

# Tar-nation

*Scalds, stupidity consequence of fixing roofs*

Recently, the store where I sell appliances has developed some substantial leaks in the roof. Most owners of companies, specifically female owners of companies, would hire trained professionals to patch the roof. But because the owner of Merchandise Mart is a guy, the roof would get fixed by unskilled workers yielding a pipe-wrench and tar.

Because it was a beautiful day and I didn't really enjoy being cooped up inside repeating the phrase, "I told you ma'am, I DON'T KNOW how much that is," I volunteered to tar the roof of my company's building.

Also, the top of a three-story building is one of the few places I can tan shirtless without getting issued a citation.

Now, I've tarred roofs before. In Mississippi, tarring roofs is practically the state pastime, although the leaks never get repaired. Usually, we just drink beer on the roof and, eventually, after the second case, conclude that the proper thing to do is tar the phrase, "Tina is a Whore!" on the side of the house.

I had forgotten how awful tarring roofs without beer really is. If any of you have only a week left to live, I highly suggest you tar the roof of a downtown building. I can attest that every second of splashing hot tar on your forehead feels like a damn century.

The basic procedure of tarring roofs consists of rolling tarpaper over the leak, sealing the paper to the roof with molten tar which is pumped from a ground-level boiling tank, and burning the "dog-shit" out of yourself approximately 18,529 times.

Hot tar is perhaps the vilest of all God's creations, because once



**Steve Willey**

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it's on you, brother, it's on you. You can't wipe it off, because you merely increase the surface area by spreading it. There is nothing to do except to accept the pain until the tar hardens, at which point it can be removed with a buttered spatula.

And for some odd reason, known only to laughing tar-manufacturers, tar always splashes. Moreover, it always splashes on your forehead.

I have found that each tar molecule (remember, I have had chemistry three times, so I know what I'm talking about), which molecularly looks like this: T-A=R, has proteins that allow it to think for itself.

According to a chemistry journal I subscribe to, powerful microphones, when placed next to cold and hot samples of tar, revealed some amazing results.

The article stated that cooled tar thinks the following: "whereas scalding hot tar is obsessed with this notion: 'Find the Forehead, Find the Forehead.'"

Tar manufacturers are not only

guilty of making hot tar splash, but of other crimes as well.

For example, I am convinced that tar-manufacturers also add unnecessary chemicals, namely horseradish, that cause the fumes from boiling tar to make normal folks behave, well, like idiots.

If you don't think tar fumes bring about unprecedented verbal stupidity, read this actual conversation between myself and a co-worker who had been tarring since early morning.

I'll call him Andy, only because it's his name.

STEVE: "Man, I can't believe I volunteered for this!"

ANDY: "I know. (Extending his left leg) my leg is made of solid gold."

STEVE: "What the HELL are you talking about?"

ANDY: (Surprised) "Bishop Tutu! Why? What are you talking about?"

STEVE: "You're talking crazy, man."

ANDY: "Tell that to your ostrich. (Pointing at his underarm) I swear, if Stenberg gets elected and he tries to paint my nose white, I'll KILL HIM!"

I had no idea what my next move should have been. As a trained journalist, I knew it was my duty to record this man's stupidity, but as a compassionate human, I desperately wanted to leave before he began to dance the Charleston.

Thinking back to the moment at which I volunteered for the tarring job, I can't believe how idiotic I am at times.

The sad thing is, with my prolonged exposure to tar fumes, I be bound to only get worse.

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# Colleges too lenient on student protests

"I am reading 'Pride and Prejudice' because I am being forced to," went the complaint of one student protester participating in the hijacking of Hamilton Hall at Columbia University.

Really? Have things come so far that innocent students at leading universities are being held down and forced to read Jane Austen? How barbaric.

For the past several weeks, Columbia University, my alma mater, has been the scene of what The New York Times affectionately labels a "rite of spring." Student "protesters" blockaded themselves inside a key classroom building and endured a hunger strike in an attempt to force the university to meet their demands.

The Times seems to find this admirable, offering a retrospective of Columbia "dissents" from past years. Morris Dickstein, a former Columbia professor and now an administrator with the City University of New York, told the Times "students there feel some need to live up to the heroism of their predecessors. They have this sense that once there was a generation that was activist."

Heroism? When Andrei Sakharov publicly challenged the Kremlin for violating human rights, that was heroism. When Lenny Skutnik dove into the icy Potomac river to save survivors of the Air Florida crash, that was heroism. Occupying the dean's office at Columbia and defecating in his trash can, burning the research notes of professors and closing down the university for a semester, as the student "protesters" of 1968 did at Columbia, was not heroism. It was criminality.

But, of course, the administration did not treat the student hooligans as criminals. No one was so much as expelled. And indeed, the students were widely lauded for their supposed "idealism." With the passage of time, and the help of liberal organs like The New York Times, the Columbia "uprising" has taken on almost mythic proportions.

Little wonder that through the years, handfuls of students have attempted to reclaim some of the glory of the '60s.

But the most recent protest — a demand that Columbia create an "ethnic studies" department and incorporate more "multicultural" works into the core curriculum — met with a surprisingly hard-headed response from the administration. University President George Rupp said, "Students do not design our curriculum nor enforce our standards."

That curriculum and those standards have been a source of pride at Columbia for more than 100 years. All undergraduates must complete a course of study that includes the great ideas of western civilization, art, music, literature and samplings of other cultures. The two courses that compose the core, "Contempo-



**Mona Charen**

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rary Civilization" and "Humanities," introduce undergraduates to the works of Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Miguel Cervantes, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Georg Hegel, Sir Thomas More, Herman Melville, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, V.I. Lenin and the aforementioned Austen, among multiple others. It isn't a summary of the "best" ideas — note the presence of Lenin and Rousseau. What Columbia has sought, and in my judgment largely succeeded in doing for 100 years, is to give students a sense of the most important ideas that have shaped our civilization.

The newest crop of protesters at Columbia scrawled in chalk on the wall of Hamilton Hall the authors they would see incorporated into the core: "Marcus Garvey, Bobby Seale, Steve Biko, Frederick Douglass, Cesar Chavez." With the exception of Douglass (who is not neglected in American History courses), the list is a mere catalog of left-wing political favorites, not a serious collection of writers who have influenced western thought — or any other.

The tragedy of the multicultural agenda is the constricted view of one's intellectual heritage it encourages. Do the Federalist Papers belong less to me because my ancestors were living in Europe when they were written than to the descendant of a Mayflower family? Do I appreciate Beethoven less because I'm not a German? Has Plato nothing to teach non-Greeks?

After two weeks of hunger strikes and disrupted classes, the administration demanded that the students evacuate Hamilton Hall. In return, the administration promised to hire more minority faculty members and consider expanding offerings in Asian and Hispanic studies.

That's not quite the unflinching posture one might have wished for, but in the annals of universities' responses to unruly students, it approaches backbone.

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# Mixed Feelings

*Nebraskans leave lasting impressions of America*

A few more weeks and my eight months in Lincoln will be over. As always, it's been instructive to live in a foreign culture, and I'm grateful for this opportunity to learn something about life in America.

Although I'll stay in America for four more months, I feel that as I leave Lincoln I'll be saying good-bye to something ultimately American, something so genuine and true that I won't encounter it in same form in any of the fancy cities and national monuments I'm hoping to see soon. My new status will be the major obstacle for experiencing this "true" America — from foreigner living in this country I'll switch to a foreign tourist, and my experiences will be those of a temporary visitor.

And then I have this funny feeling, illogical though it is, that the state capitol of Lincoln is closest to the heart of America that I will ever be able to reach. For me, Nebraska is the purest America, the America I came to know first and best. Until I've lived in some other state for eight months or more, I'll believe that everything I've seen so far and will see in future will only be refreshing curiosities from the standard cornfield.

First impressions are those that last, and my eight months in Lincoln have created a strong image of what Nebraska and Nebraskans are like. It's a pity, because in a small place like this and in a relatively short period of time, random disadvantages can grow unnecessarily large when more profound positive things go unnoticed or ignored.

As it is, I often forget that my laptop computer was stolen in New York City, not in Lincoln.

Instead of their kindness, helpfulness and honesty, I fear that some of my most permanent images of Lincolnites will be a 60-year-old



**Veera Supinen**

*"...I fear that some of my most permanent images of Lincolnites will be a 60-year-old lady who, sitting in Lied Center listening to the San Francisco Philharmonic, chews, loudly and visibly, a huge wad of pink gum."*

lady who, sitting in Lied Center listening to the San Francisco Philharmonic, chews, loudly and visibly, a huge wad of pink gum. That and the weekend father who took his three-year-old kids to see "Braveheart" and refused to leave the movie theatre as the children, scared by all the mutilation and head-chopping, started to cry. Even sadder is that these and similar incidents create the characteristics I'll possibly relate to "typical" Americans, and that these stereotypes will be those I transfer to people I communicate with. It's terribly unfair and irrational, but better knowledge doesn't always help. No matter how hard you try, generalizations are difficult to

avoid.

The time I've been in Lincoln has been both enjoyable and useful, and there are great people and places I know I will miss a lot. Still, I can't say I'm going to miss Lincoln itself — despite my attempts, I can't think of this city as a particularly pretty or interesting one.

And despite the wonderful time I've had, if someone would ask me what I thought about Nebraska, I'd probably say that I didn't like it compared to most other places I've seen in the United States.

My mixed emotions towards Nebraska are something I've tried to figure out. The reasons are naturally many, but one of the biggest is the fact that Nebraskan mentality — this, of course, being a generalization — is so akin to what one can find in Finland. People in both places feel that they live in a periphery and they also act accordingly. Inferiority complexes come in many forms, but especially in doubts about whether the home culture and society should be protected by overpatriotic attacks on anything even slightly different, or whether it would be safest to exaggerate negative things and laugh cordially with those who find the society somehow imperfect. Either way, the result is an unhealthy mixture of excessive pride, self-mocking and pity.

Perhaps the most illuminating expression of the similarities between the Nebraskan and Finnish mentalities is the somewhat pathetic way in which sports bolster national self-esteem. I'm leaving a state which unites behind the achievements of a college football team for a country whose biggest heroes are guys who can jump far with skis attached to their feet.

Small world.

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