

from other pens...

Watching coverage of flaky 41 year-old

Well, here we go again! We’re faced with nonstop coverage of a rather flaky individual who says he was with JonBenet Ramsey on the night she was murdered in her Boulder, Colo. home nearly 10 years ago.

The 41 year-old former school teacher, John Mark Karr, was brought back to the U.S. from Thailand last Sunday night. He arrived in Los Angeles, attired in slacks, shirt, tie, no handcuffs, no ankle bracelets — just another fashionable traveler in the business section of a Thai jetliner. He was taken from the air terminal to a jail cell in Los Angeles, awaiting return to Boulder, the murder scene.

We know not how, or even IF, he was involved in JonBenet’s death. All we have to go on is what he said to reporters when he was picked up in Thailand, where he looked like a lost pup. The blank look in his eyes, the lack of any emotion, his dress — this was the picture of a lost man.

What we witnessed nonstop over that weekend were television reports that contained nothing. Just worthless babbling by talking heads who couldn’t agree on anything. Of course, there was nothing on which to agree. But they jumped on this thing like a greyhound in pursuit of the finish line.

There could have been much less fanfare over this weekend arrest, especially by a media that 10 years ago pretty much had us all believing that JonBenet’s death was not by an intruder but by someone within the Ramsey household. They may, again, be barking up the wrong tree, but only time will sort all of that out.

An aunt of JonBenet Ramsey cautioned on television Sunday that we should not be rushing to judgment. And she is right. We have little, very little — in fact, nothing — to go on at this point. John Mark Karr’s ex-wife said he couldn’t have been in Boulder the night JonBenet Ramsey was murdered, as he claims, because he was with her and their family in Alabama. The child’s body was discovered the day after Christmas, Dec. 26, 1996.

Here is our simple test for Mr. Karr: When they take him from Los Angeles to Boulder, put him behind the wheel of the vehicle he will be transported in after arriving at the airport, and have him drive to the Ramsey home. If he can’t find it, then he probably was never in it.

Sometimes it’s the simple things that draw the truth.
—Tom Dreiling, *The Notron Telegram*

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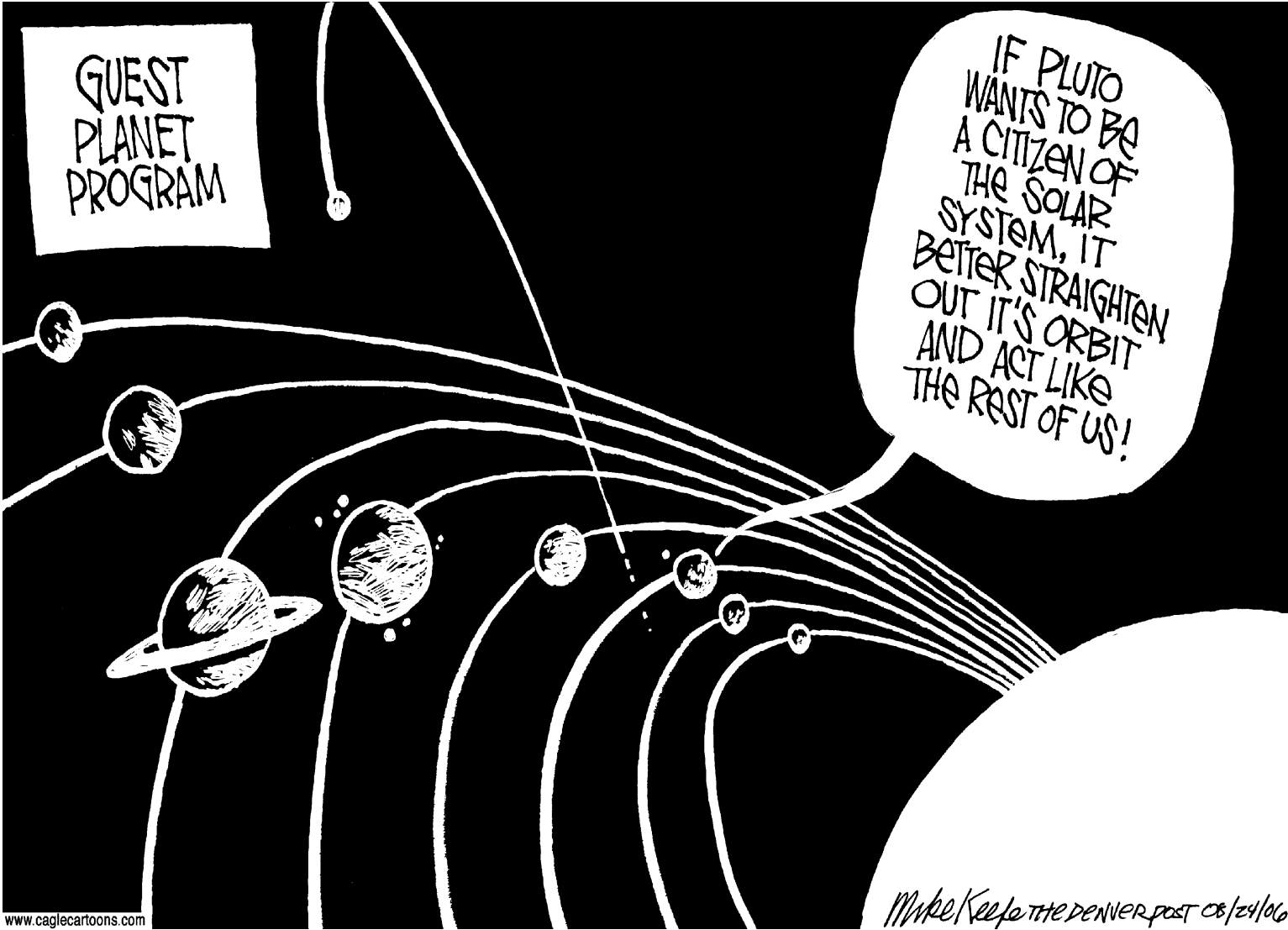
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I never knew her first name was Clara

I knew her for all of my 58 years and never realized her first name was Clara.

My Aunt Adele died earlier this month and my sister and I drove to the funeral in Arkansas. Our mother wanted to go, but she couldn’t have made the nine-hour trip. It hurt her to not be able to say a last good-bye to the older sister she had loved, fought with and been babied by for so many years.

Aunt Adele was 10 years older than Mom — part of the first litter, as my grandmother used to say. There was Madelyn and Adele — just two years apart and then 10 years later there was Emma and Jeff — just a little over a year apart.

Adele was 92 when she died and was as young at heart and as outrageous when she was in her 90s as she was when a teenager and the despair of her parents.

Her only son, George Allen, spoke at her funeral. He said he hadn’t spoken at his father’s service back in 1964 and he always regretted that. He was in West Point when his father died suddenly, leaving his mother alone.

I was sort of surprised that Adele never remarried. She had been a housewife all her married



cynthia haynes

● open season

life and had not held a job since she married in the late 1930s. She was a beautiful, vivacious woman and I could never understand why some smart man never was able to snap her up. But, no one could ever match her Bill and she remained a widow for the next 42 years.

A widow with her only child in the military, serving his country all over the world, Adele became a housemother at the college in her hometown of Russellville, Ark.

Later she became a tour guide and traveled almost as much as her son.

She was a true Southern belle, always dressed in the best she had and always wore earrings — big clip-on earrings. She would never go anywhere without her earrings and she seemed to have hundreds of pairs, each bigger and danglier than the last.

My favorite memory of Aunt Adele is a piece

When we finally take the off ramp

When I was small, my family lived in a little town not far from where I live now.

Often I drive the two-lane blacktop through the remains of that town. Past the cemetery where my parents lie, past the school where I began first grade (now a private home), past the site of the township hall where we schoolchildren recited poems and performed skits for the Community Club, then over the abandoned railroad and across the creek.

My journey is peopled with memories. Only memories, for I don’t meet anyone on the road, nor do I see anyone in the fields or farmyards I pass.

When I reach the small farm where my aunt and uncle lived, all that changes. An Interstate highway cuts across what was once their land. On it the traffic is ceaseless. One side is a torrent of cars and trucks rushing west, the other an equal torrent rushing east. The contrast with the deserted road on which I travel is jarring.

When the freeway was built, residents of our village and others believed that it would bring commerce. Gas stations and restaurants sprang up at every interchange.

They soon failed. People got on the freeway, but no one left it. Those interchanges could have been built with no off ramps.

But perhaps they will be used some day. As world population and demand outstrip fossil fuel supply, our present industrial farming practices will no longer be possible. No alternative fuel has the qualities — portability and energy returned for energy invested in production — that make fossil fuel the linchpin of industrial agriculture.

Thanks to cheap fossil fuels, farmers today can treat every acre pretty much the same. Diesel-powered machinery can till any soil type. Fertilizer produced using natural gas compensates for variations in natural fertility. Pesticides manufactured from petroleum kill weeds and insects for the whole growing season.

Few farmers are needed to manage this industrial process. And consumers can live far from the field, as trucks transport the average bite of food 1,600 miles from farm gate to dinner plate.

Good crop yields can be achieved without fossil fuel, but much more care is required. Every farm, every field, every acre requires individual attention, with careful consideration given to just the right crop for the land, and the best cultural practices for that crop. Operations must be carefully timed to control weeds and pests, and years-long crop rotations must be



prairie writers circle

● jim scharplaz

planned to assure fertility. It will take many more farmers on the land to supply the necessary knowledge, care and craftsmanship.

If you are in one of the cars rushing by on the freeway, your efforts are just as important as mine as a farmer to develop post-fossil fuel agriculture. Part of the solution is political. To a large extent, the present rural landscape in much of America is the result of federal policy that subsidizes massive production of just a few, easily industrialized crops — corn, soybeans and wheat. This policy has caused the loss of soil, biodiversity, local food markets and farmers, resulting in a fragile system that depends on increasingly tight and insecure supplies of petroleum.

Agricultural subsidies must be unhooked from production and tied to good farming prac-

of advice she gave me when I was turning 16 and ready to get my driver’s license.

When you pass a police car, she said, always smile and wave. They’ll be too busy smiling and waving back to check their radar.

That may not work with modern equipment, but I don’t ever remember Aunt Adele getting a speeding ticket and she drove like a bat out of hell, as they say.

Adele made out her will in the ’80s. She asked to be cremated and laid to rest next to her husband in the family plot. So after the service in the beautiful old Presbyterian Church she had attended, the family took her up to the hill in the neighboring small town of Dardanelle, Ark., and laid the box — about as big as a silver chest — in the foot-deep hole. The preacher said a prayer and we all threw flowers into the little hole.

I couldn’t help thinking that my Aunt Adele had always been petite but this was ridiculous. Then cousin Lisa passed by and said we were doing this wrong. We shouldn’t be throwing flowers into the grave, she said. We should be throwing earrings.

She was right.

tices. This will preserve the soil we all depend on to eat, and make our food supply less dependent on oil. Even if you live in a city, your legislator votes on farm legislation just as mine does, and your taxes pay the subsidies. Let your legislator know what you want.

On a personal level, you can seek out craftsman farmers and support them by buying and eating what they grow. These farmers have the know-how we will need more of.

Live too far from the farm? Try farmers, markets and food co-ops.

Yes, it’s more work. Post-fossil fuel consuming will require more care and effort, just as post-fossil fuel farming will.

Better still, use that off ramp. Wherever you are going, remember that someone in the oncoming lanes is rushing away from there. It’s probably not that great a place.

Exit now.

Jim Scharplaz raises cattle in Ottawa County, and is on the board of the Kansas Rural Center. He wrote this essay for the Land Institute’s Prairie Writers Circle, Salina.

