

Kids need parents, not policies

The Nebraska Department of Social Services is about to make a terrible mistake.

Late last week, Mary Dean Harvey, state director of social services, announced a new policy that would eliminate the placement of foster children in the homes of unmarried, unrelated adults who live together.

More specifically singled out are homosexuals. Ms. Harvey made it a point to exorcise these people from the system of which she is in charge, saying that no children will be put "in the homes of persons who identify themselves as homosexuals."

She went on to say that Nebraska needed the policy in order to place children "in the most family-like setting" possible.

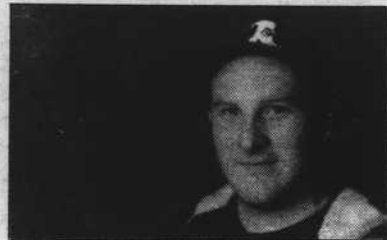
What decade is she living in? I get the feeling this woman and her constituents (Sen. Kate Witek of Omaha, for example) are spending too much time watching "Father Knows Best."

The definition of a family has changed, ladies. A family is no longer a heterosexual couple living in perfect matrimony on a brick-lined street with picket fences and a neatly trimmed lawn.

Families are varied and individually unique, and to single out one form is not only discriminatory and insulting, it is also ignorant.

Who are you, Ms. Harvey, to decide what constitutes a "family-like setting?"

My aunt Marie is a single mother raising two kids, and she has done a magnificent job. She didn't choose to do it alone, but the irresponsible ass to whom she had been married for 10 years decided he didn't want to be a father or



Michael Justice

husband any longer. She works full time, does volunteer work, house chores and repairs and still finds time to be a mother. She is an impressive woman, and I'm proud to know her.

Interestingly enough, the volunteer work she does is with children who live in abusive homes. Many of these kids are suicidal and prone to fits; some run away and (surprise, Ms. Harvey), live in a "family-like setting," complete with a married, heterosexual couple living together.

I know many kids who came from the ideal textbook home: Two parents, plenty of money and a nice home in a nice neighborhood. Some of them are wonderful people and some of them are so screwed up they may never make a positive contribution to society.

Families should not be clustered into groups and labeled correct or incorrect. They must be reviewed on an individual basis and deemed acceptable on the criterion that the child would enjoy an improved life if placed in that home.

I would feel more comfortable placing a child in a home with a single parent who could love, support and provide decent opportunities rather than in an environment that could be hostile or stunting.

What if a woman or man has never been able to find a marriage partner, yet would like to raise a child? Should a person be denied that opportunity strictly on the basis of his or her marital status?

What if a married couple decide they want to be foster parents with the hope that the child will mend their failing relationship? Should they be given the access to a child simply because they fulfill the technical guidelines of a "family-like setting" even though their reasons are unquestionably flawed?

And what of the ban and bashing of homosexuals? Not allowing them to participate is a slap in the face. Why not just say what you mean, Ms. Harvey? You're trying to tell them they are inferior because of their sexual preferences and are thus incapable of properly raising a child. At least that's the way it sounds when you single them out like lepers.

My concern is where this sort of policy will lead. Are other minority groups next on the blacklist? What about interracial marriages? How about couples who suffer from a disease or are handicapped? Will personal conditions like age or weight become a factor? How about bald men or women who wear too much makeup? Will they be denied?

The point is that when one group's rights are sacrificed, others will follow. Policies like these inevitably fail society, drawing lines of separation that do irreparable damage to the relationships of the divided factions by promoting fear, distrust and hatred.

Justice is a junior news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Media's pulpy juice is loose on Tang

There's a local story down in Jerkwater, Ga., that is threatening to break into national news.

It's about a guy who, in a fit of jealous rage, allegedly killed his ex-wife, her boyfriend, her extended family and most of her pets.

This man will be given a pseudonym for his own protection. For lack of a better moniker, we'll call him Tang.

Tang had built up a reputation as a regional hero before this tragic incident. He was a star quarterback in high school and earned a full-ride scholarship to play flag football for the Jerkwater Community College.

Tang also starred as an extra in the theatrical version of "The Naked Gun" performed by the Jerkwater Thespian Society. His splendid acting merited Tang a Thanks-For-Participating certificate and much-deserved local fame.

Tang's fame quickly shifted to infamy when it was discovered the way he had allegedly treated his wife during their marriage. Not only did he refuse to put the toilet seat down, some reports said, he had been kicking her beloved cocker spaniel Maurice when she wasn't paying attention.

These atrocities led to their eventual divorce. Tang was still horribly in love with his ex-wife, who, for the sake of anonymity, we will call Nicole.

When Nicole began dating another man, Tang couldn't take it. Police say that he sliced them both up with a potato peeler.

But this cruel vengeance wasn't enough for the former football star and renowned actor. He allegedly bombed the funeral home during the services for Nicole and killed all her relatives and wounded some guy named Frank.

News of these atrocities has been covered nearly 27 hours a day by local stations, and is beginning to spread to networks around the area.

Jerkwater Mayor Chuck U. Farley was shocked by the violence that has disrupted his peaceful town.

"It's just terrible!" Farley said. "I can't believe that such a decent, honest role model could flip out like some Charlie Manson wannabe."

But Farley thought that some good might come of this horrible incident.

"I just hope that all this attention brings in enough tourists to get Jerkwater back on the map," he said.

Reportedly, a television station has begun work on a made-for-TV movie based on the life of Tang.



Joel Strauch

KRAP-TV ("Wolf 42") has already filmed scenes of Tang's early life and currently is making up how they think that the trial will go.

KRAP production manager Tom Ace said he didn't think that they were taking this issue too far.

"The people want to know every little detail about this whole Tang thing, especially the really juicy tidbits that we make up out of thin air," Ace said.

When questioned about the legality of what his station was doing, Ace got a little defensive.

"Of course it's perfectly legal to consider a man guilty of murder even before the trial's over, just to get better ratings," Ace said. "We're a TV station, damn it! We can do whatever the hell we want."

An information number has been set up for those persons who just can't get enough details about the status of Tang, his trial and other important things, like if that nasty rash of his has begun to clear up.

Just call 1-900-PISS-AWAY-MONEY if you're one of those people who needs to know if Tang's hair has been growing at an unusual rate or what brand of deodorant he uses.

It's only \$4 a minute, and you'll probably only be on hold for about 10 minutes or so.

Those of us who live outside the circle of regional coverage on this story of obvious national importance can only wait for the inevitable. Soon every channel in the country will present each minute facet of this life-altering drama that touches each of us in some special way.

So, if you're like me, you can cherish the knowledge that soon we will no longer be bothered by such trivial news like some little earthquake in Japan that killed a couple people or some dumb war in Eastern Europe that might threaten everybody on the planet.

We can sit in front of the tube and absorb the important issues facing our nation today. And I'll finally discover what color sweater Tang wore on that tragic day that changed his life and ours.

Strauch is senior secondary education major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

Hypocrisy a blinding mirror

Sometimes it's hard to decide what to write about because of the kind of mail it might generate. I was thinking of writing about the shoot-'em-up mentality of inner-city youth vs. the more conservative white middle-class youth and how both mirror our country's history.

But to do that, I would have to mention some sacred cows. For me, it is no surprise that the young people of today want to be gun-slingers. It is no surprise at all that there is a strong trend toward violence and conservative values. That's how this country was born. Violence shaped this land.

There is a distinct similarity between the Old West and what seems to be happening today. In order to make such a comparison, some less attractive parts of American wild West history have to be mentioned.

The lawlessness of the Old West has returned. The law of the six-shooter and the law-and-order ethic of Dodge City, Kan., has returned with it. That's precisely how the West was won. But for every lawless town tamed by that Old West ethic, there was an Indian village burned whose inhabitants were killed or displaced or put on reservations. The West wasn't won without the destruction of the lives of a lot of innocent people.

I don't get much mail about the columns I've written. However, when I attack the more glaring examples of American hypocrisy, I expect something. I'd like to always talk about how great things are. But when they aren't so great, I can't ignore reality. I can't help but talk about what's real.

What little mail I do get either accuses me of hating white people, living in the past or simply being anti-American. My friend Ron Kurtenbach once told me that my writing method was subversive. I responded that legal segregation



E. Hughes Shanks

was subversive, and that I had perhaps learned well from my oppressors. Sad but true, and I was only joking.

I've learned that there are those sacred cows that really seem to make people angry. To these people I must be some mad black radical monster who wants to defame this great country and destroy the foundations of freedom and democracy.

I recently was arguing with an old nonviolent civil-rights activist. Her sacred cow was the idea that civil rights were fought for and legal segregation was ended largely because of nonviolent protest. I said there was a connection between the nonviolent civil-rights movement and the violent and destructive riots of the '70s and that segregation was a tiny part of a much larger "movement."

"It's all about the same movement," I said. "You can't have one without the other." Then I thought, "That's what hypocrisy does. It blinds you."

Another sacred cow is World War II. How could a person not talk about Pearl Harbor without mentioning the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? (In terms of overall destruction and loss of life, these two make Pearl Harbor look like a cheap fireworks display.) I think my fax machine just clicked on.

Whenever I mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki, slavery and legal segregation or Native American

genocide, I can expect at least one letter in which a white male will sarcastically apologize for being personally responsible for the terrible things whites have done to me.

Skin color has nothing to do with it. I'm not concerned about American hypocrisy because I'm black. Neither are whites responsible for it because they are white.

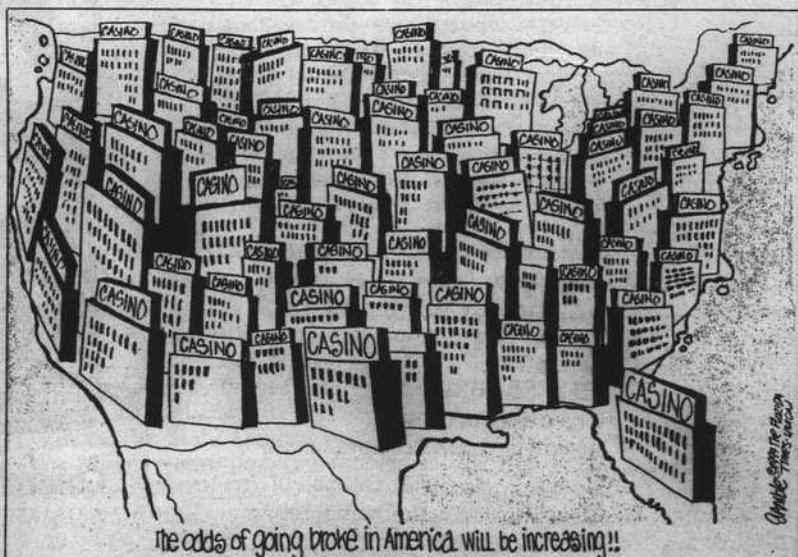
As a human being, I'm embarrassed that my country committed genocide and enslaved people, while at the same time telling the rest of the world it had this "new" idea that all people are created equal.

Just because a person is white doesn't mean their ancestors are responsible for slavery. I'm incensed that white people feel guilty for benefiting from the exploitation of slaves when their people didn't own any. It's puzzling that so many are willing to accept the blame for things that have happened. Most of their ancestors have been exploited, too. Very few white people are actually descendants of slaveowners, anyway.

It's actually much more likely for a black person to be a direct descendant of slaveowners, either through extra-marital relationships between slaves and slaveowners or marriages between slaves and slaveowners.

Take me for example. My parents met in college. My grandparents met in college. Their parents were wealthy landowners in Arkansas in the late 1800's. Hmmmm, I wonder if that means that my family has benefited from the exploitation of slavery? Of course it does. Do I feel guilty about it? Sometimes. But I'm not responsible.

Shanks is a graduate student and Daily Nebraskan columnist.



Ed Gamble