

from our viewpoint...

Trials make news because we care

Let's put this whole Iraqi-jail-fun-and-games thing in some sort of perspective:

The jail incidents, and the Army trials that will keep them in the news into next year, are news because in this country, we care.

Some armies would laugh at the things American prison guards were caught doing. In some armies, it's perfectly acceptable to shoot civilians or humiliate, rape and pillage.

Ours is not one of them. We have rules. We expect our soldiers to abide by them, and most of them do. So it's news when a few don't.

Many countries would try to sweep the whole thing under the rug. The government would deny it happened, reporters would be shooed off or arrested, the guilty would either be transferred or just disappear.

The whole thing would go away.

Not in America. We are free and open. We put the culprits on public trial, and then have to listen to defense charges that somehow the Pentagon and President Bush planned the whole thing. The guilty parties were "only following orders."

Sure, that's likely. The president and Donald Rumsfeld are sitting around the Oval Office, and Bush says, "Say, Rummy, let's have some of our prison guards sexually harass some Iraqi prisoners, raise an uproar in world opinion, and lose me thousands of votes at the same time.

"Oh, and be sure they are dumb enough to record the whole thing on video tape."

"Yes, Mr. President. Do you want us to send them a selection of sex toys for the show?"

Right.

No, the point is, Americans won't put up with this kind of thing. In World War II, we prosecuted prison guards for smashing the mouths of Japanese prisoners to steal their gold fillings. In Vietnam, we prosecuted soldiers for everything from theft to drug charges to murder.

In our own country, we've managed over the last 50 years to do away with a great deal of police violence and abuse through better training and public pressure. Rodney King may have taken a beating, but in the end, he won the war.

But it's because we believe in the rules and take great pride in our Bill of Rights and our sense of decency that we have the specter of public trials in the Iraq jail abuse scandal.

Some would say what the prison guards did was not a big deal. They posed the prisoners in sexually embarrassing positions and made them do things most of us would not want to do. As far as we can tell, no one was injured, but the treatment was psychologically brutal. It was done for no good reason but the entertainment of bored guards.

So it's not a murder case? Still, the guards need to be punished, as do any higher ups who knew about and either condoned the treatment or looked the other way.

There's no doubt, the way the army works, some careers will be ruined. Some guards will go to jail. That is as it should be.

This week, it's Pfc. Lynndie England, a West Virginia reservist, who is in the dock. An army investigator said he thought combat stress and a jail riot a few days before had contributed to the lack of discipline among the guards, all reservists, called to active duty.

This is not our way. This is not how we expect our army to behave. And it's American to do something about it, openly, before the world.

That is a good thing. — *Steve Haynes*

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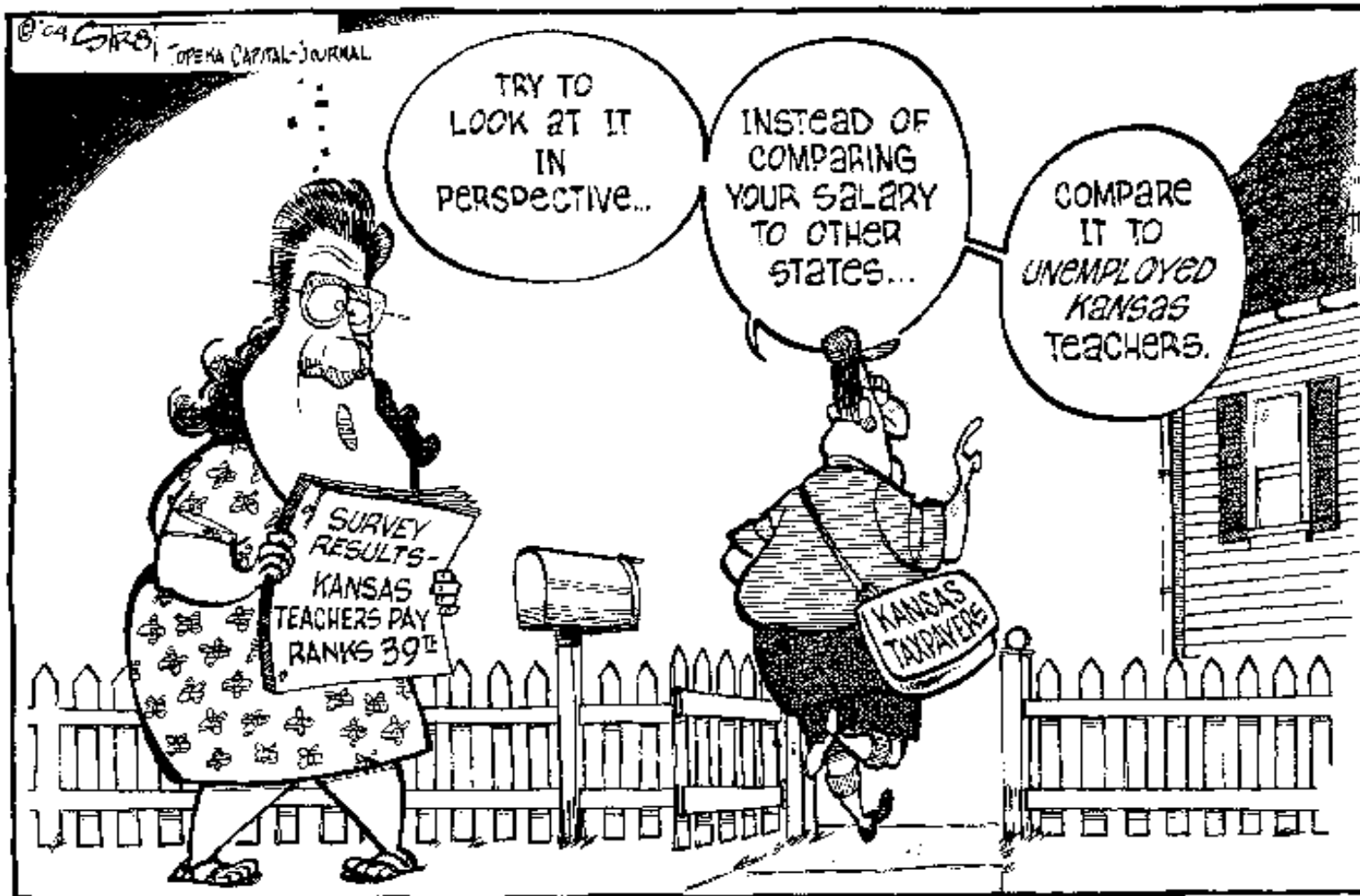
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Writing isn't always the easiest thing to do

I don't know about you, but though I have always liked to write, sometimes it isn't the easiest thing to do.

At those times, I wonder why I continue to do it.

Having a deadline is always important for me; it forces me to get something on paper. But the weeks roll by pretty quickly, and writing something intelligent on cue is difficult.

However, I was reading a book the other night where the woman was hired to write three columns a week. I certainly hope she was getting paid for a full-time job!

Another book (Fear Nothing by Dean Koontz) gave some insights into why people write.

I can understand both sides of this argument: "Your problem is you want to make a mark on the world. You want to leave something behind that says, I was here."

"I don't care about that."

"That's why you write the articles, the books. To leave a mark."

"I write because I enjoy writing."

"You're always (complaining) about it."



**lorna
gt**

• commentary

"Because it's the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's also rewarding."

"You know why it's so hard? Because it's unnatural."

"Maybe to people who can't read and write."

"We're not here to leave a mark, bro. Monuments, legacies, marks — that's where we always go wrong. We're here to revel in the world, to soak in the awesomeness of it, to enjoy the ride. The world's maximum perfect as it is, beauty from horizon to horizon. Any mark any of us tries to leave — well, it's only graffiti. Nothing can improve on the world we've been given. Any mark anyone leaves is no better than vandalism."

I guess I'm guilty of wanting to leave something to prove I was here. I don't know of any older person who doesn't reminisce and tell

their life stories. Writers just do it non-verbally. But there is logic in the idea of enjoying the world just as God made it; to enjoy the present moment. There is much to say for both sides.

I used to naively believe that history books were written so the truth could be known. Now I realize that history is always skewed by the writer's viewpoint and beliefs. Someone has said that history is always written by the winners. Some is nothing short of propaganda. But wouldn't we be poorer if we had no written histories?

If writing kept me from living my life, I wouldn't write.

Anything can become an obsession, I guess. I also love to read, so I'm grateful that there are people who are willing to risk putting their ideas down for others to evaluate and/or appreciate.

There are certainly less-productive hobbies. Writing is definitely a risk. People won't necessarily agree with you. Others will laugh right out loud at your audacity. But it is also fun and rewarding, and, hopefully, there will be someone who will gain something from your efforts.

I urge you to try it. You might like it!

Together, we can save a life

To the Editor:

You don't have to leap tall buildings in a single bound to be someone's hero this summer.

You can save a life by giving blood noon to 6 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 18, at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, 307 W 13th. Call (800) 448-3543 for an appointment today, but walk-ins are welcome.

During the summer, blood supplies often drop to dangerous levels. Because blood can only be stored for 42 days, it can't be saved up to get through this difficult season. The Red Cross relies on citizens to help. All blood types are needed, especially O-positive and O-negative.

Two-year-old Kolbey Bancroft of El Dorado needed blood twice during his first year following his heart surgery. He may need it again this summer when he has his second round of heart surgery.

Kolbey's mom, Laurie Bancroft, said it is comforting to know people are willing to give blood in case he needs it again.

Every day, 500 blood donors are needed in



**from our
readers**

• to the editor

Kansas and northern Oklahoma for hospital patients like Kolbey.

If everyone who was eligible would donate twice a year, there would never be shortages like the ones we see during summer months. Only 5 percent of the population donates blood when 60 percent is eligible.

Please donate blood and encourage a friend or family member to join you in giving the gift of life. Donating is safe and easy.

Most medications won't cause deferral. Those with diabetes or high blood pressure may donate as long as their condition is controlled by medication and they are feeling well that day. Potential donors should drink plenty of water beforehand.

A new policy requires photo identification

or a Red Cross blood-donor card.

For information or to schedule an appointment, call (800) 448-3543 or visit www.redcross.org/br/centralplains.

Luella Richardson
publicity chairman
Sherman County Red Cross

To the Editor:

Kudos to Superintendent Marvin Selby and the Goodland school system for allowing the Crossmen Drum Corps to use the school facilities for rest and practice Aug. 4.

The Denver Public School system was not willing to do the same for the group. One of the brass players is my greatnephew. His grandmother is Diane (Hertneky) Phillips, who graduated from Sherman Community High School in 1953.

The corps placed 10th in the finals on Saturday. We hope the citizens of Goodland enjoyed the "thank-you" presentation.

Judy Sanderson (class of 1950)
Colorado Springs

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