we can over-extend ourselves now, and we'll somehow make up for it later. We won't think about the consequences (I mean Hell, there will be a credit consolidation company to help us with our debt later, or worst-case scenario, we can declare bankruptcy and *still* keep our car so we can make the payments on the house we own).

We've decided to push ourselves too far, and we wonder why American has the highest rates of heart attacks (could it be the stress in our lives and our excess meat in our diets?). And we wonder why diseases strike us like AIDS (of course it has nothing to do with sharing needles with sick people when you're taking illegal drugs, and it has nothing to do with having unprotected homosexual sex, *both* of which are habits we could change). And we wonder why people age and get osteoporosis (because we drink milk from another species, and we drink it after infancy, and we consume so much protein that it actually *pulls* the calcium from our bones, making it easier to make our bones weak as we get older).

We define our own problems with our actions. We work to solve our life-threatening diseases,

when we *give* ourselves these problems with our behaviors. We accept the way things are, then work to try to solve their damaging habits, instead changing the habit that cause our downfall.

This was published in the “philosophy monthly” section of cc&d magazine, v143, 12/22/04, and in <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own>, <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>.

Swallowing Where Meat Comes From

It took me flying to China to read about this story in the *Shanghai Daily* newspaper.

Now, it's hard to be a vegetarian in China; when you want to order food, *everything* has meat in it (even the meals that say they don't have meat in them have two different kinds of fish in it...). But even meat-eaters would agree that it is crossing a line to eat **human** meat, and this was a potential peril those in Vancouver, British Columbia (Canada) learned about when it was reported that a pig farmer became a serial killer, and may have potentially placed human remains in pork that he gave to friends.

<http://www.karisable.com/skazpicton.htm> said that 15 victims were among 63 missing women, from the Vancouver Downtown Eastside in October 2002. But March 2004 newspapers revealed that human remains may have been in the processed pork products from this man's home. *CNN* reported on *March 11, 2004* that pork products processed and distributed from the farm of accused Canadian serial killer Robert Pickton may have contained human remains. I checked out more sources on line, and saw that www.seattletimes.com even carried an AP story about this. The AP article stated: A news release issued by B.C.'s Health Ministry said RCMP investigators have evidence that some products were handed out by Pickton to friends and acquaintances in the area prior to his arrest in February 2002.

A woman in California told John that it **is** possible to spread mad cow disease in the United States, because even though farmer are not supposed to feed animals the remains for their own species, they can feed remains of one animal to another, which becomes processed food for that original animal again. It seems that the way our society works, certain animals are okay to eat and to feed to others, but we don't think about how that meat gets to our table, or what we have to go through to get our "daily serving" of meat. Maybe they would think twice about their meat consumption if they knew the entire process.

the freedom pendulum swings around the globe

To visit a friend and to see the amazing historical sights, we decided to take a trip to China. We looked back over our lives — we were raised knowing that we couldn't trade with China, that they were so violently Communistic that we would never be able to experience their culture or their history first-hand. So we stopped listening to AM talk radio, hearing about how the U.S. government could search flight records for potential terrorist activity, to head to the other side of the globe and see how the other side of the planet — and the other political side of the coin — functioned. Now, I have to remind myself that I was seeing urban areas, Beijing and Shanghai, and that I was not witnessing the destitution of the rural expanses of China ... I have to remind myself of that because it was so much like the United States that I could forget. Corporate monoliths like Starbuck's and McDonald's were on every corner. People driving on the roads and on bicycles were more demonic than the city streets in the United States. Surrounded by skyscrapers and a ton of construction for the development of the city, the only thing that reminded me that I wasn't on an American street was the fact that no one anywhere spoke English. Other than seeing signs in the street written in Chinese and not English, it was amazingly comfortable to manage in Shanghai. While taking a flight to Beijing, we read an English newspaper (the *Shanghai Daily*, March 9 2004), whose main headline was "Historic Progress Hailed in constitutional amendments." The draft amendment to China's constitution went over the inviolability of private property. The *Shanghai Daily* article even stated that "the constitutional amendment is also expected to enshrine human rights protection." I even kept this paper, so I could have written record of the expansion of rights given to the people of China. This story seemed to mark a remarkable time in history.

It was remarkable because I saw the inverse happening to us in the United States. I thought about John losing unemployment benefits because the U.S. government saw (by searching flight records) that he flew to Puerto Rico, which is outside of the United States; in other words, a weekend trip cost John his unemployment benefits. I also heard that the U.S. government wanted to access anyone's hospital records to be able to search for people who had abortions.

The Patriot Act was passed six weeks after 9/11. We know now that it greatly changed the balance between liberty and security in this nation's framework. Now the Domestic Security Enhancement Act is a draft for the sweeping expansion of Anti-Terrorism Act — and one of the provisions in here (if I've got this right) is that the government could actually strip citizenship from someone if — for example, if you were found making what you thought was a legitimate contribution to some non profit organization. People can argue about the "favorability" of particular non-profit organizations (that some non profit organizations are fronts for terrorist groups).

All I know is that I see that we're walking on a slippery slope; once we've abandoned *some* rights, we can lose them all. And in China they are working to give their people *more* rights. It's amazing how the pendulum can swing from China's side of the globe to our own to change how everyone can look at the world.

I Pledge of ... What Do we Pledge our Allegiance to?

Listening to people talk on AM radio about the Pledge of Allegiance recently, I've started to formulate my own opinion. There are those who want to eliminate the line "**Under God**" from the pledge, that this leads some to believe that the United States does not stand for Atheists or people who don't believe in the same god as the ever-pervasive Christian God. But I've always thought that if that were the case, then Atheists should be against our money ("In God We Trust"???), or for that matter be against the people who founded our country (even though they did not impose a religion, they were for the most part quite Christian people...). I always thought that this is the way the pledge was written, and we should honor the way it was created.

Then I found out that the Pledge of Allegiance did not include references to God.

I read Joe Hertel's editorial in Northeastern Illinois University's newspaper (*v20 issue 16*) **INDEPENDENT**. Hertel wrote "The words 'Under God' were added in 1954 to distinguish us from the Godless Communists" ... so I realized not to make judgments until I actually research something. So I decided to search a little more.

I learned details from a short story by Dr. John W. Baer (<http://history.vineyard.net/pledge.htm>):

Francis Bellamy (1855 - 1931), a Baptist minister, wrote the original Pledge in August 1892. His original Pledge read as follows: 'I pledge allegiance to my Flag and (to*) the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.' [* 'to' added in October, 1892.]

In 1923 and 1924 the National Flag Conference, under the leadership of the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution, changed the Pledge's words, 'my Flag,' to 'the Flag of the United States of America.' Bellamy disliked this change, but his protest was ignored.

The Story of the Pledge of Allegiance states (<http://www.flagday.org/Pages/StoryofPledge.html>) that: "On Flag Day June 14, 1954, the words "under God" were added. The last change in the Pledge of Allegiance occurred when President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved adding the words "under God". As he authorized this change he said: "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

This was very nice of Eisenhower to assume our future allegiance to his God (though I'd like to know what our "spiritual weapons" are...).

Dr. John W. Baer also noted that Bellamy "had been pressured into leaving his church in 1891 because of his socialist sermons. In his retirement in Florida, he stopped attending church because he disliked the racial bigotry he found there."

So ... one can only guess that Bellamy would not have liked *this* change, either (especially considering that he even stopped going to church).

I don't know if it is proper to "change" the Pledge of Allegiance back to its original form. I understand that Amendments are added to the Constitution to make it better; maybe I'm missing the argument that keeping "Under God" makes the Pledge of Allegiance better. But reading the words of the group to Restore our Pledge of Allegiance (at <http://www.restorethepledge.com/>), I felt I might not be alone. They state:

“Currently there is a legal drive to remove those words. “God” in the Pledge has caused the divisiveness, discrimination and exclusion that the Framers specifically sought to prevent. Yes, the majority of Americans believe in God, and they nearly unanimously find no objection in the Pledge’s current rendition. But that is precisely why we have a Bill of Rights - to prevent tyranny by the majority, and to protect the rights of minorities. Our Constitution forbids government from endorsing religious views, and those who choose not to believe in a deity should never be made to feel like “outsiders,” as is now the case.”

“The words are “liberty and justice for all.” The Pledge should be a unifying experience for every citizen. Placing a religious ideal into its midst is not right, and serves no purpose except to alter a purely patriotic tradition into one that satisfies the religious bent of the majority. That is exactly what the First Amendment was written to preclude.”

This was published in the “philolosophy monthly” section of cc&d magazine, v137, June 2004 (the 11 year Anniversary issue), and in <http://poetrypoem.com/poeticpieces>, <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>.

Beauty First

We heard the news in December about the Ukrainian President candidate Viktor Yushchenko. It appeared that he was poisoned with dioxin, a chemical that could bring a man to death. One of the side effects left his face pockmarked and ashen, which will eventually disappear, but this previously good-looking face now looks heavier, and filled with crater-like acne. Tests revealed the poisoning two weeks before the election.

I've heard these things on the news about Yushchenko's condition, and most of the time people mentioned that we would be fine now that he is being treated, but otherwise they talk about the condition of his face. The fact that it has altered the way he looks. But at the end of every story, they make sure to stress that Yushchenko was a good-looking man, and he *will* gain his looks back when this disease is completely out of his system (which should be from one to three years).

Did you know that dioxin was one of the ingredients in Agent Orange? Now the company Monsanto altered it slightly, called it RoundUp, and now has it as a weed killer.

But you'd see photos of Yushchenko before the dioxin poisoning, which they guess could have been put in his soup once (his Chicago-native wife even remembered tasting something on his lips one night months ago), and the news reports would say, 'look at how good looking Yushchenko was, and look at him after months of exposure to dioxin.'

Interesting.

That's interesting to me, because hearing these stories reminds me how how interested everyone is in how we look.

Beauty first.

It makes me think about television shows that do countdowns of the most beautiful dresses, or couples, or men or women out there — because people need to know which movie and television stars are the most beautiful, so they know who to mold themselves after and aspire to look like.

Those same networks have shows where female models and actors discuss the need for plastic surgery to stay ahead in the industry. There are parents who want to give their daughter breast implants for her sixteenth birthday.

Come on, I wasn't even fully developed by age sixteen.

And my parent's would never have thought that my self esteem would be helped by surgically putting silicone under my skin to make me primed for the objectification.

It makes me think of Miss America, where they parade a bunch of women around in fancy dresses and in swimsuits (and make people think this contest is about more than looks by having a "talent" section as well, that most people turn off when they're watching it on TV). For that matters, there's the Miss Universe pageants, or pageant of each of all of the United States, even child pageants (wait, wasn't Jean Benet Ramsey a five year-old model before her parents... er, I mean, before **someone** killed her?)

In fact, I just heard of a pageant in China for "Miss Artificial Beauty" — created because women in beauty pageants got angry that they had to compete against women with so much plastic surgery done on them. So "Miss Artificial Beauty" is a pageant of women who have gone through a lot of plastic surgery.

And recently, they even had a contestant that was once a man.

Now, *that's* a *lot* of plastic surgery.

It makes me think of cheerleaders. I know, I know, they do a lot of more physical, acrobatic work now as cheerleaders, but in general they have been used as sidelines entertainment, dressed in skimpy clothes and dancing provocatively, for men to keep them entertained during sports game breaks.

I know, women watch sports now too, but they haven't been able to get rid of this sexist practice yet.

But seeing this focus on Yushchenko's looks makes me think about how many women aspire to be models (well, some men want to be models too, because Hell, why would you want to aspire to excel by using your brain?) The notion is to try to excel, based only on your looks. Remember that.

It makes me think about department store make-up counters (sometimes they're almost as big as the clothing departments). If you have to wear the right *clothes* to look good, you have to make up your face so it looks good too.

It makes me think... You know, it makes me think that there are a lot of ways women are supposed to be made to look good.

Oh, but wait, this was not supposed to be a talk about how *women* have to look got for men. The point was about the fact that *everyone* is concerned with looks in our society. The point was that this man running for Ukrainian president was poisoned — but more importantly, a side effect is that he looks like an old man with bad acne because of it.

Good thing they caught it in time, because now he won't have too look so *ugly* forever.



"Damnit girl, you're bitching a lot. People depend on looks, and i'm sure you do too, Janet. Hell, I've heard you say that you loved the fact that your husband is tall. That's based on looks, isn't it?"

I hate it when I let my alter ego get a hold of me during my editorials, forcing me to not be do one-sided.

And by the way, my husband *is* really good looking.

And yes, looks *do* matter. I know that any single person interested in meeting someone will look for cute people first. I know that a person's looks can tell you nothing about their personality, but if you're going to be dating someone, it might as well be something other people are envious of. Know that I mean?

And yeah, when you're interested in meeting people, you'll look for the good-looking person. *Then* you'll try to talk to them, to see if their personality matches their good looks. And maybe, on a personal level, we use that as one of our rulers for judging people.

You know, because we're all so interested in good looks.

But then consider about how good looks effect popularity of people on a mass scale. Like consider actors in movies or television - the better looking you are, the better your chances at getting good roles, because there's a better chance more people would like to stare at you on the big screen. And when it comes to politics, it's much easier to be sweet-talked by a good-looking politician than an ugly looking hermit.

Consider that President Kennedy was a looker (by some standards), that there are theories that Marilyn Monroe had a fling with him, even though many people had a lot of problems with his policies. And think of what you think of when you think of President Nixon: well, you think of Watergate, and him resigning to avoid impeachment. Oh, and also think of his looks. Don't his looks reflect what

we think of his presidency?

Consider that Americans want to give President Clinton credit for the Internet boom, and people forget that the crash of the dot com industry happened in the last six months of his second term.

Consider that fact that Bill Clinton had repeated sexual encounters with an overweight intern, and people considered impeaching him. But that's not how he'll be remembered: Bill Clinton was not a gorgeous man, but he was not old, and he had a suave personality and interacted well with people, he had the right tone to his voice, he gave you the impression that he "felt" for you and "understood" what you were going through.

Yes, in America it often seems to be all about looks. But although he had age on his side, this may be some evidence that personality goes a long way.

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Life, Liberty and Blocks of Cheese

I was listening to the radio the other night - talk radio (it keeps me awake when I have to drive a long distance during the night). It keeps me awake, usually because there's enough there to get me so angry that I actually want to yell back at the radio.

Honestly, I actually once heard someone call in and say it was their constitutional right to food, that the government had to give them food if they didn't get it themselves (tell me where in the Constitution does it say that citizens of the United States of America have the inalienable right to "life, liberty and blocks of cheese"). Last time I checked, The Pursuit of Happiness meant that you have the ability to do what you need to in order to acquire the things you need, such as food, not that the government has a responsibility to feed you.

So anyway, I was listening to the radio, and the discussion on this particular evening was about child molesters. Doctors and other experts has pretty much agreed that they are incurable, that castration doesn't stop their urges to hurt children, because it is a power struggle more than a sexual venting. So the question arose: should people living within a community where a child molester is going to move into be notified that this person was convicted of molesting children?

A similar story arose after a convicted rapist abducted and killed a neighborhood child after he was released from prison and "started anew." The neighborhood was in an outrage; if they knew this man was a rapist, they said, they would have been more protective of their children.

So the question going over the air waves on this particular night was whether or not it was right to notify people of the acts you've been convicted of in the past. People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc. - some also brought up the fact that the information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

But first of all, it is not the role of our government to intervene with every aspect of our lives. The government is not supposed to protect "society." As the closest thing to a capitalist society on this planet, "society" is made up of a group of individuals, and the government should work for the individual. Currently, any individual has the right to find out information about a person (this kind of falls into that "pursuit of happiness" thing), but we should not expect the government to hand it to us on a silver platter.

If a potential law does not apply in all situations, it is not a good law. So let's apply this idea to other crimes: if you move into a new neighborhood, should all your new neighbors know that you shoplifted when you were nineteen? I don't think so - all it will produce are negative effects.

People should be more responsible for themselves instead of asking the government to help them out more, then get angry when the government gets out of control and continually hikes your taxes to support the massive network of laws created on whims such as this one.

Furthermore, If this law went into effect for molesters already in prison, they would be in essence receiving two separate sentences at two separate times for a crime they were tried for once. That goes against everything this country was founded on. If they need a greater sentence, give it to them when they are sentenced.

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video games, violence, porn & death

I loved video games — when I was little we had an Atari system and I played Pac Man in the den with my friend Sheri for hours. My dad's office was next to a video arcade and I plugged I don't know how many quarters into an upright Ms. Pac Man (okay, I apparently had a thing for that game). But I even programmed a ski video game into my TRS 80 (my Trash 80, thank you), and I obsessed on Tetris starting in college.

Video games can be a good release and a chance to escape problems in life, I suppose.

But that doesn't mean that you should go to a game that supports anything illegal - like porn, or theft, or murder.

Well, that seems obvious, Janet.

Well, it might not be *that* obvious. First of all, porn *is* legal to adults (even though a lot of adults have issue with porn).

Okay, Janet, crappy argument for porn, but you didn't even cover violence or death.

Hmm. Yeah, I suppose there *isn't* a good reason to want violence or death in video games. I know that in Pac Man you went around a maze eating monsters that were trying to kill you, but they were *monsters*, and it was a measure of trying to keep yourself alive (even if you got points for eating the monsters in those moments where the monsters became a delicacy in the game).

Yeah, I may have played a game where you killed creatures by eating them, but real point of the game was survival in maze after maze, not killing others.

So why am I talking about video games? Because everyone's been playing them lately, from a guy I know who was practicing an on line game for hours every day to be a part of a team playing in the video game Olympics (yes, there's actually an Olympics, where winners for a couple hundred thousand dollars), to a guy who used to rent a place from us who played an online game *constantly*, to... to eighteen-year-old Devin Moore, who played **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** enough to relive a scene from one of the same scenarios.

You see, police officer Arnold Strickland brought Devin Darnell Moore in on suspicion of car theft on June 7, 2003. Moore said in a statement (according to the University of Alabama's newspaper *the Crimson White* on July 21, 2005) that Devin Moore grabbed Arnold Strickland's gun and shot him twice, then shot Fayette police officer James Crump as he ran down the hall. Devin Moore said he then went down the hall and shot emergency dispatcher, Leslie "Ace" Mealer five times, then grabbed a set of car keys and fled in a police cruiser.

When people studied what he had done, they saw that his actions perfectly paralleled a **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** scene.

Family members of Strickland and Mealer have even filed a wrongful death suit against "Vice City" developer Take 2 Games, Sony Entertainment, Gamestop and Wal-Mart, saying that the game trained Moore to effectively kill three police officers without hesitation. But according to *the Enquirer*, Devin Moore's defense attorney Jim Standridge even said that the defense would include testimony about video games as well as post-traumatic stress disorder in the capital murder trial.

Yes, somehow the defense will use the video game as *support* for Devin Moore.

Now, to recap from *NBC News* and the *Associated Press*: Devin Moore is charged with six capital murder counts in the 2003 deaths of Fayette officers Arnold Strickland and James Crump and dis-

patcher Leslie “Ace” Mealer.

And even though Columbus’ newspaper *the Ledger Enquirer* mentions Moore’s PTSD, we have to ask is PTSD justifies the murders committed.

Or if a video game justifies the murders committed.

...

Sen. Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y., have even asked for a ratings change that would restrict young people’s access to the video game — because it has been discovered that **Grand Theft Auto** may not only have violence problems, but sexual ones too.

David Walsh, president of the National Institute Of Media And The Family, said on *The Early Show* that “that there are explicit pornographic scenarios in which the player literally directs the pornographic scenes.” That and “the modules to activate the sex scenes are being promoted on teen-oriented Web sites. So the teen players all knew about it; parents were clueless.”

The *Beloit Daily News* reported that “The best-selling game “**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** was revealed to contain embedded sexually explicit material... Players (*children... -ed.*) could easily download a “key” which allowed them to unlock what are, essentially, pornographic images.”

Does it matter that the makers of **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** have stopped manufacturing the current version of the game, and that, according to *nvunet.com*, “Sex-free version to be released soon?” Yeah, this hyper-violent game is also bringing porn to teens, because **Grand Theft Auto** may only now change from an “M” rating, not an adults-only “AO” rating - and the late ratings-change doesn’t help the millions of children who already have the game.

I spent hours every day playing video games when I was little. And this **Grand Theft Auto** is what kids spend hours a day molding themselves after now.

...

Newspaper sources stated that when questioned, jurors were asked if their children play video games. And of course people play video games. I even heard one caller on talk radio say that they had **Grand Theft Auto** and haven’t had the urge to kill anyone.

But *CBS News* even stated that **Grand Theft Auto** is both “extremely violent and wildly popular”... which makes me wonder why there is such an attraction to things that are illegal. Because we really *want* to steal cars and kill police officers? Um, I don’t think *I* want that (maybe that’s why I don’t play **Grand Theft Auto**), but is that what all the people — kids and adults — who buy **Grand Theft Auto** think?

Steven Johnson, author of “Everything Bad Is Good For You,” said that “Mark David Chapman, who killed John Lennon, was influenced by ‘Catcher in the Rye.’ The Manson family was influenced by listening to the Beatles. Borderline crazy people will be influenced by the media. The question is: Is there a long-term, larger trend in society towards more violence or less violence, based on these video games? We all know the trend in society over the last 10 years is towards much less violence than there was before.”

And that’s true, I hear that here in Chicago murder rates are decreasing over time. But does that mean we’re choosing to let out our violent tendencies in *video games*? I thought there was less violence because we as a people were less violent. Do we need to resort to video game violence and pornography to attempt to stop these otherwise unhealthy and immoral urges?

Sexism in a Nutshell

As I grew up I did what I thought was expected of me. I didn't bring up unmentionable subjects to my parents. I didn't burp out loud. I didn't complain. And I didn't know why.

And it wasn't that my parents, or my teachers, or my peers, were trying to cram a certain lifestyle down my throat. It was just the norm, what was expected, what everyone was used to (like when parents have a child- if it's a boy they dress them in blue and if it's a girl they dress them in pink, and they give them sex-appropriate toys as they become toddlers — because that's what the kids should want).

When women are born, they are given pink dresses and bows in their hair. Little boys are given light blue jumpers. Even when they are infants, even if other adults can't tell what the sex of the child, this is done - precisely to insure that the rest of the world will know what the sex of the child is. As they are raised, they are given toys to play with - girls the infamous Barbie, and boys the popular G.I. Joe. Girls progress to baby dolls they can dress and feed and burp, with accessories such as baby bottles, strollers and blankets. Boys progress to model cars and trucks, then on to guns and weapons, then the prized bicycle, then sports equipment, then building and erector sets.

As they grow, parents decide what clothes the children will wear, and what their hair will look like, and what toys they will play with, and how they will go about playing. Girls are clothed in little dresses, fully equipped with tights and buckled shoes, and are given little bows to hold back their longer, more cumbersome hair. They are encouraged to have a best friend to stay in the house with, to play house with, to play quietly with, to put make-up on, and to maintain a one-on-one, more intimate relationship. They role-play, and even in their play define roles for themselves - or at least define that there are roles that exist in the world.

As boys grow they are encouraged to go outdoors, to be rowdy, to find new friends, explore boundaries, play sports where they learn cooperation and competition, and even learn to battle in play fights. They are dressed in comfortable pants and t-shirts and athletic sneakers. Their hair is short and manageable. They learn to get dirty. They learn to win. They learn to lead other boys in play - larger numbers of children than women are accustomed to dealing with.

Each sex interacts with other children of primarily the same sex, but these same-sex children have been taught like them to do the things their sex is supposed to do. They reinforce the behavior of other children - the behavior taught to them from their parents, their siblings, their toys, their television, their movies, their fairy tales. Each sex learns about interactions with others, but they learn entirely different things. The traits each sex take from these experiences are vastly different from the traits of the other sex.

Girls learn the importance of intimacy and trust, fostered by their female best friend. They learn not to be rowdy - they learn a more sedentary form of play. They learn the value of taking care of others. They learn to pretend and role-play the position of mother. They learn the value of their physical looks. They learn from their physical idol - the Barbie doll. If Barbie was a real woman, at 5' 10" her measurements would probably be 38, 18, 32, and she would weigh 110 pounds - an almost unattainable figure at best.

Boys learn the importance of working with other people toward a common goal. They learn to get along with a large number of people. They learn to win - they learn the American notion of competition, and they also learn the harder lesson of not trusting others, especially when other children are working toward the same goal as they are. They learn to explore new things and not be afraid. They

learn to stretch themselves physically. They learn to work toward their goals. They learn about pain, about losing, and about winning. And although boys do not necessarily gain close relationships in the same way girls do, they gain a common bond between other boys - any and all boys that can jump in and join the game with them.

I'd see these differences, and the more time I spent on my own, the more I questioned how I was supposed to act, what I was supposed to say, how I was supposed to dress, what I was supposed to like. I saw the way men treated women in relationships, how women primarily reacted to the things men did instead of acting on their own. I also saw women feel like they were being pushed around, like they were being treated unfairly.

And then I saw some statistics about rape. That one in four women will be raped by the time they leave college; that one in three women will be raped in their lifetime. That over eighty percent of college-age rapes are committed by someone the victim knew.

Yeah, I did my research about rape and tried to educate myself about it. I became a workshop facilitator and heard a lot of stories from women who had been raped, even from men who were marrying a survivor of a rape, or a man who was beaten up by men after he raped their girlfriend.

I heard a lot of stories. But now I'd like to tell you two stories about rape.

Let me first tell you a story about a woman. I can't tell you her name, because the law prevents me.

You see, this woman is the typical victim of a stranger rape. She was walking down the street after getting off of a late train from work and she was cornered by a man with a knife. She was violated, she was hurt, she had the blood stains and bruises to prove it. And she decided she wanted to report it.

She went to the hospital the next morning, after she put on an extra layer of clothing and huddled in her bed the night before, trying to sleep. The doctors took her clothing for evidence, and then they took evidence from her body.

She leaned back in a cold chair half-naked in a doctor's office, feet in straps three feet apart, and then they took samples from inside her to see if they could prove who was there. They pulled fifty hairs from her head and twenty-five pubic hairs with their fingers to compare them to what they brushed off her.

She then talked to the police. Because she couldn't identify him, because he had time to flee, because the police couldn't match the evidence to anyone, she couldn't find justice.

But her friends helped her through this. They slept in her room with her at night, when she didn't want to be alone. They listened to her. They accepted her. And she was able to take the first steps toward recovering.

It's a sad story, isn't it? She didn't deserve it. But it seems, especially with her attempts to find her attacker and with the support she received, that she may be able to eventually get over the pain.

Now I would like to tell you the story of another woman. I could tell you her name, but I told her I wouldn't.

She begged me not to.

She's a junior at a state university. The first day she came to college, the day she moved in, her boyfriend raped her.

He gave her roommate so much alcohol that she passed out, and wouldn't know what was going on. He gave his victim so much alcohol that she could barely think or move. During the course of the evening she wondered why her boyfriend was pushing alcohol on her roommate. Now she knows, hindsight is 20/20, and now she feels guilty. She should have said something to him, she thought, but what could she have said at the time? And why should she have suspected anything?

She didn't go to the hospital. She thought something was wrong with her only because she didn't want him. She thought what happened was normal. She couldn't understand why she was so hurt. She didn't tell anyone. She didn't talk to her boyfriend about it — in fact, she didn't even break up with him until weeks later, when she couldn't take it anymore & had to come up with an excuse to avoid him.

No one understood why she was acting so strangely. No one understood her mood swings. No one understood why she would break into tears for no reason. She would stand in the bathroom of her dormitory, look in the mirror, and cry before she took her morning shower. She looked so tired in the mirror those mornings, like she had been attacked just the night before.

She waited about six months before she told anyone. She told one friend. He did everything he could to help her. But there wasn't much he could do. She never told her family. She felt ashamed. She felt alone.

And as she told more people, she received more support. But it only came one year, two years later.

You see, even though it wasn't her fault, and even though she had help from her friends, she still couldn't help but think that she could have done something to stop it. She teased him. She was drunk.

He was her boyfriend.

Now, these are two pretty depressing stories, I know. But when people hear the word "rape," they tend to think of story number one first. The man could have been jumping out from a bush, an alley, or breaking into her home in the middle of the night, as long as he was a stranger. He had a weapon. It was a crime. But both of these stories are similar, because they both are rape. Pure and simple. According to Illinois law, for example, if a woman is intoxicated, she cannot consent to sex, just as she cannot consent to driving a car. That alone defines what the second woman went through as rape. Her feelings, her pain, also define it as such.

And why are so many women frightened by the judicial process? Because many times women are blamed for the rape (the victim is blamed for the crime committed against her), by men as well as women. On the stand, a woman has to defend her past, defend what she was wearing, explain why she went to his place, why she was alone with him, why she kissed him. The accused's past is protected, and in essence, the woman becomes the one on trial.

•••

So yeah, I heard these stories, and I tried to help people who went through this. But the more I researched rape, the more I realized that rape is only one part of the wide spectrum of misogyny — of hatred towards women.

Then I thought of how women are degraded and objectified in pornography, or how they are treated unfairly in the workplace. There is a different set of rules for women to follow versus men in society, and all of those rules are designed to let women know that their place is behind men.

Then I looked at history. Wedding ceremonies have had the father give away his daughter — his possession — to a man she could love, honor and obey, in a ceremony conducted by a man under the rule of a male god. Virgin women have even been sacrificed throughout history to assorted gods. Ancient Chinese mothers bound their daughter's feet for years so their feet would be petite (but deformed and difficult to walk with), because it was fashionable for women to have small lotus-shaped feet, which would make their young girls "marriage material." Some tribes have made it a custom to add tight rings around women's necks, continually adding more, to elongate the neck, while other tribes pierce women's ears and put successively larger rings inside the holes, to stretch the ear lobe down past the shoulder. Women were hunted and killed in colonial America for being witches — when they were in fact no more than individuals who practiced independent, rational thought in a society that

didn't like their women to think.

I looked at the way our parents were raised. The woman was expected to work only during war time, and then only to assist men or to work in menial tasks. They were otherwise expected to cook for the family, to clean the house, and to please the husband. The man was the owner of his castle, worked during the day to make this life possible for his family, and expected to be pampered by his wife and children when he got home.

Then I looked at the way I was raised. I was given dolls and pretty pink dresses and was encouraged to play with my best friend indoors instead of roughhousing outside with a group. My hair was long, and curled for special occasions. I had to listen to my elders, especially the male ones.

It translated to they way we were raised to be as adults. Women in society are taught to be "feminine," to be giving, and to be weak instead of assertive. They are taught to look good for men, and they are taught that they are nothing unless they get married.

So then I looked around me. Advertising and Hollywood demanded beautiful bodies in their brainless women, who blindly followed their leading man. The workplace had female secretaries serving the male CEOs, shaving their legs and wearing skirts and make-up and pantihose and high heels and earrings and necklaces and rings and bracelets... and being called "babe."

Speaking of language, even the language I heard around me — from being called a pumpkin to a tomato to a peach — made me feel like I was placed on this earth to be consumed, not to be a human being.

Let's go through the list. Men can degrade women by calling them a child — babe, girl, or baby. Men can degrade women by calling them an animal — like a chick, a bitch, a fox, a cow, a pig, a heifer, a sow, a horse — or even a pussy. Men can degrade women by calling them food — like sugar, honey, a peach, a tomato, a pumpkin, a piece of meat, pie or cherry pie, they can refer to their cherry, their melons or refer to tang (Hell, call a woman a sweep pea, or prepared foods, like a muffin or a cheese-cake, or even call her a dish, worthy of consumption). Men can degrade women by calling them inanimate objects, like a hoe or a doll — or even refer to their body parts as things like a bush, or her crack or her hole or her box. Men can degrade women by referring to making love — I mean, having sex — violently, like bagging her, banging her, hammering her, pumping her, screwing her, or nailing her. Men can even use sports analogies for sex with women, like scoring, because when you separate the women from sex with sports, power tools and violence, it becomes easy to make the women not matter at all.

So I started to work for acquaintance rape education groups, running seminars, making posters and brochures and the like for women who were in pain and felt like they had no place else to turn. And the more I saw this pain on such a wide scale, the more angry I got. I'm an intelligent woman, I thought, and I as well as all women don't deserve to be treated like this.

Although I am no longer working for any women's groups, I still feel like I am fighting. But what I am fighting for and how I am fighting for it is different from how the average person thinks of a woman "crusader." I am fighting for people to look at women as people first, before they assume we are less intelligent, less strong, or less valuable. I am fighting, through my writing, through the way I think, through my example, for men to think of women as being on the same level as them, to look at women as their equals. I am fighting for feminism.

The definition of feminism, according to Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, is "the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes." That's it. It doesn't mean women should get a job before a man just because she's a woman and has had bad breaks. It doesn't mean women have

to dress and look like men if they don't want to. It doesn't mean pornography should be made illegal, and it doesn't mean all women should hate all men.

In practice, it means we should have the same opportunities as men. The choice to take these opportunities is up to the individual — not up to their sex. In theory, it means we should not be looked at as inferiors solely because we are female. In other words, we should not be treated unfairly because of the choices that we as individuals make, if we have every right to make those choices.

It is because of the way that women are looked at in society that there are political economic and social disparities between the sexes. It is because of ideas, not laws. These ideas create a spectrum of sexism that starts at things as innocent as jokes and cute nicknames, moves to catcalls in the street to harassment in the workplace to unequal pay for equal work, and then moves on to things as cruel and as painful as wife-beating and rape. All of these things, severe or tame, stem from the idea that women are inferior and all of these things contribute to the inequality between the sexes. They all are manifestations of the same idea, only in different degrees.

A friend of mine told me about how in the Soviet Union, after the revolution, Stalin and the government wanted to make sure all people were equal — that women were free from their economic dependence on men — so they enacted laws to make women work and industrialize the country. But ideas about the role of women in society did not change, and in the post-revolution economic crisis, not only then did the women have to work, but they also had to stand in line for rations of bread. Household chores were still women's tasks; the rules changed, but the ideas stayed the same. When women were asked whether they were happier after the revolution or before, they said before, because at least then they didn't have to work as well as do their expected chores.

Today in America, we as Americans want more and more — we drive our gas-guzzling SUVs, and travel to the islands south of the United States for our vacations, and we pay exorbitant amounts of money to sit in a movie theatre to escape our dreary lives with someone else's stories. We expect our government to cover our healthcare costs for us as we age, and we expect our government to continue paying oil companies so we can guzzle oil and has for our cars and our homes for cheaper. And to pay for this, most men can't do it alone — so they ask their wives to work full time jobs. Okay, fine, we can do that, but I'll bet that when these couples have children (which the women have to bear), it is almost always the women's responsibility to raise the children as well.

Because that too is a woman's job.

Have a job, take care on the house, take care of the kids — and the least you could do is act lady-like and dress up and look pretty for us men.

You know, I'm not trying to enact any laws. I'm not trying to twist anyone's arm. A change doesn't occur in a free society by forcing rules down people's throats. All I'm trying to do is make both men and women think about the conflicts between the sexes in all of their manifestations, why they occur, and what effect they have on our society. To think. And then to act.

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The Assumption of Health-Care

I not only heard a few talk radio shows talk about this, but I also read an AP article from USA Today that a 22 year-old waitress without insurance was in an auto accident. Half of her brain was removed for corrective surgery. In fact, the USA Today article reported that “Lane, who was not wearing a seat belt, was thrown through the windshield. (She was later charged with driving under the influence and not having a driver’s license.)”

Oddly enough, that’s not the interesting part — the good part is that Medicaid and the hospital debated over who would cover the surgery to put her skull back in place after surgery on her brain. And because of this, four months passed where she didn’t have a complete skull. The AP article even stated that Briana Lane would sometimes “wake up in the morning to find that her brain had shifted to one side during the night ... The operation took place after Lane’s mother’s insurance decided to cover the surgery, as well as her nearly \$200,000 in medical bills.”

People on talk radio questioned her having a license or being intoxicated while driving, but one day said the final statement from this AP article in passing:

But she said the experience has left her a little more cynical about the health care system. “Just because they don’t have money doesn’t mean they should be treated differently from anyone else,” she said. “I’m a good person. I just happen to be not as rich as some of them.”

This sidenote at the end of her story shocked me more than anything else, because there is no reason she should be cynical that a healthcare system she never earned or payed for took so long to do work that to her was otherwise free. It’s horrific that she had to go for months without her skull completely attached, but she should at least be grateful that someone was willing to pay the charges that she was never willing to pay insurance for.

I quit my job to travel around the country, and thought that I didn’t need health insurance, because I never used it when I had my job. But my travel companion told me to get it anyway, because you never know when you’ll need it — and less than a year later someone almost killed me with their car — and having that insurance that I didn’t want to pay for saved my life. I know full well that medical bills have to be paid when someone is injured and needs medical attention. If I didn’t have health insurance, I would never make enough money to pay for my medical bills - especially when I can’t get a job after that accident that gives me the chance to pay any of those bills off. Buying insurance may seem like buying a lottery ticket that never gives you money back, but when you need it most, it’s there for you.

It seems to me that the only people who ask for things that they don’t deserve are the people who haven’t earned the right to these things.

Natural and Human Disasters: Katrina and 9 11

I've held back on writing about 9/11. I tried to get a hold of my friends and family who were in New York and Washington D.C. for days, then the best I could do was talk about it in performance art shows. After this disaster caused by kamikaze pilots incarnate and after everyone pointed fingers and placed the blame from 9/11, I tried to stay out of that arena.

Then a few years passed of hurricanes. My parents (who live in southwest Florida) stayed in a hotel because of a hurricane one year, and my aunt & uncle lost parts of their home because of a hurricane once. And year after year I'd worry about my family because of the potential natural disasters caused every season, but I never thought it was anything to write about.

And then hurricane Katrina came along, after hitting Florida and then ducking back out into the water before coming in for an attack again. Everyone in New Orleans was told to prep for a category 3 hurricane, so they figured that this would be like most other hurricanes and they could live through it with no problem.

They didn't know hurricane Katrina would be a category 5 hurricane.

But still, although it was touch, people still in New Orleans weathered the storm and started to go back into their homes.

That's when the levy broke.

And that's when most of New Orleans flooded, about the same time that hurricane Katrina started to move north and weak havoc on Mississippi and Alabama before being downgraded to a tropical storm in Tennessee.

So this was the second major catastrophe in recent years for me, but lucky for me I didn't have to call friends and family in this case — my parents were up in Illinois, the hurricane didn't do major damage to my family's part of Florida, and for writers as all know like Michelle Greenblatt, she survived as well. And although I hard many people discuss the terrible things that happened on 9/11, people did not complain as much about what the Government could have done until the 9/11 commission started getting together for find evidence for all of the things we feared could have been done to prevent 9/11 from happening.

But the things that make me want to argue and write usually stem from my hearing some loud-mouth's opinion on talk radio — and I heard it after hurricane Katrina came and left. And yeah, maybe I bring it on myself by listening to talk radio sometimes, but when I'm driving home and don't want to listen to music, I figured talk radio and news radio would be a good way to catch up on what is happening in the world, and what people think about it.

I know the problem with news radio and talk radio is that I'm actually catching up on what is happening in the world, and what *Republicans* think about it, and although Republicans have a lot of valuable points, some of the conclusions they jump to can be *so* inconsistent, that I can't *help* but rip on their conclusions, so I can come to be better conclusion of my own.

But the thing that usually happens is that I hear someone on talk radio making a rash complaint about something, and I have to clear the issue for them. Like last night, when I heard people on talk

radio complaining about the lack of federal government assistance both before and after hurricane Katrina struck. Now, I heard that even though the news reports before Katrina struck were that it was only a category 3 hurricane, people still left New Orleans (a coworker of my husband has a family of 9 who came to visit after hearing the hurricane was coming and they had no place else to go). The problem was that (A) some people thought this was another bearable storm and that there wouldn't be a flood from a levy break, but the bigger problem probably was that (B) some people didn't have the money to get out, so were stuck in the storm — and trying to recover from the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

And that is where people start to argue that the government should have done more to help the poor. (Wait, that was probably politically incorrect of me to say that these people are poor. Forgive me.) I heard people complaining that FEMA should have been there earlier to help these people. Then I heard people get angry at President Bush for not setting in to help these states with national money to help them. I even hear the media comment that the help to these people in New Orleans (these "refugees") is slow for racial reasons (though no one has been about to ever verify that, but people like to find things to argue about...).

But as soon as I heard these thoughts I thought that as far as I know, FEMA is not a group to step in immediately to help people in situations such as this, but FEMA can coordinate what will be done in emergency situations when everything falls in place for proper execution. I also know that the federal government can't take action to help a state with a natural disaster until the state literally asks for it (in other words, states should control their fate, and that not all problems are the federal government's business).

I'd also go to far as to say that it's not the government's business to get people out of the way if they think the weather is going to be really bad where they live, but hey, I'm just a wacko who thinks the government shouldn't be in every aspect of our lives. But I might be wrong to think that the government shouldn't step in, because apparently the New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin declared a state of emergency, and ordered a mandatory evacuation of the city two days before Katrina struck, even though people without money or transportation could evacuate. People argue that the local government should have used any of the many public transportation buses or school buses to give anyone a ride away from town, to safety. Well, they have a right to argue, because the kick in the pants is that the City of New Orleans Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan clearly states that "The City of New Orleans will utilize all available resources to quickly and safely evacuate threatened areas," and "Transportation will be provided to those persons requiring public transportation from the area."

But they didn't. Have you seen all the photos on the news of all the buses stuck in feet of water on the streets?

So apparently the local governments *did* have some sort of edict out spend money to help people, and they didn't do their job. So not there are a ton of people *still* stuck in New Orleans, some sick, some with infants, all without food or water, as people now try to get them small rations of food and fresh water, since everyone is living in waste water until they can pump all of the water out of the city (which is estimated to take about 3 months).

So... for once maybe we shouldn't be blaming the federal government for our problems, but we could be asking some serious questions to the local governments for why they didn't step in to help sooner.

...

But it is nice to see how the American people join together to help those in need, whether it be for tsunami victims last year or to people looking for aid after hurricane Katrina (I don't know how many blogs there are of people trying to find a way to get a bus with food near New Orleans to help people and then to drive people out of harm's way, and I've heard people call in to talk radio saying they would house a family from the hurricane Katrina aftermath but they can't get the people up here from New Orleans, and every charity under the sun is collecting donations for the relief of these Katrina survivors — even Fed Ex said they would collect unopened products to deliver to the area), and the compassion reminds me of the compassion and empathy we all felt after 9/11 for all of those who were put in harm's way only because they went to work in New York. I remember actually watching the planes crash because my husband was watching the news before he left for work that morning, and for days I tried to get a hold of my friends and family. My friend with the Aid Force was scheduled to have a meeting at the Pentagon that day, but they opted to reschedule their meeting for a week. My brother-in-law was supposed to be meeting at the World Trade Center that day, but he decided not to go there that day. And all I keep thinking about is that news reports were stating after 9/11 that if flight 93 that crashed in Shanksville Pennsylvania landed less than 30 seconds later, my nephew would have been killed while in school from that crash. Flight 93 crashed very close to my sister-in-law's house, and after 9/11, my nephew couldn't sleep for days. My friend who lived in DC wasn't near the Pentagon but dealt with the tight security and the constant roads being closed. He talked about how different streets would be closed on different days and that there were so many military guard there you felt like you were in a war zone, which in a way, you were.

I'm sure we all have stories of losing, or almost losing, someone close to us from 9/11. And these terrorists were stopped on 9/11 from being on different additional flights, and I believe it was in their plan that one of them was slated, I think, to sun into the Sears Tower. I know that for months afterward whenever we were driving toward the loop, taking the Kennedy expressway where you could see the Chicago skyline get closer and closer, I know that every time we drove by, I would be sitting in the passenger seat and I would imagine seeing a plane fly right into the side of the Sears Tower, toward the top, to the side, exactly like how it happened in the television footage to the second World Trade Center building. I imagined it, just like how you saw it over and over again on television, when we were flooded with images of it on the news. I'd see a plane flying right into the tallest building, this landmark to Chicago.

I saw that for a while, whenever we would drive into the city, but after all this time that image is starting to disappear from my memory.

After 9/11, we may have felt like we wanted to prove to the terrorists that we weren't afraid of them, that we would still fly in airplanes after they tried to use our technology and accomplishments to destroy our spirit. But although those images from that horrific day may fade from our short-term memory, we will *always* make a point to look over our shoulder and try to be both more cautious and more safe when we know that there are people that will try to do anything to tear us down.

...

Looking back over the years, I realize that there are many things that can hurt us, but in our day-to-day lives, we think of things like car crashes, or things more mundane that can cause our downfall. It becomes so unsettling when the things we have to fear are either natural disasters, or enemies who

try to use our accomplishments as weapons against us.

I guess as civilization has evolved we have always had battles to fight, so now that we don't have to fight wild animals for survival and food, and now that we have the sciences to save us from many viruses and diseases, we will still always have something fighting against us. Even though we know where it is more safe to live because of weather patterns, we still will choose to live where it may be more dangerous. So we will continue to deal with natural disasters, and we will always have some sort of enemy to face.

Working in your Spare Time

When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them that I am the art director and Internet director for a publishing company. The overtime sucks; one week every month I'm at the office for over fifteen hours a day for a week. It doesn't leave a lot of time for socializing, or even sleeping.

When people ask me what I do in my spare time, and I tell them that I am a writer, that I've had a few books published, that I'm the editor of a magazine, and that I've started a few web sites. Sometimes I paint, sometimes I sing with a band, sometimes I hone my photography skills.

And when people hear that, they ask me — well, don't you relax? And well, yes, I do, I go to bars and drink and dance and I go to parties and I do my best to be social.

And then they ask me, but why do you do it? Why do you do the extra design work and Internet work? You have too much work to do as it is, why do you decide to take on more?

I guess doing the work I do, at my job as well as in my spare time, takes a lot out of me. I'm a real bitch sometimes, tired from all the work I do, and sometimes my friends don't see me for weeks at a time. And I wish sometimes that I had a fold-out bed at my office (that would make life so much simpler sometimes...). So I don't know how to explain to people why I do it, because I don't think it needs explanation... Because I like it.

I do it because that's what I do. I design a magazine and do Internet work in my spare time because it is *my* magazine and Internet work, not work for someone else, work that needs to be approved by a bunch of non-designers. It's not that I'm a workaholic, or that I'm a glutton for punishment. It's not that I hope to make a ton of money one day by writing poetry or taking pictures (you're only a famous, money-making poet when you're dead, and publishing the right kind of photos in the right kind of venue for the right kind of market is the only way to go to make real money as a photographer). I do it because... I like to accomplish something with my time, and it just seems to make sense to do fill my time by doing what I want to do in my life. I mean, drinking gets a bit boring after a while, as do the people who want to sit and get drunk all the time with you.

I heard a friend talking at lunch today, and she was going on about how she felt like she wasn't at her full potential, how she had a boring job and has had no creative outlet lately. So all she does is go out, see bands, drink a lot, and flirt with men in bars. And she wonders what she's missing in her life. You see, that's why I edit a magazine and do my work in my spare time. That's my creative outlet.

I've seen people live their lives wishing they were doing something else, wishing they had different opportunities, when the most obvious answer is to make your own opportunities, stop being scared of life, and just start doing what you want to do and start living. I started working on the magazine when my job wasn't close to creative or interesting, and being the editor of my own magazine was that outlet for me because I hated my job. And although in my job now I do more of the work I wanted to do all alone, I still do the work that other people want me to do, and it is reviewed and changed by people who don't have design sense. So I still do the work in my spare time, because it is my work, and I like it. Why sit around and watch your life go by when you could be doing something?

And when I say these things, people look at me like I'm the strange one.

Government Inefficiency

Our gas was shut off today. The gas company had a problem with our bill and shut off our gas without letting us know, while my roommate and I were out. We were not notified that there was a problem with our bill or that anyone was considering shutting off our gas.

So my roommate straightened everything out with the gas company, and they told him that they would be at the apartment sometime between two in the afternoon and eight in the evening.

Now, I won't go into the fact that when someone you are paying for a service gives you a time estimate for a house visit, they are late over ninety-nine percent of the time.

I won't complain about that because it didn't actually happen this time - someone arrived at around three thirty in the afternoon. (Besides, everyone already knows how awful it is to be held hostage in your own house waiting for people who never show up.) The man came by and turned on the gas, and asked to check the burners at the stove. So he did, and then he asked if the water heater was electric. I didn't know, so he wanted to check, but it was in the basement behind a locked door, and the super was out of town for the weekend. So the guy said he'd have to turn off the gas until I could get the door unlocked to the water heater, to make sure. He said they had people working until midnight and all day tomorrow, so I should call back so someone else could get out here to turn on the gas again.

So I waited for my roommate to come home, and he unscrewed a panel from the basement so we could get to the water cooler before the super got back. When I called the gas company back, I was only on hold for a few minutes (another pleasant surprise). Then when I explained the problem, the man told me that I had the wrong number, that this was an emergency line. Apparently not having gas is not an emergency for the gas company, so he gave me the other number.

I was on hold for at least another ten minutes (no, make it more like fifteen), before a lady got on the line and asked me my problem. I explained what happened, and she said she couldn't get anyone out there for another week. They were booked tomorrow and couldn't schedule me in. So, from what I had gathered from the situation so far, our gas was shut off due to a misunderstanding, the person who came to turn on our gas wanted to check something we've never had to have checked before and wouldn't keep our gas on, and then they couldn't get someone out there to turn on the gas for another week.

Did I mention that it was Fourth of July weekend and we needed to cook?

Oh yes, and bathe. I suppose we could bathe in cold water.

So then my roommate called back and tried to see if there was anything else he could do. When that didn't work, he asked if there was any competition, or if we had to get our gas from them and we had no choice but to wait a week for gas.

I already knew the answer, but I wanted to hope it wasn't true, for one brief moment.

When my roommate got off the phone, I started thinking about some of the problems we have because of monopolies. Yeah, it's not something I'd have a problem with, normally I wouldn't be complaining about monopolies, but the only place in this country where monopolies exist are in businesses where the government runs or subsidizes the business.

The Post Office. Utility companies. The commuter rail system.

Great.

People complain about monopolies all the time - in our phone companies, with computer giants

like Bill Gates - even though there is nothing close to a monopoly in these industries today. Of course there isn't. The government steps in before competition gets a chance to provide a better product.

But that's a different rant. Back to the gas company.

The government doesn't let private businesses get too close to a monopoly. But when it comes to the government stepping in and running businesses, the last thing the government would want is something competing with them.

Especially when any other private business would probably run any operation more effectively than the government. They'd have to; they'd have to make a profit and wouldn't have the chance to get as much money as they wanted by taking it from people.

Oh, the government calls it a tax. My mistake.

How many times have you heard people complain - for that matter, how many times have you complained - about the long lines and the slow service at your local Post Office? Other than in an overnight package, where you're paying for the immediacy of a next-day letter, what other opportunities do you have to mail a physical letter?

How many times have you tried to take a train across the country rather than fly? Why are the costs of taking a train comparable to flying when airplanes are faster and more expensive to build and maintain, especially when rail companies get government subsidies in order to stay afloat?

What do you do when your electricity goes out and they say they'll come out between ten in the morning and two in the afternoon, so they make you stay home from work, and then, of course, they don't even show up... What do you do - call another electric company for service?

What do you do when the gas company cuts off your gas and says they can't turn it back on for another week?

Am I making my point here?

My roommate was working outside earlier today removing a tree for a client, but he had called the city's electrical department and asked them to drop the street light wires on that block during the day. In fact, he called it in and faxed it in - and checked to make sure with the department that the power lines for the street lights would be down so he could cut down this tree. Well, you guessed it - he went there to do his work, and during the entire four hour period where the lines were supposed to be down, no one came by to do the work. In essence, my roommate lost business time because this certain government department didn't do what they said they would.

If you were a private business and conducted business that poorly, you'd lose clients left and right. But when there's no competition...

I was working with my roommate, waiting for these city employees to come to our job site and do their job. When I still thought they were going to show up and just be late, I thought of asking them if they liked paying more taxes. When they'd answer no, I'd have to ask them then why they are so inefficient - because it's their inefficiency that causes taxes to go up, so we can pay more than we should for these services.

I imagine they can't put two thoughts like that together, though.

Sorry. Now I'm just getting bitter.

But there would be not only increased efficiency in work and therefore better products and services and more choices if the government got out of these businesses, but there would also be less money in taxes to pay, since we wouldn't be subsidizing the inefficiency of the existing government agencies with money we worked hard for.

My point? Well, I guess you get my point. Nobody likes have to deal with inefficiency, but no one stops to think of where it comes from or what to do about it.

So what do we do about it? Well, I suppose you could complain as much as I do, but then everyone would think that Americans were just a bunch of complainers. (Well, maybe we are...) We could stop voting for government officials who think we want them spending our money on inefficiency.

Or we could tell our officials that they're right, we don't like monopolies... And the first ones we want to get rid of are the ones run by the government.

The government doesn't have to be running companies for us - we've proven that we can do that well enough ourselves - in fact, we can run them better. It's the government's hold on companies and industries that's strangling us.

by reason of insanity

NBD5 News reported the July '05 Chicago story that Jeanette Sliwinski, a 23-year-old Skokie woman, apparently attempted suicide Thursday afternoon. Police said she was driving at least 70 mph and had run three red lights before she rammed her Mustang into a Honda Civic at a Skokie intersection, killing 3 Chicago musicians in the other car. Her car was found upside-down, but she only suffered minor injuries.

Yes, a woman decided to kill herself by ramming her car into another in the middle of an intersection. That's what I'd do, if I wanted to kill myself.

Seriously though, there were mixed reports about this story on the news and on talk radio: first stories indicated that she left her mother's house after an argument, later reports only said that as Jeanette left her mother's house, her mother had a feeling that something was wrong and went to follow her, finding the accident shortly afterward.

But family and friends of the musicians — Michael Dahlquist, 39, John Glick, 35, and Douglas Meis, 29, were outraged by this attempted suicide, which only killed 3 outgoing, talented musicians. No one could make sense of what happened, Dahlquist's two older brothers could find no reason in the "selfishness" and "insanity" of Jeanette Sliwinski's actions.

The last I heard, she couldn't make it to court because she was still in the hospital, and bond was denied for this woman.

...

I've heard of people talking about what sort of sentencing she should get, where some people are hoping for alight sentence and her attorney stated that "she's had some mental health problems, and we're going to be talking to those people and exploring more about that." Tom Needham (her attorney) said his client has had a history of mental problems.,

Then I heard people say that she should be sentenced to death for her mindlessly killing 3 people in her vain attempt to unsuccessfully kill herself. But then I read that Joseph Gray, who's friend was killed in the crash, said "Why give her that (the death penalty)? That's a wish of hers. I think she should understand and live through life with the remorse that she has." When listening to talk radio, you're usually only able to listen to Republicans (wait, they call themselves conservatives, conservatives who are for the death penalty, which sounds *so* conservative to me...), I'm used to hearing people talk about how people should be punished with losing their lives regularly, and I heard people talk so much about the death penalty in this care as well. My question to these people is this: what good does that do? Jeanette Sliwinski doesn't learn from her actions if she's killed, and as a rule it costs more to kill someone with our current penal system than to incarcerate them for life. That, and those "conservatives" can explain to me how it is a wise, moral decision to kill someone for a crime committed — how is it a wise, moral decision for an individual to be an arbiter and enforcer of human death.

...

I talked about this with my husband after we heard about this case, and I actually had to explain to my husband that someone trying to commit suicide wouldn't want to hurt others in the process. "But," my husband protested, "if life doesn't mean anything to them, they wouldn't care about the lives of others, would they?" And I said that people who didn't see value in their own lives still understood that *other* people values their *own* lives, so they won't want to contribute to the death of anyone who didn't want to end their own life as well. "Besides," I postulated, "If I committed suicide in an accident like Sliwinski's, I wouldn't want to be remember as the woman who killed 3 people while killing herself. If I was planning to kill myself." I wouldn't want to be remembered that way — that footnote would become how my existence was defined, and I wouldn't want that.

...

So what's the moral to the story? Um, really watch traffic when you're out, I guess, because there are those who still choose to live without morals, and who try to impose their philosophy on *your* life.

"Superstition sets the whole world in flames; philosophy quenches them."

— Voltaire, quoted in somereview.com & magazine *The Week*

Questions in a World Without Answers

the political portion of a 10/05/04 live Chicago performance art show

In light of the political elections this fall, I started wondering if anyone running for office could really help American with the issues we're faced with daily.

Being from Illinois, I thought of political candidates Alan Keyes (a man from Maryland running in Illinois). But he says it's not right to have an abortion, but the death penalty is good. Should I get my answers from a man who thinks it's not right to terminate a fetus that can't live on its own, but it's apparently okay to kill those who have already been living?

That doesn't help me... But all I feel thinking about is how our government is supposed to protect us, and everyone felt something was missing after 9/11. Then I remember that news reports were stating after 9/11 that if flight 93 that crashed in Shanksville Pennsylvania landed less than 30 seconds later, my nephew would have been killed while in school from that crash.

After 9/11, my nephew couldn't sleep for days.

Can he be comforted that we had a decision-making president to help an economy that was failing for a year before he became president, when we *are* gaining jobs in 2004? Can he be comforted that the decisive President Bush stepped in to fight terrorist-supporting nations like Iraq when everyone else backed away?

I don't know if President Bush can help us, when I wonder why people who have lost jobs have found that new jobs now pay Americans on average 13 grand less per year. Then I wonder: George Bush prays in the Oval Office, and occasionally he even opens cabinet meetings with prayer. May he be too much of a religious zealot to warrant reelection? And another thing: both the right and the left oppose the Patriot Act, and Bush wants to expand government powers under it. But what frightened me the most was when I heard a President Bush's advertisement that ended saying the country relies on freedom, faith, families and sacrifice.

What do we have to sacrifice for Bush's plan?

What have we already sacrificed for Bush's plan?

John Kerry and John Edwards protested and say that in war situations Kerry'd deploy all the forces in America's arsenal - our diplomacy, our intelligence system, our economic power, and the appeal of our values and ideas - to make America more secure

Do the Democrats have the answers? Let me think... Our diplomacy didn't do anything for years. We've been using our intelligence system already. And we are the biggest economic power in the world. And they hate our values and ideas. How will that help?

The Green party noted that this election is dominated by fear. The Republicans play on the fear of terrorism and the Democrats play on the fear of Bush. Do we have to play on fear to elect our president?

I've seen how other countries deal with our problems, like gas prices, or health care. In Europe, gas is expensive (their government doesn't subsidize its price down), so they don't depend on cars as much as we do in America. In China, people pay for healthcare out of pocket, because there was no national health care plans like in the United States. And if that meant families lived together to save money, then that might help keep the family together better than the American family.

Other countries don't seem to ask as much from their government as we do.

This was a performance art show, performed live in Chicago October 5, 2004. Information about that live performance can be found at <http://www.janetkuypers.com> and <http://scars.tv>. It was later published in the Performance Art section of v141 October 22 2004 *cc&d* magazine, as well as in <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>. It also appeared as the *Note from the Publisher* in the 2004 collection book **Balance**.

part 2...

Do People Want Justice, Or Just A Good Hanging?

Periodically I see efforts by the government to take away our rights, and I feel I have to speak out about them. However, when I see efforts by people in this country, individual citizens, to take away our basic rights, I have to scream out my dissent.

I am disgusted with the backlash to Mike Farrell's commentary about why Timothy McVeigh should not receive the death penalty.

Farrell's article appeared in USA Today, and discussed the reasons why the death penalty does not work, not why Timothy McVeigh in particular should be spared. The gist of his story was that no matter how heinous the crime committed (in this case, blowing up of a Federal building in Oklahoma City, killing the largest number of citizens in a single terrorist attack in the United States), we should not stoop to the level of the criminal by administering the same punishment.

USA Today voiced two responses to Farrell's commentary days later.

Glen Jones of Delaware said that we should "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." Apparently he wants everyone to kill him, then, if he advocates the death penalty.

"These despicable acts Farrell describes are not understandable," Jones said, "but rather tolerated because liberal peacemakers like Farrell have pressured us to so believe." The general tide of "liberal" politics in recent years has been to sacrifice others into servitude - in such forms as welfare, charities, volunteerism and altruism - not to value people, but to make them the hand-maids of whatever pressure group may happen to demand it.

Scot Ebisch of New Jersey says that the Bible says, "Live by the sword, die by the sword," and "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." These are, however, doctrines from Judaism, not Christianity - in the New Testament, Jesus asks his followers to reject these tenets and "Turn the other cheek." Whatever religion (or lack thereof) one may subscribe to in this country, America's laws more closely reflect

Christianity than Judaism.

Furthermore, America's laws are designed to protect individual rights. If we allow the government to kill someone for killing people, what's to stop the government from killing people because they are drug dealers? Or committed robbery? Or voiced the wrong opinions in public?

I know that a criminal loses some of their rights when they commit a crime. But I also know that the most basic individual right - the right to one's own life - it not something that should be taken away so easily.

I could also point out that with our current appeals process statistics show that it costs six times as much money to kill a prisoner than to keep him in prison for life, even if they are never rehabilitated. And if prisons serve their jobs, prisoners suffer more by living their days in a cell instead of receiving an injection and passing away. So why are people so determined to kill the killers? If Timothy Mcveigh had no right to choose who should live and who should die, why does anyone else in this country?

If there was ever a chance we could be killing an innocent person, if there was ever that chance, that would be reason enough to not allow capital punishment. If an innocent person is sentenced to life in prison, they may lose some time, but if their innocence is later uncovered they would at least be able to have the rest of their life back. You lose that opportunity with capital punishment. If their innocence is later uncovered they would have lost some time, but they would not have lost their life.

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Balancing The Budget

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us.

The reason why the government costs so much money is because we continually expect it to do more and more for us. The capitalist base that this country was founded on suggests that the government is there to protect our basic rights - "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This means that as individuals we reign supreme - the no one has the right to take our life, our property or our ability to achieve what we are willing and capable of achieving.

However, as the years have progressed, our political leaders have told us that we need to be taken care of, and to appease us they have offered, as a government, to do more and more for us. And we have agreed, these things would be better if the government took care of them for us. But that was where we went wrong.

The government is bogged down with a quagmire of laws protecting ourselves from ourselves. Seat belt laws. Motorcycle helmet laws. Speed limits. Laws to tell you when a rapist moves into your neighborhood, or laws to tell you when you're mature enough to drive a car, or drink. Although it seems to make sense that we shouldn't do these things, that we should make responsible choices, the government is going beyond it's basic role of protecting us from the force of others by telling us as individuals what is legally safe, which is infringing on our rights.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we speed on a highway. By telling us we cannot speed, the government is infringing on our rights to do what we want with our property, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. If, because of our speeding, we hit another car and injure another person and/or their property, then we have infringed on another person's rights and we should be punished. But not until then. The government's job is to protect us from others, not from the possibility of accidents caused by others.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we choose to not wear our seat belts while driving or riding in a car. The government's job is not to protect us from ourselves, but from others. Even if we get injured in our cars because we weren't wearing our seat belts, we cannot and should not blame the government for not intervening - their job is to protect our right to decide whether or not we want to use these safety measures.

I won't argue that wearing your seat belt is not a good idea, or that all 10-year-olds should be learning to fly airplanes, but I'm not going to tell anyone that they should relinquish the responsibility of making these decisions to their government. When you let the government make some choices for you, what's to stop them from making all your choices for you? Capitalism is a clearly-defined set of rules, all surrounded around the notion that the individual human being's rights are most important. When

you start to slip into socialism, however, and let the government take control of some aspects of your life for you, they can take more and more - you've let them - until you're faced with a dictatorship, with communism, and no rights as an individual at all.

The government is also bogged down with providing for those who originally can't - and now won't - provide for themselves. The productivity generated by a free economy has produced a great many things, for all of the people in this country and others. It has raised the standard of living for all. Considering the standards people lived at two hundred years ago, considering the number of religious wars that killed so many over the thousands of years of human history, considering the hundreds and hundreds of years the world lived in moral and economic darkness with other political systems, it is evident what people owning their own work can do for productivity, creativity and progress.

The creation of the welfare state has given people a reason to be unproductive. The creation of the welfare state has made people believe they deserve something for nothing. The government never said that every individual in the country was granted "life, liberty and a block of government-subsidized cheese." But this attitude, the attitude that people deserve something for nothing from their government, can be seen in our homeless on the streets, with their cups in their hands, marking a post to beg from in front of people daily commuting to work. They ask for money, bless you when you pass (invoking the notion of a god and the altruistic notion to give to others, even if - especially if - they don't deserve it), and occasionally, when they don't get the money they want from you, they scream in protest, as if the money in your pocket isn't yours, but theirs, and they have every right to expect a handout from you. America created this mentality when they created the welfare state, and we're paying for it in many ways. The lack of a balanced budget is only one way we're paying.

When the government - and the people - thought it was a good idea to help others, they didn't realize that helping themselves by being productive raised the standard of living, created new products and services for everyone, and did end up helping others. They also didn't realize that the productive earnings given to those who didn't earn it had to come from somewhere - and where it came from was from the productive people's pockets. And our productivity, as well as our budget - suffered for it.

The government is even bogged down with controlling and subsidizing many aspects of our lives.

National defense is a job for the national government, because part of it's job is to protect us from outside threats (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"). But supporting the arts, education, medicine - the government is not responsible for any of these things. And most of the mediums the government has some level of control over have suffered in one way or another.

The arts have come under great scrutiny because people don't want their tax dollars funding certain kinds of art works. America's health care is more expensive and rated worse than eleven other countries in the world. And the education system? We need metal detectors at the gates of our city schools and kids graduate from high school without being able to read.

A business couldn't run without producing a good service or product - in fact, it would have to produce a better product, since it would be in competition with other companies. And a business couldn't run at a deficit - it has to be able to run efficiently in order to run well. In what has been the most capitalistic society to date, we have proven that companies can run efficiently, run well, and always produce a better product. This could also happen in the areas the government still has control over.

Privatizing education, for example, may bring the standards of schooling better, because suddenly

there would be open competition. It would also allow for ideas that have merit but have been suppressed to be taught, because when goods and services are in demand, the demand will be met in a free economy (versus state schools, where boards of education have to impress the higher-ups in order to get more funding, and may alter their curriculum accordingly). It may cost more at first, but if Americans weren't paying taxes for schools, they'd have more money in their pockets to be able to meet these expenses. Parochial schools do this already. And in this example, we wouldn't have concerns about whether or not prayer is allowed in a school, because it is not state sponsored. And there would be no debate over whether uniforms are allowable - you may pick the school of your choice to send your children to, and base your decisions on prayer, uniforms, and even ability to teach.

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A Letter To Our Political Leaders

After watching a few of our elections, I noticed that politicians were trying to warm up to the twenty-something crowd. It's a wise decision: we're a strong group of intelligent, new voters. And, as a rule, we're dissatisfied with the United States' current political system. It's a chance for either party to take a hold of a growing and promising voter group and insure additional votes in future elections.

It would help to know what this group is looking for, though, if there's a dissatisfaction with our current parties, and to understand this, it may help to learn a little more about this group. Although I claim to be no spokesperson for all people aged 20-29, I can give you some insight into how I think, as a member of this "age group."

I'm a twenty-something. But classifying us "twenty-somethings" or "generation x-ers" by our age is something I as an individual finds insulting. I know that we're Americans, but I also know that we as a group have differing opinions, and we have a right to those opinions. We can have different views on our careers, or families, our music. And that's something I value - and I feel like is constantly being taken away from us.

Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws to tell them when a rapist moves into their neighborhood, but I know that that just causes more red tape and costs us through tax revenue more dollars, when that information is public; besides, it's not the government's responsibility to inform, it is the individual's to learn. Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws telling them that they need to wear their seat belts, but I know that in a Capitalistic society it's not the government's role to protect people from themselves, but from the force of others, and that is all. Other pressure groups may want you to pass all sorts of laws, but they are by and large laws that go beyond the jurisdiction of the American government. Other groups may want the government telling them what to do all the time, but I don't.

Part of the twenty-something's dissatisfaction (if I may speak for the group) with our current parties may be because neither party embodies a consistent set of values. Granted, our government-sponsored school systems teach students in general that philosophy is too difficult a subject for a single person to understand. And religion may not offer a practical solution for anyone that believes in individual rights, the rights this country was founded on (I mean, Christianity telling people that the meek shall inherit the earth and the self-sacrifice for the benefit of others is good directly clashes with the idea that the individual has a brain and the right to use it, the right to claim what they have earned and even become successful). But young people, especially ones who still have a glimmer of hope that there is something out there that makes sense, when all their lives their schools and leaders have kept from them that their mind is the answer, young people want their political parties to make sense. Currently, neither platform, whether Democratic or Republican - is consistent or cohesive.

If a person believes that government intervention beyond the necessities - police protection from the force of others, for example - is wrong, neither political party supports them. Republicans believe in less government when it comes to leaving businesses alone - economically the government should let businesses prosper - but when it comes to personal aspects of people's lives - choosing to have an abortion, whether consenting adults want to engage in sexual activities that are not what they consider "the norm," the kinds of art work people make and see - then Republicans think they know what's best for us, and want to tell us what to do.

Democrats believe in less government intervention when it comes to these personal issues, but when

it comes to businesses and the economy, Democrats want to be able to regulate industries because they'll hurt people, they want to be able to tax businesses because big business is bad (Why? No answer.), and they want to be able to take money away from people, via business regulations and taxation, in order to give it away to people who haven't earned it (there's no more realistic explanation of the welfare system - other than robbery from the people who produce in this country).

Republicans and Democrats both believe the government should stay out of their business, whatever their business may happen to be. Other people's business? Feel free to meddle.

Even on more specific subjects both parties split their decisions moralistically. The religious right, a Christian group of Republicans, as well as Republicans in general, will tell you that it's horrible to kill an unborn child, but it's okay to kill someone that's already alive and that has committed a crime (what happened to "turn the other cheek"?). If life is so sacred, why is capital punishment being pushed by Republicans? With our current appeals system, it is estimated that it takes six times as much money to kill someone as it does to keep them in jail for life. And who pays for it? We do, the individuals. The tax payers. The producers.

But the one thing both parties have in common is that they want to take away at least some of our rights. That's why we're so disenchanted with the political parties we have today. Republicans want to take away our personal rights, Democrats want to take away our economic rights. Taxation, the Democrats' answer (so that people can still have goods and services while not working for them) taxation for anything other than the essentials is forcibly taking away what individuals have earned. It's forcibly taking away people's money. That's the definition of robbery. And laws instilled by Republicans to protect our private lives, so that we are just like them, are not only forcibly telling us how to live, but enacting laws that also cause paperwork costs and costs in enforcing them. Who does the government pay for these things? Taxation, again, which means: we, the individuals, pay for the government telling us what to do.

Every election, I'm sure a good number of people, people with intelligence, people using reason and logic to the best of their ability in making a decision, go to the polls wondering, "Which rights am I willing to lose?"

Well, we shouldn't be losing any of those rights. We should have less government intervention in all respects of our lives.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm a woman, but I don't tell the government I need quotas to get a job, because I know that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" means just that - it means I can pursue whatever I want. But it doesn't mean the government should be handing it to me on a platter.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm intelligent, and I don't need the government protecting me from myself. That's not what I'm paying for it to do.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs (whether or not people choose to live by logic and reason or not is not for the government to control). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"), they can have the right to keep their lives (that no one has the right to take something that belongs to you, like taxation for the welfare state, or that no one has the right to try to take away your life, unlike what the government does to death-row prisoners, for instance). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government (that you can't expect hand-outs, but you also can start a business to sustain your life without

being burdened by overtaxation and regulation).

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives, they can have the right to keep their lives. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government.

I'm a twenty-something, and I'm looking for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Can anyone give it to me?

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Boomers Beware: Who Pays the Price for Taxing the Rich?

Although ability, and the ability to keep what you're earned, the individual's rights to their own property, is what made America great, people still continue to attack the rich for earning money.

What was originally a reasonable article in the newspaper about how the estate tax affect many more than the "rich" and how it should be eliminated, became yet another slam on success, ability, and everything America worked to become.

USA Today printed an article by Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise institute called "Boomers Beware: Estate Tax Now Not Just for the Rich."

It started by stating that the estate tax is only applicable to amounts over \$600,000, which has made it in the past apply only to a small group of the very rich. However, Baby Boomers are reaching retirement age - and when they pull their tax-deferred saving out to live on, they multitude of taxes, including the estate tax, could take up to 90 percent of their money away.

Seems reasonable to want to fight that.

What I wonder, though, is why it's okay to take it away from the "very rich," as our government has done in the past, versus the Baby Boomers. Because you're earned more you should be punished more? Because you're earned more means you don't have a right anymore to what you've earned?

The concept of a redistribution of wealth should be like fingernails to a chalkboard to every American. America was based on the right to work for a living, and the right to be able to keep what you're earned. That's why, as Americans, most here have a profound hatred for communism - because most here believe that you should be rewarded for your achievements, not punished. But placing a higher burden on the "very rich" via taxation is a form of wealth redistribution, yet many people don't think twice about it.

The article then goes on to drop the bomb:

"Beyond the changing politics of wealth accumulation, estate taxes need rethinking for other reasons. The fact is they have not done what they were intended to do: prevent the handful of super-wealthy from concentrating their gains even more in a small elite."

Why would the intention of a tax be to make sure the rich don't stay rich? Why would a government want to tell the people that have the most wealth (in other words, the people that produced the most, or the best, products and services, the people that have been the most productive) that after working for their earnings all this time, they no longer have a right to all of it? What harm does someone see in someone being rich?

Other than people who hate accomplishment, hate the good for being good, other than people who are envious of talent, I can imagine no one that would think its fair to take the money away from someone who earned it, because they earned it. We don't want the government, or robbers, for that matter, doing that to us. Why would we want to do it to someone else?

The article goes on: "Many western countries are doing away with estate taxes altogether, a course advocated by Speaker Newt Gingrich. America won't do that; an estate tax at least makes a statement about our values and our desire to prevent too much concentration of wealth and power."

If an estate tax at least makes a statement about "our values," what statement does it make? And

who did he talk to to know that an estate tax makes any statement about our values? Who's values - every American's values? That's strange; the estate tax is anything but capitalistic - it's very un-American.

Keeping an estate tax shows what we don't value more than it shows what we do value. If we value an estate tax, we must not value the right to our own property, because we take money away from people simply because they have more. If we value an estate tax, we must not value the mind, reason or ability, because we are telling our producers that the welfare of poor people, of people who haven't produced and haven't shown ability, is more important than the producer.

And why would America want to prevent too much concentration of wealth and power? Money is power, only in the marketplace - it is not political power, or intellectual power. And the person who earned their money has the right to power in the marketplace, to be able to purchase what they want, or save what they want. That is their right.

Ornstein goes on to say, "But we surely can change a set of levies that ends up punishing savings and investment and will soon punish middle class success." Yes, we shouldn't be punishing savings and investment; that helps our economy as a whole and helps everyone in the nation as a whole. And no, we shouldn't punish middle class success. But why does that mean we should punish upper class success?

I don't know how America could have ever achieved as a nation with the philosophy that wealth should be redistributed. If so, we'd have a nation of equals, just like the Soviet Union promised its comrades. A nation all standing in bread lines together.

Yes, the estate tax should be eliminated, but for reasons that are the opposite of what Mr. Ornstein suggests. The tax is morally wrong. It's wrong, if an individual's rights are to be upheld, to take away their money because they happen to have more. Let's not slip into the same mistakes other countries in history have made, by overtaxing the rich, who earned their money, and giving it to the poor, who didn't. If there's no incentive to work for achievements, and earnings, there will eventually be no one producing, and everyone will suffer. Who pays the price for taxing the rich? Every last one of us.

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DNA Versus Emotion

As technology moves forward, there always seems to be people who wish to contradict science and push it backward.

Such is the case with the new trend in discounting the use of DNA testing in criminal trials.

In the past ten years scientists have used DNA tests to determine if someone who is accused of a crime actually committed it. Testing usually does not positively identify an accuser as guilty of the crime, but it can exclude an accuser from committing a crime. DNA evidence is hard, scientific evidence that can show that someone did not commit a crime.

And in trials, evidence - hard, scientific evidence - is what is needed to decide a verdict.

DNA testing has been very useful in shedding light on a trial. Especially in rape or rape/murder cases, DNA testing can clear someone's name.

It's comforting to know that as hard evidence comes in to a case, that more and more people look at it as irrefutable. That people accept science and trust evidence when coming to a conclusion about a crime.

However, the trend toward accepting this science is now being fought.

"DNA may be important, but it's not the ace that trumps all other cards," said Bob Benjamin, a spokesman for the Illinois Cook County State's Attorney's Office.

Why not? Why is it not important that conclusive evidence that the human traces left on a victim from their attacker could not be the defendant's? Why is the fact that hair, skin, semen or saliva left on the victim's body could not be the defendant's not important? No answer.

And cases are increasingly being tried even when DNA tests show that the person in custody did not commit the crime.

Virginia Governor George Allen turned down a plea for a request for DNA tests from a convicted murderer on death row. Allen stated that even if the DNA testing cleared the incarcerated Joseph O'Dell, there was enough evidence to still prove that O'Dell raped and murdered a Virginia Beach woman.

Virginia Governor George Allen turned down the plea, and O'Dell was executed via lethal injection on schedule.

Although prosecutors do not claim to discount the evidence from DNA testing, they do not discount other evidence that may lead to the opposite conclusion.

But two different pieces of evidence cannot contradict each other - one must be wrong. Which is more likely to be wrong - an eye witness account, for instance, or scientific evidence with fingerprint-style accuracy?

DNA testing is nearly infallible if done properly. Only human error, such as mishandling materials, would cause DNA testing to come into question.

But that's one of the strongest points DNA testing is argued on. Recall the O.J. Simpson trial, when hard evidence was refuted with claims that evidence was mishandled.

However, in the O.J. Simpson trial, hard evidence was also refuted with unfounded claims that there was a police conspiracy or the theory that this was a drug hit. And the sad thing is, it was these emo-

tional pleas, and not DNA evidence, that won over the jury and decided the case.

And that's the only way you can argue against logic and science - by making a plea to emotions.

If a defense lawyer's job is to free his client, then fighting science would have to be done by any means possible, like discounting the science by saying DNA testing is too young. Like discounting the way the data was collected: the blood was tampered with. By emphasizing other contradictory evidence: O.J. Simpson was in his home during the murder. By listening to testimonials and opinions from friends and experts: O.J. Simpson loved his wife, he couldn't do it. Or by introducing additional theories with or without merit as to what may have happened, pleading to the jury based on the character of the defendant. By pleading to their emotions.

But remember that all of these pleas are just that - pleas - and evidence cannot contradict science.

People try to balance science and mysticism, or faith, every day. Scientists shed more and more light each day on the creation of man and this planet, but religion denies it, for instance. Once I had a conversation with a religious woman, and she stated that dinosaurs never existed and that "science was the tool of the devil." Another religious woman told me that she sinned once and got pregnant while out of wedlock, but God saved her by giving her a miscarriage.

Amen.

Obviously logic and reason won't win over a person who blatantly rejects logic and reason, but most people - especially in the United States, where science and technology have proven that people can live good lives - most people do believe in logic and reason, even if they have been taught otherwise. So their "philosophical lives" are spent trying to come up with a balance to these two opposing beliefs - of which there can be no compromise, but people still try. Okay, maybe the world wasn't created in six days, maybe that was just a metaphor for the order and time line things were created on the planet, one may decide. Okay, maybe there wasn't a man made out of sand and a woman made from his rib, but maybe God started the ball rolling in the creation of man, one may think.

It is this belief in logic, science and reason, coupled with this clinging to faith and tradition that tries to allow both sides to be right. And it is this philosophical mind set that allows people to be swayed by emotional pleas away from hard, scientific evidence.

That doesn't change the fact that the evidence is there. It just changes how you look at it.

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Capital Gains - Or Losses?

I read a debate in the newspaper about whether or not the capital gains tax should be eliminated. The first argument, coming from the newspaper, was that the tax is only affecting the rich - and Republicans are trying to make their lives easier by eliminating it. It is not a tax burden on the people who have to pay the capital gains tax, because overwhelmingly these people are making over \$100,000 annually. Furthermore, the burden from the eliminated tax revenue would shift from the rich to the poor if the capital gains tax was eliminated. The newspaper also wrote that they were disappointed that the Republicans, who talk so strongly about balancing the budget, are willing to cut taxes to the rich, which would impede the process of a balanced budget.

I read this all, and it made sense. I thought, "Yeah, we should keep the tax. Who is it hurting?"

Well, the response to this article came from Newt Gingrich, a man with whom I seldom agree. When I started to read, I had to reassess my position.

The tax, he said, is wrong. You're taxed on investments, and are taxed again when you pull your money out of the investment. These taxes are difficult to manage with at tax time, there are many forms and schedules and exceptions that make filing a tax report come April 15th with capital gains taxes more difficult. (This extra processing and paperwork also costs the government money, keep in mind, which we pay for - with more taxes.) Eliminating the capital gains tax would save the people - as well as the IRS - headaches.

It also is a relatively small tax, directed to a relatively small group - people who invest. What this tax then does is makes people who want to invest less likely to because of overtaxation. What effect does this have on the economy? The government, if they are going to be involved with regulating the economy in the first place, should definitely not be hindering people from investing their money.

People who invest for their own businesses suffer too, as well as people who invest their money. I knew of a man who made a business out of buying old houses, renovating them and reselling them. He hired carpenters, electricians, plumbers, landscapers and painters to renovate his homes - helping people get jobs. He purchased appliances, carpeting, supplies for renovation - putting money back into the economy. But when higher capital gains taxes were implemented, doing these renovations was no longer economical for him - which cost jobs, which meant fewer products were purchased, which meant people were less productive.

Some could also argue, he suggests, that pointing a tax at investors is pointing a tax at the rich simply because they are rich, which is discriminatory. There is less incentive to be more productive and earn more when it means that more money will be taken away from the producers by the government. The government shouldn't be hindering people from making more money, or from going into business - that's what keeps the economy strong.

Expecting people with more money to pay more than their "fair share" to help out the "less fortunate" is essentially forcing them to give away more of their money to other people - people who haven't earned it. Most people would call this kind of scenario a robbery.

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone, like the newspaper suggested. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us. If we did that, if we took that responsibility, there would be no need for excess taxes - especially like capital gains.

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The Illness Of Volunteerism

When I opened up my copy of USA Today this morning (April 22, 1997) I saw a chart as the illustration for the lead story. The chart stated, “Volunteerism: How Strong is the Drive?” and then asked the question, “If your place of work gave its employees the chance to take paid time off of work to do community volunteer work, how likely are you to take the time off?”

The results showed that 51 percent of people surveyed would in fact take the time off to volunteer.

But what they asked for was not volunteerism - what the question asked is would you volunteer if you were still being paid by someone. By definition, that's not volunteering.

Ask the same group of people if they'd be willing to put in the same amount of time when it was their own time, and they were not being paid for it.

I'm sure the results would be much, much lower.

People work for a living. They go to work in the morning, come home at night, and live off of what they earned - that's Capitalism, and for the most part, that's America (at least that's the idea this country was founded on). People, for the most part, don't want to give away their labor - or their money - to people who haven't earned it.

A summit to encourage people to come together to volunteer is one thing. Asking individuals to volunteer to help out the “less fortunate” is one thing. People have the right to choose what to do with their own time. Making it sound like volunteerism is the responsibility of individual companies is another.

Businesses, by producing better goods and services, have increased the standard of living - for everyone in this country (consider that poor people can purchase televisions, have entertainment and other “luxuries” that no one could afford fifty years ago). Businesses are doing a service to the world as well as to themselves when they produce. They earn a product; competition brings better products; everyone wins. It is not the responsibility of businesses to lose their workers to regular volunteer times, because they don't owe anything to “the community.”

“The community” consists of a group of individuals. Individual rights is how this country was founded. Expecting business owners to shell out money to employees for not working - for volunteering - is just another way of extracting money from the producers. Won't that hurt the economy in the end, which affects the standard of living for all?

The article went on, stating that there were philosophical questions with wide-scale, imposed volunteerism:

“How should the role of the government be balanced with the roles of companies, individuals and non-profit groups?” It shouldn’t be balanced; the government shouldn’t even be involved. Government intervention would mean more taxes and less freedom for individuals. Companies should not feel the need to volunteer, as imposed by a government; if they want to help, they can, but should not be expected to. They do enough by producing better goods and services for the individuals that purchase them.

The newspaper asked: “Is volunteerism a politically popular but lightweight response to the intractable social problems government leaders can’t, or won’t manage?” Now we’re getting somewhere. Volunteerism won’t solve a problem if the individual you are helping doesn’t want to help themselves, or expects to be helped instead of working on finding their own solution. The government, when involved with other aspects of our lives, has made a very expensive tangled mess of red tape - consider education, for example. Pressure groups have pulled funding back and forth for education, providing not the best education, but what the right people wanted. The result? A poor educational system that the government thinks more money will solve. When more money doesn’t help, add more money, and tax the people some more.

“Volunteerism is one of the great glories in America,” states Will Marshall of the Progressive Party Institute. No it isn’t. It’s a great glory to communism, where people are supposed to make sure everyone is equal and not be able to advance with their achievements, therefore giving them no incentive to achieve. It’s a great glory to Christianity, because you’re not supposed to rise above everybody else, you’re supposed to not like the things to earn. “The meek shall inherit the earth.” No, it’s individual rights, and the right to own your accomplishments and achievements that is one of the great glories of America, and that directly opposes volunteerism. The right to produce and create and succeed is the American way - and it developed this country into the greatest country in the world. But for years now, we’ve been told that we need to help others. Since we’ve heard that cry, our country has been slipping.

General Colin Powell is working on the volunteerism summit, and he added that it is in individual’s best interests to look beyond their neighborhoods when volunteering. Why? How is it in any individual’s best interest to do work for free that doesn’t affect their lives? No answer.

Companies may be interested in participating in volunteering programs because it bolsters their image in their community, providing business. Or it may give the employees a feeling that their company cares about others, which may reduce the turnover rate. Or it may be a tax write-off. Either way, the only reasons a business should - in order to be an efficient business - explore volunteerism, is in order to help their own business out somehow. The CEO of Home Depot, Bernie Marcus, said, “We don’t do it (volunteerism) because it increases our business.” Well, then, your business isn’t running as efficiently as it should be. Where are the costs of volunteerism going? Probably the prices of the goods and services the company sells. When you don’t see a return on an investment, the loss has to be eaten up somewhere.

In 1993 Maryland Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend “pushed through a controversial requirement that all her state’s public high school students must do 75 hours of community service before they graduate,” the article goes on to say. What does that teach students? That the government

has the right to tell people how to spend their time, that the government can tell people what to do, that the government can force people to do things, whether or not they want to do it? Does it teach students that volunteerism isn't actually volunteer work, but a required activity? Does it teach them their achievements don't matter, that other people matter more than they do? A "requirement" to do "community service" is not volunteering.

At the end of the article, there was another chart with the results of a survey. It asked people, "Who should take the lead role in meeting the following goals (providing medical care for the poor, caring for the elderly, reducing homelessness, reducing hunger, helping illiterate adults learn to read, providing job training for youth): the government, through programs and funding, or individuals and businesses, through donations and volunteer work?"

Answers varied, but people thought the government should help out in all of these areas. But how are they going to do it? With your tax money, deciding how to spend it without conferring with you. If it were the responsibility of individuals and businesses, on a volunteer-basis, at least you would know where your money was going.

But then it occurred to me: it's not the government's responsibility, and it's not a business person's or producing individual's responsibility - it's the responsibility for those in need to do something with their lives, to satisfy that need and accomplish their own goals. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" means that people have a right to their lives, and the right to do what they want with their lives. They can't infringe on other's rights to help them.

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Let The Government Tell You When You're Ready?

I have been hearing reports that a few counties are interested in putting waiting periods on obtaining marriage licenses unless the couples go through premarital counseling. Divorce rates are high, these people claim, and it is our responsibility as the people who allow marriages to make sure couples know what they're getting into. These defenders claim that divorces cause social stress as well as economic stress, and it is their responsibility to try to correct the problem.

The counseling would come in the form of meetings that would focus on such things as communication skills, dealing with problem solving, compromising and the like. It wouldn't be a matter of passing or failing; you would get your marriage license as long as you attended, even if you learned nothing. And what would the waiting period for a marriage license be? Three days if you take the counseling. Sixty days if you don't.

However, there are a number of problems this idea poses.

First, the decision in one county to wait on giving out a marriage license doesn't stop an anxious couple from going to the next county to get a marriage license. This merely makes people not want to marry in that particular county.

Second, couples can still hold out through the waiting period to get their marriage license, all without marriage counseling. Then the waiting period accomplishes nothing except putting off what the couple wanted in the first place.

Third, there is no clear definition of what kind of counseling would be done. Who decides what kinds of things need to be covered in these small sessions? The people running the sessions? What background do they have, and isn't it possible their views would conflict with the people they are counselling?

Fourth, who gets to be the counselors? Therapists? Psychologists? Psychiatrists? That costs a lot of money. People with marriages that have worked well? With little training, they would hardly be effective. The lawmakers? I know that personally I don't want the government to have as much intervention in my life as to tell me how to be a good wife.

Fifth, these counselling sessions are going to cost money. Therapy sessions cost \$100 and up an hour, so how is this going to be cost-effective for all people to be able to utilize? The answer is that in order to make it cheaper, the additional paperwork, the counselors, the space people are even counseled in - would have to be supported by tax dollars. In other words, every single taxpayer is going to be paying money so that couples who want to get married can have cheaper counseling. Additional paperwork costs money. Additional staff members to accommodate the work costs money. The rent for space couples use for counseling costs money. The counselors cost money.

For married people and people who aren't going to get married, or for people who are willing to wait and therefore don't go through the counseling, this means they are forced to pay money for something they cannot utilize. I know this happens everywhere in our current tax system, but adding more to it is insulting. The citizens of the United States should not have to subsidize other people's counselling. Counselling that the government is making them take.

Sixth, we have no idea if any sort of counselling or waiting period is effective at all in reducing the

rate of divorce. In theory, all this expense, additional paperwork, and time consumed could amount to nothing. No studies have been done to test the effectiveness of this kind of plan.

Some religions offer counseling to people who plan to get married. Catholicism, for instance, requires people to go through a day-long seminars with their priest before that priest will marry them. Religious institutions have the right to do this, because people decide to be a part of an institution that imposes these restrictions. The United States government was designed with the rights of the individual in mind, and the idea of government-imposed counseling for couples who want to marry violates individual rights in two respects. One is that a couple should be able to get married, without the government forcing them to wait (the government is not supposed to apply force; it is supposed to protect its citizens from force). The other is that the government is forcing people to give up more of their money (in the form of additional taxes) and giving it to other people (the people being paid, and the people going through the counseling).

The government is not our moral regulator, nor should it ever be. And economic problems, in a capitalistic society, should be the concern of the individuals within the society, not the government. This is why these defenders are wrong when they claim that it is their responsibility to try to correct the problems of social and economic stress from divorce. The government has no reason - and no right - to intervene in people's private lives. This includes intervening with marriage - and divorce. There may be a problem with divorce in America, but the government is not the group to solve it. We - as individuals - are.

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What Are Flexible Ethics?

The Lutheran Brotherhood compiled the following statistics: Nearly two-thirds of all adults believe ethics “vary by situation” or that there is no “unchanging ethical standard or right and wrong.” Nearly eighty percent of all adults from age 18 to 34 believe ethics vary by situation, but even forty-eight percent of all adults aged 65 and up believe ethics vary by situation. Never did a majority of adults believe that there is one standard for every situation.

Now, I needed to look up the word “ethics” to make sure I wasn’t getting confused with my terms. According to Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (Tenth Edition), “ethic” has the following meanings:

1. the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation,
2. a set of moral principles or values,
3. a theory or system of moral values,
4. the principles of moral conduct governing an individual or a group,
5. a guiding philosophy.

This made me want to look up “moral,” just to make sure I had this all clear:

1. of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior,
2. expressing or teaching a conception of right behavior,
3. conforming to a standard of right behavior,
4. sanctioned by or operative on one’s conscience or ethical judgement.

What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that what is “right” and “wrong,” what is “good” and “bad,” can change from situation to situation. What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that the principles guiding themselves can change from moment to moment. What these statistics say is that eighty percent of adults from age 18 to 34 believe that a “guiding philosophy” cannot be consistent.

I looked at these numbers and was astounded. If the philosophy an individual uses to guide their life is not consistent, it’s not a philosophy at all.

Consider it from a religious standpoint. In Catholicism, for instance, you should not have sex before marriage, or commit adultery. Religious leaders may forgive an individual if they have sinned, their god may forgive them if they repent, but in Christianity is it wrong to have sex before marriage or commit adultery. But there are Catholics who break both of these promises they have made with their religion - with their philosophy. And although the adulterers may ask forgiveness, there are Catholics who claim to be Catholics but still have no problem with having sex before marriage (as long as you don’t get caught, I suppose). But what this means is that these Catholics have claimed one philosophy and followed another. If they really believed in their Catholic ethics, they would not want to break them. It’s that simple.

And this was in no way to pick on Catholicism versus any other religious belief - or any belief system, for that matter, that an individual claims to follow but does not follow - it is merely to show that a belief system is consistent, and it is the individuals who choose not to follow it consistently.

Consider, as another example, the fourth definition of “ethic.” What if the principles of moral conduct for a group that you were in weren’t consistent, what if they changed from situation to situation? What if one week it supported you as a member of the group because you got a job at a good business,

for being good at what you do, and the next week they were condemning you because a black person should have had the job instead of you? What if one week the group supports your skill in creating a new product to improve people's lives, the next week they are telling you that your time is better spent feeding people who don't work for themselves? What if one week the group said they should support life and wouldn't let a woman in the group get an abortion, and the next week it decided it should reject life and kill your brother, who was falsely accused of murder and is in prison? What if one week the group said the government should lower taxes, and the next week it proclaims that it's the government's responsibility to help the poor, with more of your tax dollars?

I won't even talk about the fact that this "group" is merely a collection of individuals, each with rights that should not be violated. I won't even talk about you as an individual having the right to your own life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But imagine not knowing what laws will be enacted, not knowing what freedoms will be given to you and what freedoms will be taken away. Imagine not being able to gauge what will happen to your future. This is what it's like to have ethics that "vary by situation."

This is what is currently happening in our society today - people do not have a consistent set of values, of morals, of ethics - and it makes living a chronic state of terror.

Why do people, knowing these inconsistencies, living as if there are no absolutes, why do people continue to live this way?

Our current philosophy classes teach people that "the world is in chaos." That "you can't make a difference." They question whether you can prove that you're not dreaming through your entire life, or tell you that you can't even prove if you are merely a part of someone else's dream and do not even exist. They tell you to answer any difficult question with, "How should I know? I'm only human."

People are rational beings - that's what separates us from animals. People need to use their rational faculties in order to thrive. But they can choose not to use their mind - and the consequences are evident in the current trends in philosophy.

People, when faced with these alternatives for philosophy, turn to the religion that was forced down their throats as a child, to the same religion forced down their parent's throats when they were children, and claim that as their philosophical system. But if they don't really believe in it, they don't really follow it.

But they need something, their mind keeps telling them, they need some sort of system of beliefs. And so they keep telling their mind to shut out the fact that the system they chose isn't working for them.

But what they should be doing is listening to their minds, following logic and reason, so that they can find a consistent set of answers to every question they face in life.

Get The Government Out Of Broadcasting

I would like to commend NBC's stand on keeping the government out of regulating the broadcast industry.

After pressure from the government as well as various organizations, the major television networks uniformly adopted a television rating system, like the current system the movie industry uses to regulate content and inform viewers of movies. Since the enactment of this new system, however, groups have been complaining that the rating system in place does not tell viewers enough about why the shows received that rating. Is it because there is bad language? Is there sexual content? Is there violence? A "TV14" Rating doesn't not discern one type of adult theme from another, and groups have been pushing for an adoption of a plan similar to the current system used by the Home Box Office cable channel - one with a list that quickly shows more of a program's content, using such abbreviations as "SC" for sexual content or "AL" for adult language.

Then the government agreed that this would be a good idea. So they "encouraged" the networks to come together and come up with a plan.

The network NBC was the only major network that chose not to adopt the plan. They stated swiftly that it is not because they don't want to tell people what the content of a given show is, but that they don't want the government telling them to adopt a system. They also stated in press releases that they will be working on their own plan for a system that will help people better understand what exactly is on the shows they are about to watch.

I applaud the fact the NBC was willing to distance themselves from appeasing the first group loud enough to be heard, when it may not be in NBC's best interest to do so. More importantly, I applaud the fact the NBC was willing to distance themselves from government regulation, and that they were willing to state that that is exactly what they were doing.

When individual citizens find something they don't like about the goods and services they receive, they should not make it the government's job to try to remedy the situation. The government is there to protect individual citizens from the force of others - not from television programming that one group of people or another might not like.

I truly appreciate the fact that NBC concisely points out that it's not that they don't want to inform people about programming, if that's what they want, but that don't want that authority to be placed in the hands of an already-too-powerful government. NBC's press release on the issue stated, "NBC has consistently stated that, as a matter of principle, there is no place for government involvement in

what people watch on television. Viewers, not politicians or special interest groups, should regulate the remote control”.

If people want to do something about broadcasting, they can request information on an individual basis or bring other individuals together into a group who have the same feelings in order to make information about programming easier to get. It is possible, as a citizen or a group of citizens, to make a difference - it isn't necessary to expect the government to do it for you.

Give a government some power, and they will eventually take more - see any dictatorship or any form of communism and socialism as an example (even see the history of our own government - we have been slowly losing more and more of our rights here in America). Thank you, NBC, for understanding that the rights of individuals also include the rights of business people - and those rights should not be given away so quickly.

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The Wrath Of Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is here again, and like most unattached women in the United States, I'm filled with a vague sense of panic, fear and dread. What was meant to be a holiday to express your love for the one you care about has now become (a) a contest between coworkers for who can get the best flower arrangement delivered to their office, (b) a month-long guilt session from one half of an unsatisfied couple to the other, using the holiday as an excuse to vent their anger for being in a loveless relationship, (c) one more occasion for single men to skirt the constant badgering for a commitment (they already have birthdays and Christmas to contend with, this holiday makes winter pure Hell), or (d) a day-long seminar on depression where women sit at home alone, over-eating, watching must-see-TV, wondering if they will ever find someone to love and honor and cherish them and save them from the horrible fate of becoming the dreaded "old maid."

Valentine's Day is supposed to be a heart-felt holiday all about love, but has instead become a commercial holiday about either desperately trying to not feel alone or desperately trying to spare yourself from getting a guilt trip from the one you're supposed to love.

Half of the confusion, I think, is from how men and women interact on a romantic/sexual level. The other half rests on how people define love.

The Battle of the Sexes

What do women think of when they think of love? Commitment, finding a soul-mate, having someone romantically sweep them off their feet. What do men think of when they think of love? Being tied down, finally giving in, getting the old ball-and-chain, or else something to fake to get sex. Speaking of sex, women generically think of sex as the greatest connection between two people, something sacred, while men jokingly refer to the act with analogies to power tools or sporting games.

Imagine a woman, looking for commitment, having what was most sacred to her taken away because a man thought he earned it by buying her dinner.

Granted, these are brash generalizations, but the fact that these examples exist gives an inkling to the differences between men and women, and the potential conflict between the two when it comes to relationships. How is love supposed to flourish when the two halves come in with such distinct ideas and plans?

The Definition of Love: Altruism Versus Respect

Love, by a dictionary's definition, is rooted in three different ways: from kinship or personal ties, from sexual attraction or from admiration or common interests.

Think about that for a minute. From the first way, you'd love someone because they're your family. Not because you like them, but because you've grown up with them. From the second way comes the more spur-of-the-moment feelings, none of which usually last. From the third way, you love someone because they share interests with you and you admire them.

Admire comes the closest to defining respect, and as a result, it comes closest to defining permanent and earned love. Unlike a religious-based altruistic love which tells you to love people even if they are

not worth it - especially if they are not worth it, a love based out of respect and admiration, as well as common interests, is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

The altruistic "give everyone in your class a valentine because everyone deserves to be loved" doesn't even fool grade-school children - usually someone is left valentine-less. The question children haven't at that point figured out how to ask is "Why do they deserve it? They haven't earned it."

People claim to fall in and out of love sometimes with amazing turnaround, it seems, and I think the reason for that is that they were never actually in love in the first place. Unless someone you once admired and respected revealed that their life and your perception of it was all a lie, or else drastically changed their life so as not to be respectable any longer, the admiration and respect probably wouldn't die. Real love is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

In my lifetime I have met only a handful of people that deserved respect. Imagine how difficult it must be to find someone to respect so highly, to have common interests with, and to be attracted to - that feels the same way about you.

Imagine a woman, looking for a soul-mate, someone she could respect and admire, looking for a man who wants the same things in a relationship, finding men that are looking for a mate that will do their laundry for them, that will be subservient to them.

Images of Romance in an Unromantic World

Even to those in a happy relationship, Valentine's Day has lost some of its appeal. If you're in a happy relationship, you don't need an occasion to celebrate it. And flowers and candy are hardly good symbols for true admiration and respect - real love. Who needs us as consumers to spend the money on these items anyway, other than businessmen?

So what place does Valentine's Day have in our world? It helps conjure up the language of poetry, the beauty of flowers, the romantic notions of a world long gone ... and sometimes you get a heart-shaped box of candy to boot. But in our world, considering the different ways men and women are raised to view themselves and their mates, there are a lot of other issues that have to be taken care of before we can make a valentine card out of a doily and pink and red construction paper hearts and have it actually mean something.

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Welcome to Corporate America

Creativity, Drive, and the Perversion of the Work Ethic

"The course of a career depends on one's own action predominantly, but not exclusively. A career requires a struggle; it involves tension, disappointments, obstacles which are challenging, at times, but are often ugly, painful, senseless - particularly, in an age like the present, when one has to fight too frequently against the dishonesty, the evasions, the irrationality of the people one deals with."

- Ayn Rand, The Ayn Rand Column

I am an Art Director. Impressive title, isn't it? I supervise a staff of designers and production artists who design three monthly trade magazines, a quarterly trade magazine, promotional materials for the magazines and trade shows, and accompanying web sites. I've worked my way up at this company; I started here in a low-end position making less than half of what I make now. Now I do good work, and I get compliments on our product from others regularly. My name is on the masthead of every magazine. I have my own office. I work in downtown Chicago, with a relatively impressive view of the Chicago river and the Mercantile Exchange building. I've worked at this company for four and a half years. I commute on the train. I have a health plan and a 401(K) retirement savings. Occasionally I sit in for the editors and go to special functions and media events and get free food and drink. All in all, I have it pretty good.

Diary Entry, July 1997

I think I'm going to quit my job. I really can't stand it here; even though I'm paid well I'm treated like crap by the owner; he resents me because I asked to be paid what I'm worth. And everyone seems to fight me on any decision to be made, even though everyone will say I am the best here at my job, they'll still argue with me. I have really gotten to the point where I just hate it here, so much that I feel like I almost have to leave.

Oh, I forgot to mention it, though: Corporate America, as represented by the company I'm employed at, is horrendous. And I plan on giving up that office, that view, those media dinners, my name of the masthead, that salary.

You see, it goes like this: I love my work. I enjoy designing magazines. I enjoy working on Macintoshes, retouching photos, playing with typefaces. I don't know why, but I love it. And the thing is, I know I'm good at what I do, and every single person in this company would agree that I'm a good designer, but every person in this company also tries to still tell me what to do, even though I'm the head of this department, even though they repeatedly say I'm good at what I do. This company does not let me just do my job.

Office Memo, January 10, 1997

I know we've gone over this before, but I just want to let you know when problems came up. Today (person x), in front of myself and two members of my staff, badgered myself with design questions focusing on two scans (specifically on whether or not they would be outlined). I told her that barring technical difficulties or purely a lack of time they would be done. She insisted on having them done, that these two photos not outlined jeopardized the integrity of the design, that I looked at every scan and personally told her that they would all be outlined (which I did not do). Her tone was more than condescending, it was flat out rude. If I were her secretary I would have been offended. The demands she posed were trivial and out of her jurisdiction, and they were made to not a low-ranking member of the staff, but to the Art Director, in front of my staff. Behavior like that is unprofessional and intolerable.

We have discussed and agreed that her behavior and attitude is a problem in this office. It has caused one designer to quit and it was part of the reason the associate editor quit. I suggest that something be done as soon as possible, before she jeopardizes the job position of the new designer we plan to hire next week.

The people that work here, I've discovered, are not rational. I've done my best over the years to work with them anyway, to meet their demands, to come up with a compromise that will temporarily appease them so that I can do what I'm supposed to do. But the more I've compromised the more I've realized that a compromise between good and evil always ends up with *some* evil. If you concede a small token to the enemy, they will continue to try to take more from you. And I can no longer let incompetent people destroy a good product.

Office Memo, June 12, 1997

For months I have written repeated memos, had regular meetings and expressed an urgent concern about not only the meddling but the design incompetence of (person x) that has proven to be detrimental to this magazine and to this company. I have demonstrated over and over again that I am a good, quick designer, even when regularly faced with late, incomplete and inconsistent work from editors. I have documented repeatedly that her interference in the design department has hurt the morale of the design department, has cost hours upon hours of time and additional money to this company and has ultimately sacrificed the design integrity of the magazine.

For a full year I have outlined what a problem this is. You have told me it will get better, that you'd talk to her. Apparently, however, she has not listened to memos or discussions about this problem.

In the beginning of the June issue you told her not to meddle, to let the designers do their job. For once she actually listened, and the result was not only a smoother month in getting work done but a great looking 112-page issue. I have received compliments on the design of the issue. The magazine looks good because she was not actively involved with the design, not in spite of it. This month, however, she apparently forgot what you told her. In our design meeting she picked on almost every subjective matter she could... Why are you listening to her, when she has been told repeatedly that this is out of her jurisdiction, when it has been shown that her input in these matters only hurts the final design of this magazine?

I've had to replace one staff member that quit because of her; I've had to remove one staff member from working on this magazine because they cannot stand working with her. The challenge of working well under difficult circumstances is not the problem; the challenge of working well when inexperienced people are actively trying to stop

you from doing a good job is the problem. I can't tell people they should work on this magazine when I can't even think of any reasons why I should continue to.

Something, apparently something drastic, must be done immediately. I genuinely do not know how much longer I can work with the current circumstances. Please let me know as soon as possible if we can implement these changes and if you have any other ideas on how to solve this problem.

I know I sound like I'm overreacting here. But shouting matches are somewhat regular here, as well as multiple rounds of corrections in copy (after having three editors read something 15 times, there shouldn't be any need for more changes, they just cost time and money). Butting in to the production department's jobs is also a regular occurrence here, as is having the goals of your department change without you knowing it, having work redone because people weren't paying attention, and redoing work because someone new saw it and said it needed to change, after 7 other people approved it. Welcome to Corporate America.

Diary Entry, September 9, 1997

I took a sick day today. A well day, so to speak. A mental health day. I didn't think it would be good for me to go to work today. I really hate that place. Everyone hates everyone there, I think. (person a) told (person b) he's sending out resumes again. (Person c) says he wants to leave. (Person d) was interviewing a few weeks ago.

Are we not supposed to have balls and ask for things we deserve? Are other people in the office jealous because there are actually some people with some talent in the production department, and they have the power to expose the ignorance of the rest of the staff? I hate the fact that there are so many stupid people that are able to hold a job there. And of course it then becomes my job to cater to them, because they can't figure out what to do. I hate the fact that I have to follow other people's whims. That's precisely what they are - whims. People in that office don't know what they want, and don't trust the production department to do their job. They cost tons of money and tons of time. And the boss blames us for their ignorance.

I know I've said over and over again that I'm afraid of losing my financial security, that I'm afraid I might be making a mistake, that I'm worried about not having a plan, but there is no way whatsoever that I could stay there. It's beginning to get hard to stay there now, and I still have over a month and a half before I quit. Five weeks before I tell them.

The turnover rate in the production design department, according to rough estimates only done in my head, are something like thirty percent annually. When we're talking about a staff of seven, that means having to hire - and train - two or three people a year. If it isn't that bad, why are they all running out of here?

Diary Entry, August 2, 1997

A co-worker quit from the company I work for today. I work in an office with about thirty-five people. Now this co-worker was in charge of our trade shows and quit two days before our annual trade show was about to begin. Apparently she was at a meeting about the trade show and someone else started badgering her and twenty minutes after the meeting she was on the phone with her husband saying, "It's been bad enough that every day after work I

cry when I get home, but now I'm on the phone crying while I'm at work." So her husband told her it's okay if she wants to leave, they can work it out. So leave she did. She collected her things, and just... left.

Now I only got to hear about this scene second-hand, I didn't actually see her or even get to say good-bye to her, and that's a real shame because I probably would have shook her hand and thanked her for doing something that just about every person in our office has pretty much dreamt about on a daily basis. I mean, when I heard about what she did I let out a low, sadistic laugh, you know, one of those laughs that comes from really deep down, because we haven't had one of those angry quitting scenes in a while, and believe me, they're always fun to watch. And I laughed like that because I know what she was going through and I know what a relief it must have been for her to do it.

I work in my spare time as the editor of the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies." One of the reasons I do it is simple: I want to put together a good magazine, one people like, **on my own terms**, and know that it is good. I have been praised for the design of the magazine. Everything about that magazine is a result of my own decisions: what the covers look like, what kind of sections the magazine has, who the contributors are, what the type looks like, what photos are used.

I need "Children, Churches and Daddies" for my own sanity. I need to do the work I love, without anyone telling me how to do it. I don't get that at work, and I know I deserve it. People tell me I'm good, but they still get in my way and obstruct my progress - not at getting ahead at this company, but from producing a good product - the best product - at this company. I love my work. But they don't let me do it here.

Diary Entry, August 29, 1997

I hate having pride in my work at this place. It is hard when you know you're good at something and everyone tells you you're good and yet no one will let you make decisions. I'm the highest-ranking designer at this company and people outside my department overrule decisions of mine arbitrarily - and regularly. They destroy any consistency or style something may have. And then I have to answer for it, since I'm the head of design. But I'm really not. I'm a slave to the whims of people who don't know anything about my work. It makes me want to leave so badly.

I just hate seeing things that are good get destroyed. It's one of the hardest things for me to witness.

There are two types of people: people who think of work as an extension of themselves, people who are productive, and continually strive to improve, to move forward, and there are people who think of work as some sort of evil necessity to help them exist because no one will give them free money for some reason. So they go through work making a greater effort to not work and act like they are working, they stay in the same job, they gossip, and they make life difficult for productive people.

One of the greatest benefits of Capitalism is that when the most productive people are allowed to work and to excel and to own and fully reap the benefits of their labor, then the standard of living is raised for all. Consider how well off homeless people are in this country as opposed to other countries, for instance. There is such a wealth of goods and services that it trickles down and improves the lives of all. When new technology is created, the old technology becomes cheaper, and more affordable to the lower classes. Well, my point from all that is that yes, that's one of the greatest things about Capitalism, but I must admit that there are times when on an entirely selfish level it bothers me

that people who choose not to create, not to work hard, not to really contribute to society, still get the benefits from intelligent people's work.

There's a group of women that work in another department here at the office. Their pay is equivalent to that of a secretary here at this company, and this company has a surprisingly low pay scale. They punch in on time, they sit in the lunchroom together and gossip while eating their fast food, they take their smoke breaks in the lounge on the 22nd floor, they try to look like they have a lot of work to do so no one bothers them. They're all overweight. They all punch out at 4:30, go home, watch prime time television, and come back the next day and talk about it as if the characters on Melrose Place are friends of theirs. They never try to get a promotion, but they are angry if they don't get a raise. They never ask what needs to be done. They are resistant to change. They don't like people who succeed.

And these people make my blood boil.

It angers me that they are in the same office as me, taking partial credit for the magazine I work on. It angers me because these are the people that are a detriment to progress; *that* is the only thing they should have credit for.

"The difference between a career person and a job holder is as follows: a career person regards his/her work as constant progress, as a constant upward motion from one achievement to another, higher one, driven by the constant expansion of his/her mind, his/her knowledge, his/her ability, his/her creative ingenuity, never stopping to stagnate on any level. A job holder regards his/her work as a punishment imposed on him/her by the incomprehensible malevolence of reality or of society, which, somehow, does not let him/her exist without effort; so his/her policy is to go through the least amount of motions demanded of him/her by somebody and to stay put in any job or drift off to another, wherever chance, circumstances or relatives might happen to push him/her."

- Ayn Rand, The Ayn Rand Letter, Vol. III, No. 26

So I've made this decision that I don't have to deal with all of this trouble anymore. One coworker told me that people in the industry refer to this company as a slave camp. But it stays in business anyway. So I've made this decision to give up the salary, the schedule, the "plan." You see, I've planned everything in my life. I'm a control freak and need to have everything in order at all times.

And I'm not going to have that kind of security, that kind of stability, that kind of plan anymore. I have a plan to quit my job, to visit Florida for a month and then enjoy my Christmas holiday for once in my adult life (you see, it's crunch time at this company from November 1st to February 1st, so you're putting in 80 hours a week and have no time for the holidays). I plan to tour around the States, some for pleasure, some for writing, some for doing readings at bookstores and coffeehouses and bars and festivals. And then I plan on going to Europe for a few months.

I've never left this continent before, and I'd love the chance. I know some people in different countries in Europe, and figure that if they help me out I can afford to do this, to take almost a year off and travel.

But am I only running away from something?

In all the decisions I've made in my life, I've tried to move toward something, not to run away from something. So what am I looking for?

Diary Entry, August 29, 1997

I feel like I'm making such a large decision in my life now. When I left college, I knew I was only going to be going to school for four years, this was the logical conclusion to my schooling, but it was still a great change to go back home, as an adult, and start to look for a job. Once you're working, though, you make your own schedules. You can stay at the same job for thirty years, you can marry and quit your job and take care of a family, you can get another job. And the thing is, I had no idea how long I was going to be at this job. I thought I'd be here for at least six years; that's when my 401(K) becomes fully vested and I will have made the optimal amount of money in it, then I'd be ready to go, I could quit my job right about when I was probably ready to get married and possibly move to another city. But here I am, quitting a year and a half ahead of my plan, planning to spend a ton of my money on travelling instead of working for the next year.

It's strange. I've always been so insistent that I be financially secure. I've always planned everything. I've always done the most logical thing. Is this logical? I figure that I'm young and I have a savings and I hate my job, this is as good a time as any. If I get married and/or start another job, I might not have this opportunity in my youth again. Right now there's really nothing holding me back. So this is my chance.

But it's not like me. It's not like me to throw away a job that makes me great money. I have perks here. I can work on other projects here. The equipment is excellent. But I'm treated like a second-class citizen here. I have four to six people who answer to me design-wise, but I can't tell them what to do when someone from another department is overriding my decisions all the time. I can hardly be an effective leader when no one allows me to lead.

I've mentally just gotten tired of fighting this place. So I'm here for another two months, I'll try to save all of my money, and then I move on.

And recoup for a year.

I don't know what I'm looking for in Europe. I want to be alone, really. I want to see different sights. I want to see different sights through my own eyes, with my perceptions, with my perspectives. I want to be able to react to the world. Does that make sense?

I want to know I can do this. That I can.

Why I stay at my stupid corporate job:

1. I'm a masochist at heart and this company turns me on.
2. I was raised in a slave camp, and this place lets me drink water while I work.
3. He keeps telling me he'll deny everything in court if I leave him.
4. This company is cheaper than a sedative.
5. My boss makes me homesick for both Mother Russia and my vodka.
6. I don't have the resources to study chimpanzees in their natural habitat; had to find similar test group.
7. I'm hoping the rays emitted from my computer will eventually give me a tan.
8. Staying trapped in my office all day allows me to avoid interaction with all people.
9. I can't think of any faster way to become brain-dead.
10. All the fat people that work here make me feel thin.
11. It's fun to bet on who will quit next.
12. I'd hate to have to spend my days outside in the sun, say, being active or doing different things.
13. The constantly changing whims of my supervisors keeps me on my toes.
14. Because you can't have an abuser without an enabler.

and the bonus...

15. Contrary to popular opinion, my olive complexion does not mean I'm made of money.

Office Memo, April 28, 1997

I thought you said you told (person x) not to tell designers how to design departments. She did (see attached).

She also told me what to do for some of the show coverage, things that (1) go in conflict with consistency in the magazine, (2) go in conflict with consistency in design of all the show coverage per our meeting Friday, (3) would make the section look cluttered. She didn't cause problems in the meeting Friday; she's causing them on paper now. Why?

Please let her know that these changes are unnecessary. I've outlined it in a memo to her; she should also know, however, that it's not her place to be doing things like this, and she won't listen to me. Thanks.

I've tried to work through this unhealthy environment. I've tried to swallow my pride and just do what they tell me. But I can't do it forever; I have too much pride and I know I should be doing something more. I've tried to fight for what I know is right, and then my supervisors will agree with me, and then one of the supervisors will disagree and no one will want to fight it. Everyone is so afraid to fight for things here, that they just let the cycle continue on and on and on.

Diary Entry, September 15, 1997

Why would you hate someone for paying them something close to what they're worth? He did this to (person y), the old editor. When (person y) quit, he needed to replace him with three people, and I'm sure he's paying the new editor more than he was paying (person y). He shoots himself in the foot that way. He resents people for having pride in themselves. He wants weak people here, so he can pay them next to nothing. And then he treats them like crap for doing sub-standard work.

Then he gets someone on staff who is good, and eventually they stand up for themselves and ask for more money, and he gladly gives it to them, and then he thinks about it for a while, and he thinks, "You know, I used to be able to pay them less money for the same work. They're screwing me." And then he hates them and makes them feel like crap until they quit.

I don't understand how someone who can run a successful business can be so short-sighted.

If this place wasn't so whim-oriented, it would be a lot better. The owner makes changes from one issue to the next; he changes his mind about everything; he doesn't remember what he said; he blatantly lies.

I was told that he has told (person z) to sit on expense checks and petty cash requests as long as she can, so he can hold off on paying out what his employees have coming to them.

The thing is, work can be something that makes you happy (yes, I've heard that it is possible). I produce the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies" for no money; I typeset it, I design it, I write for it, I scan photos for it, I make all editorial corrections, do spell checks and make sure it gets out on time, and I do it all with more efficiency than a staff of people do here in this office.

Maybe that's another problem. I think I've learned all I can learn from this place. A career is supposed to be a constant progression of learning and applying what you've learned, but for the past year, or year-and-a-half here, I haven't been learning. I've just been fighting to stay at the same point I've

always been at.

And that shouldn't happen. Not from the standpoint of the owner, who wants efficiency and can most easily get it by allowing his staff to produce (a happy employee is a productive employee), and certainly not from my own standpoint. I want to learn, I want to grow. I don't want to have to fight for things I fought for a year and a half ago.

Office Memo, January 13, 1997

Bonuses and Christmas Parties

Most companies have a decent Christmas party as well as bonuses at the end of the year. HOW magazine estimates that the average production/designer received a bonus of nearly \$4,000 in the midwest and nearly \$6,000 nationally. Folio magazine estimates that production directors, people in positions such as myself and (person q), receive bonuses on average of over \$8,000 for trade magazine work.

In 1995 we had the closest thing to a real Christmas party, although we could not invite a guest (like a spouse). This year we received less than a party. For a staff that has been overworked and is looking for some sign of gratitude, no bonus and a lunch instead of a party is insulting.

Current Overtime Compensation

Overtime is supposed to be compensated for by being able to take time off. Usually, however, we only take time off at a ratio of 1:4 or 1:3. If I work 60 hours of overtime in a given month, seldom do I have the opportunity, much less the permission, to take nearly four days off, which would be a 1:2 ratio, much less a week and a half off at a 1:1 ratio. Yet this is supposed to be my compensation for losing half of my spare time. I have had to repeatedly relinquish social and family obligations, as well as eliminate basic money-saving and necessary household chores in my life like grocery shopping because I have simply had no time to do these things that I should be doing. The sheer amount of time I have worked has also made me physically sick, and with more work always piling on, I do not have the chance to take the time off I need to to get some rest and recover from illness.

The Fair Labor Standard Act requires government employees to get 1.5 hours of comp time for every hour of overtime worked. The average (norm - expected) ratio for any company offering comp time in lieu of wages is a 1:2 ratio. The Federal government is now trying to set up a standard of one hour of comp time for every hour and a half of overtime worked (in lieu of wages). This company's policy puts our comp time drastically below those ratios. Considering that giving an employee comp time off at a 1:2 ratio doesn't cost the employer anything, during less busy times there is no reason why this ratio should not apply to this company.

I have consistently worked far more overtime than a worker should. Consistently I have produced quality work at a much faster rate than the rest of the production/design staff at this company. And consistently I have wondered when I'd get paid for the work I have done, if I would even get compensation for the work I did, or when I would even have a day off. I look around and see the sales staff making three to four times my salary, all while working a normal work week (when not travelling around the globe). I see an editorial staff and a marketing staff that does not put in overtime give me work consistently late, asking me to spend my spare time catching up their mistakes.

I have battled with and created a good product in spite of an inadequate staff, or an incompetent staff, or an uncooperative staff. In short, I feel I don't receive adequate compensation in most every front at this company.

Well, if I have learned anything in the past year, it has been how to deal with the incompetency of an inadequate and uncooperative staff, which is probably a lesson I'd have to learn sooner or later anyway.

At least I haven't given in and joined them with that mentality. Then I would have really lost.

But I know there is more out there, and I know it is time for me to learn something new. It's time for me to shake up my routine.

Change is hard for anyone to look forward to; when you get used to something, it just gets... comfortable. Change can be scary. I've been at this company longer than I've been in college. The pay is pretty good. It could be worse.

Yes, I suppose it could be worse. But it could definitely be better, and I know that if it's *going* to get better, *I'm* going to be the one that will make it that way.

Diary Entry, September 15, 1997

(Person k) just came into my office with the most recent issue. She was so excited about how it looked, and she was going on about how the printer did a good job, and she's so pleased. And she kept saying things like "Next year will be better," and "We'll have a lot more ads next year," and "We'll have a lot more time to work on it next year," and I kept nodding my head and agreeing with her, but I know the issue she just handed me will be the last issue I do, at least while I'm employed here.

So now I sit here, grinning and bearing it, trying not to tip anyone off, trying not to burn any bridges. Who knows, maybe they will want to freelance out one magazine to me, have me work on it at home, on my own time. Maybe I'll have the best of both worlds for a while.

Maybe it's not like this everywhere. Maybe after travelling, I'll find a company that thinks it's a good idea to pay people what they're worth. Maybe I'll find a place that judges people on merit, and not on how they dress or if they're gay or not or how well they play golf or if they can hold their liquor or how many friends they can make - or should I say fake - with the staff.

Or maybe I'll win the lottery and become independently wealthy. Oh, I guess that means I'll have to play first. Well, I hate throwing away money, and I know I'd have to work anyway, because as I said, I love my job, I do my own work in my spare time just to keep me sane.

Maybe I'll get sick and tired of working for someone else and go for another change altogether and start my own company. One where I produce a product with content I care about, that looks as good as I know it can look.

Anybody need a job in a year or two?

Diary Entry, September 17, 1997

I make it through the day here by thinking about October 17th, the day I put in my two week notice. It's one month from today. Thirty days from now I will be telling the owner and the staff that I'm putting in my two week notice.

Thirty days from now I'll be telling everyone in production to come into my office, so I can tell them I'm leaving. And co-workers will be pouring champagne for me, and I'll be telling everyone about my travel plans, and I'll be laughing and smiling.

And when (person f) finds out and comes to me and asks me not to go I'll say too bad, that apparently they

can't pay me enough to stay here, and if she asks me why I'm going I'll tell her it's because I can't stand incompetence and idiocy and whim-worshipping and I deserve something better because I'm talented, hard-working and intelligent.

And I bet she won't even get that she is the incompetent, whim-worshipping idiot.

And (person x) will be glad that I'm leaving, because then she can take over the design of this magazine, even though she's not a designer or an art director but an editor, and a bad one at that.

And I'll look at (person e), the main saleswoman for this magazine, and I know she'll be thinking two things:

1. if the magazine looks worse it will be even harder to sell, which will make her near-impossible job of selling crap even more impossible, and

2. she'll be jealous, because she wants to get out of here too, because this place places constant barriers in front of any attempts to do your job and she's underpaid and her job depends on there being a good product when editorial can't write to save their lives.

And I'll feel bad for (person e), and I'll want to tell her to just get out of here, that working at McDonald's has to be better than this place, you'd have to have more pride in your work any place else than here.

I keep trying to think that it's not that the weak and stupid are able to beat the intelligent and hard-working and rational. That I'm not leaving because they beat me. That I was wrong. I have to keep reminding myself that it's that the intelligent and rational human does not need to put themselves through this kind of abuse. I have to make a point to actively consciously remind myself of this. There is nothing to gain from battling those who do not listen to reason. Consider trying to have a rational argument with a religious fanatic - they are not coming from a rational base, so the foundation of their argument is not sound, even though they don't question their foundation and accept it as true. And therefore they won't listen to your argument, no matter how much reason and logic you use. They've rejected that line of thinking. They've rejected thinking.

The ignorant are different from the stupid, because being stupid is not a statement on whether you choose to be that way. Being ignorant, the way I see it (I know this is not in the definition), means you choose the option of being an idiot; you ignore the better choices; you choose irrationality over reason. You're stupid because you weren't educated, but you're ignorant because you choose not to be educated, that's the difference that I see between the two, and that's how I use the word ignorant. Being ignorant is detestable. Being ignorant, since it is a choice to avoid rationality, cannot be rationally argued with. Reason won't change their mind.

So if the choices are: 1. fighting a losing battle, not because reason is not on your side, but because your opponent does not recognize reason, or 2. leaving the battleground, so you don't have to bang your head against a wall, then I guess choice number two seems to be most logical.

One of my co-workers refers to working here as "pounding nails into your cock." It's extremely painful and also absolutely pointless.

Kind of crass, but well said.

So I just keep thinking, "Thirty days."

So I now embrace change with open arms, I welcome it into my life, and I keep my eyes focused on the future, to make the best out of what I have and what I've learned in order to face the challenges I give myself in the year - and the lifetime - to come.

This essay was originally written for *Nation magazine*, but it was previously Published as the editorial in *cc&d magazine* v122, June 2000, as well as in the books **Contents Under Pressure**, **Changing Gears** and **Exaro Versus**, and *Art/Life Limited Editions*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>.

Diversity, Political Correctness, and Creativity

Are we looking for Diversity or Political Correctness?

Okay, let's get the basics down first. I'm white. Big strike against me, from a world-culture perspective, because I must be an oppressor. But I'm a writer, which probably isn't hurdling me into the upper class, and I'm a woman, which has it's own set of relatively heavy baggage to carry around.

But I've always looked at myself as a writer, not a female writer. I've always judged myself, and hoped others would judge me, on the basis of my creative ability as a writer, not on the color of my skin or whether I had big breasts or which sex I was more attracted to.

But in working extensively in the north side Chicago poetry scene in the past six months, I've noticed the issue of diversity brought up in a few different forms. They can be pigeon-holed into three catch-phrase categories: Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct, Crossing Over into Another Culture, and Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage.

Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct

I was working with a group of writers touring the nation this winter. In choosing who should be part of this tour, we had decided upon myself and four men - all white. And then some of the other members of the group started asking - is this group not diverse enough? We're all straight - maybe we need gay and lesbian representation. There's only one woman so far - do we need more? Should we be looking for African Americans to fill out this group?

And you see, these were questions I had never thought of before. I mean, I never thought of watching someone because they were gay or straight, or white or black, or male or female. Okay, maybe female, a bit. But it never stopped me from looking for talent across different ethnic, cultural or sexual lines. And I never thought that a group of people going on tour needed to fill quotas in order to be politically correct. I mean, can you imagine a heavy metal band going on tour saying, "Maybe we should bring a rap group and a Christian folk band with us?"

The thing that might make this group work well together is the fact that we may have have somewhat similar cultural backgrounds. Our work can tie in better together. It may actually seem like a cohesive show; in setting up a show the first priority should be to make the show as a whole the best it can be, not to make sure every skin color is covered in the readers. Not that we shouldn't have other backgrounds in the tour. But maybe looking for the best talent is the better way to go, and if the first people that become part of the group have similar stories to tell, well then, maybe that would work to our advantage.

Crossing Over into Another Culture

Primarily, I attend opens mics on the north side, such as Joy Blue, Lilly's, Estelle's, Red Lion, even sometimes Weeds. Once I was invited to attend the afro-centric Lit X's Saturday night open mic. I noticed a few things:

1. It was in a darkened basement in the back half of a book store. I felt like I needed a secret password and handshake to get in.
2. There was a \$3 cover. I wasn't aware of this until I got to the door; I usually never patronize places that make you pay to entertain the crowd, or expect cheap poets to actually pay money just to sit in a room for a while. They can do that at home for free.
3. As I walked in, I almost tripped over light cords running all over the floor; the stage consisted of a well-lit corner of a small unfinished basement room. Oh, and the fold-out chairs were filled to capacity (which goes to show that atmosphere isn't everything). I had to stand in the back.
4. Everyone was holding either an incense stick or a clove cigarette. Versus a beer and a Marlboro Red, which is what I'm more used to seeing.

Beyond that, there were very good readings, it was a fascinating experience, and I'm glad I went. There's obviously a demand for poetry readings and open mics that appeal to different cultures; it was nice to have a showcase of it in one night, at one open mic. I just wish that for their benefit, they had a nicer place to read.

It's not something I would go to regularly. I must admit, I felt a bit out of my element. Not because they made me feel that way; the people I talked to were glad everyone was there and everyone was very nice, as well as very talented. No, I felt out of my element solely because this experience was something I'm not used to. To submerge one person with one culture into another culture might be overkill. But to get just a taste of it is always a treat. That is great, to experience something different, even if only once in a while.

Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage

As I said, I'm a writer, and I'm female, but I never thought of myself as a "female writer." But I'm sure that men listen to my work and think of me as a "female writer," even if that decision is based solely on my own writing. I write about rape and domestic violence. I write about flirting with men. I write about being a woman.

In other words, I write about the things I know. That's natural; your best work is going to be on the things you've done the most research on. And a writer's entire life is research for poetry.

And yes, I've written both about the joys of being female and the oppression I feel in a patriarchal society. But is that what exploring diversity is all about?

A friend of mine, a talented writer that I had talked to a few times before I heard him read, read a poem in front of me on stage about growing up in a biracial family, about all the taunts and jeers and stares he gets, about how he didn't know how to behave when he walked down the street. About how people thought of him, about how they judged him before knowing him.

And I thought, I've written about that when it comes to women many times.

And then I thought, but I never thought about the color of his skin before he brought it up on stage.

I noticed after that first reading that over half of the work he read on stage in my presence was about this experience, about living half-black in a white world.

I recently told him, I said, “You know, just so you know, I never thought about the color of your skin until you brought it up in your writing.”

And he looked at me, a bit surprised, and then he finally said something to the effect of, “But that’s my hook.”

I think he was pleased that someone looked at him as a human being, but at the same time, we all assume we’re all so different. And what if we’re not?

Yes, you write about what you know. But you can learn more about what you think you know as well as what you don’t know, just by listening to the stories other people in the Chicago poetry scene have to say. The voices are out there, voices on how they think they’re perceived, and about how they perceive the world.

The important thing is not to worry too much about getting the right amount of cultural diversity, but just to open up your mind and listen.

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Keep My Sanity

Okay, this place is such a mess.

I think that only because everything around us is such a mess, and we only get to see bits and pieces of the mess.

Have you ever thought that there is so much going on in the world, and have you thought that we are so lucky that you have access to so much information? I mean, the internet alone allows you to get information from reliable as well as subversive sources about topics that might not be covered in depth in the daily news. I mean, look how powerful CNN is now, how they have a few cable channels, and web sites, and well, they probably have a bunch of other stuff too, to make the world a more informed place.

That is, if you choose their avenues to get information from. You can always choose to surf the net and get information from people who live in recreational vehicles and drink too much and are sure that they have been abducted by aliens. Well, you choose your own sources, I guess.

And yes, maybe information is a good thing, if people looking for information can weed out the bad information from the good information, or if they can weed out the bad sources when they are too busy paying attention to the good sources.

I guess.

So what does it mean to have your own web site? Well, it means getting on the internet enough to get web space. I mean, America On line offers five screen names and 10 meg of web space to you for only twenty dollars a month, all while giving you internet access to most places in the United States. Okay, in Europe too. The point is that there are a lot of places to go to get access to the information you want to share. Programs on the computer can generate the right language for web pages too. That and a little advertising, and you can have people reading what you decide to post on the web.

So what does it mean to get information from common sources? Well, be prepared for the fact that it might not have the slant of your life style. It once again is a matter of knowing how to get the right information.

I have come to the point where I am so tired of the quote-unquote information super-highway that I don't watch television much, where I don't read the newspaper... Where I don't even surf the net much or listen to the radio. I get tired of listening to other people telling me how to think that I often prefer to just miss out on the big stories so that I can keep my sanity.

Maybe I am the only person that thinks that way. Yes, I have my own web site and I have my own e-mail and I'm really thinking about getting cable so I can watch cool television. And no, I don't get a newspaper, and right now I don't even have cable, and I much prefer listening to a compact disc of mine for music instead of leaving my will to the radio station. So maybe for now I have found a way to define a line to keep for me and information. You know, how much is too much. That is something I try to keep in mind every day.

This essay was previously published as the editorial in *cc&d magazine* v117, January 2000. It was also in the book **Exaro Versus**, and *Art/Life Limited Editions*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, the *Freedom & Strength Forum* (November 9 2000), and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>.

"Type A" Person

I was in my friend's car once, and she was driving through the streets of Chicago, and she was letting people in who were getting in the right lane at an intersection when that right lane really should only be used for turning right but they go straight and try to cut off the long line of traffic waiting at the light. Well, as I said, she's letting these people get in front of her, and she's stopping at four-way stop intersections and waving other cars to go in front of her, and when she is going she's going under the speed limit, and I'm thinking, my god, she's under thirty years old and she's driving like she's twice her age and I want to tell her to get going because damnit, I don't want to die in this car, I've got a lot of living to do, I've never jumped out of an airplane or made a million dollars or been in a lustful affair with a high-ranking political candidate, and if I am going to go out I surely don't want to die of boredom while someone else is staying in the most congested lane of traffic when they could just as easily get into the next lane and cut everyone off in front of them when they eventually have to merge, like I would most certainly do.

And then it occurred to me, and of course it filled me with a complete and utter sense of elation, because I just love being pigeon-holed into stereotypical psychological categories: I really am a Type A person.

There's an intersection near my house where from one direction you can either go straight or turn right, and there are two streets that merge into this one, both turning right, so the middle street has a "no turn on red" sign. And usually when I'm on this road I'm on the street that's going straight, the left-most street, and these two streets are on my right, merging into my street. And I always catch the red light on this street, it's like the traffic gods are displeased with my constant efforts to circumvent their wrath, so I'm always catching the red light at this street, so I've learned a new trick: I turn right, onto the first street on my right, but instead of doing a U-turn I turn left at the next block so I can get on that second street, all so I can turn right onto the street I was on originally before both of the other streets get to go so I can beat every one of those slow bastards to the next intersection.

I mean, yes, I'm the one that's yelling and banging the steering wheel of my car when people on the road are idiots. Yes, I'm that person who has to race so that I can slam on my brakes at that next intersection, only 100 feet away, and yes, I am only driving a Saturn SL1, a sedan with about as much power as a 1982 Ford Mustang, but damnit, I won't go down without a fight, I will be out there cutting everyone off, weaving in and out of traffic; I will be the one getting there before you, trust me, I will.

And even when I'm tuning the radio while driving, because, you see, I do that and put on my make-up and take notes for work and check over my schedule and if I was the Hindu god BISHNU and had ten arms I'd get a cel phone and send out faxes and eat dinner and write a novel while I was at it, but, as I said, even when I'm tuning the radio while I'm driving I only let the first second-and-a-half of the song play before I'm disgusted and change the dial to the next pre-programmed station, just to instantaneously become disgusted another six times and have to find a tape to play because all those stupid corporate pieces of shit think they should play crap over and over again in order to keep the mindless tuned in.

Well, not me, thank you very much, I don't have the patience for that.

So, needless to say, I've discovered that this is a problem of mine, I wish there was some sort of therapy group for this so I could go to my weekly "Type A Anonymous" meetings, but we'd probably all be pushing each other out of the doorway thirty seconds before the meeting is supposed to start, saying, "Get out of my way ass-hole, you should have thought about being late before you tried to cut me

off,” and the meetings themselves would probably be filled with people yelling, “Hey, jerk, I think I was talking, what, do you think you’re god or something, show some respect.”

God, and I know this is a problem of mine, I know this “Type A-ness” transcends into every realm of my life. When I get on the elevator in the morning to get to my office on the eighteenth floor, I try to make the doors close as quickly as possible so no one can get on the elevator with me, because you know, I really do hate all people and surely don’t want to be in a cramped confined space with a bunch of strangers. But when people do get on the same elevator as me, they invariably press the buttons for floors fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, and I start pursing my lips, stopping myself from saying, “Oh, you people couldn’t stand to walk a flight of stairs, you just had to press all of these buttons and stop me from getting to my god-damned floor in a reasonable amount of time.”

Even walking on the sidewalk in the city, I always get stuck behind someone that’s a full foot shorter than me and a full thirty pounds heavier, someone who labors to walk very, very slowly, someone who actually sways rhythmically when they walk, like a metronome, or like a person standing on the edge of a dance floor, rocking back and forth, back and forth all too afraid to actually ask someone to dance, or else afraid to go out and dance and make a fool of themselves in front of the cool people who have figured out what rhythm really is. And I’m walking behind this person, almost tripping over myself because this walking pace is just unnaturally slow, so to pass the time until there’s an opening on the left side of the sidewalk so I can pass them and walk like a human being again I start to mimic them, swaying with my walk, more for my own entertainment than anyone else’s.

Yes, more than a human being I’m a human doing, and I hate having to depend on the schedules of others in order to get ahead of them all.

Yes, I am the person in line at the grocery store with three items, shifting my weight from foot to foot, frantically scanning the other lines, the person who wants to ask the person in front of them, “can’t I get in front of you, I’ve only got three items and you have two full grocery carts full of crap like Cheetos, Pepsi, fish sticks and Haagen Daz Cookie Dough ice cream.” Yes, I am the person who has four different sets of plans for any given evening because if any one event gets too boring I can pick up and say, “Oh, sorry, I’m supposed to be at a meeting by now,” instead of having to tell them that they’re too boring or that I just have no idea whatsoever of how to relax. Yes, I am the person who coasts toward an intersection when I know the timed pattern of the traffic lights, and know that I can manage to get to this intersection without ever having to make a complete stop so when that light does change I can accelerate faster than everyone else, pass everyone by, and have the open road to myself, wide open in front of me.

I’m already guessing that at my funeral, when the long procession of cars is creeping toward the cemetery, I’ll be opening that casket up and whispering to the driver of the hearse, “hey, what do you say we floor it and blow everyone off in line? We could probably grab a beer at the corner bar and still be able to beat everyone to the grave site,” because, as I said, I’m a “Type A” person, and I’m going to make damn sure I do as much living as I possibly can, I’m not going down without a fight, and wherever that god-damned goal line is, I swear, I’ll beat everyone to it.

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Child Molesters and the Government: Big Brother is Watching

I was listening to the radio the other night - talk radio (it keeps me awake when I have to drive a long distance during the night). It keeps me awake, usually because there's enough there to get me so angry that I actually want to yell back at the radio.

Honestly, I actually once heard someone call in and say it was their constitutional right to food, that the government had to give them food if they didn't get it themselves (tell me where in the Constitution does it say that citizens of the United States of America have the inalienable right to "life, liberty and blocks of cheese"). Last time I checked, The Pursuit of Happiness meant that you have the ability to do what you need to in order to acquire the things you need, such as food, not that the government has a responsibility to feed you.

So anyway, I was listening to the radio, and the discussion on this particular evening was about child molesters. Doctors and other experts has pretty much agreed that they are incurable, that castration doesn't stop their urges to hurt children, because it is a power struggle more than a sexual venting. So the question arose: should people living within a community where a child molester is going to move into be notified that this person was convicted of molesting children?

A similar story arose after a convicted rapist abducted and killed a neighborhood child after he was released from prison and "started anew." The neighborhood was in an outrage; if they knew this man was a rapist, they said, they would have been more protective of their children.

So the question going over the air waves on this particular night was whether or not it was right to notify people of the acts you've been convicted of in the past.

People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc. - some also brought up the fact that the information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information for themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

But first of all, it is not the role of our government to intervene with every aspect of our lives. The government is not supposed to protect "society." As the closest thing to a capitalist society on this planet, "society" is made up of a group of individuals, and the government should work for the individual.

Currently, any individual has the right to find out information about a person (this kind of falls into that “pursuit of happiness” thing), but we should not expect the government to hand it to us on a silver platter.

If a potential law does not apply in all situations, it is not a good law. So let’s apply this idea to other crimes: if you move into a new neighborhood, should all you new neighbors know that you shoplifted when you were nineteen? I don’t think so - all it will produce are negative effects.

People should be more responsible for themselves instead of asking the government to help them out more, then get angry when the government gets out of control and continually hikes your taxes to support the massive network of laws created on whims such as this one.

Furthermore, If this law went into effect for molesters already in prison, they would be in essence receiving two separate sentences at two separate times for a crime they were tried for once. That goes against everything this country was founded on. If they need a greater sentence, give it to them when they are sentenced.

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medicine

A few years ago, I felt so much pain in my joints that I couldn't walk or pick up a carton of milk in the morning. At age 21, I limped and ached; my right ankle, left knee, and right hand were swollen. I was also sore in my back and shoulders. I cried in pain daily.

I went to the first doctor. He x-rayed my hand, told me that I may have a jammed thumb, but that there would be no evidence of it in an x-ray and that the pain and swelling would just go away. Then I went to the second doctor. There may be a stress fracture in my right foot, he said, but it was nothing serious. There were no drugs prescribed for the pain, and he handed me an ace bandage and a pair of crutches and headed me out the door.

I went to my third doctor, who happened to be the first female doctor I saw. She put all the symptoms together and thought I may have a form of arthritis. She referred me to a specialist at a nearby hospital.

She was the first doctor who listened to me. Every other experience of mine was of a doctor addressing only one of the problems I mentioned, then brushing the problem off as minor. I felt as if I was getting nowhere in discovering the root of my illness. I felt as if no one wanted to help me.

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A friend and co-worker was recently hospitalized with an ulcer. When she came back, the pain still remained—especially during menstruation. She always had severe menstrual cramps, and with the ulcer present there would be days at the office when she would have to lay down underneath her desk until the pain went away.

Sometimes the pain would make her cry at her desk. Once I had to help her walk to her train station in the middle of the day, because she had to be bed-ridden and she didn't know if she could walk the block to her train without collapsing.

She didn't want to go back to the hospital after being admitted for days with an ulcer. She told me about how uncomfortable she felt with her male doctor. That the doctors she had never listened to her. That she felt they dismissed her problems as all in her head. I told her to see someone else, and to tell them how she felt, even if she had to be belligerent. She was paying for and had the right to proper treatment.

She finally saw a doctor. Then another. A few times it was suggested to her to go on the pill, since hormonal therapy may reduce the cramps. But she took that advice from a doctor years earlier, and she knew the pills made her more violently moody, and often didn't help with the pain. No one suggested other alternatives to her. She followed her doctors orders.

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My grandmother was a feisty and strong woman in her mid-eighties. Her bowling average hovered around 176. She lived alone in a condominium. Our family had dinner together weekly with her.

While I was away at school, I started getting phone calls from my family about how grandma hadn't been feeling well. She went to a doctor complaining of stomach pains, and his diagnosis was that she had a yeast infection. She told him she knew her body well enough at this point in her life to know that she did not have a yeast infection. That a yeast infection wasn't causing this pain. She thought his diagnosis was ludicrous. The doctor brushed her off.

She told us this. We told her to get a second opinion. She saw another doctor. The stomach pains persisted, and due to the cold weather her asthma was acting up. She was always out of breath. Tired. In pain.

Still no answers from this doctor. He told her it was probably a stomach flu and that she would be fine soon. He gave her a prescription.

Within two weeks she was in the hospital with a laceration in her stomach. The laceration was worse because she had it for a while and it wasn't treated. Strong acidic fluids were seeping through her body and infecting other organs. She was admitted to the hospital on a Friday; by Saturday morning, she was dead.



I told friends about my grandmother's experience with the doctors. More than one person mentioned that my grandmother's next of kin could probably win a lawsuit against the doctor who misdiagnosed her, especially when she complained to us when she was alive that he didn't listen to her. But the problem was deeper than that.

That doctor, like the ones myself and my friend had been to, didn't think he was doing a poor job. If you asked him, he probably would have thought that he was doing a perfectly good job.

The problem was as simple as not listening. Those doctors didn't take us seriously. Simply put, they didn't listen to us.

Why? Is it that all doctors are callous? No, from my experience alone I knew that the female doctor was helpful and took me seriously. Was it that male doctors didn't listen to anyone and female doctors did? Not from what I knew. Stories like these of doctors ignoring patient's feelings and statements are relatively foreign to men I talked to. In fact, often when I mention stories like these to a woman, she usually has another story like it to add to the list. It almost seems that most women I know don't feel comfortable with a male doctor. But men don't feel that way at all.

Most men don't feel that way because they have never had that problem. They have always been listened to. They have had doctors pay attention to them. They have received better treatment, on the whole, than women.

I decided since that last bout with the doctors that from now on I would see a female doctor whenever I could. But that doesn't solve the problem either. I should be able to go to a doctor, no matter if the physician is male or female, and feel confident that I will get the medical attention I need.

But I don't feel that confidence. Neither do a lot of women.

pornography

The language of sex that is forbidden used to be a language like this:
Bitch," he snapped, pulling away from her, yanking his dick out of her mouth.
"You're trying to make me come before I'm ready..." She ate up that kind of talk.
John Stoltenberg, "Pornography and Male Supremacy - the Forbidden Language
of Sex," "Refusing ... Essays on Sex and Justice."

Think of some woman in a porn magazine or movie. You probably be able to think of one in particular, so just think of the general notion of a woman in porn.

Here's a woman, which you probably wouldn't even think to call a woman, doing whatever the said man in the movie wants her to do, on film, for others to derive pleasure from. Now in general, when men or even women look at her, they don't wonder about her intellect, her personality, even the sound of her voice. You don't even wonder if she's a good cook. When it comes to the viewers of this woman, all they're thinking about is sex - her body parts and what she does with them. That's all you're supposed to be thinking about when you watch it - that's the whole point of porn.

Okay, so now you're looking at this woman and you're thinking of her as, well, not even as a human being as much as some sort of object with legs and tits and other things. You're not thinking of her on any other terms, you don't want to think of her on any other terms. Her express purpose is your sexual satisfaction. You begin to objectify this woman - you don't even know her name, and you are shown to think of her as and object derived to fulfill your needs.

Now, you watch a porn more than once, you see different porn movies, you see these naked women more than once, you see them in magazines as well as in movies. For your purposes, they could even be all the same person - they're just legs and tits anyway, right? For all you know, you could have been looking at the same woman on numerous occasions without even knowing it. They have no personality to you in this form, in pornography. And you may even become accustomed to seeing them this way - seeing the women in these videos and pictures as objects of pleasure for the male viewer.

Now tell me, who is to say that on some levels there aren't men who don't begin to look at women in general in terms of the images they're seeing of women - as objects, as sexual creatures? Do men begin to think of all porn stars as women whose personality doesn't matter to the male, then think of all naked women as objects without feelings, then think of all women in general as tools for men's satisfaction?

Skin flicks and porn reading matter market women as commodities, denying physical uniqueness, women are presented as "tits and ass" with bulging breasts and painted-on smiles. This caricature of the female body and its reduction to a few sexual essentials is presented undisguised in the "hard core" material and covered up with sophisticated packaging in Playboy, Penthouse, and "soft core" porn films. Whether explicit or implied, the underlying message is the same: women are to be treated by the consumer (the male reader) as pieces of ass.

Michael Betzold, How Pornography Shackles Men and Oppresses Women, Male Bag, March, 1976

This woman in the porn movie, on the pages of the magazine, she's probably not even the type of girl the average guy would want to take home to introduce to mom and dad. For some reason she is acceptable for sexual purposes, but not for relationships. She's acceptable for what men, in general, prefer for interactions with the opposite sex, but she is the opposite of what women in general want for interactions with the opposite sex.

Pornography promotes our insecurities by picturing sex as a field of combat and conquest. The sex of pornography is unreal, featuring ridiculously oversized sexual organs, a complete absence of emotional involvement, little kissing and no hugging...

Besides reinforcing destructive fantasies toward women, porn promotes self-destructive attitudes in men. By providing substitute gratification, it provides an excuse for men to avoid relating to women as people. It encourages unrealistic expectations: that all women will look and act like Playboy bunnies, that "good sex" can be obtained anywhere, quickly, easily, and without the hassle of expending energy on a relationship.

Michael Betzold, *How Pornography Shackles Men and Oppresses Women*, Male Bag, March, 1976

The male viewer is turned on by her, but these men wouldn't want to actually have to spend time with her. Now why? Because what she does is unacceptable? Why is it acceptable for her to make these movies, take these photos for the pleasure of men, but because of that she is not respectable enough to date?

But how to chart the pressure sensed by women from their boyfriends or husbands to perform sexually in ever more objectified and objectifying fashion as urged by porn movies and magazines?

Robin Morgan, *Pornography: Who Benefits*

Now tell, me, what is to say that men don't begin to look at women in general in terms of the images they're seeing of women - as objects, as sexual creatures, as legs and tits, but as something they don't respect?

I want the world to know that I have a brain. I want the whole damned world to know that I have ideas, and talent, and intellect, that I'm hard-working, that I'm interesting. But how am I supposed to fight these notions that men have of how women are? Of how I am, or am supposed to be, according to their standards?

Do you have any idea how sick it makes me feel when I see some guy leering at me in the street? But you have no idea why. No, the typical male response of "She just doesn't want to be flattered" doesn't make sense, because you're not flattering me by reducing me to something you can abuse. To tits and legs. To something like an object in a porn magazine or movie, someone who wants to solely be a vehicle for the man's pleasure. No, I don't think finding someone attractive is a bad thing, in fact, it's a very good thing. But that isn't all there is to a human being, and that surely isn't all there is to me. If someone is going to stereotype me into one category, I would rather be thought of as smart, or hard working, than a potential fuck.

Every time I see a pornography magazine, I wonder if the owner, or the men looking through it, expect me to look like that, or expect me to perform like that for them. Or if they think I like the submission and degradation. I don't. Most women don't.

Janet Kuypers, *How Pornography Affects Me*, 1994.

"But the women who are porn models and actresses like it, I mean, they're not being degraded, they're being paid for it."

Would you enjoy having a photographer take pictures of you so everyone could fixate on your penis? (maybe you would.) Let me put it this way: would you like it if every interaction you had in the world related and depended only - and I mean only - with your penis? That the only way you could achieve anything in life was only if you exploited your sexual organs? If your brain didn't count? If your abilities didn't count? If you as a person didn't count?

Would you enjoy it if you were trying to apply for a job and all through the interview your potential employer was more interested in how you looked naked than your skills applicable to the job? It would be so frustrating, because that wouldn't matter to the job, and you wouldn't be able to prove to these people that you are qualified for the job. It would be so frustrating, because there would be nothing you could do to make these people see you as a person.

You probably think it sounds funny, but in all honesty, these things all relate. Pornography objectifies women, and these views of objectification translate to other parts of society, from looking for a job to walking down the street. And in my opinion, it's just not fair that women should be treated that way, simply because that's the way it is, simply because that's the way men and women have been taught in this society think.

Many men, knowing intimately the correspondence between the values in their sexuality and in their pornography - share the anxiety that the feminist antipornography movement is really an attack on male sexuality. These nervous and angry men are quite correct: the movement really does hold men accountable for the consequences to real women of their sexual proclivities. It is really a refusal to believe that a man's divine right is to force sex, to use another person's body as if it were a hollow cantaloupe, a slap of liver, and to injure and debilitate for the sake of his gratification.

When one looks at pornography, one sees what helps some men feel aroused, feel filled with maleness and devoid of all that is non-male. When one looks at pornography, one sees what is necessary to sustain the social structure of male contempt for female flesh whereby men achieve a sense of themselves as male...

John Stoltenberg, "Pornography and Male Supremacy - the Forbidden Language of Sex," "Refusing ... Essays on Sex and Justice."

"But women like porn movies, too, and there's naked men in the pictures. It's eroticism, it turns everyone on, not just men. What's wrong with that?"

First of all, the way pornography depicts sex is different from eroticism - the one difference is that pornography is by nature degrading towards women. How? By her submissiveness, her subservience. Is she tied up? Is her aim to please the man? Is rape a common fantasy in pornography, or physical pain, or very young women (even more weak than full adults), or more than one woman serving a man?

Eroticism does not rely on one sex submissive and subservient to the other. Pornography relies exactly on just that degradation of one sex.

statistic: 75% of all women involved in pornography were victims of incest.

Think about this, which is one of the most common fantasy scenes when the tables are turned: would you, as a man, like to be naked with another man, the both of you working to satisfy one woman? Would you really feel comfortable being with another man in that situation? No, I'm sure you wouldn't want to compete. And I'm sure you'd want to know that you are capable of bedding a woman and don't need to share the responsibility of satisfaction with another man. Would you want the woman deriving pleasure from another man while she was with you? No, I'm sure you'd want to know that she was dependent on you, and not someone else, for her satisfaction. Imagine that situation, really think about it, and tell me honestly that the fantasy of two women having sex with one man is fair, or accurate, or considerate, or even enjoyable for women.

Both law and pornography express male contempt for woman: that have in the past and they do now. Both express enduring social and sexual values; each attempts to fix male behavior so that the supremacy of the male over the female will be maintained.

Andrea Dworkin, Pornography and the First Amendment.

Pornography supports, encourages these situation if submissiveness, like multiple women, or bondage, or rape. And in my opinion, any medium that eroticizes rape is completely inaccurate. Women don't like it. No women do. A woman may fantasize about rough sex, which could be played out in the bedroom like a rape scene with a trusting partner, but that is definitely not rape, and it doesn't feel like rape. Why would men want to fantasize that women actually enjoyed an actual rape? To feel secure that women enjoy their oppressed place in the society? Because the men want to rape someone? That's hard to believe, but if that's really a possible answer, then where do they get the fantasy of raping a woman? Pornography.

statistic: it currently is legal to sell tapes of real rapes in this country.

And if women like pornography, it might be because they have grown to like it. It is one thing to be sexual, and it is entirely another to support this kind of degradation toward women. In our culture, pornography exists, but eroticism barely does. Women don't have the choices for pleasure in this society that men do. Playgirl and other similar magazines are designed mostly by men - and revolve around the same fantasies that men have. It is assumed that women enjoy the same fantasies. No one questions whether or not they do. And in fact, the vast majority of readers of Playgirl are gay men.

Pornography contains hidden messages. For example, the recent surfacing of sado-masochistic material in more respectable publications such as Penthouse illustrates how reactionary sexism gets mingled in with the turn-on photos. The material suggests that women should not only be fucked, but beaten, tortured and enslaved—triumphed over in any way. Penthouse gets away with this murderous message by cast-

ing two women in the S/M roles, but it's no problem for a man to identify with the torturer—the victim is provided.

Michael Betzold, *How Pornography Shackles Men and Oppresses Women*, Male Bag, March, 1976

Does pornography produce these subservient, submissive, sexual, non-human notions about women in men, in all different levels in society? It may be one of many forces that produce these notions - and all these different factors feed upon one another. Sexism pervades every pore of our culture, and pornography reinforces these barriers, as do other forces in our day-to-day lives.

There is little understanding that pornography is not about sex but rather is a fundamentally misogynist expression of patriarchal rights...

Gary Mitchell Wandachild, *Complacency in the Face of Patriarchy*, Win, January 22, 1976

Women are portrayed as sexual objects in almost every form of media today. There are so many more strip joints for men than women, and there are so many restaurants and bars with female employees wearing next to nothing. Women make 63¢ for the man's dollar in the work place. Women are abused in marriages and relationships, physically and sexually. A single 30-year-old man is considered sexy while a 30-year-old woman is considered a hag. One in three women in their lifetimes will be raped, one in four before they even leave college. Over 80% of the rapes that do occur are committed by a man the survivor knew, a friend, a relative, a boyfriend - someone they trusted. Playboy and Penthouse outsell Time and Newsweek twenty times over.

And the word misogyny exists - it means "to hate all women" - and a similar term does not exist for hating men.

No, I don't believe that pornography should be banned - I also believe in the First Amendment, and I believe in freedom of expression. I just wish that people didn't support it so much. I wish that these notions weren't forced on to me by men I interact with, by society in general.

No, I suppose I can't change the world, but I'll do what I can to make people understand me. Because every day I have to live with these notions in society, these stereotypes about me. And I don't like them, and I don't want to live by them. Most women don't want to live by them, but they figure it's easier to go along with it than fight the system. I can't go along with it. That is who I am - a person who cannot be submissive, who has her own thoughts, her own brain. And if these notions are in my way, than I'll do what I have to to get rid of these things. I couldn't live with myself if I didn't.

Janet Kuypers, *How Pornography Affects Me*, 1994.

The rallying cry of porn dealers is freedom of speech and the press ... Yet we would be appalled if movies showed blacks being lynched or castrated, Chicanos being systematically beaten and tortured, and we would quickly protest. But we say nothing when the same activity goes on with women as the victims.

Michael Betzold, How Pornography Shackles Men and Oppresses Women, Male Bag, March, 1976

"Women don't like pornography because they're afraid to say they really like it. Women are just jealous of better looking women being sexually active, doing what they think they cant."

Women don't like pornography because as human beings they don't like being reduced to an object for men's pleasure, a receptacle for a man's penis. They don't like being reduced, and in such a graphic way, to a non-thinking, non-feeling pile of rubble. And they don't like the fact that men can go into many newsstands or video stores and get something commonly sold, or even popular, that supports this. That harbors this. That encourages this.

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Children Flying Airplanes and More Government Red Tape

I was watching the news a few months ago, and I found another story that I couldn't help but question. If you watched the news in the beginning of April I'm sure you caught the story.

The story was about a little girl, a very smart little girl, a seven-year-old girl named Jessica.

She was a darling little girl; she was taught by her mother and was very head-strong and intelligent. She went to a farm to learn how to ride horses and instead learned every aspect of taking care of the farm. A driven girl indeed.

Then she decided that at seven she wanted to learn how to fly. It was her own decision; she wasn't pressured by the parents (this is at least what we assume). The parents concented to giving her lessons.

She could become a pilot after taking lessons and getting 70 or so hours of in-air flight training.

During her training there would be an instructor in the cockpit with her, and she/he would have an identical set of controls so they could take over if there was ever a problem.

Well, Jessica thought that if she was going to learn how to fly at such an early age, she may as well break a world record by doing so, so she decided that she would like to travel around the country on her plane during her training. She received approval from the city council, from her family, from her instructor. And off they went.

The first leg of their trip was a success. From the west coast they landed in Cheynne, Wyoming. It was raining, and conditions got worse. They decided to take off again, but within two minutes of taking off, Jessica and her instructor crashed and died.

Now, some of the details of this story cannot be verified. The parents say this was her decision, that they didn't pressure her. For our augument, let's say they didn't, and this was all her own desire. In fact, the mother on the news said she asked Jessica what would happen if she crashed in the plane and died, and Jessica responded that her spirit would be in the plane.

We can't be sure if the instructor took over the controls, or when he did so, and we don't know why they took off in hazardous conditions.

It's a very sad story, and it seems as if something should have been done so that this tragedy and loss of life was avoided.

But the next day I was watching the news, and one of the things they said was that there is now a plan to introduce into legislation a bill that would make it illegal for children to learn how to fly a plane. We got to hear activists that believed that the child must have been put under great emotional pressure to learn how to fly. We got to hear other children, some as young as eight, that know how to fly. Those children didn't believe that should be legislation passed, but most everyone else did.

So this is my question: do we need to enact a law everytime a tragedy happens in our country?

After the Oklahoma bombing, anti-terrorist bills were all the rage. We've heard about a law to notify a community about a sex-offender who served their sentence moving into their neighborhood. We see more laws to restrict airplane pilots.

Some people argue that the law to restrict child pilots is not for the safety of the pilot, but for the safety of the people the child pilot could possibly injure. But laws in a capitalistic society are designed to protect us from the force of others, not from the accidents that we may run into in going about our day-to-day business. When we decide to be a part of this society, we agree to take on the risks of interacting with public - we understand that there is a chance we may get hit by a car when crossing the street, we understand that accidents happen.

Have we finally relinquished the responsibility to governing ourselves to the whims of a select group? This country needs less laws, not more. The government was set up to provide basic protection from other, not ourselves. Let's keep it that way.

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Poetry

There are two types of poetry writing. One is writing for yourself, the type of writing that you do when your dad hits you or your girlfriend breaks up with you or you're trying to come to grips with the fact that you think you're gay. It's the kind of writing that you do for you, you're the only one meant to see it, and it eventually gets tucked in a box in the bottom of your closet to be forgotten.

The other type of writing is when you write for an audience, when you want to make a point, when you want to get published. And then your work suddenly becomes very important, because it can be interpreted in many ways. Wouldn't want anyone to think the wrong things, so you have to be careful with your word choice.

The easiest and probably best way to do this is to avoid explaining emotion. Explain everything in the scene to depict the emotion, and the reader will feel the feeling without having to be told what the emotion is. The emotion will be self-evident. It will be so self-evident, in fact, that the reader can't avoid it. They couldn't escape it if they wanted to. You have to set a scene and be as concrete in your description as possible so the reader can feel the wood finish on the bench at the church, or they can smell the glass cleaner from the window they're reading about leaning on. When the reader is forced to feel the images in the writing, then it suddenly becomes strong, it pulls them into the story, kicking and screaming.

And that's often frightening, because it seems so real.

The easiest way to describe a scene with such vividness is to not write fiction. Study your surroundings in such detail and you'll realize the vast amount of information your senses overlook. For instance, just think about your body right now. How do your shoulders feel? Are your fingertips cold? Are your legs crossed? Is your hair tickling your forehead? As I'm writing this, I realize that my legs are crossed, and it's actually quite uncomfortable. In other words, I wouldn't have even noticed that I was actually in pain unless I made this conscious effort to think about it. We neglect to notice these daily things, these things that make us feel the way we do on a daily basis. And all of these things, when described in a certain way, can portray a mood with more power and strength than ever saying, "I feel tired." In this way you can make the reader feel like they have been sucked in by this work, that hands have come ripping out from the very fibers of the page itself and taken a stranglehold on them. That they have just lived it all.

Often, when you do that, when you put your own feelings and experiences into your work for an audience, the work begins to sound like the work you did for yourself, because then the work is about when your dad hits you or your girlfriend breaks up with you or you're trying to come to grips with the fact that you think you're gay. But there is another step taken, one that escapes the more general, one that uses concrete descriptions so you take the reader step by step through everything you've felt.

The first step toward healing from a pain is accepting the pain, accepting the problem. The second step is expressing that pain. Then it is easier to come to terms with it and move on. Writing for an audience as well as for yourself can be the way to get over those problems. And help others come to terms with the problems they share with you.

There are enough critics and professors who are telling people how to write and how not to write. But to struggle with the feeling you want to put on paper, and to succeed in doing so, is what matters. This takes work, and a lot of it, but the end result may not be as lofty as review editors would like it

to be. But lofty may be exactly what it should not be in order to get to the people.

Some writers, and I should correct myself by saying the “literary” writers that are more concerned with being published in the right places, will follow the current trends, or try to sound aloof by using amazing language. But our society does not reflect these literary tides (which may or may not be a good thing, but it is the the case). Our society is fast, ever-changing, impatient, and in pain. And what the masses don’t want to listen to is metered lines they don’t understand. Poetry is art, but that doesn’t mean it should only be accessible to the elite, the few. The type of work I’ve described in these pages appeals to people because it is not only easy to understand, but it is also about their lives, and they can feel something from it.

And that is what poetry is. It’s not escaping, like trash novels out today, it’s not there to pipe a story into your head. While giving you concrete details the reader is still allowed to envision their own scene, conversations and feelings, and all from a short written piece. It makes you think. And it makes you feel.

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About the Aurora Borealis

When visiting the last of the 50 United States, Kuypers made a daily habit of going to sleep immediately after dinner in Alaska to wake up near midnight. Janet & John went outside with camera equipment to photograph the Aurora Borealis. Using 800 & 1600 ASA color film with a tripod, their exposure times ranged from 10 to 30 seconds to capture the Northern Lights on film.

But they agree that film does not do it justice, because you cannot catch on film the apparently random motion of lights as they literally dance across the sky. The camera cannot effectively catch the Aurora Borealis starting at the horizon and moving almost completely to the opposite side of the horizon. When we watched it, you could even lean on the car on an empty rural road, and turn your head to try to guess where the lights will move next.

This is what happens on nights where gases react to the electromagnetic fields at certain temperatures and certain heights in the sky. It is hard to capture the streaking the lights produce because gases only react at certain parts of the atmosphere at a given moment. You can try to catch the color changes (if they stay in the sky long enough to be caught on film), and sometimes you are lucky enough to be able to catch the Northern Lights dancing in front of constellations in the sky.

Someone told us on a Tuesday night in Fairbanks Alaska that they tell their family that they’ll move back to the lower 48 when they get tired of seeing the Aurora Borealis. But people don’t tired of trying to listen to the sometimes-perceived, never-recorded sounds these electric charges seem to make in the sky.

There’s a scientific explanation for the existence of these lights, but most don’t care, because people are captured by the effects of these lights in the sky.

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Modern Day Footbindings and the Oppression of Women

I have never been one to think about my predicament. It's a common predicament-- I have to face it every day of my life, and it indirectly causes me problems wherever I go. I can't walk alone at night because of it. I can't look a male stranger straight in the eye because of it. I have to worry about the kind of clothes I wear, the implications of the statements I make, and even the way I walk because of it. But I've never given it a second thought.

My predicament is that I am a woman. At first it doesn't seem to sound like a predicament at all, but the more one thinks about the lack of freedom sentenced to a woman solely because she is a woman, the word 'predicament' becomes more of an understatement. In this male-oriented society, women are reduced to objects: pornography sells more than the top news magazines, the videos that MTV broadcast flaunt the woman's body for just anyone to see, and instances of rape are at an all time high. Women today are held down by forces that are blind to many - society has evidently become a jail cell so large that its prisoners cannot even see the bars. But there are bars, and if we only look for them and see them for what they really are, we may then be able to make the changes that will make this society a more equal one. And a safer one.

In China, one man created the custom of wrapping up the woman's foot so tightly that it restricted the woman's walking because it caused so much pain. It was a way for men to be sure that women in their society were entirely dependent on them. In many third world countries, women are forced to wear dresses that cover up their entire body, for one man has no right to look at another man's possessions. They call it tradition. If this is so, then tradition dehumanizes the woman.

Even in the United States these bindings are all around us, and these indirect restrictions are so commonplace that we have failed to notice that they are even there, keeping us "in our place". I will only give one example. I feel that only one example is necessary.

I used to get a subscription to a women's magazine. I enjoyed flipping through the pages of Glamour, even if it did only make me feel inadequate as a woman and as a person. As I read, as I flipped through the pages and saw the photographs of beautiful women staring me in the face telling me that I was no good unless I was beautiful and was able to attract the best looking men, I began to feel that I had to change my image in order to become the objectified model that society had typecast to be "the best". These women's magazines devote about one fourth of their contents to careers, and probably about three fourths of their magazines to looking good. These magazines focused on looking like the stereotypical woman, looking sexy, and doing this all for a man. That's half of the problem right there.

But just the other day I looked through a neighbor's recent issue of Glamour magazine, and I came to a startling realization. As I flipped through the colossal number of advertisements that appear in the first half of these magazines (you often can't find an article until you reach page 50), I looked at the women. I looked at the underlying messages that these advertisements were relaying. And I couldn't believe my eyes.

Here is an example that illustrates my point. "Every Valentine Needs A Hero." The quote itself, from one of the first ads that I saw, gives the impression that a woman needs a man in order to survive. As romantic as the ad may look, I couldn't help but notice the subtle signs: the woman is lying

down on the bed, looking up at the man; the man is standing over her, looking down on her. Her back is turned to the camera, so that you can't see the expressions on her face and so that you can't see her humanness. The woman's arms are crossed, evidently covering herself. A rose is placed right in the middle of the tray (remember-- nothing in advertising isn't planned). Yes, the man is the hero, and the woman needs him for support. How would she function otherwise?

"Valentine... I got you just what you wanted." This ad, as I looked at the couple plastered on the page, seemed to scream "submission" to me. As the woman's face is turned toward the man, she is turned away from the camera - and becomes more of a body than an actual woman. Her arms are folded around him in a way that makes the viewer feel that she is clinging on to the only thing that matters to her. Furthermore, the two wide silver bracelets on her hands give the impression that she is handcuffed-- attached to the man, whether or not by force. The man, however, is merely smiling (maybe "smirking" is a better word) as he looks away from the woman. His happiness seems to stem from the fact that he has this relatively valuable possession.

Even the words in this advertisement are misleading. How handy it is that the woman has given her man just what he wanted. And she should, too. It's her duty. She's a woman. And what exactly did she get him? Why, "she got him a year of..." wait a minute, let's put a little pause in there, one just long enough to make your mind wander... "GQ". This relatively innocent ad has taken on a different meaning altogether in this new light.

Then I turned the page and saw another advertisement--and it appeared to be a centerfold. My only question was: how on earth is a clothing company supposed to advertise clothes when the clothes are barely on the model? Then, I'm afraid to say, I answered my own question. This company, like most others, isn't advertising for the product that they are selling, for their products have become the means to another end, as opposed to the end itself. They are advertising an image-- an image of the woman being dependent on her looks in order to achieve success. Keep in mind that this - good looks - is the possible extent of a woman's success. The concept of talent has seemed to fall by the wayside.

After looking at the images that bombarded me, I couldn't help but wonder if I was reacting rather harshly. But then I began to think: what about the images that you see on billboards? What about the flaunting of women on television programs and commercials? What are these images teaching the children of today - the adults of tomorrow that will shape society? I couldn't help but wonder if these signals were related to the increase in crimes against woman that are so prevalent today. If they are related, when will this ever change? Or will we be forever bound to the system?

Needless to say, I don't get those magazines anymore. I try to explain to others how women are metaphorically abused inbetween the glossy pages of these magazines. But it's only one source. One of many. And it seems that even if we as women were capable of removing one form of this degradation, other bars would still be up to keep us in our cell. Only until we break down the walls will we be able to say that we are free.

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Letter on Religion

Thank you for writing to me about how you felt about your religion. You wanted a response - and I wanted to tell you the things I'm about to over the phone so you could actually hear my voice - I wanted you to know how honest, sincere and open I'm being in what I say. How much I believe in what I'm saying. We never seem to get the chance to discuss this, and when we are on the phone, it does seem a little difficult to say, "hey, let's change the subject to our differing religious beliefs."

So, so you don't think I was avoiding the questions, I'll answer them now, point-by-point, from your previous letter.

You first ask me what I think happens to us when we die. You believe one of two things happens - you're either saved by Jesus Christ and spend eternity in heaven with God, or you spend eternity separated from God.

Whoa, I think I've got to cover some other ground about me before I even respond to that one. Okay, here goes: I'm a very rational person by nature (you may not think so by some of the stupid things I've done in the past, but I've grown up, as have you, and I'll get into all that later). There is no proof that a God exists - that is inherent and necessary in religion, abandoning reason and having faith that a God exists. And for every situation where a religious person refers to God's influence, I can give at least three other possibilities that are more grounded in reason - reality - than theirs. The concept of a God doesn't make sense to me when there are so many other, more rational, possibilities. Something has to be proven to me in order for me to believe it. Or at least be provable.

Morals taught by religion and the notion of a God are not usually bad, in fact, they are often quite redeeming in society - not killing people, being monogamous, being kind to others - but those are morals, virtues, values, which by definition are not based on religion. One can learn good values, morals without a God or religion. It's just that most people, as I see it, cannot see a consequence to being "good" unless the consequence is a God. I see consequences in doing good, for myself as well as others, and that is why I choose to be a good, kind, successful person.

Okay, I think that starts to cover the basics, so now I can go back to your letter... You believe there are two possibilities for you when you die. Since I don't believe in a God, I believe one thing happens - you die (worm food, to be rude). That I believe is the other major reason why religion and this notion of God has existed for so long - because people are afraid to face death - people really don't want to believe that death is an end for them. Well, it is an end - for their body, for their personality - of course, their matter and energy go on to exist in new forms after their death, but when you die, you die. That's what I believe. Your memory can last in others, you can have an effect on other people's lives after your death, but when you die, you simply cease to exist.

Then you say that you want me to be in heaven with you. Thank you, I really thought that was very sweet. If there was a heaven, I'd want to be there with you, too. If there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I've lead and think I'm a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. After I've seen his existence. If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don't think I'd like your God.

Then you refer to sharing the joy of heaven with me, and the joy of being with the Lord. There's another joy I experience, not related to a God, which I don't think you realize. I'll explain in a moment.

Yes, you've always claimed to be a Christian, and sometimes you haven't led a very Christ-like life.

Most people are that way, and it bothers me that people claim to have beliefs but don't live by them. They're not really beliefs then, and all these people are lacking a belief system that they understand. The fact that you've decided to actually pay attention to the beliefs you claimed to have before is an admirable thing.

Personally, I think you're going in the wrong direction, because I think the structure your beliefs depend on - Christianity - is a falsehood, but at least you've decided to live by the beliefs you've claimed for so long.

You write that since your decision to grow in the Lord, you haven't felt like running away and trying to fill an emptiness in your life with alcohol or sex. That's good - we all have to come to that point at some time in our lives in order to adhere to a value system. I think I've come to that point as well, but by a different means.

Then you ask me: which is better, being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has an emptiness in their life, or being the person who has Christ in their life filling that void?

Wow. There are two things I'd like to say about that last sentence. First, it's funny how a super-intellectual doesn't believe in God, but apparently you can't be a super-intellectual and believe in God (well, that's true, but I didn't think you'd write it). Second, you forgot my category - being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has no emptiness in their life. I fill my own void. I am whole.

You see similarities between us, and you say that in my searches for the right party or the right man I was looking for Jesus. Well, in the past I suppose I was searching for something else when I was looking for the right party or the right man, but I found it. Myself. I've discovered that I'm an intelligent, powerful, beautiful, dedicated, driven woman who can do whatever I set my mind to. I've discovered that when I use the best tools I have - my mind - I can succeed in making myself happy, in accomplishing my goals. And you know, knowing that about myself, believing in my abilities as a person - gives me the drive to do what I want and need with my life, and makes me truly happy, deep-down happy. It gives me what you call joy.

And it gives me even a greater joy knowing that it is my mind - my mind, my abilities, my power, not some God's - that makes my life complete. I have complete dominion over my life. I'm the one I answer to.

I can have a bad day or I can have a good day. Something wrong can happen to me or my circumstances. But I know who I am and I know what I'm capable of, and I have no regrets, and I know that I'll make it though anything I choose to tackle. I'll make it through what I choose to tackle, not what your God helps me through. And knowing that I'm a complete human being gives me great joy.

You write that God has helped you in your dealings with AIDS. I'm sure it has - when your world doesn't make sense, when you're faced with your own mortality, it's a great comfort to make sense of it all. That's often a course of action for many people who get AIDS, when they don't feel they are strong enough to depend on themselves. People I know in AIDS groups say that's one of the common routes for people who find out they have AIDS. That's one of the steps most sufferers of traumatic events go through. That's what victim-blaming is in cases of rape - it makes no sense that a man did this to a woman, but if it is the woman's fault, the woman could know what she did wrong - correct the actions of the woman, and the woman is safe from rape - but it's just not true. This is what you've done with your God. God was your answer to all of your questions - not the right answer, in my opinion, but an answer when you could find nothing else.

You say that God is using your situation to help others. No, you're using your situation to help oth-

ers. It's that simple.

You feel that your church is a place for activism. Your church rejects homosexuality. Your church doesn't believe women are on equal footing with men. The Bible says so. Activism within the church could mean the sharing of values and morals and good beliefs, but I fear that activism within the church would mean the spread of narrow-minded ideas such as homophobia and sexism.

Then you share a few verses with me. The first is John 3:16 (He gave His only son...). You then say "That's unconditional love. God loves me and you no matter what we say or do. I think that's wonderful."

I don't think that's wonderful. It makes no sense to give unconditional love. If love is unconditional, then there is no value in it. If you love something or someone whether that something or someone is good or bad, you love something or someone whether you want to or not, then it is not earned, it is not chosen, and it is not a value and it possesses no worth. Value is a standard to be judged by; worth is defined as deserving of or meriting. To me, love is a standard that people earn and therefore deserve, and that is what makes it valuable to me.

You say you can't believe you lived as long as you did without believing these words. "Yes, it means you don't get the credit for the things you've done, but at the same time, you realize the Lord has a hand in it," you write. But God didn't have a hand in it, Gods have been created by people throughout the ages to answer the unanswerable. People created rain gods when they didn't understand the weather. People created gods for harvests when they didn't know if they could sustain themselves, when they didn't have the knowledge to harvest successfully. People created gods that reflected the stars and planets when they didn't understand the universe beyond the world. People created a God to explain how the world began, how to live well, and what will happen after our lives end. All these gods reflected the image of man and earth. But they were all created.

God doesn't have a hand in what you do, you do, and you should thus take responsibility - and credit - for what you do.

"Yes, bad things still happen, but you know that God will see you through them," you write. Yes. bad things still happen, but you know that you will see you through them, you, not your God.

And that brings us to the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness comes and goes. Joy is forever. I even have times that aren't happy, but I never lose Joy or Hope.

You wrote that sentence, and you wrote it about your God. I could have written that sentence, but it would have been about me.

You really want me to experience the same joy you have. I think I do. And my joy comes from within. You can't find joy from within, so you find it in your God.

Then you write: "Now let's say I'm wrong. When you die, you're just dead and there's nothing else. Well I'm still happy trusting in God and I won't have lost anything."

The thing is, if there is no God, you have lost - you've lost your life. You've spent your life living for something that wasn't real, that didn't exist. You've spent your life relying on something other than yourself. You've spent your life under false assumptions, not to your full potential, doing what you were not meant to do as a human being. You've wasted your life. And to someone who doesn't believe in a God, you're life, this lifetime, is all you have, so you've lost everything.

"But if I'm right, wouldn't you like to be with me in heaven?"

As I wrote before, if there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I've lead and think I'm a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. If I saw a God, if he was shown to me after I died, I think I would be on my knees praising (I mean, you'd

have to respect the guy if he really did everything religion claims). If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don't think I like your God. Besides, that wouldn't be a God that loves me unconditionally.



I don't think you're some brainwashed right-wing preacher, as you write. I do think you have intelligence. I also think you're scared. I think most of us, most people our own age, still feel as invincible as we did when we were too young to understand death, and none of us are really ever ready to face our own mortality.

I wish I could help you with your fears. I don't know the right words to say, but I know that the answers are within you, and you just have to look for them.

I have thought about this, I wouldn't just cast aside what you say (I think this letter is evidence to that...). But I've thought about this for years; you'd have to do that in order to have a cohesive value system.

And I don't think this because I think the world is cruel and evil. In fact, I think there is the opportunity for great happiness and joy in life, for great achievements, and for great minds to prosper. But for great minds to prosper, they have to follow reason. Faith may be acceptable for hunches about unimportant day-to-day events, but not with your life.

You have to take your life into your own hands and make it what you want.

I know you won't read this and agree with me, I'm just hoping you understand me and not worry about me (I get the impression that you do - that you think I have a void in my life and it is only filled with depression, and that's simply not true). As we grow up, grow old, mature and gain knowledge, we have to come up with a comprehensive value system in order to make our lives complete. I think I've done a pretty good job for myself; I'm sure there's a lot more learning I have to do in my lifetime, but I think I'm on the right track. I hope you are, too.

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Kids Can Be Cruel: The Effect of Peers On One's Full Potential

When I was a little child, I was very smart for my age. I was always considered the teacher's pet, and I always did my homework as soon as I got home from school. I came from a family of all older brothers and sisters, and I constantly heard language that was more advanced than a normal infant would be accustomed to. I read by the age of three. I seemed to have a good ability for math, and my memory retention was above normal. Teachers from my grade wanted me to skip a year of school.

I also didn't have a hard time getting along with others. I was always friendly (at least as far as I can remember), and I enjoyed having fun. However, it seemed as if other children had a hard time getting along with me. I would be picked on a lot because I was smart, and I never understood why — for there were quite a few smart boys in my class as well. I don't think it was because I was very different from them because I was smarter, for I think I acted like a kid just as much as everyone else. I think other kids didn't get along with me and picked on me because they didn't like the fact that I was a girl and I was smart. I could always beat the boys in any academic competition, and it was very easy for me to do so. I think that is why the people that picked on me the most were the boys.

I don't think I acted like a boy, and I don't think I was any less feminine because I was smart. I never picked fights with these boys, and I was never too aggressive (generally considered a masculine trait). Every day I would receive a series of cut-downs because I was considered smart. Every day I felt these blows, trying to stop me from being what I really wanted to be — what I really could have been.

Once I got to high school, I never tried as hard in any of the work I did. I became a procrastinator. More importantly, I noticed a change in the way that I viewed myself — I suddenly became overly conscious of looking and acting like a girl, and not a boy. I'm sure that others go through these changes in opinion, but I don't think that the reasons are the same. I notice the changes now — there are differences in the way that I keep myself, for example. I make a point to always wear make-up and jewelry. My nails are always manicured — to the point of giving me difficulty in writing this. My hair has been long ever since I left the third grade. I haven't cut my hair in four years. For the time I spend making myself look "pretty", I could be doing something more constructive. I could be working harder to achieve my full potential in academics. I can't help but wonder if I could have been any better if I wasn't cut down when I was a child for doing something that was particularly masculine. I'm sure I could have.

I don't know why the other kids treated me the way that they did. Maybe it was because the other boys felt threatened by my success. Maybe it was because the other boys thought that I was a girl that didn't fit into the role that she was supposed to be playing. Maybe something different startled them, and maybe they felt that the only way to cope with that problem was to try to eliminate it. I don't know what the reasons could be that a society would do that to a person, but those damages can be far too great.

I know that the things that have happened to me have had a great impact on my life as it is now. An example: I like to wear mini skirts. I must admit that they're not particularly comfortable, and I often get annoyed by the stares that I get when I wear them, but I wear them anyway. Why? Because I feel that mini skirts will make me feel more feminine, and if more men notice that I am feminine, I feel better. Then I know that I will never be mistaken for a man again, or made fun of because I carry masculine traits. I find myself often playing the role of a "dumb blonde" around men-- I even find myself talking in a higher voice in an effort to make myself sound more feminine.

Once I grew older, I grew taller. Much taller. Being taller than five feet ten inches is very tall for a

woman. This presents itself as another blow to my feminine ego (which is already damaged), and so I think I often feel as if I must overcompensate for these traits that I carry. I slouch more than the average; I try to act meek. When I don't gain acceptance in a feminine respect, especially after I've tried to (for example, when I've tried to look pretty and nobody notices the fact that I've made this effort to look "sexy", "cute", or "womanly"), I feel very dejected. I feel as if I haven't done what I should have, and I feel like a failure. I feel miserable when I don't have a boyfriend, for a woman can't be a woman without a man. All my other female friends can't understand why I want to have a boyfriend so much.

But I know why. Society tells me that I am supposed to be feminine. I am supposed to have a man, and if I don't I am not a complete woman. I have accepted these notions, for they have been ingrained into my head for all of my life. I have already received blows to my fragile female ego-- I have been made fun of because I was smart (for that was a masculine trait), and I have been made fun of because I was tall. Maybe, because of this society and because of the things that have been said to me, I feel the need to make myself feel feminine. And maybe that's not right. And maybe, as I gain self-confidence, I will be able to change that and be myself in front of others. Maybe I will yet be able to grow to my full potential.

Look in advertisements today. There are women dressed as women in pretty pink dresses. There are men dressed as men-- in gray business suits. Women cook the meals, men go to work. Women are passive and submissive, men are strong and aggressive.

Children can see these signs at very early ages. Society — everyone that they know — accepts this and tells them that they should accept this as well. If a child sees something that doesn't fit into this picture of a model society that everyone has construed for them, it can be considered understandable that the child may grow hostile to it, and want to make fun of it if it is considered something different.

Look at the influence that parents have over their child. Many children come from homes where the father works and the mother stays home and takes care of the kids. As soon as the child is born they are thrown into a nursery room with a color scheme that matches the baby's sex. Girls are given dolls as opposed to trains, they are told to play inside instead of outside and they are appreciated when they act "feminine" instead of "masculine", and they are cut down when they deviate from society's norm. Picture books even impact the child's beliefs: Male and female role models can be found in these books, and they are particularly masculine and feminine. In the picture books *What Boys Can Be* and *What Girls Can Be*, children are informed that boys can be firemen, policemen, businessmen. Girls are informed that they can be school teachers, nurses, and — don't forget — mothers and housewives. The effect these childhood experiences can have on children can have a great impact on them for the rest of their lives.

Not only can these things influence a child's attitudes toward their own sense of self, but it can also have a great influence over the child's view of others. If another child is acting in a way that seems to go against all that had been taught to that child from everyone and everything else, they may want to act out against that behavior, in a passive, conforming context. The behavior of making fun of someone that has characteristics that are different from that of their assigned sex (according to society) can reaffirm a person's belief in their own masculinity/femininity.

But that's not the only thing that the action of teasing does. It also has a very negative effect on everyone — from the teaser to the teased.

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When Credibility Doesn't Matter

There's a fine line between what the media says is good and what the public says is good. This much I have discovered with the whole Clinton "scandal".

I have made a point to stop listening to the reports on how Clinton is doing, what the media thinks the people think about Clinton, you name it. I did go through an article recently, though, and it started aggravating me right at the first sentence. As the editorial letter says, "President Clinton has lied and lied and lied some more..." I was already intrigued.

Granted, that was the first line of the story.

But I think we as Americans know that the average politician lies a lot anyway, to their family, to the other politicians, to their represented people. The only thing that is novel about this story, versus stories of other presidents, is that there is more media in the President's face, and more avenues than there have ever been, to tell the public about the President's wrongdoing.

I think the majority of people I have talked to agree that this whole Clinton thing is pointless. The people don't seem to care so much about whether or not the president bedded someone. Or didn't. Or lied about it. You get the point. I think people get that Clinton has a private side; Clinton is just subject to a more volatile pressure from groups that want to expose him.

I don't think that Clinton is going to make our country go down the tubes with a pending possibility of an impeachment. And I don't think that Clinton will make love to any stranger he can, whether or not he is the President of the United States. What I can think is there has to be a fine line for what we as people can tolerate from the people we voted into office. We all have to make that judgement every day, it is just that now we have to do it when we learn more information. So we have been making these kinds of judgements for years; it won't be too hard to do that again.

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The Christian Coalition and the Religious Right

Because of the religious ties the Christian Coalition has with the republican party, the platform in American conservative politics - particularly when it comes to life-and-death decisions - is riddled with oxymorons and philosophical fallacies.

Not that there are not discrepancies with the theories with the democratic party, but the liberal party - and leftism in general - though nonsensical to some, is at least consistent with its views. The involvement of the morals of Christianity in the conservative party are what give the republican platform the additional inconsistencies.

For instance, the Christian Coalition - and Christianity in general - is supposed to take the stance that all life is sacred, that no one has the right to take a life except for Christ. Hence the pro-life movement becoming a primary political issue. However, the republican party - supported by the Christian Coalition - also is in favor of the death penalty.

Now, I personally can see the reason for an argument on the issue of abortion (though I do not see the reason for the intensity of the debate politically when it is not a political issue, but a philosophical one; besides, there are many other political issues that have to be taken care of that are neglected). People can argue that the rights of a woman are infringed upon; people can say that a fetus is not a viable human being (while others can argue the opposite). However, there is pretty much no argument that a prisoner - a person convicted of a crime in the United States - is in fact a viable human being. I would think that it would follow (with the logic of Christianity) that that life - the life of the prisoner, the person who committed whatever crime our judicial system found them guilty of - is just as viable a life as that of an unborn fetus. It would also follow that since Christians cannot (under their own code of ethics) be the ones to decide who lives and who dies, only Christ can, they cannot give the government or the judicial system the right to decide who can die.

Yet this is the stance the republican party as a whole, which is backed by the Christian Coalition. This scenario also applies to the government's ability to call adraught and declare a war on another country. A Christian cannot claim allegiance to an organization or a government (according to their doctrines) that commands them to go against their religious codes. A Christian under no circumstances is able (according to the New Testament) to kill another person - even if they have been commanded to do so by another person, organization or government. Yet many people that volunteer for duty with any one of the branches of America's Armed Forces (and are not merely drafted and forced to go) are Christians, and see no problem with following orders to kill someone else. Even if a Christian was drafted, they should, according to their beliefs, peacefully protest and refuse to go into battle. If that required leaving the country, that should be done, because a Christian's allegiance to their country is less important than their allegiance to their God. This reasoning would be the only line of action that would be in accordance with their beliefs.

This essay was previously published as the editorial in the books **Close Cover Before Striking** and **Exaro Versus**, as well as the 1996 chapbook *The Matter At Hand*. It was also published in <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.artvil-la.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, and <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>.

Victim Blaming

No... I don't victim blame.

Nobody wants to think that they are at fault. When it seems that the accused is too innocent looking, when it seems that the boy next door is the one being accused of rape, it may only seem appropriate to think that somehow the victim caused the incident to happen. And especially when we are bombarded by society with messages that state that if the victim of sexual harassment was wearing a tight dress, was drunk or flirting, then they were at fault, how could we not come to that conclusion on our own?

But just as a burglar has no right to steal, a rapist has no right to rape.

That last sentence is often never considered, however. Most seem to feel that an act of rape - acquaintance or stranger - is just too bizarre to actually have no reason for happening. It may seem too strange to think that a man you've never met before could just come out of a bush, pick you out and attack you. It may seem too strange to think that a friend, or a boyfriend, or someone that you thought you could trust, could turn on you in such a way for no apparent reason and hurt you so much. In this world, things don't just happen - there's a reason for things, and there is sense in the world. Besides, the victim probably brought themselves into the trouble and therefore deserved what they got. If we as onlookers just don't make the same mistakes that they did, we won't have the same problems that they did. In this way unexplainable, traumatic acts such as rape can be explained away and therefore be easier to handle.

This is the line of reasoning that many people go through. If a woman can victim blame another woman, then she can eventually say to herself, "That's never happened to me, so it must have been something that she did. Well, if I don't do what they did, then I will be safe." Since women live with the fear of rape all the time, victim blaming makes them feel better about the irregularities of the world. If a man victim blames a woman, it may be because he can't understand that another man - possibly someone that he knows, possibly a friend - can do what the accused did. If another man has the capacity to do that, than that male onlooker may have that capacity, too. It's a frightening thought to think that you could be a rapist. The man may eventually say, "I couldn't do that, and therefore that other guy couldn't do that. It must have been something that she did."

The reason I find is the most believable is the reason that there is sense in the world and that there is a reason for everything. If there is a reason for everything, then there must be a reason for something as insane as rape - even if the reason doesn't seem immediately apparent. Maybe, as many come to think, maybe the reason that it happened is because the victim led her attacker on or didn't do enough to stop him. When someone blames the victim, the behavior is then correctable, and when the victim corrects that 'wrong' behavior, then they feel not only safer, but also a better person for correcting their own faults.

I have often found myself victim blaming, and although I may realize that it is irrational for me to do so, I can't seem to help it. What I have noted, however, is that I only seem to victim blame when it comes to myself. Maybe I do that because experiences that happen to someone else aren't as hard-

hitting as experiences that happen to yourself. You hear news casts of people dead in a plane accident, or of people held hostage by irate third world terrorist groups, or of a woman beaten to death after she was raped, but these experiences, possibly because we don't experience them first hand but only hear about them, don't seem to affect us. Sadly enough, when I hear of these experiences, they don't affect me and I therefore don't have to explain them away through victim blaming. But when I live through an experience and it seems as if there is no reason for the violence or the trauma, I can't help but try to explain it away through investigating my own behavior.

When I hear of another person that has gone through a traumatic experience such as rape, I never think that it was their fault or that they deserved it. When it comes to my own experiences, because I have to explain them away (when I don't have to explain away other's experiences), I find myself victim blaming.

I have always been taught respect and kindness for others. I have always been taught to turn the other cheek when I am hurt, and I have been taught to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Because I possess these qualities, I often have a tendency to think of them as faults and see them as a cause for victim blaming - when it comes to myself.

I was forced into a traumatic sexual experience, and although I had no choice in the matter, I still to this day can't help but feel that there still was something that I could have done. I should have been more explicit in what I wanted. I shouldn't have had so much to drink. I should have seen that he was trying to get me drunk. I shouldn't have been so nice to him. I should have said something afterwards: to him, to the police, to myself. I keep thinking that if I just keep looking over the pieces of the puzzle, something will fall into place and make it all understandable, all comprehensible. I keep thinking that if I keep looking for what I did wrong, once I find it I will be able to explain away what happened.

If I blame myself for what happened, I feel that then the problem is solvable, avoidable, and correctable. It makes my world make sense again.

But the thing is, I can't. I can't try to depend on the myths that surround us to explain away unexplainable behavior. I can't try to hurt myself by blaming myself for something that wasn't my fault.

But sometimes that pain seems better than shattering everything I've always believed in.

This essay was previously published in *cc&d magazine* v085, november 1996, as well as in the book **the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism)**, and the 1995 chapbook *Grappling with the Questions*. It was also published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Challenges magazine* (both August and September 1997), <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, <http://www.artvilla.com/kuypers/prose/prose.html>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/prose/prose.htm>, and *poets2000* at <http://www.poets2000.com/kuyperswriting>.

Index

A

abortion	10, 11-15, 16, 49, 74
ADHD	20
AIDS	46
al-Qaida.....	37
aurora borealis	129

B

baby boomers	84
beauty	52-54
beliefs.....	8, 10, 11-15, 25, 32, 35
the Bible	16
big brother	22, 76, 116
Big Mac.....	45
Bin Laden	22, 32, 36-37
broadcasting	96
the Budget	78
Bundy, Ted	19
President G. W. Bush	5, 12, 16, 22, 24-27, 30, 32, 34-35, 50, 65, 74

C

California.....	7, 17, 27-28, 48
capital gains	88
car	114
cats	42, 44
CAT scan.....	7
Catholic	11, 12, 16, 46
CBS.....	27, 57
cheese.....	44-45, 55, 61
chicken.....	42-43, 44, 46
child/children/kids.....	115, 126, 136
<i>Children, Churches & Daddies</i>	5, 27, 30, 33
China	39, 42, 48, 49, 52, 74
CNN.....	24, 48
corporate/corporations.....	49, 100
cow	17, 42-43, 44, 46, 48, 61
create/creativity.....	20-21, 110-111

D

<i>the Daily Show</i>	27, 32
Democrat.....	26, 27-29, 32, 74
diversity	110-111
divorce.....	92
DNA	86-87

E

emotion.....	14
ethics	94
Ethiopia.....	28

F

Farrell, Mike	
feminism	61-62
freedom	22-23, 24, 49, 74
food chain	46
footbinding	130

G

government	8, 13, 22-23, 28, 30, 32-33, 35, 38-40, 49, 51, 55, 62, 64-65, 69-71, 74, 126
grocery store	114

H

Hannity, Sean	5, 8, 27, 32
Headline News	25
healthcare	62, 63, 74
herpes	46
<i>the Hitchhiker's Guide</i>	25
Hitler.....	13, 34
holy	35-37
hunting	46

		P	
		Paxil.....	20
		philosophy.....	13, 46, 73
		(the) Poconos.....	44
		poetry	128
		political correctness	37, 110-111
		pornography.....	120-125
		prejudice	41
	I		
intellect/intellectual			46
	J		
journalist			28
justice			16-18, 50-51, 59
	K		
Kerry, John			16, 24-26, 27, 32-33, 74
	L		
liberal.....			11, 22, 25, 27-29, 30, 37
Limbaugh, Rush			27
Los Angeles			24
	M		
magazine			5, 6, 29, 33, 46, 68
marriage			33, 35, 41, 60, 92
McDonald's			42, 44-45, 49
McVeigh, Timothy			
media			9, 22, 25, 27-29, 30, 32, 37, 57, 65-66
medicine			118
morals			26, 44, 73
MSNBC			22, 25
MTV.....			22, 26, 32
	N		
newspaper			16, 22, 29, 35, 48, 49, 50, 56-57
New York.....			27-28, 42, 44, 64, 66
	O		
office			25, 32, 56, 59, 68, 69
OJ Simpson			86-87
		R	
		rennet.....	44-45
		Rand, Ayn	13, 18, 24, 25
		religion	132-135, 139
		Republican	5, 8, 11, 16, 22, 25, 32-33, 64, 72, 74
		Ritalin	20
		S	
		sacrifice	24, 60, 74
		sexism	26, 58, 62
		<i>South Park</i>	28
		SuperSize	45
		SUV	29, 46, 62
		T	
		tax.....	11, 12, 17, 28, 39, 40, 55, 70
		terror	23, 33, 35-38, 49, 66, 74
		"type a"	114
		V	
		Valentine's Day.....	98-99
		values	22, 25, 26, 37, 46, 73, 74
		vegetarian	5, 42-43, 44-47, 48
		volunteer	89
		W	
		war (World Wars, the War on Terror, the Korean War, the Viet Nam War)	16, 26, 30, 32, 35-37, 61, 66, 74
		Whopper	45
		women	58-62, 130, 140

About The Author

Janet Kuypers has a Communications degree in News/Editorial Journalism (computer science engineering studies) from UIUC. She had the equivalent of a minor in photography and specialized in creative writing.

A portrait photographer for years in the early 1990s, she was also an acquaintance rape workshop facilitator, and an editor of two literary magazines. Later she was an art director, webmaster and photographer for a few magazines for a publishing company in Chicago.

She sang with acoustic bands "Mom's Favorite Vase", "Weeds and Flowers" and "the Second Axing" (where she had concerts in Chicago and Alaska), does music sampling and learned to play the guitar.

Kuypers is published in books, magazines and on the internet around 9,300 times for writing, and almost 17,500 times for art work in her professional career, and has been profiled in such magazines as Nation and Discover U. She has also been highlighted on radio stations, including WEFT, WZRD (88.3FM), WLS (8900AM), the internet radio stations ArtistFirst.com, chicagopoetry.com's Poetry World Radio and Scars Internet Radio (SIR), and was even shortly on Q101 FM radio. She has also appeared on television for poetry in Nashville and Chicago, and was interviewed on her art work on Urbana's WCIA channel 3 10 o'clock news.

She turned her writing into performance art on her own and with musical groups like "Pointless Orchestra," "5D/5D" and "Order From Chaos." She has performed spoken word and music across the country - in the spring of 1998 she embarked on her first national tour, with featured performances, among other venues, at the Albuquerque Spoken Word Festival during the National Poetry Slam. In 2003 she hosted and performed at a weekly poetry and music open mic (called "Sing Your Life"), and starting in 2002 was a featured performance artist, doing quarterly performance art shows with readings, music and images.

In addition to being published with Bernadette Miller in the short story collection book *Domestic Blisters*, Kuypers has had twelve books of her own published: *Hope Chest in the Attic*, *The Window*, *Close Cover Before Striking*, (woman.), *Autumn Reason* (novel in letter form), *Contents Under Pressure*, *the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism)*, etc., and eventually *The Key To Believing* (650 page epic novel), *Changing Gears* (after travel throughout the majority of the United States by car) and *The Other Side* (after travel through 9 European Countries immediately after the war on terror began). Three collection books were also published in 2004, *Oeuvre* (poetry), *Exaro Versus* (prose) and *L'arte* (art).

Although he has not written about her travel through China, or Puerto Rico, or even Canada, Kuypers continues to keep traveling — and keep writing, and continue documenting the world through her photography skills.



final note

There aren't many times when you can get on your soapbox and tell your opinion to the world. I regularly go to poetry open mike shows, and while driving there I listen to the likes of Sean Hannity on talk radio, the Republican idol in political punditry who calls not only every veteran but also everyone who agrees with him a "great American," all while downplaying everyone else's beliefs over the radio waves. Then I get to the poetry reading and listen to poets spout off on how they *hate* President Bush (yes, they're quite vehement about it) and anything Republican.

And I just shut my mouth and listen to these clashing views, knowing the neither side wants to listen to anyone else, and even with reason thrown in their face, they'll still believe whatever they want to believe.

People like being on their soapboxes.

Well, I suppose I've had my own soapbox for years as the editor of the literary/art magazine *Children, Churches & Daddies*. Though it started in 1993, I didn't start writing editorials for it until probably 1995, but that still gave me ten years of "spouting" on pretty much a monthly basis. Some of the editorials have appeared in the essays section of the books **Hope Chest in the Attic** (1993), **Close cover Before Striking** (1996), **(woman.)** (1996), **Contents Under Pressure** (1997), **Changing Gears** (1998-2004), **Rinse and Repeat** (1999), **The Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism)** (1999-2004), **Survive and Thrive** (2000), **Balance** (2004), and **Chaos Theory** (2005). We wanted to make sure that these editorials, which more often than not only appear in small-circulation in the literary magazine, held a more permanent place.

The editorials in these pages cover everything from abortion, to war... to vegetarianism, or to keeping your rights in a presumable free country. — ideas that everyone at one time or another thinks about. We all have ideas, and we want to share them with people, to learn and to grow.

We wanted to make sure these ideas were not lost, because good ideas are a terrible thing to waste.



Janet Kuypers

Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

P.S.: I'm sure in time I'll develop more editorials, because something always happens in the world that invites protest. I think that's the key, to keep looking for things that happen in the world, and to keep thinking about the world, to come up with the right ideas.

Colophon

The body typeface used is Adobe Garamond (plus Bold and Italic), and LinoText was used for the credit line on the copyright page for Penny Dreadful Press. Headlines for titles include Type Attic, Type Harting and Type Vintage-One, and additional fonts used include American Typewriter, Impact, Marker, McGarey Fractured, Trajan and Zapf Dingbats.

This book was designed using QuarkXpress v6.5, images were edited using Adobe Photoshop v7.0, after using a Microtek flatbed scanner. The background image on the covers is of a stack of newspapers (photographed in Naples, Florida). Covers images include a stock image of a typewriter, and images of Kuypers are with her and a microphone, since she is a singer and performance artist and has frequented radio stations with readings and interviews.

Credits

All of the writings in this book have publication credits at the end of every piece. However, every single piece in this book has also been published in **DeepThoughts on the Writing of Kuypers** at <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/prose/prose.htm>, **Chaotic Kuypers** at www.chaoticarts.org/chaotic-writing/prose/prose.htm, <http://www.janetkuypers.com> and <http://scars.tv>.



for sale

<u>title</u>	<u>price</u>	<u>#copies</u>	<u>total</u>
Hope Chest in the Attic <i>poetry book</i>	\$10.95
The Key To Believing <i>novel</i>	\$13.23
Etc. <i>poetry book</i>	\$9.95
Changing Gears <i>travel book</i>	\$10.95
The Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism) <i>poetry & prose book</i>	\$10.95
Domestic Blisters <i>prose book</i>	\$9.95
Oeuvre <i>poetry collection book</i>	\$16.22
Exaro Versus <i>prose collection book</i>	\$16.22
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How Do I Get There/ <i>performance art CD</i>	\$6.22
Contact•Conflict•Control <i>performance art CD</i>	\$6.22
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The Other Side, The Boss Lady's Editorials
and The Boss Lady's Editorials 2005

Expanded Edition is available through
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Close Cover Before Striking
(Woman.)
Autumn Reason
Contents Under Pressure
the Average Guy's Guide (to feminism)
Changing Gears
The Key To Believing
Domestic Blisters *with Bernadette Miller*
etc.
Oeuvre *poetry collection book*
Exaro Versus *prose collection book*
L'arte *art book*
The Other Side

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Death in Málaga
the Svetasvatara Upanishad
the Swan Road
The Significance of the Frontier
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Memento Mori
R.I.P.
Bob the Bumblebee
Remnants & Shadows

Collection Books

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Slate and Marrow
Blister and Burn
Rinse and Repeat
Survive and Thrive
(not so) Warm and Fuzzy
Torture and Triumph
Oh.
the Elements
Side A/Side B
Balance

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The Beauty & The Destruction *Weeds & Flowers*
Something Is Sweating. *The Second Axing*
Stop. Look. Listen to the Music *MFV, w&f, axe*
Live in Alaska *The Second Axing*
Sing Your Life *The Second Axing*

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Seeing Things Differently
Change Rearrange
Stop Look Listen
Tick Tock *5D/5D*
Six One One
The Entropy Project *Order From Chaos*
Moving Performances *mp3 compilation CD*
Death Comes in Threes
Changing Gears
The Other Side *CD tracks & live performance show*
Dreams
How Do I Get There?
Contact•Conflict•Control
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Nick DiSpoldo, Small Press Review: Kuypers...demands political, economic & social equality ... I like Kuypers because she is clear, unequivocal & cleverly calculating.

Jason Pettus: The things I like the best so far are the little stories, the things about day-to-day life that don't seem to have any neat wrap-up at the end.

Angela Uptmor-Herrera:

I want to praise (Kuypers') essay on pornography. It's wonderful to know that there are intelligent young women out there that "cannot be submissive" either, and are not! Keep up the inspiring work; I intend to be an avid fan.

