

commentary

from other pens...

Postal workers need to be in our thoughts

The Garden City Telegram on postal employees:
The postal workers have a good point.
While Congress closed shop after an anthrax-filled envelope to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's office infected 28 of his aides Oct. 15, the danger to people who sort and deliver the mail was overlooked. Indeed, while more than 5,000 congressional workers were being tested for exposure to the deadly bacteria, two postal workers from Washington's Brentwood mail center were quietly dying from the disease.
Not until three days after the letter was discovered in Daschle's office did someone decide that postal workers in facilities where such letters originated should be tested. By then, it was too late to save two people who had inhaled the germ. ...
Tuesday, Oct. 30, a U.S. Postal Service repair facility in Topeka was closed after it was determined that it had received equipment from the Brentwood facility and those in Florida and New Jersey where anthrax-contaminated mail had been handled. ...
Postal workers are asking why it took so long to address the potential dangers they face, while the response on Capitol Hill was immediate and absolute. ...
Such errors by the government are inherent in this new kind of war, and there will be more before victory has been proclaimed. It's important that we realize we all bear responsibility for our own well-being, even if the government is a little slow to respond to a new challenge.
The situation with the postal workers certainly has been a learning experience. It's a shame that the lesson came at the price of human life.

Lawrence Journal-World on school funding:
It's good that Gov. Bill Graves isn't shirking his responsibility for funding public schools in Kansas, but statements he made to a group of parents and educators ... in Topeka may be too little and too late.
Graves said he accepted some of the blame for inadequately funding K-12 education in Kansas for the last several years, but he was quick to spread that blame to state legislators. He argued that he had proposed significant budget increases for school districts every year but those proposals had been shot down by the Legislature. ...
If the governor is throwing down the gauntlet, daring legislators to put the state's money where their mouths are, power to him. If he's just making excuses in advance for failing once again to improve school funding, shame on him. ...
If the governor feels as passionately as he says he does about improving the quality of public schools in Kansas he should put a plan on the table and fight for it. He should take his proposal to Kansans and tell them why they should urge their elected representatives to vote for it. Next year is an election year. The governor can't run for re-election so he has nothing to lose — but legislators do. Graves could turn public education into an issue that could make or break many legislative re-election campaigns across the state. ...
Graves could help improve education funding by giving Kansans a plan they can get behind, a plan they can point to as they tell their local representatives what they should vote for. That's the kind of leadership the state has been looking for on public education. Graves should provide it.

where to write

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715

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Teddy-bear and angry

Barbara Ehrenreich's hair has grown back in unmanageable curls, a revelation for a middle-aged woman who, until last year, couldn't have teased a wave from her hair if she'd plunged her head into a Mixmaster.

The hair is now the only physical sign of Ehrenreich's recent bout with breast cancer. Well, the hair and the eye-popping essay in this month's Harper's magazine.

Ehrenreich, the former Time magazine columnist and author most recently of "Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America," blasts what she describes as the pink-ribboned, teddy-bear, feel-good cult that has turned the horrible disease of breast cancer into some kind of a transformative rite of passage that offers women spiritual upward mobility and endless opportunities for self-improvement.

"So pervasive is the perkiness of the breast cancer world," she writes, "that unhappiness requires a kind of apology."

And: "... obedience is the message behind the infantilizing theme in breast-cancer culture ... You are encouraged to regress to a little-girl state, to suspend critical judgment and to accept whatever measures the doctors, as parent surrogates, choose to impose."

I wolfed down the essay like popcorn, not because I necessarily agree with Ehrenreich — who knows if I would be as offended as she by the fluffy kitsch and smiley-face attitudes if I were stricken? I loved the piece because she said the unsayable.

In these super-sensitive times when we navigate conversations as if tip-toeing across a floor of pup-



joan ryan

• commentary

pies, such unrepentant candor — about anything! — stands out like red chiffon at a convent.

"So far I've gotten positive responses — 'Oh, thank goodness somebody finally said it' — but I'm waiting for the hate mail, too," she said over iced coffee in a cafe near the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. Ehrenreich, who has a Ph.D. in cell biology, is in Berkeley teaching a five-week course on essay writing and another in sociology.

When she was diagnosed, her primary emotion was of righteous anger. She hated that the existing treatments caused horrible nausea, hair loss, disfigurement, shattered sexual confidence, lost time at work.

She found that while the richest and most mainstream breast-cancer organizations looked for "the cure," they weren't spending much time or money unmasking environmental causes of the disease. Hooking up with environmental activists might chase away corporate donations. AstraZeneca, for example, sponsored Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Until a reorganization in 2000, this company was also a leading producer of pesticides, Ehrenreich writes, including acetochlor, classified by the EPA as a "probable human carcinogen."

Giving life the slipcover



red green

• north of forty

I remember as a kid going to visit my grandparents and noticing that they had plastic slipcovers on most of their furniture. I'm just now starting to realize the implications of that practice. Putting plastic seat covers on new furniture says so much. It says that neither you nor any of your friends are worthy of sitting on this stuff. It also tells any furniture salesman that you are not planning to make any purchases in the foreseeable future. It tells your children that you care enough about them to keep your estate in showroom condition. It tells the medical world that you plan on outliving any furniture that doesn't have plastic seat covers. (Or it could be telling the medical world that you have some control problems.) It tells your business partners that you are a frugal person who spends money wisely and protects your investments. Mainly, it says "Hey, when I buy stuff like furniture, I don't want to spend any more of my disposable income than absolutely necessary. Not as long as we live in a world with trucks and boats and RV's." That's why only grandparents have plastic seat covers. It's the kind of wisdom that comes with age.

TALKING SOLO

Men have trouble communicating. They say we don't talk much. Some of you older guys know what I mean. Remember when you asked your wife to marry you 20 years ago? She's been waiting for an interesting follow-up question ever since. "Are you going to finish that sandwich?" doesn't count.

I find that as men get older they actually talk more than they did when they were young. The only difference is, they're talking to themselves. You've all done it. Wandering around the house trying to find your wallet and pretty soon you're

muttering away like that weird guy in the park who thinks your dog is a communist. Sure, sometimes we cover it up by talking to the television or the radio, but deep down we know the people selling deodorant can't actually hear us making suggestions for what we think they should do with it. Now the way I see it, talking to yourself is nothing to be ashamed of. You have some things that need to be said, but you don't want to offend anyone. Saying them to yourself when you're alone is saving your job and your marriage. So when you ladies see us talking to ourselves, just leave us alone. You'll know when we're ready to have a conversation with you, because we'll stop talking.

FORBIDDEN PLEASURES

I was at a video store last week. As I walked past the adult section, I saw a movie called Forbidden Pleasures, which made me think of how much that phrase can change in meaning as we get a little older. Here's a revamped list of Forbidden Pleasures for middle-aged guys like me:

- Sleeping through the entire night.
- Staying awake the entire day.
- Not having to explain why you're wearing a bandage.
- Finding out your brother-in-law's sitar concert has been canceled.

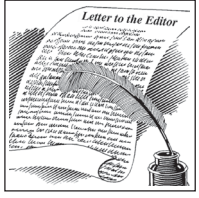
Thanks for Halloween night fun

To the Editor:

The Goodland Police Department hosted a Halloween Trick or Treat stand on Halloween night at the Goodland City Building.

I would like to thank the sponsors of this event: Goodland Coca Cola Bottling Co., for furnishing the drinks; Goodland Area Crime Stoppers for providing the Trick or Treat bags with Halloween safety tips; the Goodland Kiwanis for the pencils and other bag "stuffers"; and the police officers who put together the bags and volunteered to hand out the bags and drinks.

But most of all, thanks to the parents and chil-



from our readers

• to the editor

dren who stopped by to share their Halloween fun.

Ray L. Smee
Chief of Police

Letter Policy

The Goodland Daily News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. Form letters will be rejected, as will letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters, with phone numbers, by e-mail to: cdaily@nwkansas.com.

This led the Cancer Prevention Coalition to condemn Breast Cancer Awareness Month as "a public relations invention by a major polluter which puts women in the position of being unwitting allies of the very people who make them sick."

As for the corporations, Ehrenreich writes, involvement in the breast cancer effort is a way of appealing to the middle-aged female market "without being feminist."

As an experiment, Ehrenreich posted a statement on one of the many breast cancer Web sites. She listed her complaints about treatments, insurance companies, environmental carcinogens and "sappy pink ribbons." She received a chorus of rebukes.

"You need to run, not walk, to some counseling ... I ask everyone on this site to pray for you so you can enjoy life to the fullest," wrote one respondent.

Many women who have suffered through the disease, Ehrenreich said, don't see how "you can get through the treatment experience without convincing yourself it's a makeover."

"The potential harm in all this," she said, "is the intolerance of the human variance of emotion. You're slapped down, if you express anger. There's something wrong with that."

For her, breast cancer will never be a source of identity or pride. It is an abomination that cannot be tied up nicely in a pink ribbon.

"I know this much," she writes. "I will not go into that last good night with a teddy bear tucked under my arm."

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

- Being with a woman who orders nachos.
- Being complimented on how you look in your favorite jogging pants.
- Being left home alone with a satellite dish and extra batteries for the remote.

BOXED IN

It was pointed out to me the other day that refrigerators now have a small compartment in the door where you put butter to keep it soft. This is done with a little heater. So if you imagine a cold day, what we have is a big box that we live in to keep us warm and inside that box is a smaller box that we put food in to keep it cold and inside that box is an even smaller box to keep butter warm. I can't believe the government isn't involved in this somehow.

Quote of the Day: "People who know where they're going don't need to hurry." - Red Green
Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

berry's world

