

commentary

from other pens...

Jacqueline Kennedy and the White House

By Lawrence L. Knutson

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — "I want to make this a grand house." With those words, spoken shortly after her husband's inauguration as president, Jacqueline Kennedy set in motion an investment in White House history that is still paying dividends four decades later.

"Young and energetic, with a sense of style that captured the attention of the nation, Jacqueline Kennedy took a hands-on approach to changes in the house," writes White House curator Betty C. Monkman in her recent, lavishly illustrated history of White House furnishings.

The new first lady organized the elegant reshaping of the stiff, hotel-like interiors of the old mansion, then caught the public's admiring attention with her televised tour of what had been accomplished.

The White House Historical Association, the nonprofit institution she founded, carries on the work. It is a major source of funding for restoration, the acquiring of antiques and art important to the White House story.

Hugh Sidey, now the association's chairman but then White House correspondent for Time magazine, remembers Mrs. Kennedy looking out from the Truman Balcony with its unmatched view down the South Lawn and out to the Jefferson Memorial.

"She explained she wanted to make the place a living museum that would highlight American history and display the development of art in America," Sidey said.

All of this represented a break with the past. In the spring of 1882, 24 wagon loads of discarded presidential trappings were trundled out of the White House and sold to the highest bidder.

"The sale is worthy of the attention of persons desiring souvenirs," the auctioneer advertised, noting many of the items were "very antique."

In an era far more protective of the past, the auctioneer's gavel is likely to fall on the sale of artifacts returning to the White House collections.

That's an accomplishment due in large part to the White House Historical Association and its financial arms, including the White House Endowment which pays the basic costs of White House redecoration.

Founded in November 1961, at Mrs. Kennedy's request, the association generates a stream of revenue based on donations, book sales and the seasonal sale of popular White House Christmas ornaments.

The money has covered expenses for which no tax dollars are available. The list includes purchase of art, antique furniture, replacement of worn carpets, redecoration of the Blue and Red rooms and last year's purchase of a new set of china to commemorate the mansion's 200th anniversary.

A current project involves refurbishing of some chandeliers and lanterns. Publication of the guidebook is the association's founding moment.

The first lady believed the story should be available to the hundreds of thousands who visit the White House each year.

"In all truth, she was editor of the book," says Robert Breeden, who was then on the staff of the National Geographic Magazine, which illustrated and published the guide. "She selected the typeface, determined subjects for photos, read every proof and made comments."

The magazine borrowed a city fire truck and shot the North Front of the White House from the top of its 90-foot ladder to get the cover shot Mrs. Kennedy wanted, says Breeden, the association's director emeritus.

Neil Horstman, the association's president, notes the book is now in its 20th edition and has sold more than 8 million copies over 40 years.

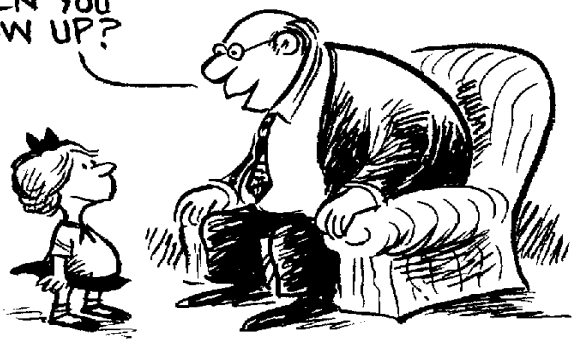
Horstman charts an ambitious future, centering on telling the stories of White House history in exhibits, books, seminars, videos, a partnership with Scholastic magazine and through a rapidly expanding Web site.

Sidey says consideration is being given to founding a history prize, underwriting a television series and celebrating next year's centennial of the West Wing as the quarters of the presidential staff.

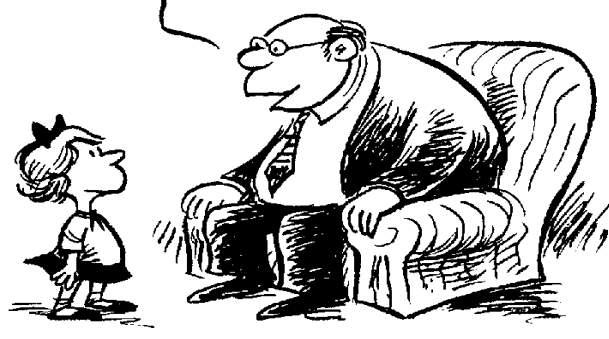
"The White House has been a stage for the biggest events of American history for 200 years," Sidey said. "There are wonderful stories to tell."

EDITOR'S NOTE—Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for more than 30 years.

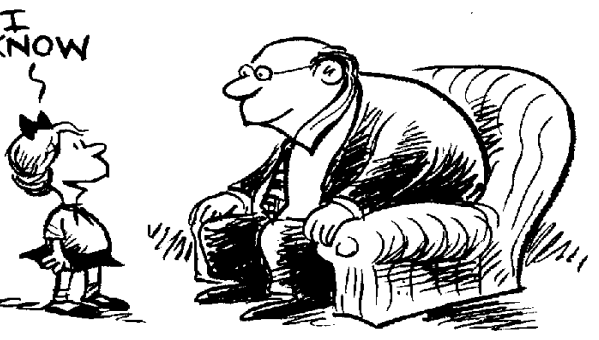
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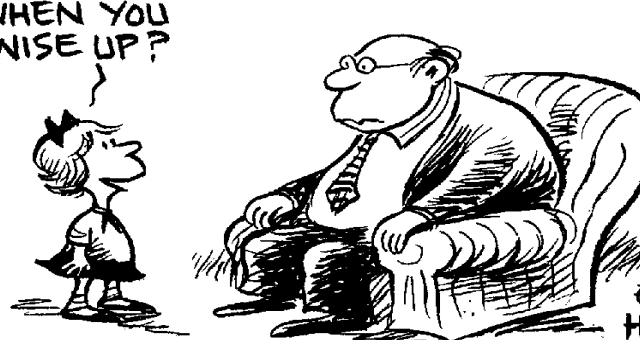
WE REALLY NEED TEACHERS AND NURSES



I KNOW



WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO PAY WHEN YOU WISE UP?



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Thesaurus not best way to find right word

Say what you mean; mean what you say. Write what you know. If in doubt, leave it out.

Those are a few of the rules of good writing. And, on most writers, bookshelves is a copy of Roget's Thesaurus. For most professional writers, Roget is an emergency source to help us overcome writer's block. Most households also probably have at least one copy of that book. Many use it to help them solve crossword puzzles. But many other people use it as a dangerous writing crutch.

In another maxim, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. A little knowledge, dangerously incomplete knowledge, is exactly what Roget gives his readers.

In this month's Atlantic Monthly, Simon Winchester writes that Peter Mark Roget's book is a hazard to the English language.

Reading Winchester's article, "Word Imperfect," reminded me of a girl who lived down the hall from me in college. I could always tell when she had a paper due because she would borrow my copy of Roget's Thesaurus.

When I asked her why she wanted the book, she said she wanted to sound more educated. Instead, she often sounded pretentious or just plain laughable. The words she grabbed out of Roget in order to "sound educated" weren't exactly what she meant to say or they were words that no one else knew. She probably didn't know them, either. If it was listed in Roget, she probably believed the word she used was acceptable. But even if she used words that had the right meaning, writing over your readers, heads destroys the purpose of your writing, which is communication.

My friend's experience points out the thesaurus, great weakness. Roget's work does not define the terms that he calls synonymous. Sometimes they



roxie yonkey

• star tracks

are a near synonym. The definitions were left out because Roget was a brilliant man and he did not need definitions to tell him a word's meaning.

He may not have needed definitions to teach us the shades of meaning between his synonyms and near-synonyms, but we do. The English language's millions of words are rich with shades of meaning. When writers use unfamiliar words, they either display their own ignorance or they lose their confused audience.

My college friend isn't the only person to abuse Roget. Winchester cites a student who "attempted to improve the phrase His earthly fingers, with His chthonic digits."

My on-line dictionary doesn't list "chthonic," which is a good sign that no writer should use that word. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines the word as "earth" with a synonym as humble and antonym as infernal (as in hellish).

Obviously, this student really didn't know what he was writing. He likely just wanted to "sound educated."

This student — and my friend — were saying what they thought they meant, but who can tell? They certainly weren't communicating well.

They should have paid attention to the maxim "If in doubt, leave it out." Any word a writer has to look up in the dictionary is probably not a good word to use. If in doubt of a word's meaning, look it up to

add to your own knowledge. But if you're in doubt of the meaning, many of your readers likely will be, too. If you don't need the word to express a precise shade of meaning, use another, plainer, one.

Roget also has another fatal flaw, according to Winchester. Roget's "definitions" are divided into two groups, those words that are synonyms (sort of) and antonyms (sort of). They are grouped together in the thesaurus. But Roget doesn't indicate those words that fall somewhere in between.

To use a simple example, hot and cold are opposites. "Hot" is listed first in my copy of Roget's, followed by "Cold" and its synonyms. But my copy of Roget's lists synonyms for "hot" as "heated," which is fine, but it then goes on to list "warm," "tepid," "lukewarm" and — worst of all — "unfrozen" as possible synonyms. Those terms lie somewhere between hot and cold. Lukewarm certainly isn't hot. Just drink a can of room-temperature pop sometime. That's lukewarm.

"Cold" isn't as bad. The only "tweener" word listed in that category is "cool." But "cool" isn't exactly "cold." A cool day requires a jacket; a cold day requires a coat.

Using English is just like using a tool out of the toolbox. If you use the wrong size wrench to loosen a bolt (Roget lists "loosen" with "circumsize") or the wrong size screwdriver to remove a screw, you're likely to strip them and render them unusable. So it is with words. Use the wrong word and you're likely to confuse or offend your readers and/or make yourself look ridiculous.

So ditch that Roget — or just use it for your crossword puzzle — and write what you know.

After all, it's better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth — or scribble with your pen — and remove all doubt.

Finally it's spring: Words of wisdom XXVII

I'm writing this column on a spring-like day. Though the first day of spring is officially a few days off, today is a tease of the beautiful days to come.

Yes, I know that as you read this column, spring is well underway. It's nearly the end of April, after all, and spring should be here already. However, because of my heavy travel schedule during the next several weeks, I'm writing this column in March so I can enjoy the travel without added pressure of column deadlines.

So as I write this, it isn't yet Spring. Today's spring-like weather has given me a bad case of spring fever. In the warmth of the late afternoon sun, I am cooking steak and vegetable shish-kabobs on the grill. As I enjoy the evening, I am anticipating the end of winter and the coming of spring.

There is something comforting to me in the cycle of the seasons. While I dislike the cold of winter, I know it is necessary to ensure the coming of spring. As January turns into February, and February drags into March, my thoughts are already on the warm sun, flowers, buds and freshness of spring.

I'm looking forward to spring and welcome it as a time of renewal. I will reach gladly for the hope of new life and new opportunities this spring brings. Spring is my favorite season because of new life. Every new leaf and every new sprout is a promise of renewal.

Here are a few thoughts on the wondrous season of spring. I hope they spur a burst of life in your veins.

Thoughts on Spring
No winter lasts forever, no spring skips its turn.

where to write

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don taylor

• minding your own business

April is a promise that May is bound to keep, and we know it. - Hal Borland

The world's favorite season is the spring. All things seem possible in May. - Edwin Way Teale

Long stormy spring-time, wet contentious April, winter chilling the lap of very May; but at length the season of summer does come. - Thomas Carlyle

If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome. - Anne Bradstreet

An optimist is the human personification of spring. - Susan J. Bissonette

We grow great by dreams. All big men are dreamers. They see things in the soft haze of a spring day or in the red fire of a long winter's evening. Some of us let these great dreams die, but others nourish and protect them; nurse them through bad days till they bring them to the sunshine and light which comes always to those who sincerely hope that their dreams will come true. - Woodrow Wilson

There is so much to be thankful for! The feeling of springtime promise in the air after the cold grayness of a winter season; the drops of rain take on new meaning. They are not the dull accompaniment to a somber, gray sky and relentless chill, but

bear the promise of new life and renewed energy to the rootlets and buds. - Helen Keller

If spring came but once in a century, instead of once a year, or burst forth with the sound of an earthquake, and not in silence, what wonder and expectation there would be in all hearts to behold the miraculous change! But now the silent succession suggests nothing but necessity. To most men only the cessation of the miracle would be miraculous, and the perpetual exercise of God's power seems less wonderful than its withdrawal would be. - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

To shorten winter, borrow some money due in spring. - W. J. Vogel

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