

At least dog knows his 'heels'

My dog Higgins thinks that when I say "heel," I'm going to give him a piece of toast.

If you don't have a canine companion, you can stop reading right now and move on to the crossword puzzle.

If you do own an animal, but it is a well-behaved four-legged friend or one that understands what "heel" really means and slows down instead of salivates at the command, then you too can move on.

But if you have a dog like Higgy-Poo, one who climbs up on the table to steal cookies while your back is turned, who relieves himself on both the neighbor's leg and your kid's snowman, and who would betray his loyal owner in an instant for a greasy chicken bone, then you're in the right place.

Your dog, too, would probably fail the Good Canine Test.

It has been said that one can tell how important something is to a culture by how many words they have to describe it. In Alaska, for example, there are supposedly 400,000 words that mean snow.

At our house — in the Lange-Kubick subculture — by virtue of his 27 nicknames, Higgins is definitely top dog. My son, Justin, spent one evening last week compiling a list of epithets for Higgins that include Higgy, Hig, Higgy-Piggy, Higadoga, Higeister and Highead. You get the picture; those derivatives make sense.

But the mutt is also lovingly referred to by these terms of endearment of questionable origin: Geidel, Fruen, Ginzy, Fruen-Ginzy, Fruen-Doggy. (I think our German roots are showing through.)

Nobody loves Higgy-hoo more



Cindy Lange-Kubick

than the kids — they sleep with him, fight over him and let him wash their faces with his tongue.

My youngest son, Joe, claims that HiggyDugga is a person. (I tend to agree with him, although I question Joe's overall judgment, since he also feels that our two guinea pigs, our ex-turtles and the goldfish that are buried in the backyard — Like-a-lot and Love-a-lot — were people, too.)

So the children love El Frueno; guess who he loves?

Guess who Higgelty-Piggelty moons over while this person is away — sitting softly whining, his nose between his paws by the front door?

Me, his mommy.
"Look, Higgins, it's Mommy. Mommy's home!"

At first I was flattered. It reminded me of when my children were wee babies, and they loved me best.

Of course, that feeling of superiority at being the center of a helpless infant's universe soon dissipates after a few sleepless nights.

So it is with my new baby. It was love at first sight when he smiled at me through his prison bars at the pound, his tail wagging furiously.

My heart melted.

Yes, dogs do smile.

We took him home and began to bond. I fed him, I bathed him, I culled him for fleas.

I walked him, I slipped him pizza crust under the table, I whispered sweet nothings in his ear.

My husband started giving me sidelong looks of jealousy and became downright hostile when I asked him if he could just scoot over "a little bit" so the dog could sleep between us.

I was concerned about separation anxiety.

In short, I spoiled Higgins rotten.

And that's why he will never pass the Good Canine Test.

Not only does he not come, sit or stay. He also cannot "walk on a loose lead," or "demonstrate good manners when left alone."

He flunked parts four and eight of the test hands down. He could neither "walk through a crowd without straining on the leash" nor "demonstrate no more than casual interest in the presence of other dogs."

Pleeease.

The Higeister pees on animate and inanimate objects alike, jumps up on strangers and attacks dogs three times his size.

The only part of the test he managed to pass muster on was when I said "heel."

He slowed down long enough for me to slip him a piece of toast.

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

Politicians better watch their tongues

Imagine coming home from vacation to discover that your congressman had a name-change operation. It's enough to make a girl lose her tan.

Hereabouts, most of us have known and voted for Barney Frank ever since he ran for the state legislature under the slogan "Neatness Isn't Everything." We've known him rumpled and ironed.

But Barney Fag? After House Majority Leader and Ph.D. Dick Armeey let this little bit of Freud slip off his lip, he insisted vociferously that it was just a mispronunciation, "I had trouble with alliteration. I was stumbling, mumbling ..."

Well, Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers to you too. Frank, fank, fink, fig, fag? As Barney said, in all his mother's 59 years of marriage, no one had ever called her Elsie Fag.

As for Armeey's sub-subconscious, the man uttered this provocative pronunciation right after proclaiming, "I like peace and quiet." He ended that possibility with the sentence: "And I don't need to listen to Barney Fag (pause) Barney Frank haranguing in my ear. ..."

But enough psychotherapy and speech therapy. After dabbling in some medical literature, I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that certain right-wing brethren in the new order are suffering from a new disorder. They are suffering from what I can only describe as Political Tourette's Syndrome.

Tourette's Syndrome, you may recall, is that unfortunate neurological disease whose symptoms include, among other things, involuntary swearing. A disease, by the way, that is three times more likely to affect males than females and gets worse at puberty.

My medical dictionary describes the swearing symptoms with a sympathetic and classic understatement. It says: "This aspect of the disease complicates social adjustment."

There you have it.

Newt Gingrich, Speaker of the House and also a Ph.D., pontificates in futuristic cyberspeak about the Third Wave, when everybody will have a tax-deductible laptop computer. But then, says mom, out pops a decidedly First Wave word on the first lady: Bitch!

Rep. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.) prides himself on speaking Patriotism as his first language. Then out jumps a primal slur on his commander-in-chief: Traitor!

The honorary member of the new Republican class, talkmaster Rush Limbaugh, insists that some of his best friends are strong women. But then from somewhere



Ellen Goodman

behind bared teeth blurts out: Feminazi!

The short list doesn't include other such verbal escapees as "counterculture McGoverniks" or "media elite" (certifiable swears), but you get the idea. At least the new leaders aren't like the poor man in Coral Springs, Fla., whose neighbors wanted to evict him because his disease made him shriek at night. On second thought, maybe they are like that.

Nobody has yet suggested that we evict Armeey and Gingrich, both of whom, of course, deny everything and blame the media. (Another symptom.)

Political Tourette's Syndrome, or PTS, is not exclusively a Republican disease. However, it appeared in its earliest form on the tapes of the late Richard M. Nixon, whose epitaph should have been "Expletives Deleted."

It became rampant at the Republican National Convention in 1992, when rancid little bits of hate speech — misogyny, homophobia, workingmotherphobia — kept popping up from under the sweet frosting of family values.

But what typifies the current strain of PTS is the irresponsible meanness in outbursts of those who find themselves in positions of what we would loosely call responsibility.

Responsible people, alas, are expected to hold their tongues. Conservatives, on the other hand, include many who have long bridled at the "political correctness" cops and longed for the good old days when you could call a strong woman a bitch and a homosexual a fag. Thus we have whole minutes, hours, weeks of responsible speak punctuated by volcanic verbal eruptions — Bitch! Fag! — followed by the passionate denial of people who couldn't help themselves.

As Barney Frank said, it wouldn't have popped out if it weren't in. Bitch! Fag! It's getting to be a habit. Or a disease.

And as the medical book says, it "complicates social adjustment."

© 1995 The Boston Globe Newspaper Company

Athletes secrets better untold

The TV talkers repeatedly tell us that the Simpson trial is teaching us that sports heroes can be real people with character flaws.

Yes, that's true. But does that surprise anyone expect tiny children?

There have been days when the sports pages read like the daily police blotter, with athletes being accused of selling or using dope, assaulting females, evading taxes, walloping fans, throwing mini-bombs and even committing armed heists.

If someone did a study, it would probably show that the misbehavior rate among athletes is probably higher than any other group of public figures except Chicago aldermen.

And that is despite sports reporters trying to be kind by sparing us an overdose of true-life portraits of the athletes they cover.

Or maybe they aren't being kind, but fear that if they tell us too much, they won't be able to go in a locker room without having a limb ripped off.

Whatever the reason, sports reporters have, to some degree, tried to shield sports idols from being publicly unveiled as mopes or menaces. And maybe that is only fair, since the athletes and reporters can be brought together so intimately. Few political reporters get to interview politicians when they limp naked and dripping out of a shower. They're grateful for being spared the sight.

And maybe the sports reporters believe that the fans — already yawning through contract squabbles and labor disputes — really don't want to know that the splendid athlete they cheer eats dinner with his fingers. Even the soup.



Mike Royko

At one time, everything off the field was considered confidential. That's why we didn't know that Babe Ruth was an incredible glutton for food, booze and any woman who was handy. Or that Ty Cobb was a vicious racist. Or that other star beat their wives, kept bottles in their lockers, or made goo-goo eyes at their teammates. We were happier believing they all ate Wheaties and dedicated every home run to a sick child.

In recent years, there has been more pecking into the laundry hamper. Not only of athletes, but of everyone else. But there is much that we aren't told, and I'm glad. When I go to the ballpark, I want to yell, "Way to go," instead of, "Call the cops."

But because I have friends who are sportswriters, I've heard many of the stories they tell over lunch or a beer. And it gives me a clearer idea of why there is no cheering in the press box.

A few examples:
One day the Bears announced that they had traded a player for a low draft choice.

Like many fans, I was surprised because that player was one of the few bright spots on a really pathetic team.

The writer who covered the Bears team was a proper fellow and a churchgoer. When I asked him

about the strange trade, he looked uncomfortable.

"The coach told me, off the record, that the other players had been complaining about him," the writer said.

Why?

Grimacing, he said: "Well, they have this one big shower room that they all use. And he was always ... always ... well, he was always abusing himself in there."

In front of his teammates?

"Yes. You know, he's not the brightest person in the world."

Does the coach of the team he was traded to know about this?

"Sure, but he says it won't be any problem because they have separate shower stalls."

And then there was the pitcher who was traded to the Cubs, and almost immediately went on the disabled list.

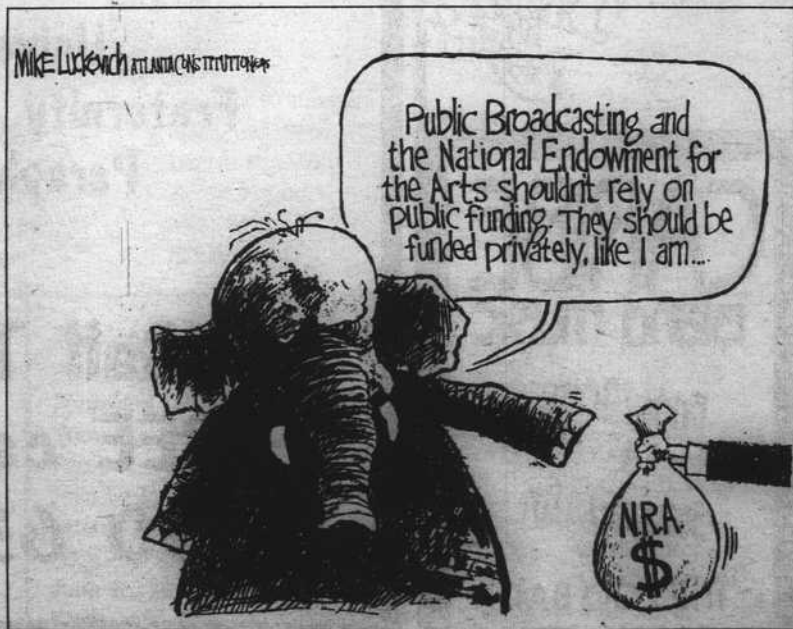
When I expressed puzzlement that the pitcher had been injured even before he had a chance to play, the baseball writer said: "Just between you and me, I'm told he just came down with VD, a case of clap. It'll take a little while before the shots clear it up."

Does that prevent him from pitching?

"Not really. But he's married and he told his wife that he can barely move around in bed because he has a bad back, so the team has to cover for him."

So we shouldn't be surprised that O.J. turned out to be something less than a church deacon. And regardless of what he has done, it should be remembered that his teammates didn't mind sharing a shower with him.

© 1995 Tribune Media Services, Inc.



Mike Lukovich