

CINDY LANGE-KUBICK

Birthdays are precious times

It has been one of those no-time-to-tinkle kind of weeks.

Forget the basics — food, sleep, shelter, bodily functions — this week; Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been turned on its head. The "higher" needs, those leading to self-actualization and a college degree, have taken precedence: paper deadlines, exams, reading social theory and chasing snipers across town.

This morning, after rising at 5:30 a.m., studying for an ethics presentation, walking the dog, doing a load of laundry and balancing the checkbook, I remembered my daughter, Anna. At 2 a.m., she had turned 10.

When she awoke, I knew she would expect nothing less than a birthday pancake with a candle stuck in the middle and an organized scavenger hunt to find her birthday gifts.

In less busy years, I had imprudently begun a tradition of composing cute little rhymes that led her to her goodies. I wrote ditties like: "You can look both near and far, but your first clue is in the car." And for this year, "Your present is somewhere to be had; look in the place I send you when you are bad." (I know what you're thinking: "This woman could write for Hallmark." It's a gift, I guess. The stuff just flows out of my head and onto the paper.)

But this year, by the time the children were up, dressed and civil, we had exactly 3.2 minutes to celebrate the poor kid's first decade.

I rushed her to the table, yelled to my husband for matches, and we all — except my youngest son, who was in the other room pouting because he couldn't have a Butterfinger for breakfast — sang a decidedly subdued version of "Happy Birthday."

"OK, hurry and blow out the candle."

"Hurry up and find your presents."

"Don't forget to brush your



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teeth."

At this point, I had approximately 4.8 seconds to eat my toast, grab my bookbag, tie my shoes, give the birthday girl a hug and leave for class.

Disaster strikes, as it usually does in one variety or another, every morning at the Kubick house.

Predictably, the dog running for his Purina jostles my bookbag, I trip on my shoelaces, and the toast is ... well, it's toast. It's gone, on the floor.

At my house, you eat off the floor at your own risk. My linoleum could qualify to be an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund cleanup site.

Look, when you have to schedule time for a bathroom break, some things have got to give, and clean floors are one of them. Sanitary toilets, folded laundry and balanced meals are a few more.

Lately, anything that does not make noise does not get noticed. This means my philodendrons are dying, because they don't squeal as loudly as the guinea pigs do.

I just wish the kids didn't have to be objects of my neglect as well.

My husband can take weeks of mumbled hellos, dirty looks and impatient sighs when he interrupts me working at the computer. He also can watch Letterman while I bone up on grammar and sleep an extra two hours while I study social theory.

My children are not infants. They can make their own lunches, call friends over to play and even in a pinch put themselves to bed

without a good night kiss from Mom.

But today is different. Today I want more than 10.6 minutes of quality time with my only daughter, who will never be 9 years old again.

So I shut off the computer and turn on the answering machine.

I forget for just a moment the undone dishes, the unfinished assignments and my full bladder.

I pull Anna's baby book off the shelf, peel her away from the radio and partake in another annual ritual.

We go back in time. It's 1984, and Ronald Reagan is president, Bob Kerrey is governor and Michael Jackson concert tickets are selling for a whopping 30 dollars. Break dancing is in, and music television is a new media innovation.

Together we study a lock of hair, a smudged footprint, a list of milestones: first tooth, first smile, first steps.

Her father and I remember a long forgotten nickname, "little dickens," and her sweet open-mouthed baby kisses.

Together we find the blood-stained cap she wore in the delivery room.

We sit until dusk fills the room. Tomorrow will be another no-time-for-sleep kind of day. But tonight the outside world can wait. I'm putting my daughter to bed.

Lange-Kubick is a senior news-editorial and sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

YOUSUF BASHIR

Society not guided by intellect

We do not find in the annals of history any civilization that can be called intellectual — in which everything was accepted only after being weighed on the scale of reason or commended by human intellect.

If such a civilization were to come into existence, it would make life an ordeal and perhaps would not last for more than a couple of days.

A Western writer says "man is by far more stupid in his actions than prudent."

It thus would be incorrect to claim that reason alone can become the base of culture and its ramifications. In fact, ideas and thoughts, beliefs, superstitions, habits, customs and usages often come into existence before any thought is given to them; thereafter, intellect enters to discriminate, accept or reject them. Not infrequently, it so happens that intellect assumes the role of advocate and defender of the existing usages.

What reasons were not conceived by the Grecian intellect to vindicate female lewdness and prostitution? No act of human brutality and savagery can rival gladiatorial sports, but did the Roman intellectuals' sophistry not try to prove it inoffensive? Were not Arabia's custom of infanticide and suttee in India rationalized by the intellectual pundits of these countries?

Nevertheless, these sophistries and rationalizations could not alter the realities — not intellectualize these customs or civilizations that produced them.

Even philosophy cannot claim to be completely free from irrational



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traits, much less to prefer such a claim on culture or social order.

If subjected to closer scrutiny, things civilization commonly accepts as intellectual and scientific at the first glance would be found to be essentially reactionary and materialistic.

In the 17th century, European scholars, social scientists and philosophers declared anything that could not be measured, tested, weighed or counted was not acceptable and abiding by their intellectual standard. They believed nothing was moral if it had no utility.

Every other explanation, thought and discourse was rejected as irrational or unscientific, resulting in gradual pragmatism, natural selection and utilitarianism swaying over the field of human life.

Their new doctrine thus animated the entire human existence, leaving not the untouched its remotest corner — the recesses of mind and heart — and utility and pragmatic experience were accepted as the cornerstone of social, ethical, economic and political life.

It is undoubtedly correct that the terms "intellect" and "nature" have

been used to a far greater extent in European literature. These words have had a magical effect and still are readily acceptable to the Western mind, but if one were to explore their meanings and examine their applications to human life, one would find that intellect actually stands for "animal intellect" — an intellect bound by perceptions and experiences and reflecting everything imperceptible as irrational and unreal.

Human nature is not different from the nature of the beast, for it becomes devoid of sublime instincts, moral consciousness, nobleness of heart and intellectual virtue.

It is weary of all restraints over its freedom and demands complete mastery over itself in order to satisfy the appetites of flesh: to eat, drink and amuse itself without interventions from any quarter.

The context in which the word "nature" is more often used in Western literature leaves no doubt that it does not stand for ought but animal instinct.

Bashir is a senior food science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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