

OPINION

DAILY JOURNAL

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"The Daily Journal is dedicated to community service, to defense of individual rights and to providing those checks upon government which no constitution can ensure."

SCOTT ALEXANDER
founding editor, 1963

AT ISSUE

The serious burns suffered by two Franklin youngsters underscore the danger of fire.

OUR POINT

Parents must take an active role in educating children about fire safety.

Lessons on fire safety can never start too early

The Daily Journal

An explosion and fire Feb. 28 left two Franklin boys critically burned.

They face years of surgery for skin grafts to replace tissue destroyed by the blaze.

The boys and two others were using gasoline and a lighter to set a shoe, a stick and some paper on fire.

They were in a shed behind a house on the near-east side of Franklin. Volatile fumes from the gasoline erupted into flames as soon as the lighter was lit.

A neighbor heard the explosion and rushed to the house to help. He put out flames on one of the boys and instructed the other to roll on the ground. A third boy suffered minor burns, and the fourth escaped injury.

In a world of pyrotechnically jazzed up, special-effects movies, it's no surprise youngsters might want to experiment with fire. It looks so cool on the screen.

But nothing indicates how carefully and professionally the stuntmen approach these movie scenes. There's no way a child could know that gasoline is dangerous and the fumes even more so.

That's why it is imperative that parents actively teach children about fire safety. No child old enough to understand what is being said is too young. The boys critically burned in the incident were 6 and 7.

Home fire-safety rules are basic and easy for children to understand:

- Never place anything over a lamp, like clothes or a blanket, not even when playing.
- Don't touch radiators or heaters. Ask an adult to turn them on or off.
- Don't stand too close to a fireplace or wood stove.
- Never touch matches, lighters or candles. If you see matches or a lighter in a room, tell an adult right away.
- Don't cook alone or without asking an adult.
- Don't play with electrical cords.
- Turn off lights, TVs, computers etc. when finished using them.
- Sparklers can burn as hot as 1,200 degrees. Use them only with adult supervision.

For adults, there is a longer list of precautions. Chief among them is proper storage of flammable materials like gasoline.

A good and fun source of fire safety information and activities for children is available online from the U.S. Fire Administration.

Log on to www.usfa.fema.gov/kids to access a variety of interactive pages and fun-yet-instructive games. Children can even qualify to become Junior Fire Marshals, with a certificate available for printing.

Care and planning are the only way to prevent fire calamities like the one that befell the Franklin family. It's up to parents to teach their children so tragedies can be avoided.

Focus: Civil liberties

Americans' ignorance of rights disheartening

Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune

Of all the liberties Americans prize as their birthright, perhaps the most important are the freedoms to be disengaged, entertained and just plain ignorant.

How else to explain a new survey's findings that only 20 percent of Americans can cite at least two of the First Amendment's five freedoms, while more than half can name at least two members of "The Simpsons" household? Or that 24 percent know all three of the judges on "American Idol," while 27 percent (and largely the same folks, we suspect) can't identify a single First Amendment right?

This is hardly the first poll to document Americans' stunning unfamiliarity with the basics of democracy, nor the first demonstration of pop culture's pervasiveness. But these results surprised even the survey's socially savvy sponsors at the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum, a new Chicago institution dedicated to raising public understanding of this country's fundamental freedoms.

Man, do they have a job ahead of them.

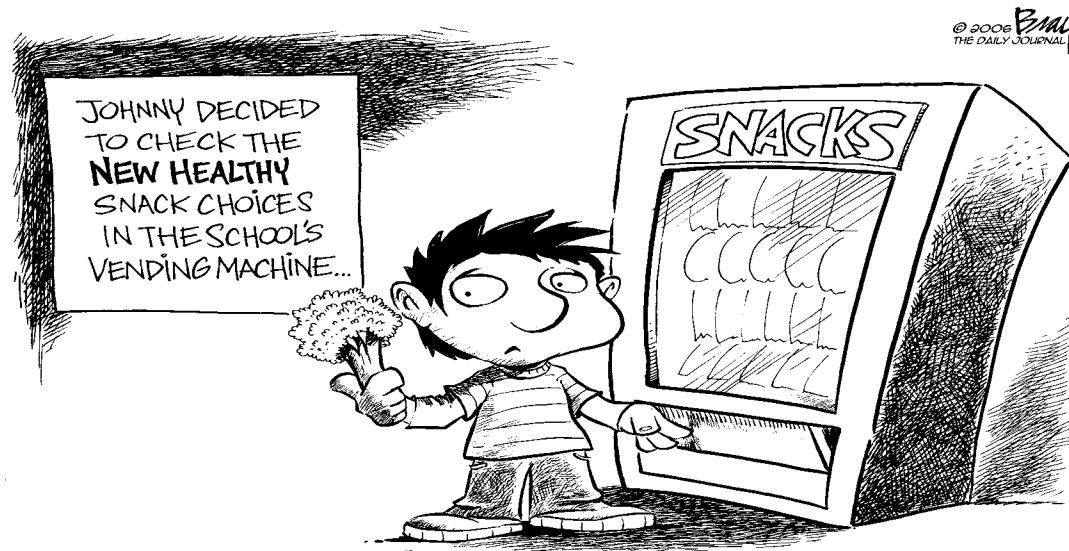
Asked to list a First Amendment right, 70 percent pegged free speech; not bad. But only 24 could come up with freedom of religion, and things went rapidly downhill with freedom of the press (11 percent) and freedom of assembly (10 percent). OK, the right to petition government for a redress of grievances may be more obscure; still, it's amazing that only one person out of the 1,000 surveyed could recall it.

Meanwhile, it seems that 36 percent thought the First Amendment includes the freedom to keep pets, and 17 percent, we are not making this up, were pretty sure it established the right to drive cars. Now that's the mark of a living Constitution.

Commenting on the survey results, a few academics have cautioned against being too alarmed: After all, the Constitution is just a piece of paper, and anyway it isn't terribly important that citizens know exactly where their rights are enumerated.

Even, perhaps, if they think the right to "take the Fifth Amendment" is guaranteed by the First (38 percent). Nonsense. Immigrants this ignorant of the nation's democratic foundations would stand no chance of attaining citizenship.

How can it be acceptable that people born to these rights have so little grasp of them?



YOUR VIEWS & COMMENTARY

People would do well to get to know a soldier

To the editor:

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4.

With the passing of Gene Robinson and Sgt. Rickey Jones, our country and our communities need to reflect on Ecclesiastes 3. As we take time to weep and mourn, we should also take time to remember the fond memories both of these veterans brought to their families, friends and fellow Americans.

Gene Robinson served his country with pride, purpose and enthusiasm. Over the past years he served his fellow veterans with the same effort. Gene was passionate in his service as director of veterans affairs for Johnson County. Operating on a meager department budget, I'm sure Gene spent more time and dollars of his own than the position required.

Having worked with Gene on the county council, I witnessed his efforts and will miss his professionalism. I wish somehow I could have known Gene and his lovely wife, Marsha, more personally.

I only know Sgt. Rickey Jones through newspaper articles. In my mind I picture Sgt. Rickey Jones as an all-American hero, standing alongside his family and friends, honoring his faith and his country. The more than 1,000 mourners who gathered at his funeral confirm my thoughts.

Every day we lose some of our veterans as age and war take their toll, and a new season arrives. Every day more of our young men and women make the commitment to serve our country with their time and their lives.

I am saddened by the fact that I did not know Gene and Sgt. Rickey on a close, personal level. Today we weep and mourn.

WRITE A LETTER

The Daily Journal invites readers to submit letters, opinion columns and e-mail comments for the opinion page.

SEND IT

Drop-off
2575 N. Morton St. (U.S. 31), Franklin

we may laugh and dance. Today and every day from now to eternity we should take a moment to thank every veteran for their service and invest the time to get to know them personally.

God bless you, Gene and Rickey, and all those with whom you share the honor of being called a veteran.

Ron West

Johnson County Council

Secondhand smoke affects health of all

To the editor:

There have been several letters written recently regarding the Johnson County smoking ban. I must say that I am in complete agreement with banning tobacco use in public buildings.

I do not enjoy eating in a restaurant that smells like smoke. When it is difficult to breathe, it is difficult to enjoy anything, especially a meal. Several letters have been written by individuals who support the freedom to light up and smoke at any time in any place.

Their arguments have included statements such as, "What is next? Banning fast food because it makes a person obese?" or "Would I smash my hand with a hammer if I knew it was bad for me?" meaning stay out of restaurants that allow smoking if you do not like smoke.

These arguments do not make sense because I can sit at the same table with a person who is eating fast food and it will not affect me. I will not become obese

due to what the person next to me is eating.

Also, if I were eating in a restaurant or working in a facility and the person next to me had a hammer and smashed his hand with it, that would not affect me either.

However, if that person were to smash my hand with the hammer, then that would be a health hazard to me. Breathing in secondhand smoke does affect me; therefore, it is a health hazard to me.

My husband works in a factory in Marion County that recently implemented the smoking ban. Prior to the ban, he had chronic sinus infections involving his lungs, throat and eyes, which were affecting his productivity at work.

Let's face it, when you do not feel well, you do not feel like working. Since the ban has been in effect, his health has greatly improved. He is able to breathe without being congested, and his eyes are not red, irritated and watering.

With this, I do not understand how anyone can say that secondhand smoke does not affect the people who are in its vicinity.

Karen Towles
Franklin

Military prison in Cuba contrary to U.S. principles

To the editor:

I am in complete agreement with Professor Yu-long Ling's column, "Guantanamo prison hurts nation's credibility" (Daily Journal, March 3).

I have felt this way for a long time and think he expressed my thoughts exactly.

Yes, the United States is a champion of democracy and the rule of law. What is gained at Guantanamo is not worth sacrificing these basic principles and the support of the world.

In the war on terror, international support is of utmost importance, I also believe.

Carolyn Hood
Franklin

Death row inmates use art to convey unique take on Christ's crucifixion

The painting depicted a biblical scene, a mother and child in a doorway, a father standing in a courtyard outside a simple Judean house. His back to the viewer, the father is looking toward a hill with three empty crosses upon it.

The pious scene was painted in the naive style of Grandma Moses and would look perfectly at home in a church narthex or Sunday school room.

But this painting isn't hanging in a church, and it isn't the work of a grandmother. The religious scene is the work of David Hammer and Jeff Paul, two men on death row in a federal prison.

Along with other paintings, drawings and poems, Hammer and Paul's work is part of the Death Row Art Exhibit on display through March 31 at the Johnson Center for Fine Arts on the campus of Franklin College (free admission).

I expected the exhibit to force me to deal with my somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the death penalty. I would describe myself as 99 percent opposed to capital punishment as cruel and inhumane.

One percent of me, however, still isn't sure.

But standing in front of Hammer and Paul's crucifixion scene, I found myself considering something besides where I stood in this ongoing controversy. Perhaps the best way to describe the effect of the painting was to say that it tossed my soul headlong into Lent.

There are far more disturbing images in the Death Row Art Exhibit than this one.

But maybe I knew before I went that I would see drawings of gallows, electric chairs and lethal injection tables. That was what I expected to be on the minds of death row prisoners.

But Hammer and Paul's crucifixion scene wasn't what I expected, and the more I studied it, the more questions it raised.

The first detail to catch my eye was the distance between the figure of the father and his wife and child. The mother and child are in a doorway, shadows obscuring the details of their faces. The man is



David Carlson

alone in a courtyard, isolated from his wife and child as he ponders the crosses.

I wondered if Hammer and Paul had painted themselves into the scene.

Each had been found guilty of a terrible crime, something so horrible that they'd been distanced forever from family, friends, and even other prisoners.

I wondered if the man in the courtyard, standing alone, was their representation of every person on death row, including both of them, imprisoned in a loneliness that I can hardly imagine.

That led to another question: What did these two death row inmates see when they pondered the story of Jesus' death? I tend to read the crucifixion story and focus exclusively on Jesus, not unlike Mel Gibson's view of the tragedy.

But Hammer and Paul's painting is closer to the gospel. There were three crosses on the hill. Three men died that day.

It is only Luke's gospel that tells us what Jesus and the two criminals talked about before they died that Friday.

One criminal joined the crowds in taunting Jesus, inviting him to admit that he was one big failure. I suspect that Hammer and Paul have heard lots of taunting in prison: prisoner to prisoner, guard to prisoner, prisoner to guard.

But there is a second criminal in Luke's account, and he saw what even the frightened disciples couldn't see that day, that death for Jesus wasn't the end.

This second criminal was really the first Christian theologian, the first to believe that a kingdom was on the other side of Jesus' death, the first to believe that this kingdom could hold out hope even for him.

The story suggests that his theology must have been pretty good; Jesus invited him to enter paradise with him that very day.

The question from earlier came back to me: Had Hammer and Paul once again painted themselves into the story?

Certainly both men would know how the majority of society views them, as men worthy of death. But was the painting their way of revealing how they view themselves, as men who, like the second criminal in Luke, hope for new life?

But the painting wasn't done with me yet.

One of the speakers at the exhibit opening stated that death row inmates are kept totally isolated from other prisoners. The only people they get to know as they await their end are the guards. How was it, I asked, that Hammer and Paul had been able to paint together?

They hadn't, the speaker explained.

Each of them painted a portion of the scene. The canvas was then passed back and forth between their cells until finished. I looked again at the painting and saw that even their names do not appear together on the canvas. Hammer's is signed at bottom left, Paul's at bottom right.

So there it is. Hammer and Paul have never met. And yet, in a way, they have. I like to believe that both of their brushes contributed to the solitary man in the courtyard who is staring up at the three crosses.

In the end, Hammer and Paul's painting depicts more than the terrible loneliness of death row.

I take their painting to be a type of confession of faith, that loneliness and despair aren't the last word. Both are defeated by hope for new life in the world to come, but also by something in this life as well.

The canvas they shared, passed back and forth between their cells, must have become a kind of conversation between them. Their isolation was overcome through art, one brush stroke at a time.

David Carlson is a professor of philosophy and religion at Franklin College. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.



Dick Wolfie

Price of addiction? One dollar

My wife says it is a cheap obsession and that no good can come of it. Sometimes I am away from my family for hours at a time. I can't help myself.

Where do I go? I go to the dollar store. I haven't capitalized "dollar store" because there are several different corporate names for this general concept.

But no matter how you slice it (and you can get a great knife there for a dollar), the idea is the same: a store where you can buy anything for a dollar.

Anything, but your self-respect.

Of course, shopping at a dollar store is nothing to be ashamed of.

But still, when I walk the aisles, eyeing the 64-ounce bottles of Lotta Soda and mega-size bags of cheese popcorn, I do wonder what people must be thinking about my store of choice.

Are they commending me for my acute skills in discount shopping or wondering if I am gainfully unemployed?

My addiction is very specific. Just like some find solace in a particular brand of whiskey, I am drawn to the Deals on 96th Street in Fishers.

I mention this particular location because if you ever want to meet me in person, there's a pretty good chance you can find me there.

Where exactly? I could be on the cookie aisle (60 ginger snaps for a buck), or the toothpaste section (\$1 a tube) or the pet aisle (30 dog chews for a slim George Washington).

The manager's name there is Sheila. She is my enabler.

But I hold no grudge. I accept all the blame for my weakness.

It is not her fault that I will never eat that 24-ounce can of sardines.

I can't blame Sheila for my purchase of six helium-filled balloons that say Happy Second Birthday.

It's not Sheila's fault that I don't know one person who is turning 2 years old.

The psychology of shopping at the dollar store is dissertation material.

Graduate students in marketing are wasting important time looking into the buying habits of Lexus owners and iPod purchasers.

The bigger question is: Why would someone (me) buy three hammers just because they are a dollar each?

I am going to start a support group.

Here are my 12 steps to the recovery of self-respect.

• Admit you are powerless to resist a huge \$1 can of bees when you can't even stomach to look at the stuff.

• Come to believe that a power greater than the supermarket can provide sustenance.

• Make a decision to turn your shopping over to your saver.

• Make a searching and fearless inventory of your shelf.

• Admit to the exact nature of your spendthrift ways.

• Recognize that lower prices are a higher power.

• Humbly ask that the dollar store never become the Two Dollar Store.

• Love thy neighbor and share your faith in all that is good and wholesome.

• Live a life where you no longer question the price of goodness, but know in your heart that the price is a always a dollar.

• Share your story with others, so they too can be savers.

• Admit when you have strayed and that you once paid full retail for Cheerios.

• Recognize the power of the almighty dollar and never take its name in vain.

I hope you will join my support group.

There's a small monthly membership fee.

I think you know how much.

Television personality Dick Wolfie writes this weekly humor column for the Daily Journal. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com