

Idiots need slap upside head

I know that all of you out there share with me the thought that there are just certain people who shouldn't be allowed to breathe.

Now, I'm not talking about the degenerates of our society, but those idiotic people who do the world's dumbest things that annoy you to the point that you want to strangle their little necks.

There I was the other day, driving to Best Buy to do what most people do when they just get their first computer, buy some cool video games. Anyway, I pulled into the parking lot behind some airhead with a driver's license, who decided to stop to wait for a parking space.

Nothing unusual about that, but let me finish.

This other driver, she had seen some guy cross into the parking lot walking to his car, so we waited and waited and waited. Finally, he got to his car, and then she had to back up to let him out.

Being the nice guy that I am, I backed up too, because this crazy broad probably would have hit me. After this, we had to wait a few more minutes for this guy to get in his car, warm it up and pull out.

No big deal, you say, but when I can clearly see an empty parking space only three stalls down, but I have to wait for this one, I tend to get a little annoyed. I had serious thoughts of just going up to this woman and asking if I could blow in her ear just to make sure she didn't need a refill of air.

I know all of you know other people who act this way and just want to — well, I'll let you decide what you want to do with them, but this incident did give me two good ideas. The first was to go out and smack around the people at the DMV for issuing a license to this



Robb Goff

person, and the second was a good topic for this week's column.

So with that thought in hand, I searched out all my friends (or, rather, the three or four people who actually claim to know me) and asked them what their biggest pet peeves were.

My original thought was that people would be most ticked off at the morons who thought that the turning signals in their car were to be used only after they had started turning or at least before they turn. But, lo and behold, that wasn't true. The biggest pet peeve that most of the people I talked to was hair getting caught in the shower drain.

You people need serious help. What is the state of our existence if the most annoying thing that people can think of is a few hairs clogging the shower drain?

After advising these people to get good psychiatric help, I tracked down a few other little gems that just make you want to become a member of a local gun club.

My top 5 are as follows:

1. The dorks who push the elevator button at least ten times because they think it might get there quicker. It makes you just want to ask, "WHY?"
2. Not refilling an empty toilet paper roll.
3. People who put the ice-cube

trays back in the freezer without refilling them.

4. Leaving toilet seats up. For some reason, only the girls complained about this one. Go figure.

5. People who always drive 10 miles under the speed limit.

What are we, the level-headed individuals of our society, supposed to do about these individuals, who think that the O.J. trial has something to do with contaminated orange juice?

The thought of strapping them to a chair and forcing them to watch 20 hours of videotaped ASUN meetings sounded pretty good, but I don't know if any mortal could withstand that kind of punishment.

I figure we should come down just a little bit, but still make sure we get our point across. So, I hereby unofficially give the thought (just to make sure I don't get sued) that if you see someone doing something that fits into this category of stupidity, smack 'em. In the head. Really hard. Repeatedly.

We need people to wake up, smell the coffee and stop being dorks. These individuals must be trained, and to help them train, we need strong members of our society to lead (that eliminates everybody in administration), but it can be done.

So, the next time you're driving around town or walking through campus and you see a living replica of the movie "Dumb and Dumber," don't just think of them as members of the same party as Newt, but feel compassion for them.

Hold them, comfort them and make them aware of their little trivial brain-lapse. Then kick the living tar out of them.

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Congress wants to be welfare's father

There's at least one missing ingredient in the cauldron of welfare-reform ideas brewing on Capitol Hill. It's a spoonful of something called humility.

For a long time, conservatives in this country have accused liberals of "social engineering" — trying to change private behavior through public policy. Now they're trying it.

At this point, the prime target of the welfare reformers is the unwed, uneducated and unemployed poor woman. In the economic lingo that the Republicans prefer, welfare is now called an "incentive" for having a baby. They talk about withdrawing AFDC as a disincentive — economic birth control.

But the truth is that the reformers — left, right or center — don't know how to penetrate and turn around the teen cultures in which parenthood has become too common. There isn't a magic, one-size-fits-all-people policy to reduce the number of kids born to women who are out of wedlock and out of luck.

So if humility is the best policy, it's smart to think small. To think about doing what we know can make a difference.

This is what we know. In America, a striking 60 percent of all pregnancies are unplanned. That figure rises to 76 percent among the poor. These poor, pregnant women are somewhat less likely to have abortions than higher-income women.

We also know that sexually active poor and low-income teenagers use contraceptives less regularly than upper-income teens. And we know that they are much less likely to have abortions. Only four out of 10 poor teens have abortions compared to seven out of 10 higher-income teens.

The assumption of the social engineers is that these women are getting pregnant for the welfare check. But we know from the Alan Guttmacher Institute that between a fifth and a third of poor women who had unplanned births would have had abortions if they'd had the money — if Medicaid funding were available.

Nevertheless, there has been hardly a word spoken in the welfare debate about birth control or about the way federal funding and access to family-planning clinics has steadily diminished over the last 15 years. As for abortion funding? It's the rare politician who has dared to touch that hot button.

But if we are talking about government programs influencing private decisions, there's no way to keep abortions out of the equation.



Ellen Goodman

Today the composite welfare plan being drawn up by the latest batch of social engineers looks suspiciously like a trap. The government already offers an "incentive." It will pay for childbirth but it won't pay for abortion, except in cases of rape or incest. The Republican contract would go further. After paying for the birth of a child, it would withhold AFDC from the mother who's a teen or has another child on welfare. And within two years every mother and child would be cut off, though the toddler might be offered a slot in an orphanage.

It's possible that Congress will adopt a different plan that passes the welfare buck to the states in exchange for taking on the whole Medicaid bill. What would happen then? Today 16 states pay for Medicaid abortions with their own tax dollars. After the swap, could the federal government prevent or hamper the states from paying for abortions? Nobody knows.

The Republicans insist that their welfare reform will save money, though we don't know the social cost accounting — how many homeless, how many hungry. But if we're talking money, here are some other figures. Every public dollar spent on family planning saves \$4 on medical and welfare costs. So does every dollar spent on abortions.

Funding Medicaid abortions would save \$162 million over two years. Not by encouraging abortion, but by enabling poor women to make their own choices. Just like women who aren't poor.

Abortion is by no means a cure for the problems of welfare dependency, of poverty, of hopelessness, of girls looking for babies to love them and boys who can sire but not father. But it's one piece of the puzzle we can put in place.

Americans don't want to pay for abortions and don't want to pay for welfare. We have tied poor women into our own double bind. Now, in this momentous debate about the future of welfare, we have to untie our tongues.

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Faith is finding your own god

When I was about 8 years old, I got some rather disturbing news. The girl next door told me that because I had not been baptized, I was the devil, or I was going to hell or something along those "eternal damnation, hellfire and brimstone" lines. Her father was a local pastor, so I guessed she knew what she was talking about. Needless to say, I was a little taken aback.

I'll be honest. I'm not a very religious person; I never have been. But the knowledge that I was destined to an afterlife of torment and misery was frightening. At the age of 8, then, I began to ponder the nature of religion, faith and "God."

My early struggles with matters of faith subsided when, at the age of 12, I was baptized and confirmed into the United Methodist Church. Thus my salvation was assured.

Phew. But college brought back old doubts and introduced new questions. During my freshman year, I made a difficult, but successful, transition from nonpracticing Methodist to practicing agnostic. Later, desperate for a belief system to which I could cling, I created my own personal religion, New Reformed Druidism.

It was a pretty straightforward deal. All I had to do to maintain my faith was to be relatively nice to all the furry little forest creatures and make a reasonable effort to hug as many trees as I could. This I did for several weeks before encountering another crisis of faith. After developing considerable slabs of callous on my hands and arms and abrasions on my face from prolonged fits of tree-hugging, I decided that I really didn't like all the furry little forest creatures after all.

From then on, I have waffled between rather noncommittal Protestantism and devout agnosti-



Doug Peters

cism, with short bursts of hedonism, narcissism and a bunch of other -isms interspersed throughout. For all my looking, however, I still haven't found a belief system that really answers all my questions.

I doubt I ever will.

But I still wonder. Every once in a while, the question I asked myself when I was 8 years old creeps back into my mind:

Who is this God person anyway?

Who (or what) is this being who supposedly guards the threshold to paradise, checking for certificates of baptism and casting the heathen into the abyss? What does it look like?

Imagine the frustration of a police composite artist given this description — Sex: male, female, or possibly neither; Age: all; Color: all ... or maybe none; Distinguishing Characteristics: really bright light and harp music, carries around a worldwide baptism ledger.

Nobody could draw God from that.

Some people say they have seen God. Of course, some people say Elvis is working at the airport Denny's in Fargo, N.D. Even I thought I saw God once. It was about 1:15 on a Saturday morning on O Street a couple of years ago.

After I sobered up a little, I realized that it was just some slobbery, hacking old drunk guy. I should've known, I guess. Any guy who can't keep from vomiting on

his own shoes would have a hell of a time creating an entire universe.

Maybe God, as Hollywood has guessed in the past, really looks like Charlton Heston. Maybe God IS Charlton Heston, and only NRA members will be allowed into paradise. Scary.

But does it really matter what God looks like, or even whether God exists at all? Probably not.

There are hundreds of religions, hundreds of gods. Millions of people have been killed in attempts to show which gods are right and which are wrong. Millions more will die in the future, whether in gas chambers, on the field of battle, in the parking lots of abortion clinics or in the suffocating flames and smoke of an underground bunker. The sad fact is that religions are created and shaped by their members; gods are empowered by those who believe in them. A faith is as good or as evil as the individuals who interpret it.

But it doesn't really matter.

In the final analysis, religion is smoke and mirrors — a way to give people hope, where otherwise there would be none; an answer to impossible questions. It doesn't have to be true. The only bad religion is one that fails to comfort. The only false god is one that promotes hatred and bloodshed, that fails to provide an answer, however flawed, to life's impossible questions.

So really, when you get down to it, if worshipping a slobbery old drunk on O Street makes you feel comfortable and secure in your existence on this planet, you can call him "God," and you won't necessarily be wrong.

Just be ready to show him proof of your baptism.

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Mike Luckovich