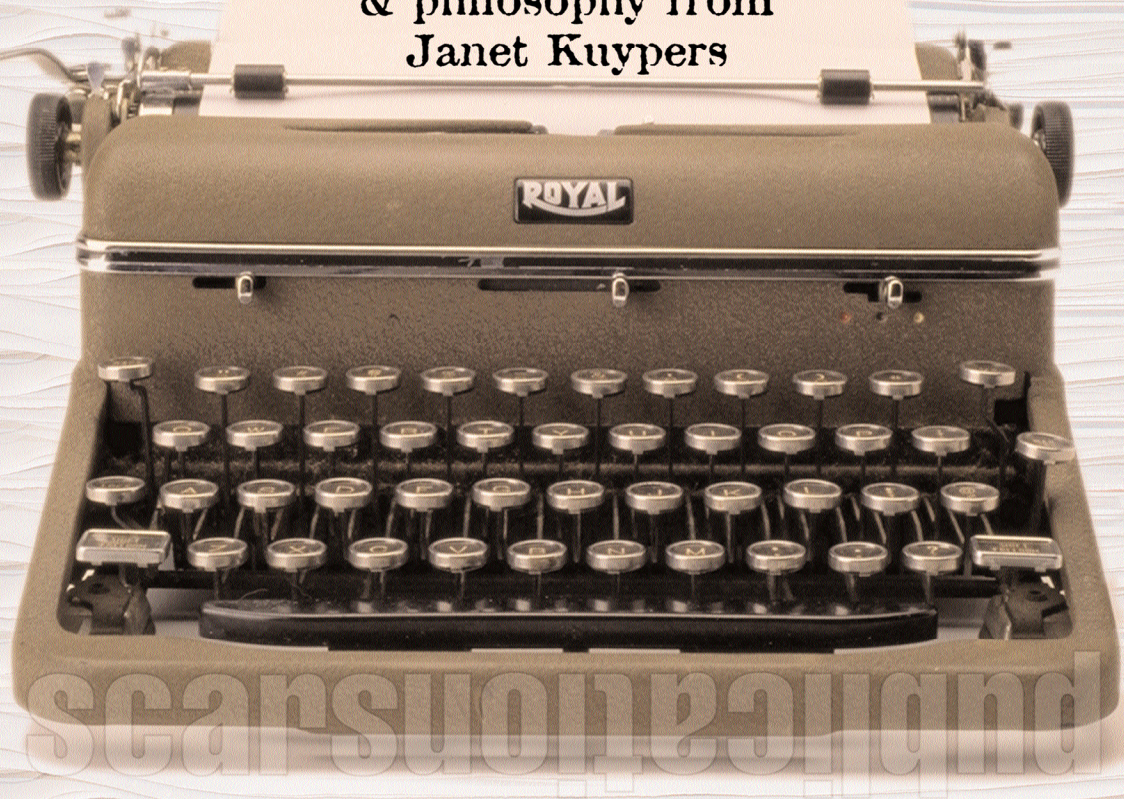


the
bosses
lady's
editorials

editorials, essays
& philosophy from
Janet Kuypers



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the
boss
lady's
editorials

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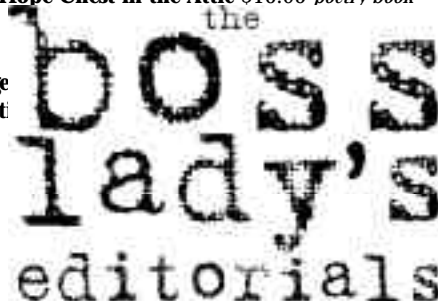
“I think I just want to be someone
that makes people think.”

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

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TOO

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dedication

There aren't many times when you can get on your soapbox and tell you 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 ever 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 appears in the essays section of the books **Close cover Before Striking** (1996), **Contents Under Pressure** (1997), **Rinse and Repeat** (1999), **Survive and Thrive** (2000), **Balance** (2004), and **Chaos Theory** (2005). Although the two editorials that appeared in *Balance* are also in this collection, no other writings in the other books appear here. We wanted to make sure that these editorials, which usually 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.

We wanted to make sure these ideas were not lost, because good ideas are a terrible thing to waste.



Janet Kuypers
Editor in Chief

*this book is dedicated to ideas..
to researching, learning & growing,
to gain ideas to help you though life*

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 of the Schindlers) around 5:30 a.m. EST, Schiavo collapsed in the hallway of her St. Petersburg apartment, where she then went into cardiac arrest and suffered severe brain damage. The cardiac arrest is believed to be due to a bulimia nervosa-induced hypokalemia (insanely low potassium), and while waiting for the paramedics to arrive, she experienced a loss of oxygen to the brain. Schiavo remained unconscious and fell into a coma. To keep her alive, Schiavo was intubated, ventilated and trached; she was also given a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy (PEG) to provide nutrition and hydration. She came out of the coma two and a half months later, but never regained consciousness nor had any evidence of 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



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

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 hav-

ing 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.

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 my 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.abortionsprolife.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.

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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 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 were 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 the 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.

The Liberal Media

The Republican talk radio shows (you know, with the Rush Limbaughs and the Sean Hannitys of the world) always talk about the “liberal media.” I know *Scars Publications* is a part of the media (*so to speak*), and I don't think *Children, Churches & Daddies* is really “liberal.” But when it comes to broadcast journalism, television in particular, we need to objectively ask: *is* the media liberal, and if so — why?

Before the election, CBS media got in trouble for not checking its sources about the legitimacy of President Bush's past military experience. They were even documented as saying that they may not have had the guarantees for the legitimacy of their story, but they went with it anyway, because if it wasn't right, there were other problems with Bush, because, well, they thought he was wrong for the country.

And on election day, they would poll people leaving the booths to see how they voted, and their returns indicated that Kerry was in the lead.

When they saw that their post-voting polling wasn't accurate, they found that the people looking for results asked *mostly* women, which may have slanted the vote toward Kerry.

I mean Hell, even fake news shows like *the Daily Show* seem to revel in their hatred of the Republican Party, and every audience member there praises anything to do with Democrats like Kerry. They would interview conservative politicians, and they would occasionally even get boos from the audience during their interviews.

And I was thinking about this, and I thought about the fact that Bush won a good majority of the states, so I started to think that maybe the media *is* “liberal.” So the next question I have to ask is, *why*.

Well, the first reason I'd guess for the media touting liberal ideas would be that they were appealing to what people wanted to hear. Makes sense, because in order to keep people listening, they will report the news — and they'll also report *what people want to hear*.

That make sense to me, but...

But if more people voted for Bush, then I would think that *more* people wouldn't want to hear all of these views of how wonderful Kerry was.

So then I pulled back to think about this.



Then, I pulled *way* back. All the way back to looking at the entire country. I looked at the states that had a strong pull for Kerry, versus a strong pull for Bush.

And the thing I noticed was that the Democratic states were states with major cities. Illinois (holding Chicago) went to Kerry. And yeah, living in the Chicago area, I'd go to regular poetry open mics and hear people talk about their utter hatred for Bush. And yeah, the other bigger city players were Democratic states — New York and California both went to Kerry.

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 peole 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 : 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 "naive" spelled backwards...).

Maybe we *have* been naive; 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 live 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\ **ba** (1): preconceived judgement or opinion
(2) an opinion or leaning adverse to anything without just grounds or without sufficient knowledge
ba: an instance of such judgement or opinion
an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed 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 do to everything else.

And after a second, I thought, well, maybe I don't want to *pay* someone 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.

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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.

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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 judgements 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" make 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.”

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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 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.



“Damn it 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.

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 molestor 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 a a group if 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 hies 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 could 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 day, 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 eight-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.

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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.

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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.

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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 American 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 dee jay 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 work that to her was otherwise free. It’s horrific that he 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 keep 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**.

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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.

About The Author

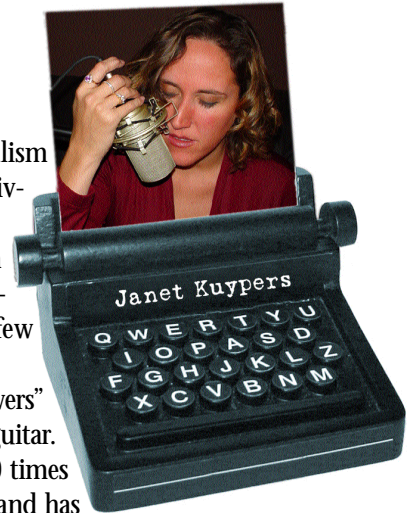
Janet Kuypers has a Communications degree in News/Editorial Journalism (computer science engineering studies) from the UIUC. She had the equivalent of a minor in photography and specialized in creative writing.

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,” 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; her bands have had concerts in Chicago and in Alaska; 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*, *the Average Guy’s Guide (to Feminism)*, *Contents Under Pressure*, etc., and eventually *The Key To Believing*, *Changing Gears* and *The Other Side*. Three collection books were published in 2004, *Oeuvre* (poetry), *Exaro Versus* (prose) and *L’arte* (art).





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<u>title</u>	<u>price</u>	<u>#copies</u>	<u>total</u>
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Live in Alaska *The Second Axing*
Sing Your Life *The Second Axing*

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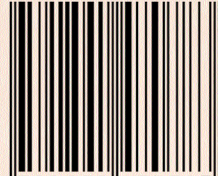
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Nick DiSpoldo, Small Press Review:
Kuypers...demands political, economic & social equality ... I like Kuypers because she is clear, unequivocal & cleverly calculating.

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 your inspiring work; I intend to be an avid fan.

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