

RAINBOW ROWELL

# Breaking free of safety net



*I excel. Not out of pride or achievement. Out of fear. Fear is my motivation and drive. My muse. Because if I make everyone happy and pass every test, they can't send me back.*

Sometimes I think they can tell. "They" meaning everyone, meaning you probably. "They" meaning professors and friends and prospective employers.

Sometimes I think that it shows in everything I do and say. In the way I walk and dress. Sometimes I think they smell it. Beneath my perfume, seeping out from beneath my well-soaped skin.

Sometimes I think that no matter how hard I study and smile and struggle, the poverty is still in me, rotting in my breath, devouring my stomach, burning in the back of my throat.

In my eyes. And sometimes I think they can tell. Because it's still there. It will always be there. Keeping me on the run, making me think that if I sit still it will catch me again. It will catch and hold me for good this time.

That it will turn off the heat and take away my shoes. That it will empty my refrigerator and make my mother cry.

And so I run. I excel. Not out of pride or achievement. Out of fear. Fear is my motivation and drive. My muse. Because if I make everyone happy and pass every test, they can't send me back. They can't, they can't.

But it can. It can catch me, and it can catch you. Don't ever think you're too smart or too clean. Don't ever think that you're too hard working.

"I don't like welfare," someone told me yesterday.

I don't like welfare either. I hate it. But I don't know where I would be without it. I hope that I would

still be here. On the run from poverty, but not in its clutches.

But I doubt it. My mother went on welfare when I was 8. My father left us — three kids, a pregnant wife — on a farm in eastern Nebraska.

A farm with no phone. No car. No heat. No electricity. And a few weeks before they turned off the running water. No nearby family to step in. No benevolent private sector.

We needed a safety net. And I thank God — and this state and this nation — that there was one. Being on welfare was hard. Harder for my mother than for me. The monthly check was hardly enough for a family of five, and our rent was high because she refused to live in the housing projects.

But we were warm and safe and fed. Above all, we were together.

Now I'm at a university in Lincoln, Neb. For the first time in my life, I'm not wearing used shoes and I own more than two pairs of jeans.

I'm two semesters away from a degree. I have a decent shot at being middle-class. After a few years in the job market, my income taxes should pay back those welfare

checks, food stamps and public school lunches.

I'm hearing more and more about welfare. I hear important men and women talking about trimming the fat from the budget. About setting loose welfare queens and cheats.

About the government's role. About waste. About orphanages. Welfare, it seems, is dragging our nation down.

But Aid to Families With Dependent Children saved my family. Welfare gave me a chance.

Most people on welfare aren't lazy. Aren't dirty. Most people on welfare are children, children neck-deep in poverty. Children who already face more obstacles than they should.

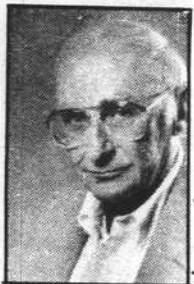
And I don't want them to fall. I want them to have the same chances I had. The same hope that maybe someday they'll crawl out of poverty. That if they work hard enough they can get away.

That if they study and smile and struggle, they will rise above it, beyond it. And maybe no one will ever know.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan associate news editor.

MIKE ROYKO

# Believe all anonymous sources



*If we name even one senior law enforcement official, the others will be so upset that none will ever speak to us again. And that would mean that the nation would no longer benefit from their amazing information.*

Rep. Newt Gingrich created quite a stir when he said that about one-fourth of the White House staff had a history of drug use before coming to Washington.

He didn't identify the person who fed him this statistic, other than to say that it came from a "senior law enforcement official."

But since Gingrich is the speaker of the House, a former college professor and the most powerful Republican in America, would he pass bum information?

Of course not. If we can't believe a Washington politician, who can we believe? And if he said the info came from a "senior law enforcement official," it must be true, or Gingrich wouldn't have said it.

By coincidence, I happened to be talking to a senior law enforcement official the other day.

I can't give you this senior law enforcement official's name, because, as Gingrich can tell you, we all take blood oaths that we will never identify senior law enforcement officials who give us shocking information.

If we name even one senior law enforcement official, the others will be so upset that none will ever speak to us again. And that would mean that the nation would no longer benefit from their amazing information.

Anyway, while we were chatting, this senior law enforcement official whispered that at least 27.2 percent of Republican members of Congress are habitual nose pickers.

"That is a stunning statistic," I told him. "Are you really sure?"

"Absolutely," he said. "The reason it is not widely known is that they are careful never to do it while the C-Span cameras are on them. But as soon as they are out of camera range, they go at it with reckless abandon. Believe me, it is a terribly disgusting sight to see."

"I can imagine. But they seem like such refined gents."

"Hah. That shows how little you

know about them. Are you aware that 28.5 percent of Republican congressmen have, at one time or another, told really lewd, filthy jokes? And another 39.7 percent of Republican congressmen have laughed with gusto at these same foul jokes?"

"Oh, no."  
"Oh, yes. And that 31.3 percent have been known to get roaring inebriated before or after they became members of Congress? And of that group, 53.4 percent put lampshades on their heads at parties and clumsily stomped on the toes of women with whom they danced?"

"This is too much."  
"There is more, much more. I have seen a Top Secret study showing that 37.5 percent would eagerly have an illicit sexual encounter with a beautiful movie actress if they were sure their wives wouldn't find out."

"How depraved. By the way, which movie actress?"  
"Doesn't matter, any of them would do nicely. And 92 percent wouldn't even care if the beautiful movie actress was a liberal."

"If the nation only knew. The stock markets might crash."

"Yes, but get this. According to our agency's records, within the past year, more than 48.7 percent of all Republican congressmen have stood sideways and naked in front of their bathroom mirrors after taking a shower to see if they are

becoming pot-bellied. Of those, about 82.7 percent do it every day."

"That is mind blowing."  
"Then you will be shocked to know that 43.7 percent have, during their adult lives, taken the Lord's name in vain. Another 21.5 percent have skipped church because they were suffering from hangovers."

"Are your figures reliable?"  
"How can you even ask? I'm a senior law enforcement official?"

"I apologize."  
"You should. Furthermore, 98.7 percent of Republican congressmen have admitted — at secret, behind-closed door inquiries, naturally — that if they had a choice between being in Congress or doing honest work for a living, they would prefer being in Congress. The other 1.3 percent didn't respond because their hearing aids were turned down or they were sleeping."

"That is almost enough to shake my faith."

"Well, check with me next week. I will be able to pass along something that will shock you out of your wits."

"Is it sordid?"

"I can only tell you this — Beavis and Butt-head have some secret fans in Washington."

"I can't believe that."

"Where do you think Newt gets his material?"

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NU vs. BOWLING GREEN

SATURDAY  
Dec. 10  
7 p.m.

Bob Devaney  
Sports Center

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Free - Full time UNL student with photo I.D.  
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& \$20,000 in the  
Martha Gooch Shootout!

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coolers to first 100  
people in the door!

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