

commentary

from other pens...

Women are liberated; not always protected

The Topeka Capital-Journal on domestic violence:

In the United States, we consider women liberated and society enlightened.

We need to reconsider whether either is really true.

We may not be home to the Taliban, but women in the United States can be oppressed and abused right here at home just as they can be in other countries. The difference is, of course, our societal institutions are called upon to protect women from abuse.

We're not doing it.

Kansas requires that a woman either live with a man or have a child with him before the law will step in to protect her from abuse.

That's just a little backward, wouldn't you say? Like, to the frontier days?...

A House bill ... would close the loophole.

It should be passed immediately, if not sooner. For some women out there, it may be a matter of life or death ...

So let's send them real hope. Hope that society cares enough about the safety and dignity of women and girls that we're willing to stand up for them when they need us.

Hope that abuse victims don't have to fulfill outdated notions of what is considered domestic abuse in order for the law to step in and stop illegality.

Hope that if more resources are needed in the law enforcement system to protect unmarried, non-cohabitating, childless victims of abuse, then lawmakers will make it enough of a priority to find the resources.

Failure is not an option when it comes to protecting the innocent.

The Manhattan Mercury on Sen. Kay O'Connor:

We haven't often agreed with state Sen. Kay O'Connor, a conservative Republican from Olathe. We didn't hesitate to criticize her last fall when she questioned the wisdom of the 19th Amendment ...

She's held other positions with which we have disagreed ... But her candor over time has been admirable. She hasn't been sneaky.

The same, unfortunately, can't be said of some of her constituents who want to remove her from office ...

It's one thing to be sufficiently outraged at an elected official to want her removed from office. Our system has recall provisions for just such situations.

It's quite another to set up an elected official as Sen. O'Connor was set up. That occurred when a woman came to the O'Connor's house in November and asked Mr. O'Connor ... to sign a petition seeking his wife's recall. He called his wife to the door and she discussed the petition with the woman ...

What Sen. O'Connor also did not know was that the woman was not working alone. Nor was the visitor on a simple mission to gather signatures. Another person some distance away ... captured the conversation on videotape.

Though there is little dispute about the facts, a judge on Thursday said the petition carrier did not have to identify who did the secretive filming ...

Regardless of how the case is resolved ... she deserved better than to be tricked at her front door by people who also manipulated the democratic process. So do voters in that district.

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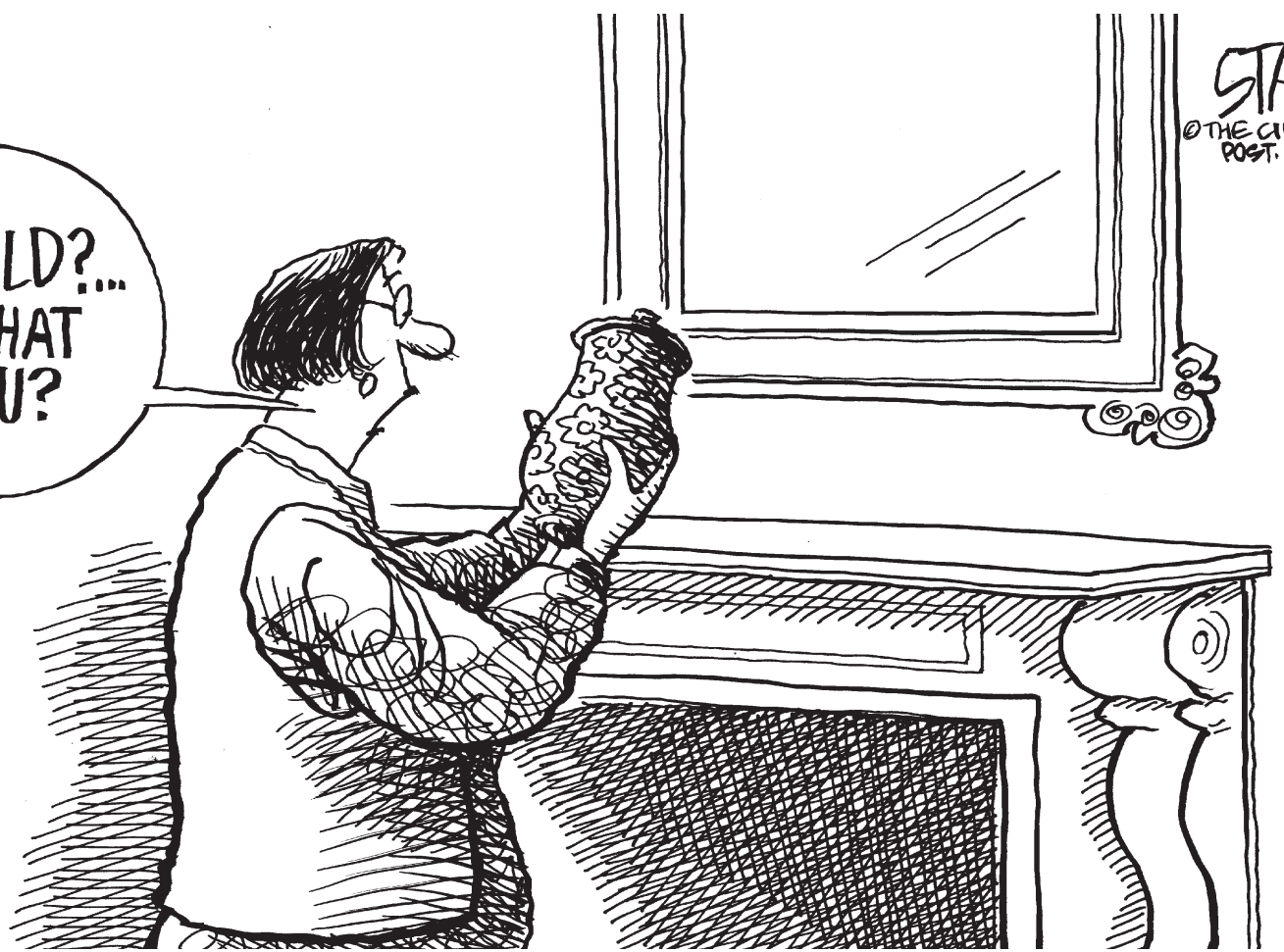
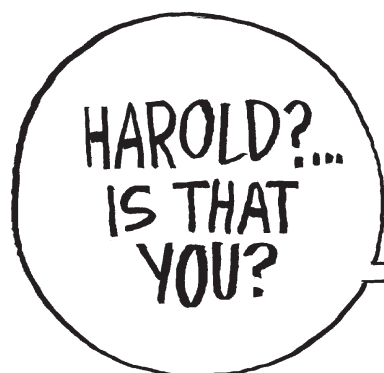
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Lenten recipes



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• postscript

4 tablespoons scallions, minced
2 tablespoons fresh parsley, minced
4 tablespoons lowfat mayonnaise
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Combine all ingredients and mix lightly. Cover and refrigerate for at least an hour before serving. (You can actually serve it right away, but the flavors are better if they have a chance to blend together...and it's even better the next day.)

If you want more flavor, add a little mustard or grated Parmesan Cheese.

Variations that I might suggest would be to use actual crab and instead of scallions use green onions or chives.

Crabs are crustaceans, a group which includes shrimp, crayfish and lobsters. They have a hard outer covering called a carapace.

Crabs have ten legs, and use the three middle legs for walking sideways. The pincer claws are used for defense and snaring prey. The last pair of legs resemble paddles and are used for swimming. Some of the varieties of crab available in groceries are blue crab from the New England states, stone crab from Florida and king crab from Alaska.

You can buy crab boil spice packages in various forms at the store. It is just as easy to make your own, using a wire mesh ball or cheese cloth. Use in decreasing amounts the following spices for a crab boil: mustard seed, coriander seed, red pepper, bay leaves, dill seed, allspice and whole cloves. Coriander seed tends to become wormy, so store it in the freezer.

The following recipes are from Healthy Cooking for Singles & Doubles by Eleanor Brown.

Crab Salad

1 cup nonfat cottage cheese
1 cup imitation crab

The car of the future



red
green

• north of forty

Have you noticed anything unusual about the cars you see on the road these days? Most of them are trucks. Oh sure, they might call them SUVs or mini-vans, but don't kid yourself, these are trucks. I think it all started with the oil crisis in the 70s and the subsequent need to save the environment and stop burning gas. Cars got small and gutless — in many cases, the exact opposite characteristics of their owners. The car manufacturers knew they had a lot of unsatisfied customers out there, but they couldn't go back to making big cars without looking irresponsible, so the perfect solution was to make trucks more like cars. Once you take a powerful pickup truck and add leather seats, cruise control, AM/FM radio and air conditioning, you don't really have a truck. You have a 1973 Buick Roadmaster with a truck body on it. And let's face it, that's what most men really want.

WHAT MAKES A PERSON TICK

I've had a lot of motivators in my life. When I was a toddler, I was driven to find candy and toys. As a teenager, I was preoccupied with how I combed my hair and any girls who found that attractive. Or more accurately, any girls who found anything about me attractive. After I got married, I was fascinated by the level of intimacy that can be achieved when two people really love each other. Once the kids came along, survival became the main issue, along with any acceptable level of mental health. Now that I'm well into middle age,

the only real motivator I have left is curiosity. Even when things mess up, my main emotion is wonder at how they'll turn out. You know how you'll sit through even a bad movie just to see how it ends? Well, that's the way I feel about life. I'm fascinated by people and events, not for the way they are, but for how they got that way and where they go from here. I have some friends I've known for 20 years or more, and most of the things in their lives now are a result of things they did way back when. That satisfies my curiosity. It's interesting to see how the past affects the present and how the present will affect the future. Thanks to curiosity, I plan to live a long time. Unless I get curious about life after death.

LISTEN TO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING

A lot of times we say things without really thinking about their meaning. This is especially true with some of the older expressions that are passed down through generations. The following expressions are supposed to be good things, but when you take them literally I'm not so sure:
— Eating high on the hog.

Crab Stuffed Potatoes

1 large baking potatoes, baked
4 ounces flaked, cooked crabmeat, canned
2 tablespoons plain nonfat yogurt
2 tablespoons lowfat mayonnaise
2 tablespoons chives, minced
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated
pepper to taste
Split the baked potatoes and press open.

In a small bowl, mix together the rest of the ingredients.

Spoon mixture into potatoes.

Broil about four inches below heat until golden (3-5 minutes).

Can be used as a hors d'oeuvre in tiny potatoes. Lent is a time for fasting and abstinence. One of the things people traditionally abstain from is meat. To me, giving up meat is really not a hardship, as I like fish and shellfish.

Food for thought: Do deeds of greatness and heroism always need to be large to be great or heroic?

- Having a hair of the dog that bit you.
- Sitting in the catbird seat.
- Having the luck of the Irish.
- Coming out smelling like a rose.
- Having horseshoes up your butt.

MOOD SWINGS

From the day I first met my wife, I've put tremendous effort into affecting her mood. When we were dating, and even for a while after we got married, there was always a certain mood I was trying to get her into. Then there was a period where I worked hard at getting her out of certain moods. We survived that reign of terror, and I'm now back to getting her into the mood. Except now it's a different mood, usually involving golf or watching boxing or putting down the needlepoint and turning off the light so I can get some sleep. For all these years my behavior has been based on my wife's mood. But she insists the exact opposite is true. I don't think she's right. It's probably just a bad mood.

QUOTE OF THE DAY: "A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't. A man marries a woman expecting that she won't change, and she does." — 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."

A six-letter, four-letter word



joan
ryan

• commentary

It is only a word. Six letters. It is not an expletive. It is not slang. You can find it in every anatomy and medical book printed in the English language.

But you still can't say it on morning television, at least not in most markets.

Recently, when a woman appeared on KTVU's "Mornings on 2" to promote V-Day, an anti-violence movement centered around "The Vagina Monologues," the woman was told not to mention the word "vagina" on the air. It is OK to use the word on newscasts that air later in the day, but not in the morning, said news director Andrew Finlayson.

"In the morning, we recognize that a lot of parents are watching the show with their kids," Finlayson explained. "As a parent, I'm not sure I'd be comfortable hearing that word in front of my kids. I think a lot of people would find it objectionable. Children might ask what it means."

"When you know there are children watching, you treat the news differently. It's not about censorship. I've talked to my staff about not showing any explicit violence in the morning show, bloodstains, things like that. So it's not just about the use of certain words."

I passed his comments on to Eve Ensler, who wrote "The Vagina Monologues."

"What, people don't have vaginas in the morning? Children don't know they have vaginas?" she said.

Ensler brought her show to San Francisco last Tuesday night for a V-Day fundraiser that drew more than 3,000 people to the Masonic Auditorium and raised about \$500,000 for organizations bat-

ting violence against women. She was joined on stage by more than a dozen fabulous women such as Rita Moreno, Gloria Steinem, Kathy Najimy, Ronnie Gilbert and Jill Eikenberry, who each performed one of Ensler's monologues about pleasure, shame, violence, exploitation, love and, most of all, finding humor in sex.

"Let's just start with the word 'vagina,'" Ensler opens the play. "It sounds like an infection at best, maybe a medical instrument: 'Hurry, Nurse, bring me the vagina.' Vagina. Vagina. Doesn't matter how many times you say it, it never sounds like a word you want to say."

So we don't. Last year, ABC television showed a live birth on "Good Morning America." It wasn't graphic. But a baby emerged. From somewhere. Charlie Gibson never used the word vagina, or even alluded to it, which seems a bit like doing a story on automobile manufacturing without making reference to the mechanisms for production or delivery.

Bob Dole can speak openly about erectile dysfunction. But can you imagine Elizabeth Dole going on television to speak about a sexual problem? Except in fictionalized shows like "Sex and the City" and "Ally McBeal," female sexuality — like

the word "vagina" itself — is still something to put in a dark drawer, away from polite company.

"Language is so powerful," said Elizabeth Bachan, an assistant professor of psychology at Mills College. "Feeling comfortable with the word could very well translate into feeling comfortable with your body. How can we talk about what gives us pleasure if we can't even say the word?"

Ensler has seen significant strides made since she began performing "The Vagina Monologues" nearly six years ago. "Back then, I couldn't say the word anywhere," she said. Now stories about her and the vagina phenomenon are in mainstream publications such as Time and Newsweek. Most of television — the medium that brought us "Baywatch" and "Victoria's Secret Fashion Show" and sweeps-week news stories on transsexuals and prostitution and Internet pornography — is still queasy about identifying the center of a woman's sexuality by its proper name.

"People are still more scared of the word 'vagina' than they are of 'anthrax' or 'Scud missile' or 'nuclear war,'" Ensler said. "No one is scared of those words."

Keeping the word taboo is not about protecting our children from embarrassment, but about protecting ourselves. Shame is learned, and in America in 2002, more than 30 years after the so-called sexual revolution, girls still learn it early and too well.

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