

Escaping the realm of razors

To shave or not to shave: that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler to suffer the nicks and cuts of errant razors, or to take armpits against a sea of shaving creams and by opposing them go au naturel ...

It is a dilemma.
But let's face it. For most of us, female body hair is difficult to defend on aesthetic grounds alone. Although it does have its benefits.
I'm fairly certain that it was my hairy legs that nabbed me this job in the first place.

"Tell me something about yourself," the editor asked.
I smiled winsomely, as women desperate for work are wont to do, and crossed my legs.
I considered sharing my grade point average, my enduring love of the classics, my penchant for opera, my geode collection.
"I don't shave my legs," I replied instead.
His eyes widened perceptibly; he peered surreptitiously over the desk at my gams.

I had him.
How could he risk not hiring one of the 10 women at the university with woolly calves?
Another perk that goes with unshorn legs is obvious — no nubs. No prickly, bristly, stubbly hairs to rub against your loved one in the middle of the night.
And if you don't whack off your armpit tresses, you can actually wear deodorant without incurring third-degree burns under your



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arms.
No razor burn, no multitude of teeny hairs to wash down the drain or scrub off the side of the bathtub. Fewer Band-Aid bills.

To shave, to shear, perchance to cut: ay, there's the rub.

American women sporting the European style in body thatch are about as common as an honest Washington politician and as gaped upon as three-headed cows at the state fair.

I'll admit that it's difficult for Americans to look beyond the hair to the person beneath.

However, there is a decidedly sexist twist to this logic. What do we call a man with a three-day growth of hair on his face?

Sexy.
What do we label a woman with leg hair?

Butch.
Men with stubbly faces are sporting the Don Johnson look. Women with stubbly legs are unbecoming, unfeminine.

Thus culture doth make conformists of us all ...

One of the first rites of passage into womanhood involves a Bic razor and a can of SoftShave.

After the onset of puberty, unshaven legs become a sin of the highest order.

Like most women, I dared not break the sanctimony of smooth — read sexy — baby-soft legs.

I begged to shave my legs. I shaved on the sly and have the scars to prove it. I even shaved my arms — big mistake.

On the eve of the birth of my first child, I plopped my bare bodkin into the tub to ensure that a silky smooth body would greet his imminent arrival.

"What are you doing?" my husband asked, panic in his voice.

"Just getting rid — pant, pant — of these nubs, Honey," I replied, straining to see my legs over my belly.

And why? Five hours later, I sat on a hospital bed, sweating, panting, moaning, every orifice in my body exposed; but, hey, my legs looked good.

My move into leg-hair acceptance has been gradual. Right now I'm just a winter-hair person — just beginning to see beyond the surface to the beauty of the hirsute leg. The advent of shorts and swimsuit season usually drives me back to the blade.

To bare or not to bare. That is the question.

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Leaders redefining equality philosophy

It seemed like old times for Democrats last week. Vice President Al Gore was in Florida, promising the AFL-CIO convention that President Clinton would bar government agencies from doing business with companies that replace striking workers. The new chairman of the NAACP was spouting the same old clichés that stereotype blacks as hopeless, hapless victims of white racism who cannot make it without affirmative action and other quotas designed exclusively for them.

Newly elected NAACP chairman Myrlie Evers-Williams vowed to be "very vocal on issues that deal with welfare reform" — meaning don't cut the dole. And also with issues dealing "with the real attitudes and attempts to roll back many of the gains that we have made over the years ... particularly affirmative action" — meaning the continued hiring of people based not on the content of their character and ability, but on the color of their skin.

These are echoes of a soon-to-be-buried philosophy. Politicians, including some Democrats, realize that while the Voting Rights Act, open housing laws and school desegregation produced equal opportunity, affirmative action produces unequal opportunity, dependency and increased tension between races. Politicians are getting this message: It's no longer political suicide to stand against affirmative action and to campaign for colorblindness.

Even Charles Evers, brother of Evers-Williams' late husband Medgar Evers, is a Republican.

It was from the lips of the president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, that some profound truth recently came. Addressing the second session of the Democratic Parliament in Cape Town on Feb. 17, Mandela sent a message to people who thought his election meant government was open for handouts. Mandela said, "The government has extremely limited resources to address the many and urgent needs of our people. We are very keen that this real situation should be communicated to the people as a whole. All of us, especially the leadership of political organizations and civil society, must rid ourselves of the wrong notion that the government has a big bag full of money. The government does not have such riches."

Mandela wasn't through. While he spoke favorably of



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affirmative action for those who had suffered the sting of apartheid, he said only those who exhibited "collective responsibility and accountability" would benefit. Then, in a statement that would get him branded a right-wing reactionary in this country, Mandela added: "It is important that we rid ourselves of the culture of entitlement, which leads to the expectation that the government must promptly deliver whatever it is that we demand, and results in some people refusing to meet their obligations. ..."

The past is the NAACP and its total allegiance to the Democratic Party, which has dispensed welfare checks and affirmative action in exchange for the organization delivering a huge bloc of black votes to the party. And the future is hard-working blacks such as Oklahoma Rep. J.C. Watts, Rep. Gary Franks of Connecticut and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Growing numbers like them have made it without the "assistance" of the NAACP and quotas. By their lives and words, this new generation of blacks is saying that nothing takes the place of persistence.

The desperation of those who are about to lose power was expressed recently by Rep. Charles Rangel of New York, who equated opposition to affirmative action to Hitler's policy of exterminating Jews. (He did subsequently apologize for this remark.)

Perhaps Rangel, the NAACP and similar organizations dislike anyone who declares independence from government because it means people will no longer be dependent on them. Some civil-rights "professionals" may have

to find productive work — an unwelcome prospect for people who have earned big bucks by playing a lifelong and divisive game of racial politics.

Nelson Mandela has it right. He should return to America and give that parliamentary speech to Congress and the American people.

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Faith found through baseball

Right now in Florida and Arizona, replacement players are preparing themselves in spring training camps for the upcoming baseball season. In our nation's capital, the players and owners are still arguing over who will receive the biggest slice of the revenue pie.

There is no doubt that a large number of American people are just plain fed up with the whole deal and could care less if the season is played by a bunch of has-beens and never-will-bes.

I feel differently, though.

I have a very unusual connection with baseball. It is through baseball that I found God. I realize that most people, when claiming to have found God, are either handing out pamphlets or sitting on death row, but that's not my story.

In the summer of 1993, I began to have serious doubts as to the existence of a supreme being. There were the usual amounts of war and brutal crimes in the world, but it was a tragedy closer to home that really made me wonder if we were being cared for by a creator.

It was the summer of the Midwest floods. Iowa was underwater, and the national media focused daily upon the loss of life and property and the building of sandbag barriers.

One night as I was standing in line at the grocery store, I picked up the evening newspaper. There was the usual picture of a submerged farmhouse, but the story was what set me off. A woman, who had lost everything she owned, was quoted thanking God that it was only her home that had been destroyed, and that no one in her family had been killed.

I shook my head in disbelief. I began to wonder why anyone would be thanking God after a devastation



Todd Elwood

like that. I actually became angry at this woman. "Am I the only one who would question God for something like this?" I thought.

As doubts and anger filled my head, I passed a gum machine. This was no ordinary penny-slot machine, though. This was a monster. It stood about five feet tall, and the gumballs were the size of golf balls. They were beautiful, bright, and most assuredly, sugar-packed. They were also 25 cents apiece.

I slid a quarter into the slot, and as I turned the giant handle, I prayed. More precisely, I challenged. "God, if you are there, give me a red gumball."

It wasn't as though I were asking Him to turn stones into bread, and I had, after all, just invested a quarter on my faith. But after the guts of the machine turned and twisted, out popped my gumball.

White.
I don't know anyone who enjoys white gum balls. It is the worst flavor of the bunch. That was it, I thought; God is a hoax. He is a creation of men to keep society ordered and nothing more.

For the next week or so, I collected as much evidence as I could to prove that God did not exist. It was not difficult. More people died in the floods. The robberies, rapes, murders and other forms of senseless violence contin-

ued. The world was filled with white gumballs.

But then, on July 13, all of that changed.

Being a baseball fan, I found myself in front of the TV watching the All-Star Game. I noticed that one player, as he stepped up to the plate for his turn at bat, crossed himself.

I chuckled confidently at his foolishness. This All-Star was obviously asking for God's assistance at the plate, and I knew that God was way too busy saying you're welcome to a woman in Iowa to help him hit a baseball.

But before every pitch, the player made the sign of the cross. After three or four pitches, this All-Star (and God, apparently) liked the next pitch. He swung the bat and the ball exploded to left field. I thought it was actually going to go over. It didn't.

The ball flew to the left-field fence, and there it stuck. It was one of the most unusual things I had ever seen. The ball lodged itself in between two of the mats that line the fence to make a soft landing for any player who decides to run into it. The play was ruled a ground-rule double.

Before the ball was pried out of place, the TV camera got a nice tight shot of it. My jaw dropped open as I stared at what looked exactly like a giant white gumball.

I decided that questioning God was pointless. He would not answer me in human words, or with the challenge of a quarter and a gumball.

I got down on my knees and thanked God for the ground-rule double.

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P.S. Write Back