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R. Patrick Deans

# From the President

## The Torch and Mr. Pickwick



Who can forget the ebullient Mr. Pickwick, and his rollicking adventures alongside three members of the Pickwick Club? In the serialized tale, written in the mid-1830's, club members Winkle, Snodgrass, and Tupman did their comic best. But when indispensable Sam Weller entered the story as Mr. Pickwick's servant, the little party of travelers burst straight from the supplement pages and into history. Charles Dickens ("Boz"), then only 24, and his illustrator, Hablot Knight Brown ("Phiz"), a mere 20, were now famous.

Dickens was poking gentle fun at what he saw. At that time, most respectable country houses featured equipment for observing nature and laboratories for scientific experiments. Societies for sharing the latest findings had sprung up in London, university towns, and every hamlet. From the

renowned Royal Society down to the humble but ever-hopeful Pickwick Club, those bent on scientific discovery were sharing their observations in person, and publishing their papers in journals.

Confident that discoveries by members of his club would improve mankind, Mr. Pickwick exuded the instincts of a keen observer. The old gentleman was admired endlessly for a paper titled, "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with Some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats." And indeed, the bespectacled soul, with a kind heart and spotty credentials, was a fictional stand-in for many citizens of his day. At the time, a number of amateurs produced major breakthroughs in science. Among them were: William "President," see page 2

## A Few Words From the Editor's Desk...



This is my last column for the year. I'm sure that will make some of you glad, but none as glad as I. For the last month, I

have been trying to write this column while dealing with corrupted computer files, reformatting hard discs, and recovering (some) data. I am at the point where I am in total agreement with Jerry Petre's "rant" in *The Torch* a few years back, in which he seemed to advocate a return to the pencil for such mundane tasks. Computers seem to be as much

of a problem these days as writer's cramp was in earlier times.

The Richmond Torch Club has gone all-out to plan a great convention this year. Facilities and programs will be first class. And, as in previous conventions, our hosts have spared no effort to find and schedule the most interesting tours and dining opportunities. It will be a chance to conveniently and easily visit the sites of some historical events of great importance in our history. If you were to visit these sites as an individual tourist, you would have to arrange

*Continued on next page*

“President,” from page 1

Smith, father of modern geology, and Mary Anning, discoverer of important fossil remains.

In that early Victorian era, those with intellectual curiosity shared a common optimism about what science could do to improve the lives of ordinary people. They also believed in sharing knowledge for its own sake—and enjoyed the friendships which emerged in the process. Societies for exchanging knowledge, they knew, would inevitably feature papers with nothing beyond workmanlike quality—but interspersed with these moments would be presentations bursting with new discoveries and insights. Although in possession of more university degrees than Dickens’ beloved

Continued from previous page

your own transportation and tickets. As part of a group, your transportation and tickets are arranged by your hosts and you have the pleasure of being in a company of Torch friends.

We have eight contestants for the Paxton Lectureship this year. A quick look leaves the impression that they are pretty good papers and that the judges may have some

character, we are nevertheless—through all these beliefs—direct successors to Mr. Pickwick.

The amateur scientific societies of Dickens’ day are not, of course, the only intellectual predecessors to the Torch idea. Yet several notions embodied in the fictional Pickwick Club persist among today’s Torch members. First would be the enduring belief that in sharing our separate troves of knowledge, we help each other to a better understanding of the universe, enriching our own lives and the collective store of knowledge.

A second idea we share with Pickwickians is that travel is broadening, and often connected to research. Our Torch conventions, which move around the continent, are founded on the notion that in

difficulty in selecting a winner. I think we’ll enjoy the paper this year. As a matter of fact, I’ve been much impressed by the quality of papers this year. There have also been papers from new clubs and old ones which I don’t remember as being sources of papers in recent years. Please keep them coming, folks.

And now, a request for authors of Torch Papers: Please send us a hard copy of your paper with your

visiting other regions, we enlarge our individual and collective compass. Also, our recent effort to found new Torch Clubs abroad may soon involve travel beyond North America to Wesel, Germany.

Still another common belief would be in the pleasure of laughter-filled meetings, when members share a meal and listen to a fellow member offer his observations—on tittlebats or trains of the future. In a previous column, it was suggested that the Torch represents the light of logic and reason. How could we have forgotten that the Torch also represents the warmth of friendship! With thanks to Mr. Samuel Pickwick, Esq.

— Anne Sterling, IATC President

name and address on a cover page. That and your Torch Manuscript Submission Sheet are all that we need to process your papers. Your help with this will be greatly appreciated.

Finally, I hope to see many of you at the June convention. It starts a little earlier this year, which may make traveling a little more comfortable. In any event, I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.

— Pat Deans

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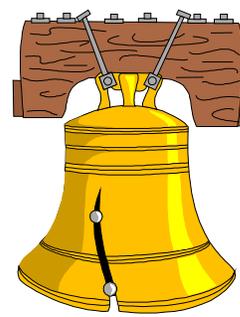
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# Semantics and the Remarkable Human Brain: Why Computers Don't Translate Well

*This may be the modern version of the perpetual motion machine.*

By Ann St. Clair Burwell Lesman, Ph.D.



## About the Author

Ann holds a B.A. from Rollins College with a double major in French and Spanish, minor in German, a M.Ed. from Duke University in French, a M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland in Spanish. Her dissertation topic deals with linguistics.

Currently Chair of the Foreign Language Department at Shenandoah University in Virginia, she has won a number of awards during a long career in higher education. She is particularly proud of having won the Foreign Language Association of Virginia's "Excellence in Teaching Award" given to the outstanding college/university foreign language professor in the state and, last year, being named Shenandoah University's outstanding professor (Exemplary Teacher Award).

For the last 25 years, she has traveled extensively, alone and with students, throughout the Spanish-speaking world: a Fulbright-Hays grant, study/travel tours, intensive study abroad courses, and mission trips involving construction projects (Ann is really good at laying block or brick!) and medical missions.

She speaks English, Spanish, French, and German, and has functional skills in Chinese. At the time of her faculty exchange to Pyatigorsk Linguistic University in 1999, she had functional skills in Russian, since lost from disuse. She studied Latin in high school, and has some basic skills in Portuguese and Italian.

She is co-author of a series of books

designed to teach basic conversational skills in Spanish and Medical Spanish. The series is coordinated with an interactive web site for instruction, drill, and practice. Collaborating on the website over the last eight years has taught her a great deal about programming.

She has been active in the Winchester chapter of Torch, and was president in 2004–2005.

Presented to the Winchester, VA Torch Club on June 5, 2002.



Human language, our system of communication using symbols possessing arbitrary conventional meanings, is what distinguishes us from other creatures. It is a strictly *human* characteristic. It is what has made all of human civilization and culture possible. Language makes it possible to communicate and cooperate with our fellows and to engage in abstract thought. It is our means of ordering and understanding the world around us. Nevertheless, the nature of human language is still baffling. We have a couple of centuries of serious philology, describing and comparing languages, tracking the course of languages. And yet the miraculous decoding process that occurs in the human brain is still poorly understood.

The process of language is a dazzlingly difficult skill, or rather a series of skills, each one a minor miracle of biological engineering. The auditory input—the sound—that enters the ear is transformed into a stream of electrical signals. In the neural pathways of the cerebral cortex, the words must be parsed as the brain figures out the syntax of the incoming sentence. The brain

must then attach a meaning to each word in the sentence that is appropriate for the grammatical and semantic context. In an explosion of firing of electrical impulses across synapses, the mind comprehends the meaning of the incoming sentence. The result: sound waves entering our ears enable all the marvels of language, which can paint in our minds pictures in lush detail, describe events remote in time or space, and hypothesize about the future. A nineteenth century British philologist compared the brain to "an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern." (Martin, 94) In this paper, we are going to consider only one portion of the process: semantic choice, or the way we choose among multiple meanings of a word.

Every language is comprised of abstract symbols. A language must have a syntax that orders the relationships between the words and must possess a lexicon and semanticity. The relationship between the symbols and the reality they describe is arbitrary. Except for a handful of onomatopoeic words, what a certain combination of phonemes—sounds—means is completely a matter of convention: that the word "chair" in one language refers to a certain object which in other languages is a "chaise," "silla," or "Stuhl."

The field of semantics is the study of the meaning of words. We sometimes refer to the area as *lexicology*. Linguists refer to the smallest unit of meaning as a morpheme. "Chairs" actually contains two morphemes: "*chair*," which describes the object, plus "-s," which means more than one of them. In order to keep this paper relatively free of

jargon, we shall simply say “words.” And as we address problems of semantics, we will limit ourselves to denotation without extending our inquiry to questions of connotation. The area of semantic connotation opens up the door to the field of linguistic study called pragmatics or discourse analysis, under which fall disciplines such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

Even as we limit ourselves to what a word denotes, or what it means without considering affective or emotional coloring, we run up against the problem of polysemy. A word is polysemous if it has more than one meaning. The word *table* can mean an object, or a *table* as in an arrangement of data: *table* of contents or the multiplication *table*. It can also be a verb, *to table* a motion, or may be used in idiomatic expressions like *turn the tables on someone*.

There are some words that have only a single delimited meaning. *Crabgrass* refers to just one plant, but look in any dictionary and see how many meanings the words *get* or *set* have. The word for a single lexical unit is a lexeme. Therefore, *crabgrass* is just one lexeme. The word *long* represents 39 lexemes, in the categories of adjective, adverb, and verb.

A word acquires multiple meanings in several ways. It is important to realize that language is in a constant state of flux as its phonology, its morphology, and its syntax shift and change. One of the ways that a word evolves is by extension of lexis. Extension of lexis means that the word boundaries of the original word are extended to take in new meanings. A word may come to be used in a figurative sense, or various figurative senses, thus gaining new meanings in addition to the original meaning. The new meaning is often a metaphor of the old meaning. Many of our abstract terms are faded metaphors. *Fervent* originally meant boiling, then one who showed great intensity of feeling was said to be, metaphorically, boiling. Language is already a system of symbols running parallel to reality;

adding metaphorical language adds another layer of abstraction.

To illustrate how polysemy occurs, let’s look at some examples. The word *horn* has 37 definitions in *The Oxford English Dictionary*. The first *horns* that men blew to make noise were made from the *horns* of animals. Then any object which one blew through to create a sound similar to the noise produced by blowing through an animal *horn* was also a *horn*. This is extension in lexis. Today a French horn is made from brass, not *horn*. And by further extension from hunting *horns* we have an automobile *horn*, which has little in common with a sheep’s *horn*. From the sense of *horn* as a musical instrument we have “*to blow one’s own horn*.” A shoe *horn* was originally made from a curved piece of *horn*. We may have no sense of an animal’s *horn* as we reach for the metal object we use to ease a foot into a shoe. From that sense of *horn*, we have “to horn in on.” And still the original sense of animal *horn* continues. Thus we have polysemy: multiple meanings for a word.

Sometimes a literal meaning of a word will give rise to a figurative sense, the two meanings will coexist for a while, then the literal meaning will disappear. *Ardent* meant originally burning, then came to include the sense of passionate or zealous. Now the original definition of burning is considered archaic and has become largely obsolete.

Words may be polysemous because they have acquired new meaning through extension of lexis, or, in other cases, polysemy may be a result of homonymy. Homonymy is the term used for two or more different words that are spelled and pronounced alike. Two words from different roots may converge in spelling and pronunciation. An example of homonyms are the two words *grave*. We have one word *grave* from an old word meaning to dig and another word *grave*, meaning serious, derived from a word meaning heavy. This is homonymy because there are two

entirely different words, with different derivations, which happen to be spelled and pronounced alike. Shakespeare makes a pun on these homonyms in *Romeo and Juliet* when Mercutio says, “Ask me tomorrow and I will be a grave man.” Most dictionaries use the convention of listing multiple meanings of a single word as numbered definitions under one entry, while homonyms from different sources are separate entries. The border between separate words and separate meanings of a word is a fuzzy one, however.

What is interesting about polysemous words, from the point of view of the way the brain processes language, is that a word may have a column and a half of meanings in a dictionary and an individual speaker may know almost all of them. However, in the split second that the morpheme, embedded in its context, enters the brain, the listener (or reader) selects the appropriate meaning and is never conscious of the other meanings that he has rejected. A person hearing the sentence “He writes *well*” never thinks consciously of a *well* from which one draws water. A person listens to someone complain about dogs that *bark* and never calls to mind the *bark* of a tree. If one person says to another: “This hardware store doesn’t stock seed,” the listener must make the distinction between the four meanings of hardware, the 14 meanings of store, the 61 meanings of stock, and the 20 meanings of seed. He or she must select the appropriate meanings of all the words; that is to say, must select the appropriate lexemes, and parse the sentence to understand the relationship between all the words, so that its meaning becomes clear, even without ever having heard that combination of words before. The entire process takes place in a split second that seems simultaneous with the utterance.

Some puns and all double entendres depend for their effect on having us become aware of a second meaning of a word or expression, sometimes a moment after taking in the primary

meaning. Headline writers like to play with words in this way, forcing our minds to consider simultaneously two senses of a word or expression, something which we do not normally do. We read that mass transit plans have been “derailed,” for example, or that the sport of figure skating is “on thin ice.”

One of the proofs of the complex nature of decoding polysemous words used in the context of a sentence can be seen in the limitations of computers in dealing with *natural language*. For people in computers, *natural language* is what you and I speak and write, as opposed to the various programming languages which are artificial languages, in which each term means just one thing and terms can only be combined in restricted ways. Examples of computer programs that process *natural language* are help files, search engines, or information access systems. “Ask Jeeves” is an example of a program based on algorithms that process *natural language*. Another application is MT, or machine translation. This involves computational linguists’ first writing rules of analysis based on the syntactic structures of the language so that the program can parse sentences—that is, define the structure of sentences and the relationships among words. Then they must develop a lexicon that includes all the lexemes—all the meanings—of the words in the language along with the information needed for the computer to make choices among those meanings for a particular context. The standard for comparison for computational linguists working in MT is “human generators” and “human analyzers”—you and I when speaking or listening or reading. At the present time, MT programs fall woefully short of us “human analyzers.” The ability of the MT programs to translate *natural language* range from marginally competent to dismally incompetent. Why? What is it that we “human analyzers” can do, which computers cannot do? And, the most fascinating question of all, how do we do it?

First of all, let’s concede that there are tasks that an MT program can do much better than a person. It can take a 30-page document and render a translation—or a rough version of a translation—in seconds. It can take that document and translate it into half a dozen languages, something that would likely be beyond the capabilities of all but the most gifted polyglots. What it cannot do is make a *good* translation. Often it cannot even make a comprehensible translation. Those who make regular use of machine translations can usually glean from a source whether it deals with the desired subject matter and is likely to be of use, then can decide to have the text translated by a human translator. The major problem area for these programs is lexicography: choosing which sense of a polysemous word is intended in a particular context.

Let’s take a look at several samples of machine translation. We can begin with the first sentence in this paragraph: *Let’s take a look at several samples of machine translation*. It is a simple and straightforward sentence which includes neither slang nor highly figurative language, both of which cause enormous difficulties for MT. Passing this sentence first into Spanish then back into English (using SDL International) we get: “Permit’s glances at to several samples of the translation of machine.” If we go from English to German and back again, we get: “Let’s looks at yourself several samples of that of translation machine.” If I take the sentence I used earlier: “This hardware store doesn’t stock seed,” which, although it is simple, with neither slang nor metaphor, it does, as most English sentences do, contain several polysemous words. Passing into Spanish and back again renders: “This doesn’t of the hardware actions sow.” The only word it handled properly was “hardware.” People working in MT talk about dealing with these problems as “lexical tuning.” Obviously, we are not talking about fine tuning.

Will MT programs improve in the future? Almost certainly so. Will they

be able to process natural language as well as the human brain? Not in the foreseeable future. Why not?

MT programs can definitely be expected to do a better job of parsing as computational linguists program more details of the syntactic structures of languages. The larger, more intractable problem is one that people in the field call WSD: word-sense disambiguation. Indeed, one of several problems MT programs have, even with parsing, deals basically with WSD: amphiboly, or ambiguity caused by lack of grammatical clarity. The sentence “They can fish” may mean they are able to fish or they put fish in cans.

It can be assumed that programming ever more contextual clues will improve word sense disambiguation; that is, it will make it possible for the computer more often to make appropriate distinctions among lexical choices. Any mention of water, stream, or creek side in the context would help a program decide that bank refers to a bank of a river. Any use of fiscal terms in the preceding or following lines of text would help it decide that *bank* is a financial institution. The context in which a word occurs is called the semantic environment. It is evidently what the human brain uses to select the appropriate meaning for a word. However, the semantic environment may not be only linguistic. It may be sensory or perceptual, and therefore beyond the scope of any of the MT programs we have today or are likely to have soon. Seeing that a person is crawling around in the grass at the campsite next to his Coleman lantern helps a person select the proper sense for *match* in “I lost my *match*.” Seeing someone sitting glumly on a bench courtside with his tennis racket beside him suggests a different meaning for *match* in “I lost my *match*.” The human brain makes the choice instantaneously, with the concomitant disregard of every other sense of the word or expression. When I say to another professor “I can’t go to the film this evening: I have to

make up a test,” my colleague knows that I have to compose a test, write a test. When a student walking across campus says to her friend, “I can’t go to lunch now; I have to make up a test,” her friend understands that she has to go take a test which she missed earlier due to absence. The clues for the proper choice of lexeme are situational. There may be nothing for a thousand words of dialogue preceding or following the sentence that will help to determine the proper meaning. Yet even a D- student comprehends instantly.

We know a little—very little—about the way the brain processes language. Much of it, interestingly enough, we know from pathology. We have several new tools at our disposal now, which enable us to peer into the brain: several techniques for imaging the brain and recording its activity, such as PET, position emission tomography, and MRI, multiple resonance imagery.

We still do not understand precisely *how* the brain processes language, but we are learning a great deal about *where* activity takes place. These discoveries shed light on the nature of language. We have long assumed that the brain contains a dedicated language-handling mechanism, and we have known for some time that two areas of the brain are important for language processing: a part of the brain called Wernicke’s area for the reception and comprehension of speech, and Broca’s area for the production of speech. Autopsies on stroke patients who later died showed that those who suffered speech-productive aphasia, the inability to speak, even though they could comprehend, had suffered injuries to Broca’s area. Those who suffered speech-receptive aphasia and could not understand what was said to them, although their ability to produce speech was unaffected, had lesions in Wernicke’s area. We thought we knew, therefore, that these were the two speech-receptive and speech-productive areas of the brain. Recent experiments using brain imaging have shown that

language is not simply located in these areas. Injuries to Broca’s or Wernicke’s area will indeed affect language production or reception. However, there are a number of centers of the brain involved in language processing. By mapping the location of nerve cells that analyze and produce language, we are revolutionizing previously established ideas about how language is organized in the brain. Moreover, each individual has a unique brain pattern underlying his or her language capacity. Further, men and women tend to use different areas of the brain for processing language. And some, although not all, left-handed people have speech processing areas located differently from right-handers.

Among the most remarkable discoveries of the last part of the twentieth century was that different aspects of language—nouns, verbs, adjectives—are processed in different areas of the brain. This has intriguing implications for the subject of our paper, the way in which the mind makes semantic choices. Not only are nouns processed—perhaps stored—in a different part of the brain from other parts of speech, but different categories of nouns have their own location.

For example, the word *work*, which has 53 meanings in Webster’s *Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary*, can be a noun: “look for *work*;” an adjective: “*work* permit;” a transitive verb: “*work* a machine;” or an intransitive verb: “to *work* hard.” Does that mean that in order to disambiguate the word *work*, that is, select one of the 53 senses of *work*, four different language processing areas must be involved?

One patient had suffered a stroke that injured a tiny area of his brain, with the result that he could not recognize any noun that referred to animate beings. He knew what a pen was and what was a pencil, but did not know the difference between a cheetah, a fish, and an eagle. One of the most remarkable cases occurred a few years ago with a stroke patient whose language was intact

except he could not name any fruits or vegetables!

We know that languages learned in early childhood share the same space in the brain, but languages that are learned later, after the so-called “critical period,” are processed in other parts of the brain. This discovery reinforces our empirical observations that second languages are acquired differently from first. A person’s first language is tightly organized in terms of nerve cell circuits; second languages are more loosely organized in the brain. We have been able to observe that a stroke in one part of the brain can erase a native language and leave later ones intact, or vice versa.

As we have said, different aspects of language, nouns, verbs, etc., are processed in different areas of the brain. One of the theories that neurolinguists are working on now is that there are something called “convergence zones” in the brain for language processing. Still, from what we can observe from brain scans, the areas of the brain that process different aspects do not send their signals to a common destination for integration. It appears that language is controlled by some still undiscovered mechanism that binds different areas of the brain together in time, not in place. This mechanism is still as mysterious to us as it was when we first began peering into the brain.

Is there any hope that we will understand the nature of the blindingly quick interconnections of the human brain better than we do now? Will there be another revolution in linguistics like the one produced by the work of Naom Chomsky, mid-twentieth century, which changed forever the way we view language acquisition and which has transformed the way we view the nature of language? I think it is reasonable to assert that the next advances in our understanding of cognition, and of language as an instrument of thought, will be in the area of neurophysiology.

Those of us who are lovers of words are fascinated by the way we can use “*Semantics*,” see page 30

# Getting Nicked by Nicknames

*A humorous look (not constrained by political correctness) at a practice which is universal among American boys.*

**By David Isaacson**



## About the Author

David Isaacson taught college English from 1967 to 1972 at MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois, and Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. He was a Reference and Humanities Librarian at Western Michigan University from 1973 until he retired at the end of 2005. He has published numerous articles about libraries, language, and literature in various magazines. He has a monthly column, "Vogue Words and Buzz Phrases," in the online journal, *Vocabula Review* ([www.vocabula.com](http://www.vocabula.com)). In retirement, he also enjoys acting in local radio plays, reading to citizens more senior than he, and being a docent at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts.

Presented to the Kalamazoo, Michigan Torch Club on February 15, 2006.



Whoever said "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" had a psyche built of steel. Some nicknames merely nick, but others wound deeply. Because I am the offspring of a Jewish father and a Christian mother, my features are not noticeably Jewish. But my last name is Isaacson. Having been born in 1943, the first President to mean anything to me was Eisenhower. It was only a matter of time before one of my nicknames, when I was a junior in high school, became Ike. Though even then I was a died-in-the-wool Democrat, I rather liked having my name rhyme with the President's nickname. Ike had a ring to it better than the less imaginative nickname "Big I." (I was tall for my age.)

On the other hand, I did not appreciate, at the tender age of thirteen, being called "Ike the kike." The kid who called me this name, Floyd Petrucci, wasn't really an anti-Semite. And if he was, it was an innocent as much as an ignorant prejudice. He would have had to have been from New York City, not Gary, Indiana, where we grew up, to know that Ike or Ikey sometimes functioned, like Hymie, as an anti-Semitic epithet. No, it is much more likely that Floyd heard some adult say kike and quite independently came up with the rhyme on the nickname of our President, and then, with a wonderfully insightful poetic leap, decided to rename me Ike, instead of Big I or Isaacson.

This many years later I don't remember why Floyd and I didn't like one another; but, like most kids' nicknames, my new moniker was intended to tease me, not to perpetually shame me. We were, after all, just kids fooling around with slurs we'd heard adults say. Floyd and I hardly knew the difference between summer camp and a concentration camp. There was no way my behavior conformed to any of the usual anti-Semitic stereotypes. And even if they did, I doubt that Floyd was badly educated enough to truly harbor these prejudices. My nose was big, but not hooked. I didn't talk with a Yiddish accent. I wasn't a money-grubber or a money-lender. I think I remember trying, without success, to call Floyd a dago in retort, but of course, even though I hadn't studied tropes yet, I knew that one-word slurs like dago or wop had nothing like the rhetorical force a rhyming phrase like Ike the kike had. In retrospect, I wish I'd called Floyd Lucy Petrucci. Granted, that something less than Homeric epithet would only have

rhymed on the last syllable of his three syllable last name, while his nickname had me skewered much more memorably in one masculine syllable. But I think associating Floyd with a girl's name, and implying that he was as ditzzy as Lucille Ball, at a time when the situation comedy, "I Love Lucy" was as well known as the nickname "Ike" for Eisenhower, would have made us nearly equal in the eyes of our classmates. And they, after all, were our audience and the real judges of our verbal dexterity. Part of the fun of nicknames, after all, is that they not only capture something seemingly essential about the person in a word, but that they are fun to say aloud.

Alas, I only thought of calling Floyd Petrucci Lucy in 2005, not 1957. Or, maybe, it also just occurs to me, I might have gotten at least a little comeuppance by calling him Floyd the Negroid. Floyd was somewhat dark-skinned, though far from being mistaken for a Negro. Casual and ugly white racism, hiding itself in formal, anthropological lingo, might just have been clever enough, I think now, to counter the sting of "kike" but also sound as if I was above four-letter racist epithets myself. No, there was only a tiny audience of pseudo-intellectuals among my classmates that would have understood the word Negroid. Too bad Floyd wasn't Spanish, and improbably called Nick, so I could have matched the one syllable taunt with a rhyme just as apparently mean and nasty as his: "Nick the Spic."

What I've just described is a particular kind of pejorative nickname more precisely identified as ethnic or racial slurs. And yes, I know: I am distancing myself not only in years from these early adolescent male naming rituals, but intellectually I'm distancing

myself by analyzing with linguistic objectivity what was a purely emotional experience in 1953. And yet, in 2006, this phrase stings more than rings. Thank goodness, nicknames don't have to be vicious to be memorable. We carry complimentary nicknames like a badge of honor—they are, after all, miniature resumes in which positive, maybe even ideal qualities are condensed. Who would not like to be known forever more as Wily Odysseus or Honest Abe? Of course, such nicknames, just like derogatory ones, are simplistic. I bet Richard was sometimes less than Lion-Hearted, Catherine not consistently Great; Ivan, at least when sleeping, probably not Terrible and Dicky not always Tricky.

Nicknames don't have to be accurate or even plausible. Their staying power has as much to do with sound as sense. Garry Trudeau, in two of his "Doonesbury" cartoon strips in July 2005, had George Bush refer to his main advisor and good friend, Karl Rove, as "turd blossom." It turns out that this is Southwestern slang for a flower that grows out of cow dung. It is, I suspect, a matter of debate whether Karl Rove's face actually resembles one of the (presumably) pretty flowers growing out of such an unbeauteous nutriment. Trudeau used this term to make fun of both Bush and Rove, but apparently, he did not make it up. The President, who sometimes wants to be seen as a good ol' boy, likes to call his good buddy Karl by this ironically negative name. Snooty people (not all of whom are necessarily liberals) will make fun of Bush for using potty humor. But laid back people (not all of whom are necessarily conservatives) will laugh with Bush rather than at him. At any rate, even though a number of prissy newspapers either pulled the columns featuring the use of turd blossom, or worse, omitted the term or bowdlerized it, Trudeau has given all of us unfamiliar with this regionalism, a colorful new phrase. The part of me that enjoys sneering at Bush exalts, but the part of me that wants to

have a few beers with him (if only he weren't such a pious dry drunk) has to admit that with locutions like this Bush is, after all, a "regular" guy.

I used to call a good friend of mine "fart face"—for no reason other than the fun of the alliteration and for its mild shock value. He liked the nickname for the same reason. Couples who love one another dearly sometimes use baby talk with one another. It's not unusual for a guy to call his girl not simply "baby," but pet names like "poopsie-pie," or "cuddles," or maybe "cuddle-wumpkins." And what guy isn't pleased to be called "sweetie" or "honey?" My wife's father called her Princess when she was a child. My wife and I call our cats names almost as affectionate as the pet names we have for one another. The cat we call Purdy is a variation of Pretty but, because we're lit'ry, we sometimes call her Per Diem (she doesn't seem to mind). It was lack of imagination that led us to call our gray cat Gray, but sheer inspiration that morphed this into Grable (she does have pretty legs). A woman I know who loves James Joyce called one of her cats Epiphany, which led to the more comfortable diminutive, Piffy.

My wife and I are distinguished, among other things, for having quite protuberant proboscises. Not surprisingly, when she was growing up, one of her brothers called her "banana nose," and some of my friends used to call me, rather affectionately, "ski nose." (The literary lady who called her cat Epiphany was pretentious enough as a girl to call me Cyrano.) My mother's maiden name is Kentopp. She also had quite red hair as a girl. It was inevitable, then, that she was called Carrot Top.

Some of the best nicknames are mean, accurate, and funny all at once. We used to call an obese switchman on the railroad I worked on one summer, "Wide-Load." He seemed to like being associated with an over-size truck. We could just as easily have followed another nicknaming convention—using a name directly opposite of some prominent fact about a person—to dub

Wide-Load "Slim."

If you value original language, a common nickname like Slim can't hold a candle to a nonce form that seems to capture some essential quality of a person. A friend of mine calls a snobbish friend of his, whose first name is Arthur, "Art for Art's sake." Because this friend is bellicose and Portuguese, I call him the Portuguese Man-of-War. Someone I know who is forever complaining that he resents having to do work not designated by the union contract as "work of the unit," has been dubbed WOTU, which if you sound it out one letter at a time is an initialism but if you morph the initialism into an acronym you can pronounce it as if it were the two-word lament, "woe to," which exactly describes this man's mournful manner when he says "work of the unit."

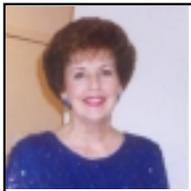
The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines nickname as "A (usually familiar or humorous) name which is given to a person, place, etc., as a supposedly appropriate replacement for or addition to the proper name." Like all very carefully worded definitions, this one is a model of condensation. It neatly summarizes the major problem of nicknames: if the nickname is simply an addition to a proper name, then it functions only as an alternate form of identification. I may not like "Ike the Kike," but fortunately I have been more often called David, Mr. Isaacson, or some other nickname without such a sting attached. But I would hate to be in the other situation included in the OED's definition, in which the nickname becomes the supposedly **only** appropriate replacement for the real name. All victims of prejudice know how this feels. If my sole identity were Ike the Kike, I'd lose all the calm detachment with which I am considering the subject of nicknames right now. I suspect I'd be resentful, something like poor Seamus in the following parable:

A visitor to a pub in a small town on the west coast of Ireland sees an old man taking a solitary pint of Guinness "Nicknames," see page 31

# PR: The Engineering of Consent

“Public relations” runs deeper than “spin control.”

By Barbara M. Allen



## About the Author

Barbara Allen has had two major careers so far, television and public relations. Her

television work includes ten years as a daily television interviewer at the NBC-TV affiliate in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She also wrote, hosted, and produced a program about and with Pearl S. Buck.

At the public television station in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, she served as a writer/producer and also an associate producer of *American Dreamers*, a documentary about Horatio Alger Society award winners, which was aired nationally by PBS.

She was co-founder and partner in RiverRidge Video Productions, which received an award from the Central Pennsylvania Chapter, Women In Communications, for its marketing video for Homestead Village, a life care community in Lancaster.

She served as associate producer of communication arts at Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, creating the first courses offered there about the history of television and radio and also writing for television and radio.

She became director of public relations for St. Joseph Hospital in Lancaster and won two first place awards for annual reports from the Central Pennsylvania Chapter, Women in Communications.

As a free-lance public relations consultant, she researched and created *Profiles in Hospital Marketing*, a national healthcare marketing magazine.

Ms. Allen received her B.A. degree from Mount Holyoke College in speech and drama, and her M.S. degree from Syracuse University in radio and television.

She considers herself an entrepreneur, seeing problems as challenges, and addressing “it can’t be done,” with “I can do that.” Her passion is theater, on-stage and off.

Presented to the Lancaster, Pennsylvania Torch Club on May 3, 2004.



“Let’s say the circus is coming to town and you want people to know about it. **Advertising** is displaying a sign announcing that the circus is in town. **Promotion** is displaying a sign on an elephant and parading the animal through town. It’s **publicity** if the elephant carrying the sign tramples through the ornamental garden of the mayor and the newspaper reports it. And it’s **public relations** if you are able to get the mayor to laugh about the incident and ride in the circus parade with no hard feelings.” So says Raleigh Pinsky, author of *The Zen of Hype*.

It is also the “engineering of consent.”

I want to tell you about the man who originated that phrase, “the engineering of consent,” a man who has been called the father of public relations. I want to dispel some misconceptions that many have about the breadth of public relations, often unknown, overlooked, or underestimated. And I want to share a few case studies with you; the bad, the good, and the superb.

Public relations begins with discipline; the discipline which looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behavior. The widely acknowledged father of public relations was Edward L. Bernays, who called it the “engineering of consent.”

He was born in Vienna in 1891, and died in 1995 at the age of 104. His mother was Sigmund Freud’s sister and

his father was the brother of Freud’s wife. He began practicing public relations during World War I, counseling presidents, large corporations, actors, and government.

He explains the **engineering of consent**. “This phrase quite simply means the use of an engineering approach—that is, action based only on thorough knowledge of the situation and on the application of scientific principles and tried practices to the task of getting people to support ideas and programs.”

Two reviewers of the book, *The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays*, by Larry Tye, state: “In an industry that is notable for its mastery of evasions and euphemisms, Bernays stood out for his remarkable frankness. Bernays insisted that ‘public relations is the science of creating circumstances, mounting events that are calculated to stand out as newsworthy yet, at the same time, do not appear to be staged’.”

In 1915, at the age of 24, he began as a publicist hired to publicize the American tour of the Ballet Russe. He said, “I was given a job about which I knew nothing. In fact, I was positively uninterested in the dance.” Most Americans were more than uninterested. They thought that masculine dancers were deviates, and that dancing was not nice. So Bernays connected the ballet to things that people understood and enjoyed.

He developed a newsletter for editorial writers with photographs and human interest stories. He contacted the women’s pages with stories about costumes and fashion design. He created an 81-page publicity guide for advance men to use on the tour. He quoted glowing overseas media reviews and much more.

“The ballet was sold out before the

opening. By the time it toured American cities, demand had already dictated a second tour and little girls were dreaming of becoming ballerinas. Bernays had remolded biases to get his story told. The American view of ballet and dance was changed forever.” And he was only 24!

During the First World War, he served with the U.S. Committee on Public Information, a government-sponsored organization dedicated to maintaining domestic morale. Its purpose was to package, advertise, and sell the war as one that would “Make the World Safe for Democracy.”

In 1928, he was hired to warm up President Calvin Coolidge—no small task. He invited Broadway stars Ed Wynn, The Dolly Sisters, and others to provide warmth, vitality, and fun to a special breakfast event for reporters. Al Jolson sang “Keep Coolidge,” which he had written. Despite all this, Coolidge appeared unmoved.

However, the presence of the stars certainly helped. Newspaper headlines reported: “Actor Eats Cake with the Coolidges...President *Nearly* Laughs... Guests Crack Dignified Jokes, Sing Song and Pledge to Support Coolidge.”

Public relations as a recognized field came into its own in the twentieth century. It was often employed by industries that were fighting negative public perceptions—tobacco firms, railroads, and the like. A wider array of businesses turned to public relations in the 1930s as public sentiment seemed to be turning away from private enterprise and capitalism in general.

Stuart Ewen writes, “The Industrial Revolution had created a vast newspaper-reading public. The power of the medium was brought home to big businesses at the turn of the century when the muckrakers began their extraordinarily successful series of attacks against monopolies. An effective counter was needed, and so public relations was born.” It has grown and grown since—and Edward Bernays was there creatively dominating the public

relations scene for more than six decades.

In my experience of some years as a hospital PR director, I have learned that the art of effective public relations consists in always asking this question: What do our publics need or want and how can I provide it, *not* what do I have to sell and how can I get our publics to buy it.

You notice I use the word publics. There can be many. For example, in the case of a hospital they include doctors, the board of directors, outside physicians, or courtesy staff, nurses and other employees, volunteers, donors, suppliers, neighbors, city government, patients, media, and more. Each may need to be approached in a different way and often at a different time. The media are the ones you hear about most often. But dealing with them is only part of the PR director’s job.

An effective PR director has to be familiar with psychology, photography, graphic arts, printing, journalism, mediation, public speaking, hand holding, diplomacy, a dash of wizardry, and grace under pressure.

The job description includes everything from writing annual reports, newsletters, and brochures to acting as a consultant to the CEO. It includes arranging for TV and radio interviews, letters to the editor, and sponsoring special events such as parades, public meetings, open houses, and trade shows.

And it includes more ticklish subjects such as a hospital’s disaster plan and crisis communications—what to do if there is a hostage situation, or a suicide, a busload of children injured in an accident, or the collapse of stadium bleachers. When there is a crisis or disaster, the PR director is the person who must lead the communications part of the disaster plan; communication *from* physicians and administration; and *with* families, friends, and the media. The PR director must keep everything and everyone under control. There has to be prompt, frank, and full information to the media, without compromising

patient privacy.

You can see why PR has been listed in many studies as one of the top ten most stressful occupations.

One of the ways PR professionals reduce that stress is by being pro-active. Companies can’t wait for a situation to become an issue and then react, because then they are on the defensive. The key is defining the issues before they can have an impact on you so that you can diffuse them, being prepared with an action plan when something comes up rather than having to respond hurriedly under someone else’s attack, when things can go wrong. And when those things go wrong, what actions must be taken to diffuse the fallout?

The fallout—this is the part of public relations with which most people are probably most familiar. The media respond immediately. And the company must deal with irate publics and often *very* serious situations. In a crisis, you need to bring all the key players together, get the facts straight, develop issue-specific talking points, and then constantly update reporters.

When it’s all over, then it’s time to bring those key players together and evaluate the handling of the situation and correct any problems encountered so that they don’t happen again. Crisis communication is a major PR concern.

However, more and more firms are not waiting until calamity strikes to think about what they would do. Instead, they are developing detailed plans to cope with such crises from industrial accidents to terrorist attacks. These plans include the use of mobile phones, cable, satellites, faxes, voice mail systems, and the source with the most profound effect, the Internet.

Internet use includes, in part, making online versions of key print publications available at the touch of a button. With another click, you can send a message directly to the CEO. You can hold on-line conferencing. With search engines, you can find information that would take you days or more in the library. Instead of monthly newsletters

mailed to a community, a corporation can send out e-mail newsletters that reach targeted publics immediately, that can be updated instantly, and which offer the viewer the opportunity to ask a question or make an immediate response.

But whether a PR person is using the Internet or some other means, it is the message, not the messaging, that makes the difference between success and failure. Consumers prefer to do business with organizations they hold in high regard and effective PR builds positive perceptions, creating a fertile environment for successful marketing.

This is true not only of profit-making corporations but also in the non-profit sector with successful efforts such as the "Amber Alert" network. This is known for its efforts to rescue abducted children, or for promotion of the U.S. women's soccer team, the Washington Freedom, or its efforts to keep youth offenders out of the adult prison system. Serious PR people are behind all of these. But not all efforts are successful.

Take this case of a company that did everything wrong. The history of the incident and its aftermath is a story of an almost unbroken chain of corporate error.

A traffic signal stopped working one day because the lineman pulled a fuse from a transformer box near an intersection. He was there to repair a downed power line and turned off power to the transformer to protect the power crew.

But, according to the power company spokesperson, the lineman never saw the metal plate at the base of the pole marked 'traffic signal,' and he never alerted police, or the city, of the outage. That was the first mistake.

Two cars coming from different directions connected at that downed traffic signal. In one, the mother recovered and the daughter was killed.

The spokesperson for the power company told the local paper that "the utility had no duty to warn the public about power outages or disabled traffic

lights," and that "the company's primary obligation was to protect its own workers." Moreover, he made no expression of sympathy for the accident victims. That was the second mistake.

When the girl's father read those words, he became angry and decided to hire an attorney. The attorney said, "The single, greatest cause for adverse litigation is when the victims feel the company doesn't really care."

Questions to the company concerning the case were routed through the spokesperson, who declined to comment other than to say that "the utility would file an appeal." That was the third mistake.

According to the father's attorney, the company should have contacted the family immediately to express its sympathy and then settled quickly and quietly to avoid negative publicity. They could have done that. The family was suing for \$5 million. The most the utility's lawyers offered was \$400,000.

The father said that the power company's principal lawyer never expressed any regret to him over the loss of his daughter. He said, "I saw him at least a half-dozen times. He never once offered an apology. The last time I saw him, he wagged his finger at us and said, 'Accept our settlement offer or we'll see you in court.'" That was the fourth mistake.

The jury made a unanimous decision that the power company was entirely at fault. They said that without the power outage, the fatal accident would not have happened. The power and light company might have settled for \$5 million, but their cold, defensive attitude did them in. The jury awarded the girl's parents \$37 million in compensatory damages.

There is no need to say more about that story or that company. It speaks very loudly for itself.

On the other hand, here is a story about another company.

The young man was 31 when he hanged himself at home and was discovered on a Thursday morning by

his wife. He, she, and her mother had all worked for the same company at various times.

When the public relations director of the company heard the news, her first thought was, what can my company and I do for their family?

She e-mailed the other employees to tell them about the tragedy and to ask for their help, for food or cash contributions to take to the wife's parents' home where the wife had gone because she just couldn't go back to her house.

In less than two hours, over \$400 had been contributed. More was to come in later. The PR director took this money and went to a nearby grocery store to order substantial amounts of food to take to the family home, 25 miles away.

Friday morning, the mother called the PR director and said, "How can we every repay you?" The director said it was a gift from other company employees, and then asked if there was anything else she could do.

The mother said, "Well, yes, there is," and she asked if the company could provide food for the people coming to the home after the funeral service on Saturday evening, about 40 to 55 of them. This was a big request, but the PR director said that she would be pleased to do it.

The house was under construction by the parents. There was a concrete floor, a utility sink, a refrigerator, a wooden table, and a couple of shelves on the first floor. That's all. And 40 to 55 people were coming for dinner.

So the PR director and her assistant headed for a grocery store and purchased utilities and food. And they tried to make the room as attractive as possible.

All of the aforementioned happened over a weekend, so the PR director's work was not on company time. She and her assistant finished preparations, went to the funeral, and then left.

The following Monday, the mother and daughter came in to the company's human resources office to express their "PR," see page 31

# Gay Marriage: What Is This World Coming To?

*An important issue which generates more heat than light.*

**By Deborah N. Bauserman, Ed.D.**



## About the Author

Deborah (Deb) Bauserman is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in Winchester, Virginia where she has been in private practice for over 25 years. She earned degrees at Michigan State University (B.A., M.A.) and Northern Colorado University (Ed.D.) and completed post-doctoral studies at the University of Virginia. She has been active in her community and church with special interests in cultural, environmental, and civil rights issues. She is also an avid equestrian and tai chi quan practitioner. Her paper was originally presented to the Winchester Torch Club in June 2005 and was later invited as a keynote address at Shenandoah University in November 2006.

Presented to the Winchester Torch Club on June 2, 2005.

.....  
"Some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger (*sung softly*) ..." I did!

"Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage..." Thirty years later, our marriage still does.

Now, if we could just get our two sons married! Our happiness would be complete.

I want to be the mother of the groom, sitting in the front pew in a pastel dress, eyes shining, squeezing my husband's hand, as we look forward to our children's future together with *their* beloved.

If fortune smiles, this will happen once for us. Probably not twice. Unless the wedding takes place in Massachusetts. Or unless we choose a garden party and our pastor will come. And unless we call it a commitment

ceremony. But a cheery bunch of family and friends are certain to attend. Being openly gay is just part of the integrity that enables him to make and keep so many friends, straight and gay.

So, although I enjoy gay friends and colleagues, and have counseled some over the years, my interest in the questions around marriage for gays is no longer casual. But I'm probably as surprised as anybody. Gay marriage?! What is this world coming to?

At this point, the gay marriage issue is like some highly caffeinated volleyball game pitting conservatives against progressives, and secular leaders against religious leaders. It's time to step back and consider some of the facets of this fast moving game. Let's deconstruct it in three steps: What does being "gay" mean? What is marriage for? And, what are some of the implications of permitting or not permitting gay marriage?

## "Gay" – Definitions and Meaning

To define "gay," an elusive quarry, we must navigate a thicket of myths, ancient practices, religious beliefs, stereotypes, misinformation, and political agendas. Even agreement on terminology stumbles over rocky ground. For example, some will thunder, "homosexuality is an abomination" quoting verses in Leviticus. Yet scholars have written numerous chapters struggling with the two original Greek terms supposedly pointing to homosexuality. "Malakoi," originally meaning "soft," conveys the sense of moral softness as well as effeminacy. "Arsenokoitai," literally meaning "male/bed," is a one-of-a-kind term used only by Paul. In the end, many exegetical and

hermeneutical analyses, polite terms for fisticuffs among intellectuals, have hardly settled the issue.

In modern times, these two terms reappear in different Bible editions and produce a variety of translations: "homosexuals," "sexual perverts," just plain "perverts," and "sodomites." The latter term is interesting because it would refer to any of us engaging in non-procreative intercourse. Since the term "homosexual" only entered the English lexicon in 1892, most scholars agree that the original Biblical, Greek terms were probably referring to pederasty, a widespread cultural practice in the ancient Near East, involving men and boys, an uneven power dynamic, as opposed to today's sense of a consensual relationship between two self-identified adults.

Then there are many dismissive, prejudiced terms in colloquial use such as: "fag," "queer," "butch," and "dyke." For many, the word "homosexual" focuses narrowly on only sexual behavior or conduct, while to others, gay-lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, being "gay" refers to the entire range of their human identity and relationships. Since the unique sense of self usually unfolds during the innocence of childhood, it's difficult to fathom why and how "gayness" has remained so sexualized in our culture. (Let's blame it on the Puritans!) In our discussion, I'll be using the term "gay" as an umbrella term for the range of differently-gendered as well as the term "homosexual" since it's in general usage.

Haven't we all at one time or another issued an invitation to a friend and heard the response, "let me check first with

my better half?" Now, we may have finally discovered the source of that concept.

One of the earliest cultural depictions of gays may be found in Aristophanes' description of the myth about the origins of human beings. He conjectures that humans were essentially two people combined, each with two heads, four feet, and four arms. Thus, there were three sexes: those with two male halves, those with two female halves, and those with one of each. However, at one point, Zeus needed to punish humans for misbehavior and cut each human in two. Since then, each half wanders the earth in search of its lost half, creating gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals. Today, if our Greek sage could board a time machine, he would certainly feel at home with our ideas of psychological androgyny and right-left brain functioning as well as the still timeless urge to find a partner. In short, self-identity of gays and straights simply refuses to be tied up in neat little boxes.

In contrast to Greek mythology, Jewish patriarchs valued heterosexuality and were opposed to the equality of the sexes. Men took multiple wives who were viewed as property, valued for their ability to have sons. Having children was a priority for survival and prosperity. Knowledge of sexuality and procreation, however, was inaccurate. For instance, it was thought that each male seed was a new being. Any wasting of the "seed" was seen as a threat to the tribe. Thus, coitus interruptus, male homosexuality, or masturbation were all deemed deserving of a judgment as severe as execution. Ironically, patriarchs scornfully rejected homosexuality, yet inflicted anal rape as a way of humiliating enemies.

Leonard Shlain, physician-anthropologist, offers a fascinating hypothesis that for over 30,000 years, selective pressures in the human species have ensured gay members in every generation and culture. Although the reasons are poorly understood, he offers a bold explanation he calls the Theory

of Eights: four unique human traits appear in every human population and remain stable at 8% for males: gayness, color-blindness, left-handedness, and baldness. All have adaptive value for the hunting tribe. That is, having a gay, non-procreating male hunter increased the resources of meat for the tribe and, with a watchful eye for nieces and nephews, also increased the likelihood that ancestral children would survive. Over time, meat segued into resources, then capital. Excess capital, together with a unique brain organization blending male and female specialization, became one of the reasons that gay contributions to the larger community continue to be disproportionate to their numbers.

This would probably be a good time to mention that, in terms of numbers, the actual prevalence of gays is probably closer to 2–3% on the conservative end, although gays push the number closer to 10% for reasons we'll look at shortly.

In modern times, we can increase our understanding of gay identity by looking through three lenses: science, religion, and law.

In terms of science, debate often rages around the questions of whether homosexuality is a given—biologically determined—or a deliberate choice; hence, amenable to prevention or change. To understand the roots of homosexuality, we must first examine how sex itself is determined. All fetuses will develop into females unless they are exposed to testosterone in utero in the early weeks of gestation. Genes on the future man's Y chromosome orchestrate hormonal flooding and in turn command the fetal body to choose male rather than female genitalia. This androgenic hormone (which literally means "man maker") is also responsible for wiring the developing brain so that he will see, think, and experience life as a man.

Thus, given the crucial role of hormones, an interesting finding is that a higher number of gays are conceived in times of great stress; for example, WW II, because of higher levels of the circulating hormone, cortisol. Indeed,

Swedish researchers recently made the startling discovery that homosexual men's brains responded more like women's brains when they were presented with the male hormone testosterone in a sniff test. According to Sandra Wittleson, research team member, "It's one more piece of evidence...that sexual orientation is not all learned." Other scientific studies give preliminary support to hypotheses that birth rank and brain cell variations in the specific brain sites may also be significantly involved. Last but not least, Kinsey's groundbreaking research in the 1940s and 1950s showed that for most persons, sexual identity is fixed relatively early in life. That is, identity is not a simple binary event of either masculinity or femininity, but a sliding scale between the two genders, which accounts for some of the discrepancies in trying to figure prevalence of homosexuality.

So, nature or nurture? Figuring out the components of gay identity and behavior will continue to pose daunting challenges to researchers given methodological difficulties involved in study. A definitive answer will come another day and provide needed balance and perspective to debates.

Just as with science, though, religion has done little to calm the rumbling storms.

We are heirs to centuries of religious beliefs and practices and it is clear that old ideas die with difficulty. A good summary of the current positions in religious thought is provided by James B. Nelson, Professor of Christian Ethics. The first position, rejecting-punitive, has gained new energy in recent years with the increased visibility of gays in society and lately with gay marriages making headline news. Fundamentalist churches have reacted with fear and homophobia. Their position is marked by selective, literal biblical readings. Nelson speculates two sources of fear: unconscious homosexual feelings (stunningly portrayed in the movie, "American Beauty") and exaggerated

images of masculinity and anxiety about softness often found in male dominated societies. For other people, a great source of fear can be the loss of what they regard as immutable rules, the rigid enforcement of which protects against chaos and loss of personal control. Last, but not least, is that primeval wariness we all share when we confront the unknown other, the stranger.

Representing the second position, rejecting/non-punitive, is the restrictive Vatican policy for Roman Catholics which has imposed celibacy for gays, opposes any civil rights, opposes the use of condoms, and warns that violence against gays is to be expected.

The third position, qualified acceptance, reveals the real dynamism of contemporary debate and is seen in the larger Roman Catholic view by theologians, laity, and clergy who react with more openness. In this outlook, homosexual activity is morally good in a monogamous relationship and such persons are entitled to the right of respect, friendship, and justice. In the same group, mainline Protestants are collectively known as the “muddled middle.” They study issues of ordination and commitment ceremonies and, with their fears of divisiveness within ranks, authorize cyclical study commissions. An important talking point is that the Ten Commandments and the words of Jesus are silent on the subject of homosexuality. Positively, these groups emphasize the broader central teachings of Jesus regarding non-judgmentalism, acceptance of others, and inclusion.

Like Catholics, Jewish groups run the entire gamut with Orthodox and Conservatives residing at the rejecting-punitive pole to the Reformed who are moving towards acceptance. Their trends seem to be built on remembrance that gays were murdered with them in the holocaust and also positively on the goal of *tikkun olam*, the idea of society based on righteousness, moving toward perfection.

Finally, in the full acceptance camp are the Quakers, dissenting Catholics,

and Unitarian Universalists. They see the narrow and possibly linguistically and historically incorrect biblical tradition as a major stumbling block and note that ancient attitudes towards slavery and women have been rethought in modern times. Bishop Wheatley, a Methodist, epitomizes this position in noting that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are a mysterious gift from God—neither is a virtue or a sin.

Now, let’s consider the secular side of the coin—civil law. Andrew Sullivan, a senior editor at *The New Republic*, provides a crisp historical summary. He notes that, until recently, no court anywhere in the U.S. extended civil marriage rights to gays. In the past decade, however, state courts in Hawaii, Alaska, Vermont, and Massachusetts have interpreted their constitutions to recognize rights of gays to enter the institution of civil marriage. Although the Hawaii and Alaska rulings were later invalidated by their legislatures, Vermont’s highest court gave the legislature an opportunity to create a parallel institution, “civil unions.”

The U.S. Supreme Court has not yet ruled on the issue of civil marriage for gays, but has issued a number of important rulings on specific related issues, such as the right to sexual privacy. In the past year, the highest court in Massachusetts ordered civil marriage for all citizens and rejected proposals by the legislature for a civil union measure.

Perhaps inevitably, this gunning of the democratic engine by progressives has led to reactionary brake pumping by conservatives. Following the Massachusetts ruling, members of the U.S. Congress began to introduce proposals to amend the U.S. Constitution to define, for federal purposes, marriage as between one man and one woman and, more significantly, to prohibit state courts from interpreting their own constitutions to recognize same-sex marriages.

Keeping in mind that my knowledge of the law could possibly fill a thimble,

it seems to me that clear protection for citizens and the states are under challenge. We have Article IV of the Constitution and Amendments Five, Nine, and Fourteen that give “Full Faith and Credit” to each state, as well as “Privileges and Immunities,” due process and equal protection under the law for all citizens. For the first time in the history of our nation, our federal government is poised to take away federal and state protections to a class of people under the name of the Federal Marriage Amendment. While our laws strain to keep pace with current social and political upheavals, we might bear in mind the insight of Supreme Court Justice Blackman: “The Constitution cannot control such prejudices (against private sexual behavior), neither can it tolerate them.”

### **What Is Marriage For?**

Did you hear that the Virginia legislature was considering authorizing personal license plates that read “Traditional Marriage?” Is marriage such a beleaguered institution that we need to alert all citizens—along with bumper stickers for “Save the Whales” and milk cartons which advertise, “Have you seen this child?”

So, what is traditional marriage? And how far back do you want to go?

The allure of tradition belies the fact of human experience. Tag along for a moment on E.J. Graff’s illuminating turbo tour through a history of Judeo-Christian marriage:

950 B.C. – King Solomon follows the tradition of the day, which dictates that the lesser kings give a daughter’s hand in marriage in order to seal a treaty with a more powerful king, and finds himself with 700 wives and 300 concubines.

1400 A.D. – Parents in France and Holland have the legal authority to veto a daughter’s choice of spouse until she turns 25 and a son’s choice until he turns 30.

1775 – Married women lose the right to own property, make contracts,

or file lawsuits after Lord Blackstone declares that “husband and wife are one person, and the husband is that person.” (Coverture is born.)

1863 – Alabama passes a law forbidding marriage between different races, later enshrined in the state constitution and only removed in the year 2000.

1920 – British physician Marie Stopes published the shocking book, *Married Love*, and in it justified contraception by describing sex as a spiritual union and mutual pleasure.

Initially, marriage was a private act that only gradually became public. It afforded protection for wealth and class status, regulation of sexuality and reproduction, established kin boundaries, and spelled out relationship privileges and duties. The ability to ratify who was married, and the form and requirements of that process, was an important source of social power, increasingly assumed in the west by the church, and later shared with civil power. Today, we commonly agree that it has become ultimately distilled as the emblem of love and commitment.

For Nancy Cott, Professor of History at Harvard University, the evolution of modern marriage parallel’s legal and social changes in this country. She notes that our Christian founders took for granted the rightness of monogamy, although it was a forty league change from the practice of the times. Marriage and government mirrored each other, based on consent. The new nation depended on monogamy, but state legislatures actually set up the rules for marriage, which were then effectively buttressed by social controls taking place informally at the local level.

Later developments showed that marriage is not just a contract, but a status and an institution. Marriage was also found to have a unique ability to regulate other areas of public life. Like a surveyor’s transit, marriage policy was used by the government to set social boundaries in such contentious areas as

Indian policy, states’ rights, interracial marriages, women’s rights, polygamy, contraceptive rights, citizenship for immigrants, and vice control.

When the sexual revolution started at the time of WWI, the connection between compelling state interests and “traditional” church and male values began to weaken. Outcome: women gained the right to vote and to own and control their own property. The last vestiges of coverture were finally being shaken loose. Marriage was gradually rewritten as an economic provider-dependent model, with increasing provision of government benefits.

Traditional marriage is obviously a far more colorful and textured cloth than previously imagined. So why not gay marriage? Let’s look at that question next, as debated by opponents and proponents.

### **Top Ten Reasons Against Gay Marriage**

- Opponents say marriage is between a man and a woman because that is how God wants it. “Man shall cleave to his wife and be one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24)

Proponents answer that God first said, “It is not good for man to be alone,” (Gen 2:18).

- Opponents say the purpose of marriage is procreation.

Proponents remind us that marriage is not just about reproduction; animals can do that. A homosexual union is, anatomically speaking, nothing but a type of sterile union as with a postmenopausal woman or a man with a vasectomy. Children are not a trivial reason for marriage; they are just not the only reason.

- Opponents say the best way to raise children is with a mother and a father.

Proponents answer that the research that supports this claim chiefly compares two parent families with single parent families. And two parents are best. Numerous national child care organizations support same-sex parenting including pediatricians, family physicians, social workers, attorneys,

psychologists, and psychiatrists.

- Opponents worry that kids who have gay parents, or others, might be enticed to become gay; sometimes called “waverers.”

Proponents note that evidence increasingly suggests that being gay is an inborn quality. Past President Reagan, as Governor of California, sealed the defeat of an anti-gay measure in his state, when he spoke out against it. He quoted the role model argument of a newspaper write-in, “If teachers had such power over children, I would have been a nun years ago.”

- Opponents reassure us that women and marriage help to stabilize and settle wild young men.

Proponents state, on the contrary, it’s the moral commitment renewed daily that domesticates and matures both women and men. Even the prospect of marriage is a stabilizer and motivator.

- Opponents profess that marriage is a sacred, even noble institution.

Proponents say yes, and the problems with it—a sacred vow, now as likely to be seen as an easily cancelled contract—can be laid at the feet of traditional marriage. Adultery, spousal abuse, and abandonment are the social viruses which afflict it, unrelated to gay conduct.

- Opponents state that marriage is society’s most fundamental institution; don’t rock the boat.

Proponents respond—so is the Constitution. The proposed amendment to limit marriage to a man and a woman would be a precedent for limiting rather than extending civil rights. We are a nation of laws, not a referenda at the fundamental level of human and civil rights. With regard to the government’s role, marriage is a legal, not sacred, institution.

- Opponents assert that married life is virtuous; gays are deprived.

Proponents sigh, that sad stereotype aside, one may ask about the social incentives for virtuous life among gays: there’s little social or familial support, no institution to encourage fidelity or

monogamy, and little religious or moral outreach. Today's rampant promiscuity is an ill-advised attribute of both straights and gays.

- Opponents say marriage is good for people: married adults do better in almost every measure of emotional and physical health. They live longer and have happier lives.

Proponents agree—gays would like these and other benefits of marriage too. Poverty, stress, illness, and aging affect them just as much as anybody. The pursuit of happiness is the right of all.

- Opponents bemoan that any further changes to marriage will further weaken it beyond recognition; if we let gays marry, then what about polygamy, incest, and bestiality?

Proponents aver such gloom and doom arguments, known as the “slippery slope,” are diversions that opponents try when they don't have a good enough reason to justify ongoing discrimination. That is, arguments for equal rights for gays have to be condemned because they would lead to other, more objectionable things.

In sum, every change in marriage rules in modern times has evoked the same catastrophic rhetoric. Here are some classic examples cited by Graff: allowing women to own property “would be virtually destroying the moral and social efficacy of the marriage institution.” Or allowing contraception “is not what God of nature and grace...ordained marriage to be...(it's) the lustful indulgences of men and women.” Marriage between races was called “bestial;” divorce, “tantamount to polygamy.”

Still, you may ask, why do gays want to marry? A solitary person lives on the tip of vulnerability. Marriage creates kin and strengthens our communities. Importantly, civil marriage provides a safety net of over eleven hundred federal and over three hundred state benefits which can be obtained no other way, even if you're wealthy and can afford the power of an attorney. A short list of these vital

guaranteed protections include hospital visitation, social security benefits, family medical leave, rights of survivorship, and tax relief.

While marriage has significant religious meaning for many people, the urgent need for gays is to have access to civil marriage, not a continuation of knee-jerk discriminatory exclusion based on out-moded definitions. Granting civil marriage rights would not require any religion's blessings. The government's role and responsibility is to uphold equality under the law. As it is now, incarcerated felons have the right to marry, but not law-abiding, tax-paying gay citizens.

Some pragmatists want to offer civil unions as a substitute, otherwise known as “marriage-lite.” While this may be a viable option from the standpoint of social evolution, at least two problems are prominent. One, couples would have legal protections and rights only in their home state; and, two, they would be lacking the huge array of federal benefits and protections. As we've seen over and over, separate is seldom, if ever, equal.

As for protecting the institution of marriage, one wonders about the real source of the threat. Is it really a small percent of gays, strangers at the gate, seeking entry? Or is it the proliferation of competing options by our larger, heterosexual society in the form of cohabitation and domestic partnerships?

### **What Is This World Coming To?**

The short answer is that at least a dozen other countries are ahead of the U.S. by offering legal recognition, if not marriage, to gays. Canada, Spain, Belgium, The Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries are among this group. Acceptance of people's right to be different, to exercise conscience, is a hallmark of democracy in which civil law rules, not the religious doctrines of a particular group. As a country which both models and seeks to extend freedom world-wide, the U.S. can hardly stand to maintain a course of blatant discrimination.

Thus, on the home front, we may look at the question of gay marriage as a kind of litmus test for the state of health of our culture of democracy. For gays, in the secular arena, it represents a cluster of rights-based initiatives including open inclusion into the military as well as a host of economic and other protections. In the sacred arena, it's a signifier of full inclusion and dignity. Our founding father, Madison, linked the two: “In a free government, the security for civil rights must be the same for religious rights.” Religious difference is protected, in part, because it's a matter of choice—as with opinion, identity, express, and in intimate association. Freedom of choice is the true moral vision of the U.S. Constitution; it helps keep us all free, in our communities and our churches.

The health of marriage and families is also key to the future health of our country.

The crisis in heterosexual family life which is so frequently cited as anxiety behind greater acceptance for gays—the 50% divorce rate, 1.5 million women assaulted annually by men, 1/3 of all children born out of wedlock—can hardly be laid at the feet of gays who have largely been excluded from regular society. Jim Wallis, author and commentator, states that gay activists have been so busy countering mean-spirited, ignorant stereotypes, including ones focusing on moral decay and threat to the family, that everybody has been missing the ways in which completely different sets of fears are being projected onto gays.

Amanda Udis-Kessler, a Boston writer, says we need to discover the target at which this sense of fear, anger, and loss would be more appropriately aimed:

“As for loss of innocence, we may look at political and economic corruption in high places. Threat to family life appears in contaminated water and air supplies, toxic dumps, hunger and homelessness. Our education  
*“Gay Marriage,” see page 32*

# Youth Voting: Our National Dilemma

*Americans have a generally poor reputation as voters. Perhaps attention to youthful voting habits will improve our record.*

**By Jane Mangarella**



## About the Author

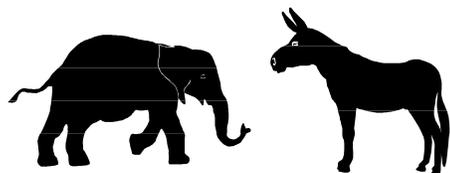
Jane Mangarella has been in the field of public relations and publications for over 25 years, of which 17 were spent at Wilkes University, where she served first as Assistant Director and then as Director of Public Relations and Publications.

As Director, she managed the University's News Bureau, all university publications, and served as Editor of the Wilkes University Magazine, *The Quarterly*. She continued to serve as Director until she left Wilkes in 1991.

Jane moved to the Directorship of the Luzerne County Commission for Women, where she served for the next five years concentrating on issues of women in the workplace. Deciding to establish her own business as a Public Relations and Publications Consultant and Editor, she reluctantly left the Commission in 1997. She now simultaneously manages that business and serves as Director of Development at the Hoyt Library in Kingston, PA.

Jane is a 12-year member of the Board of the League of Women Voters and chairs their Youth Voting Project. She co-chairs the League's Political Debate Portfolio. She is a member of the National Fundraising Executives U.S., and the National Council of Executive Women. She also serves on the Board of the Luzerne County Planning Commission.

Presented to the Wyoming Valley, PA Torch Club on May 9, 2005.



This paper was actually written two years ago, when I was asked by the Board of the League of Women Voters Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania Chapter to give them an overview of why the project on Youth Voting, which I then chaired, had failed.

I responded defensively at first, because I really didn't have a clue to what went wrong; but much later, I was grateful because it forced me to really look at the project from its enthusiastic beginning to its demoralizing end. Two wonderful women, Susan Payne Fiorantino and Mary Ann Storz, both of whom are school teachers, agreed to join me in the revisiting. Together we dissected the project step-by-step. I also continued to research and read everything I could find on Youth Voting.

Youth voting was then very much in the news, but there were few serious studies going on to find the real reasons behind the problem. What we did find in abundance were theories. Very few substantiated theories, but nonetheless widely disseminated and presented as fact on the Internet, in print media, and on talk shows.

Since starting this paper, and because I was learning as I went on, I have consistently added to, changed, restructured, rewritten, and it is still a work in progress. If I were to come back to you in a year, the information and demographics given you tonight would be somewhat changed as information and research improves and is substantiated.

However, the one thing that will not change is my opinion. It is an opinion based on two years of concentrated study and research, and strongly indicates that the real and unreflected reason young people do not vote is that they are, by and large, uneducated or undereducated

in the entire democratic process. And more important is the fact that they don't know that they don't know.

I hope in this paper to give you an overview of the history of our project, its beginnings, some of the data, the resulting inadequate plan of action and, finally, the common denominator in the data that led us to the conclusion that there is an educational void in the teaching of democracy at the elementary level.

I use the project to illustrate that, on this subject, even a well-meaning group who are versed in the political process can misinterpret data; and that the misinterpretation leads to plans of action and reform that cannot be sustained.

Our project began four years ago, when the League compared statistics from voter registration drives for 18–24 year-olds with statistics of that same age group who actually vote. The discrepancies were huge and consistent enough to make us begin to wonder why. The Board decided to form a Youth Voting Committee to look beyond the statistics and to explore reasons for the discrepancies.

So with pure spirits and a great deal of shameless self-promotion, we announced to the media that we were going to mount this project and not only find out why our young people are not voting, but we were going to fix it—at least locally. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot! I'm sure that I don't even have to mention the tip of the iceberg. As I go on, you will see what we eventually saw—that *we* didn't know that *we* didn't know.

We started with a series of roundtable discussions hosted by King's College in Wilkes-Barre, PA and graciously moderated by King's

President the Reverend Thomas O'Hara. I think Tom, who holds a Ph.D. in Political Science, knew about the iceberg from the beginning but was kind enough not to rain on our enthusiasm—and agreed to moderate the discussion.

In the ensuing five months, we brought together college and high school students and their respective faculty for an initial exchange of information and to compare their collective perception of the problem, if indeed they agreed there was a problem.

Each roundtable began with a question on what they thought were reasons that young people registered to vote by the thousands and came out nationally in such low numbers. Among the reasons cited in this and the next two roundtables were—and I use students' direct quotes:

- “Issues don't interest and they don't really apply to us. They (candidates) don't consider us important enough to get us on an agenda.”
- “Candidates, whether incumbent or running for offices, don't understand us, our motivation, or our values.”
- “Candidates can't be trusted because they all have personal agendas and will say anything to get votes.”
- “Media doesn't give us enough information; they just go with the gossip.”
- “In presidential elections, why vote? The popular vote doesn't count; the Electoral College decides who wins.”

They also did not seem to understand their own demographics. For example, to which district did they belong? Where should they go to vote? How does one use an absentee ballot? Many were uncomfortable using the machine itself.

So we now had data that told us students had feelings of being disenfranchised; of cynicism; of a certain degree of apathy; and of distrust of media, of candidates, and of the system itself.

Mired now in our own brand of theorizing based on too small a sample

and without the forethought of outreach to organizations who might be better equipped to do the same kind of research, we created our own plan of action.

We decided to bring the students together with each group mentioned to openly discuss the concerns that had been voiced in the data that we collected.

We decided to form a “Rock the Vote” Committee of young ambassadors to present events throughout the year that would rally the young voters and bring them out to the polls. We, the League members, would mentor and encourage, support, and even subsidize the costs of all of the above. We kept to the course and followed through on all of this.

The students met and discussed issues with legislators and they confronted media with their concerns about insufficient and quality information. They planned rallies, town meetings, and public forums.

The most important component of the plan was the formation of a self-governed and self-motivating group of young people who would serve as Ambassadors for Youth Voting. The structure had college seniors and juniors mentoring college freshmen, sophomores, and high school seniors. High school seniors would work with high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. The plan looked perfect.

The Ambassadors' responsibility included going out to high school assemblies, to public meetings, to junior achievement meetings, and to honor societies both in high schools and in colleges to initiate discussion, exchange information, and answer questions on voting and its procedures.

The League's committee was absolutely convinced that this plan of action would, in the next few years, grow this grass roots movement into a consistent presence in the community to influence and produce young voters. And we were more convinced when our first event brought nearly 300 students out on a day-long seminar on voting at

the Luzerne County Courthouse. The event was highly publicized and we felt we were on our way.

I won't bore you with the details of our gradual demise. Just let me say that we could not sustain the interest of the young people on our own teams. The farther we got into the project, the more disinterested they became. We wondered what piece of this puzzle we were missing.

At the wise urging of one of our Political Science faculty, we asked students to meet with us individually and to give us their individual opinion on what went wrong. The answers were the first inkling of our own naiveté.

It seems that these student volunteers, the best and the brightest, did not feel prepared to discuss our basic democratic processes for voting, eligibility to vote, registration demographics, absentee ballots, much less candidates or issues, or any other of the questions that came from assemblies of students who really wanted to know.

It was amazing to us because our high school ambassadors seemed comfortable and eager for the assignments. Our college level ambassadors could discuss in detail Political Theory, Comparative Political Systems, Politics and Government of Third World Countries, and a host of other sophisticated subjects pertaining to politics.

None were comfortable enough to discuss what we assumed was taught and learned during the formative educational years. They did not feel they knew enough about the basic democratic experience, its meanings, its processes, and most importantly its responsibilities well enough for peer review.

None of us on the committee were convinced that this was true, but if it was true, if indeed there was a void in the early elementary curriculum, what could we possibly do to change it?

We admitted defeat—Susan went back to her classroom vowing that this would not happen with her students.

Maryann had always been a champion of teaching the full scope of civics and would do so with even more fervor. I just requested from the Board another portfolio to work on with the League.

But I couldn't let it go. To me, the continual decline in youth voting is a problem that is as serious as anything facing us as a nation. I ask you to imagine, as I do, what the long-term consequences of not engaging our youth in politics and governance will be. We lose not only our future voters; we also lose tomorrow's leadership. If they don't know how to vote, they certainly are not going to know how, nor be inclined, to run for office.

I continued to wonder if we did lack a central source of solid, consistent information in our schools for the basic tenants of the democratic process.

I decided to do my own limited and informal survey of elementary and middle school teachers and what they taught in civics, more out of curiosity than any idea of reform.

I won't claim this as serious or even measurable research, but during the next six months, I talked to or emailed about twenty teachers in an attempt to prove or disprove our assumption that some of the problem could be curriculum. What I asked was – "Are you mandated by Pennsylvania Standards to teach civics? And if so, do you include the basic tenets of democracy, including voting procedures?"

All answered yes, that teaching Civics is required, but most answered no to the question about teaching basics which covered issues, candidates, recognition of political rhetoric, political party platforms or philosophies, or voting. It seems that what they taught in civics and how it is taught is left entirely to the discretion of the teacher. In fact, in some districts, the teaching of civics comes under another related discipline; sometimes history, sometimes social studies, sometimes other and seemingly unrelated disciplines.

Did civics get its fair share of time? Most admitted it did not, especially since

the No Child Left Behind initiatives have been implemented. Teachers' efforts to prepare students for the government mandated tests in Math, Reading, and Science now take precedence over all other subjects in most schools.

Out of curiosity, I searched the Pennsylvania State Standards Web Page on curriculum, where it tells us that by sixth grade the elemental knowledge of democracy should be mastered. The scores indicate they are not.

I realize that 20 teachers casually interviewed does not constitute research; however, those conversations convinced me that there was something consistent happening here. I went to the League Board and asked if we could reinstate the Project so that I could form a new committee to further explore curriculum. The Project on Youth Voting was reinstated during March of this year (2005).

The project is moving ahead slowly. A major change in our approach is to find out what other organizations are doing on the subject and to find ways to work with them to initiate discussion and try again to grow a grass roots movement here.

I was energized recently when I discovered that our interpretation of our own very limited data agrees with the credible and superbly researched data provided by the nationally recognized and endowed Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE).

CIRCLE is funded by the Pew Memorial Trust and The Carnegie Corporation, and is housed at the School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland, and their website is a trove of useful information.

They have been doing, on a grand and very expensive scale, what we foolishly sought to do alone and they have made available to the public an Executive Summary on their research, with recommendations.

Let me reiterate the introductory statement in the Executive Report:

*"For more than 250 years, Americans have shared a vision of Democracy in which all citizens understand, appreciate, and engage actively in civic and political life. In recent decades, however, increasing numbers of Americans have disengaged from civic and political institutions including political and electoral activities such as voting and being informed about political issues. Young people especially reflect these changes. They are less likely to vote and are less interested in political discussion and public issues than young people in past decades. As a result, many young Americans may not be prepared to participate fully in our democracy now and when they become adults. School based civic education is in decline. Most formal civic education today comprises only one semester course on government compared to the many courses in democracy, civics, and government that were common in the past."*

CIRCLE has launched a state-by-state campaign entitled "The National Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools," whose primary goal is to conduct a long-term effort to renew and elevate civic learning in our schools Kindergarten through twelfth grade. I quote from their opening statement.

"Democracy does not happen on its own. Democracy is learned. Our schools have the opportunity and the responsibility to prepare the next generation of Americans for Citizenship."

In conclusion, let me just get back to the statement that they didn't know that they didn't know. When we reviewed the six or seven points that came out of the data we collected, we found the common denominator that I mentioned earlier. What was missing was their ability to see the relationship between the issues and how they corresponded to and impacted on their daily lives.

In addition to having spent seventeen years working with students "Youth Voting," see page 33

# Poetic Relief: Creative Writing As A Professional Outlet

*An outlet for members of professions emotionally involved in the results of their work.*

By Peter M. Mellette



## About the Author

Peter Mellette has represented health care providers, including medical facilities and

practitioners, for over 20 years. As a principal of the law firm Mellette PC, he offers daily counsel to health care clients on regulatory compliance, payment, development, and operational issues affecting provider services. His Medicaid appeals in federal and state courts and in administrative hearings have resulted in recoveries of millions of dollars of additional reimbursement for providers.

Mr. Mellette is a frequent speaker on third-party reimbursement, licensure, and other legal issues affecting nursing homes, hospitals, and other health care providers and is a regular contributor of articles on legal issues relating to reimbursement, peer review, and long-term care.

Mr. Mellette participates in a variety of bar and community activities, including serving on the local hospice board and as a past president of the Richmond Torch Club. When alive, his father was a Senior Vice President with the National Conference of Christians & Jews, and was also a former clergyman and Richmond Torch Club president. His mother was a medical oncologist and poet.

Mr. Mellette was graduated from Dartmouth College with an A.B. in Policy Studies (health care focus) and from the T.C. Williams School of Law at the University of Richmond with his J.D. He lives in Williamsburg with his wife, a health foundation director, and

two children.

Presented to the Torch Club of Richmond, Virginia on March 5, 2002.

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Why write? One Nobel laureate recently likened writing to the loneliness of the lighthouse keeper. Certainly that is the image of the creative writer that is shared by all but the professional writers themselves. As a busy professional, why would you write?

One reason to write, as described in a poem recently published by Dr. Barry Kirschbaum of MCV's Department of Internal Medicine, is "to find meaning in life, a pattern to the weave." As Dr. Kirschbaum suggests, finding the pattern first may be better than weaving recklessly through life.

In this paper, I intend to sort through the reasons that writers and psychologists have identified for creative writing. In the process, I will share with you some words left to me a year and a half ago that show my mother's gift of writing. While some of you may remember her as a medical oncologist, she was also a prolific writer. She will provide an example of how creative writing can be a useful professional outlet.

Let us start on this creative caper with the proposition that writing offers meaning to life and is a basic human act. As noted by David Read Johnson, a clinical psychotherapist, we write to empty our minds of troubling thoughts and also to record them for posterity. According to Dr. Johnson, writing, like meditation or quiet reflection, allows our feelings and thoughts to flow out of us and reveals the wisdom, memory, and suffering they contain.

Novelist Henry Miller said, "In an intelligently ordered world there would

be no need to make the unreasonable attempt to put such miraculous happenings down" into "crude hieroglyphs." Unlike Miller, we may not have the vision or talent to inspire others with our writing. Yet, as Miller noted, "every man, when he gets quiet, when he becomes desperately honest with himself, is capable of uttering profound truths."

Such aimlessness appears to be a recipe for creative thought, while at the same time a distraction from day-to-day living. A.E. Housman describes the production of poetry, in its first serendipitous stage, as not as an active but as a passive and involuntary process. For most active professionals, the passive art of listening required to write poetry seems too detached; too disengaged from the world of work and family. So even if the truth is within each of us as Housman says, "to be secreted," why should a professional person try to be T.S. Elliot? What drives each of us to pick up the pen or sit at the keyboard now and then?

Julia Cameron, author of *The Right to Write*, has six answers to the question: "Why write?"

- We should write because it is human nature to write. Writing claims our world.
- We should write because humans are spiritual beings and writing is a powerful form of prayer and meditation.
- We should write because writing brings clarity and passion to the act of living.
- We should write because writing is good for the soul.
- We should write because writing yields us a body of work, a felt path through the world we live in.

• Finally, we should write, above all, because we are writers whether we call ourselves writers or not.

My mother was a writer. Her oncology practice and her professional and family commitments led to long working days and nights. Yet, in spite of her busy schedule, she made time for something that she loved almost as much as her patients and family. On one late evening at the typewriter 33 years ago, my mother described the human nature of poetry in this way:

*For I agree that in the rhythm and the cadence of the words*

*There is a sort of "tribal dance" – a mechanism to release an inner soul*

*I knew this when I wrote some twenty years ago*

*That when one speaks in verses – oft as not – "He speaks his soul"*

*What was I then that I should know that truth?*

*What am I now – a greater soul – or less?...*

*Frustrated soul – at times – and sorest enemy –*

*The air I beat...the stars I count – and what is worse –*

*I know that this is true – but cannot cease.*

*How many ones have found – as I have found – that writing is a joy*

*Unmatched – a re-creation – and a valid means to find release.*

*And that much more if words can find*

*This basic chant...this lullaby of sounds...*

*This kinesthetic rhythm which is not The intellect – nor yet the conscious searching of – or for –*

*The soul;*

*But the unfurbished rushing of subconsciousness*

*To paper – and the end result – So often is*

*A renaissance...a birth of insight...and as lines grow long*

*The joy unfolds...the senses wake...illumination*

*Seems to come. It may be subterfuge...and pure illusion*

*But it serves*

*A purpose nothing else can quite achieve...*

*It gives me back unto myself...and how surprised I am*

*When reading over all those words I wrote*

*Another day – to find*

*That they have never really reached my conscious mind*

*That I can barely just recall I wrote them down*

*Much less the substance that they had – or lacked – as case may be.*

*And thus a double joy is born...the writing of the words – at first –*

*And then their reading...in another attitude of mind.*

*Perhaps their secret is which should be still explored*

*Is it, mayhap, just "playing the piano" for ones pleasure or relief*

*Or is it more...can hidden thoughts – and better – hidden strengths*

*Be grasped? Can L.C. Smith behave like LSD?*

*Can Royal open up a road to some romance (No Halliburton this)?*

*But...understanding may be born*

*Beside the Underwood.*

*And frivolous enjoyment is embodied in – these pallid puns.*

*No Wordsworth I...No Coleridge...Nor even Edgar Guest...*

*And is it true, perhaps, that others find in reading verse, in saying verse...*

*Some respite of a sort? Is it like singing for the slave*

*Or chanting for the monk? Like rocking of the cradle – or the gentle motion of*

*The amnion? Can one regress... acceptably? And is the fear men have*

*Of poetry perhaps a part of the attempt to say:*

*"I am a man...I left the childish things behind..."*

*This is the stuff of weaklings—or of fools?"*

*Perhaps. But also it may be*

*That in denying need at times to be the child...or deeper yet—*

*To hear the rhythm of the tribal*

*drum – the heartthrob of*

*Emerging man—the birth pains of his first attempts to think—as well as feel—*

*One may deny those feelings which give intellect the tap roots*

*Vital for its strength...those earthy channels which foundations are*

*For contact with the basic. Are not man and Nature one—*

*And so inseparable from Infinite?*

For many professionals, as it was for my mother, writing is an instrument to take stock of the subconscious world and share its insights into the conscious human existence. In his book, *The Courage to Create*, Rollo May describes five different types of courage. As May notes, in human beings, courage is necessary to make being and becoming possible. The discovery of new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society may be built is "creative courage," what Rollo May describes as the most important courage of all.

In the midst of social change, such as we have experienced as a nation over the last two years, the need for creative courage among professionals of all cloths and shingles is even greater. The new forms, symbols, and patterns upon which our ever-evolving society is built must be divined and discovered. Such acts of creative courage require us to be in touch with all facets of our senses and our imagination.

As W.S. Merwin observes, poetry and the arts not only reconnect us to the world, they emanate from the connection of the world of the senses and the imagination. A simple act of stepping on a loose cobblestone in the street – as Marcel Proust did – may unleash a million word torrent of feeling and inspiration for those who are receptive to it. Or the act of stooping to pick up a dropped pen may open up a window to a new world of vision, even while in the act of creating a poem, as W.B. Yeats found.

The professional who writes may find, like my mother did, that he doesn't know what his intention is when he puts

pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. And that is perfectly okay—it merely takes a little getting used to. Over time, the results may open the eyes to the weave of the fabric around us, to the previously unobserved labyrinth of life.

Julia Cameron describes Joseph, the busy executive, who writes to stay connected to himself during long and hectic days. Joseph meets so many people each day and does so many things that he needs a place to ask himself what he *really* thinks. By writing without a specific direction to follow, the busy professional like Joseph is able to metabolize the events of the day and examine them in the context of the streaming video of life.

Much of my mother's poetry emanates from efforts to process the sadness and stress of caring for terminally ill patients. As her outlet, her coping mechanism after a 14-hour day of patient visits and professional encounters, my mother would sit at her typewriter and let the conscious emotions and subconscious connections flow into words. For example, 33 years ago, my mother wrote this poem, "A Letter to a New Patient."

*Tonight I looked into your eyes—and saw your tears*

*"They come unbidden (this you said)*

*Whenever I allow myself to think of those I love."*

*And thus you told me that you knew the odds we face...*

*And, in a sense, I find it better that you know—*

*For then we start together on this battleground...*

*For that is what it is—We know that—each of us—*

*But I alone can know the real amalgam that my bullets are...*

*Though I could wish them golden, they are brass—*

*You, on the other hand, are unaware, perhaps, that even brass*

*May dent, sometimes, the armour of our foe;*

*And I am optimist enough to hope—*

*to pray—that each small dent*

*May buy us room for an advance—for you—not just for those*

*Who are to come. (We'll find their bullets as the need arise.)*

*It is for you we fight today—for your tomorrows—for those years*

*You have expected which are threatened now.*

*What can I promise you tonight? This single certainty*

*That I command: Just this—That I shall choose the ammunition*

*That I use with care—to make the most of every weapon that we have.*

*Of this you may be sure...*

*And one more vow I make—a corollary pledge—*

*That I shall not retreat—I shall be there beside you*

*Come what may. A colleague and an ally of a sort, as well as one*

*Who must direct the fight.*

*Your battle is my own as well...For you—and those you love*

*A campaign worthy of the best that all of us can give,*

*With due humility of those who know*

*The limits of their finite power, but are not unaware*

*That each small particle of Light we have—Is harbinger and proof*

*Of greater Light awaiting means—To make it*

*Visible.*

The defiant spirit of the first poem is followed by the encroaching reality of the three sequels written beginning a year later. First, in February:

*"Why did you keep me here?" she whispered, weakly now*

*"It would have been a better thing to let me go."*

*"I kept you here because you wanted to remain," I said*

*(But was I right?...I thought I was...*

*The spark which glowed for just a while when she once more*

*Became aware...I read it as reality—*

*I took it as an evidence of still a glimmering*

*Of hope...*

*"I can't say anything to her," she*

*told the nurse of me...*

*"For when I would—she smiles—and I am powerless*

*To raise objection or complaint"...*

*This means she tries to live not for herself and what might be*

*Alone...but alas—she*

*Just hates to see me lose...*

*And though she told the nurse she could not speak*

*She has...One night last week*

*She thanked me for the things I'd tried to do and said,*

*"Now don't feel bad about it—for I know you tried..."*

*It's not your fault, and I don't feel it is..."*

*She didn't need to make the speeches, for I think I know*

*Just how she feels—at least in part:*

*She's tired...so very tired...of lying there...*

*Of hurting...and of gasping for the air...*

*With only words—not evidence—that there is hope indeed.*

*Why do I struggle on....without that evidence?*

*I need it too—as much as she—*

*To give me reason to believe that anything I do*

*Can still reverse the trend which now exists...*

*And yet, I have not heard the message clear which says*

*For certain that the "jig is up"...*

*For this I wait...I search for fragments of*

*A miracle.*

*And as I put that medicine into*

*Her vein tonight...and once again reminded her*

*Of all the little evidences that function was intact*

*I had to say it...for our thinking it was part of any hope*

*We have — I had to say:*

*"We just might lick it yet" ... We might...*

*I have to try...*

*Forgive me if you suffer when the odds against us are so great*

*I am not sure I'd be as patient as*

you are...

*It's just that this is all the life you have*

*And giving up would be an easy road for me...*

*For you are one of many*

*But for you – this poor short breath is all there is–*

*And who am I to will that it should cease?*

And then, less than a month later:

Final Words to F.B.

*It was not even brass of which those bullets were composed*

*Those drugs intended to control disease*

*Instead of gold, they proved to be but lint*

*Those futile feeble weapons left no trace...*

*And you are gone.*

*Those brave shrill words I spoke– and wrote*

*Those self-exalting claims...*

*They ring like wind-chimes in my ears*

*Like crushing wads of paper in ones hands–*

*'Twas there the sounding brass–the tinkling tin.*

*I meant them well. I ventured–but I failed–*

*I even failed to justify the claims I made...*

*So little respite was there in the sure advance*

*Of those wild cells we cannot yet control.*

*What secret lies submerged– unfathomed–far below*

*Our poor ability to comprehend?*

*So on...and on...and on...we muddle as we may*

*It is not wish nor will nor even sacrifice*

*Which makes us fail–no lack of any one of these*

*Pertains. It is our ignorance–our bleak stupidity*

*How long? How long? How long?*

*This soul-defeating maze?*

And then, three months later:

*Those words I wrote the twelfth of*

*March I read again*

*For the first time...tonight...*

*And all I found was bitterness*

*The loss I felt that night... unmitigated was...*

*My medicines had failed*

*My wrestling with the Angel was as naught.*

*I could not reconcile myself to Fate*

*I could not own a God who let you die.*

*Not only you...but all the others for whose need*

*No really valid answers yet exist...*

*This bitterness I had to sublimate*

*I had to face each day those souls who looked to me*

*For – help – whatever shred of help that I could give...*

*And I remembered – for I had to – for some peace of mind*

*The small successes and the minor gains.*

*The three years now for one who started out almost like you,*

*Her tumors shrinking once again with a new drug this week.*

*I do not know, in this our ignorance,*

*Why some respond...and others don't,*

*I only know I have to try...and try again...and yet again.*

*I also know the joy, the happiness of even small success.*

*And thus I find the courage to endure.*

*But there is more...tonight...which could not find its place*

*Among those bitter words three months ago.*

*For in these weeks, so many times, I have remembered*

*Your shy smile...your busy hands...your hope...your confidence*

*So many things ingrained into my soul*

*Who watched you in those stressful days,*

*Intangibles can never die...they are transferred*

*To those of us who stood beside*

*And we are richer now because you lived.*

*The strength–character–the soul– you were*

*Does not depart as protoplasm does*

*It is indeed eternal–boundless–infinite.*

As poet Carolyn Furche said in an interview with Bill Moyers, poetry allows the human soul to speak. Or, to quote Julia Cameron, “Writing is a friend whose shoulder we can cry on, writing is who listens and lets us sort things out. Writing is a comrade who marches with us through the steep days of sorrow and despair.” For my mother, poetry was a refuge from sadness and a process of integration of the profound events of life and death in her life. It was also a means of moving the grief away, getting it down somewhere else. As Martha Whitmore Hickman notes in her book, *Healing After Loss*, “Writing siphons off the grief and distances the writer from loss.” This was certainly one significant aspect of my mother’s writing.

But let’s get back to the question I first asked: Why write? The answers for those who are listening to the muse within should be evident. Writing is a window into the subconscious, into the soul. Writing allows us to witness ourselves in a way that we need to in order to be creative. Writing allows us to find and communicate the creative courage within all of us. And writing allows us to process and integrate what we have learned about ourselves and our world, so that we can better communicate with others on a professional and personal level, and preserve those thoughts for others in the future.

James Joyce may have summed up the experience of writing best in his often-quoted passage from his book, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the young hero’s diary, he writes, “Welcome O Life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.” As with Joyce’s hero, the writer “*Poetic Relief*,” see page 33

# Home: The Exploration of An Idea

What does home mean to you? What means home to you?

By Martha Horton



## About the Author

Martha Horton grew up in Gettysburg, PA in a historic house that was captured by the Confederates and used as a field hospital. She graduated from Penn State University and went on to enjoy a long career in journalism, advertising, public relations, and publishing, during which she occupied 17 homes in a variety of locations from Marco Island, Florida to Milan, Italy. She now lives in a brick row house in Elmira, New York's Near Westside Historic District. Now retired and a freelancer, she writes cover stories for the Homes section of *The Star-Gazette*, Gannett's first newspaper. She has also completed a novel based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Marble Faun." Her avocations include traveling, gardening, poetry writing, and choral singing. Horton has been a member of Elmira Torch for more than ten years, served as president in 1999–2000, and is currently a member of the board.

Presented to the Elmira Torch Club, June 2005.

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Charles Dickens wrote:

"Home is a name, a word, it is a strong one, stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit ever answered to."

But what does this word, "home," really signify?

What started me on a quest for the meaning of home was a brainstorming session at the Elmira, New York *Star-Gazette*. I write for the Homes section of the paper, and each Sunday we feature on the front page an area home, usually single-family house. My editor and I were looking for more variety in our subjects; hence the discussion on what constitutes a home. As a result, we now

write about not only single-family homes but also apartments, assisted living facilities, summer homes, mobile homes, group homes, home businesses, even a yacht.

So there are all sorts of dwelling places that people may call home, but can "home" be defined simply as a specific physical residence? What comes immediately to mind is the title of a book written in 1953 by a former brothel keeper, Polly Adler: "A House is not a Home." Still, that's the first meaning that the Merriam-Webster dictionary gives for home: *one's place of residence, domicile, house*.

Merriam-Webster continues with five more meanings:

2—*the social unit formed by a family living together;*

3—*a familiar or usual setting, congenial environment*—I think of the TV sitcom bar, Cheers, the place where everybody knows your name—also the focus of one's domestic attention, as in home is where the heart is. This speaks to love and companionship beyond immediate family members, perhaps even the companionship of a dog or cat.

4—*a place of origin, as in salmon returning home to spawn*. We all understand the place of origin and the return home. Some philosophers consider life to be a circle, and home is where we both begin and end life's journey. *also headquarters*. Home is certainly our base of operations, and increasingly a communications center, where we have our mailing address, our telephone, radio, TV, Fax, computer.

5—*an establishment providing residence and care for people with special needs*.

6—*the objective in various games, home plate in baseball*. And, I would add, the end of many a legendary quest. "The Odyssey" comes to mind.

And then there is the phrase, "at home," with three meanings:

1—*relaxed and comfortable, at ease*

2—*in harmony with surroundings*

3—*on familiar ground, as a teacher being at home in a certain academic field*.

These are all fine descriptions of the various aspects of home, but fail to convey the totality of the concept, the emotion, and, as Dickens noted, the magic of it.

Author William Goyen, in "The House of Breath," comes closer:

*"That people could come into the world in a place they could not at first even name and had never known before; and that out of a nameless and unknown place they could grow and move around in it until its name they knew and called with love, and call it Home, and put roots there and love other there; so that whenever they left this place they would sing homesick songs about it and write poems of yearning for it...and forever be returning to it or leaving it again."*

In my exploration, I hoped to discover whether this yearning for home could be found in our DNA, just as some scientists have speculated that man's need to acknowledge a creator is innate. Perhaps, the "home" and "God" ideas are related—we all seek to learn just where we fit into the universe, to find our home in the cosmos.

One of the most fascinating pieces of writing I unearthed on the subject via the Internet was a master's thesis written by Tami Sutcliffe. She writes:

*"Whether we live in a cave in southern France or an apartment in Los Angeles, as a species we share the same impulses, the same appetites and many of the same dreams of safety and contentment. The myths we all share from Egypt, Greece, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Native—*

*American religions, the Arthurian legends and all the rest, lead us to keep seeking the sanctuary of our real homes, the places we know we belong.”*

Certainly, home is associated with the satisfaction of our biological imperatives for safety, food, shelter, and association with others of our kind. The spawning salmon mentioned by Merriam-Webster, and migrating geese, and hibernating bears—all creatures great and small who live in swamps or burrows or dens or nests—share this leaving and returning home instinctively; why not *homo sapiens*?

Edward Abbey writes in “Desert Solitaire”

*“This is the most beautiful place on earth. There are many such places. Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary. ...A houseboat in Kashmir, a view down Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, a gray gothic farmhouse at the end of a red dog road in the Allegheny Mountains... there’s no limit to human capacity for the homing sentiment.”*

When in the history of man did the homing sentiment—or instinct—become apparent? When did man utter the first grunt that meant home?

I tried to find answers to these questions in areas of psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, archaeology, religion, architecture, literature, and more—without finding resolution. The exploration continues.

However, I did unearth what may be the earliest graphic evidence that man recognized home.

The spiral graphic began appearing in the Euphrates–Tigris river valley cultures around 2000 B.C. The symbolic essence of the spiral, says Elizabeth Helfman in “Signs and Symbols Around the World,” is the evocation of home, the place to which one returns, even though the physical mark of the spiral itself is abstract and does not necessarily reproduce any tangible memory of a given building or location.

Thus, the idea called home, if not programmed into our DNA, is certainly a very early concept.

In furthering the exploration, let’s begin where the dictionary did, with the **place** called home.

You know exactly where that is — your specific house or apartment, your address. But when you are in another city and talk about going home, you would probably be referring to your town, a point on the map.

If you were elsewhere in the country, you might refer to your state, and when you travel overseas, you become very much aware that your home is the United States of America.

If you were to venture into space on a shuttle flight, you would look back at the beautiful blue ball and think of Planet Earth as home. Astronaut Russell Schweikart wrote:

*“You see the earth as a bright blue and white Christmas tree ornament in the black sky. It’s so small and so fragile—you realize that on this small spot is everything that means anything to you—all of history and art and death and birth and love.”*

However, if someone around the table at dinner asked you, “Where are you from?” you would probably respond by mentioning your home town—the place where you were born, or where you grew up (dictionary meaning number 4—place of origin).

Does that place remain home forever? I think yes. Even when you move away from it and establish your own home elsewhere, you may talk of “going home” for the holidays or for a visit.

As George Garrett writes in his novel, *King of the Hill*:

*“And I love it still, that time and place, believe it or not, because where you suffered first, incurred your first wounds and scars, is where you’ve hung your heart once and for all and called it home...”*

This quotation underlines the profound attachment to an early environment in which formative

relationships are developed. Author Clare Cooper Marcus, in the forward to her fascinating book, *House as a Mirror of Self*, carries the thought further:

*“As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relations with people, but also by close affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood... We are all—throughout our lives—striving towards a state of wholeness... Although this has been widely written about, especially in Jungians, what this book adds to the debate is the suggestion that the places we live are reflections of the process and indeed the places themselves have a powerful effect on our journey toward wholeness.”*

Successive homes. Indeed, in today’s culture, the old song lyric, “Anywhere I hang my hat is home,” seems applicable to many of us who follow first where our families go, and proceed wherever our education and employment dictate. And when we leave one home for another, we don’t necessarily abandon the previous one—so we have, also, simultaneous homes. Successive homes, simultaneous homes...to complicate matters further, The National Health Care for the Homeless Council web site addresses three homes: the **self**, the **dwelling place**, and the **community**.

**The Self.** If we’re not at home in our own skin, and heart and mind, we’re not at home anywhere. Obvious, perhaps, but a lifelong endeavor for most of us. We have to find the solid calm center of self—the spiritual home, if you will—if we are to be at home in the constantly changing environments of this world. As Debbie Allen, of Ithaca, New York, stated in a sermon entitled, *The Journey Home*:

*“Perhaps we never can be completely at home in this life if we define home only as a static place where our restless spirits are unburdened of the worries of the world... So often home has*

*been associated with life after death, that heavenly realm where suffering ends and we are at one with God. An important question for us is how we can experience this eternal dwelling place in the midst of our everyday lives...*"

The second home is the **dwelling place**—the house or apartment, but I'd like to add, also the "location, location, location" as real estate agents are fond of saying. For some, home has to be by the sea, or in the mountains. Where it snows or where it never snows. In the country, with no close neighbors, or in the heart of a city that never sleeps. We learn to love the landscape, or the streetscape. The perfect home in the wrong location will never be home.

I grew up in an historic Civil War home on Seminary Ridge in Gettysburg, PA. A friend from Gettysburg sent me a newspaper clipping last fall with a picture of that house engulfed in flames. I was shocked, of course, but now I realize it hasn't changed how I feel about Gettysburg. I know the trees, the rocks, the way the grass grows — the land itself. Although my childhood house is lost, and most of my friends have left, Gettysburg remains, in many ways, my place.

The third home is the **community**, which the dictionary alludes to in meaning 3—*"a familiar or usual setting, a congenial environment."* We think first of the neighborhood, but also of friends and acquaintances, organizations or interest groups to which we belong—like Torch Club, Yankees fans, theater buffs, The Class of '56 or '76 or '96. A key community for many is the corporation or company where we're employed, our colleagues, and other members of our profession. There are those who find their home in the military, or in a particular religion, or in an academic pursuit.

Many of us have experienced periods of having no specific place to call home, or of feeling displaced within our home. Consider my son, John, who was born in Gettysburg. He spent his pre-school years in Philadelphia and

Boston. He went to grade school in Marco Island, FL, and later in Horseheads, NY. He lived in Pine City, NY, while he was attending high school and Cornell University. After graduation, he worked in New York City, then Hermosa Beach, CA. He married and set up a cozy apartment there with his wife, but it evidently never became a real home, because they divorced just a year later. John's company sent him to Hong Kong, where he stayed for three years; he was then transferred to England for a year. He changed employers and is now with Corning, Inc. He works in the Tokyo office and all his stuff (at last!) is in his Tokyo apartment. But John still considers Elmira home, because his mother and uncle (dictionary meaning 2—the social unit formed by a family) are here. He's in Elmira physically perhaps 80 hours a year.

So where—and what—is his real home? We can go back to "Anywhere I Hang My Hat is Home"—just substitute books, stereo, DVDs, pictures, and computer for hat. Or, automobile. Debbie Allen writes:

*"I felt a sense of grief when I finally let go of the car that had carried me almost 183,000 miles. I remembered wonderful conversations, rich hours of reflection, eating, sleeping, laughing, listening to music, and visiting many new places in that car and was saddened to realize that it no longer provided the feeling of safety I needed."*

In this mobile society, we may recognize home in our belongings, wherever we may keep them.

Again, a quote from Clare Cooper Marcus, who interviewed more than 60 people in depth about their various homes, from illegal shacks to mansions, in the course of writing her book:

*"Objects, like people, come in and out of our lives and awareness, not in some random meaningless pattern ordained by Fate, but in a clearly patterned framework that sets the stage for great self-understanding..."*

She goes on to make the analogy of stage props in the theater of life. And

here she addresses most particularly that home that is within our selves:

*"Even the prisoner, shut away by society because of a crime, is permitted to have certain effects that are personally meaningful...we concede that the personalization of place is an inalienable right. Conversely, when society wishes to mold a group of individuals into a whole (military) or the attention of the group is deliberately focused away from personal needs (religious orders), the personalization of space is consistently precluded."*

What one book would you want to have if you were marooned on a desert island? What picture would you want to hang on the wall of your prison cell? What object would you rescue from your burning house, so that you could preserve the idea of home?

The Health Care for the Homeless Council has developed a curriculum for training outreach workers, entitled, "The Meaning of Home."

Participants are given a sketch of a house divided into four sections. They are told to choose the four most important things that go into making a home—security, privacy, comfort, companionship, recreation, aesthetic satisfaction—and write one in each section.

They are asked to imagine that there was some transition in their lives that required them to relinquish one of those things and to cross it out. Then they must sacrifice another component and cross it out and so on, until there is only one essential remaining. Finally, they must eliminate the last vestige of home.

This exercise is both simplistic and excruciatingly difficult; its intention is not so much to force one to prioritize the components of home as to sensitize people to the plight of the homeless. One may think of tsunami victims; the displaced peoples of the Sudan; those whose homes were destroyed by the war in Iraq, or by the floods in Florida, or by the landslides in California.

In completing the exercise, a "Home," see page 34

# Buffalo Bill and Steele MacKaye: The Synthesis Of A Legend

*The source of many of our legends, movies, and novels about the "Wild West."*

**By William S.E. Coleman, Ph.D.**



## About the Author

Williams S.E. Coleman is Professor Emeritus of Theatre Arts, Drake University, and is now a freelance writer. His most recent work, *Voices of Wounded Knee*, published by the University of Nebraska Press here and in England, and reviewed in *The Torch*, was researched and written over nearly thirty years. Working with him on the book as a researcher and copy editor was his wife, Linda Robbins Coleman, a composer of symphonic and chamber music and a member of the Des Moines Torch Club. Coleman holds a B.S. from Slippery Rock University, an M.A. from The Pennsylvania State University, and a Ph.D. in theatre history and dramatic criticism from the University of Pittsburgh where he was a Danforth Fellow. He is the author of three books and many articles, is an award winning and produced playwright, and a screenwriter as well as being a stage director.

Presented to the Des Moines Torch Club on November 20, 2002.

On November 24, 1886, at Madison Square Garden, William F. Cody, the legendary Buffalo Bill, and Steele MacKaye presented one of the genuine curiosities in American entertainment history. Their production, *The History of American Civilization*, as it was labeled on the program, was one of the most lavish theatrical events of the nineteenth century. More importantly, this fusion of events of a rodeo with a historical pageant was a forerunner of that uniquely American art form—the

Western film. Out of these films, large and small, grew America's self-image, an image that has defined us to ourselves and to the world about us.

The time was ripe for such a synthesis. In 1886, the West was still wild, and the East was fascinated by its Indian wars, its lawlessness, and its heroes and their evolving legends. Cody and MacKaye were eminently prepared for the task they undertook.

MacKaye was an established theatrical innovator, a popular actor, the owner and manager of his own theatre, and a successful playwright. As the summer of 1886 drew to an end, MacKaye returned to New York after a thirty-five week engagement as narrator for a touring exhibition of Matt Morgan's panoramic Civil War paintings. Akin to the cycloramas then popular, Morgan's exhibition provided MacKaye with a vision of larger scale entertainments than were possible in conventional theatres.

Buffalo Bill Cody was a genuine, if minor, hero of the frontier. In the pen of Ned Buntline, he became a fictional dime novel hero in 1869, embarked on a stage career in 1872, and in 1883 co-founded *The Buffalo Bill and Dr. Carver's Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition*. It was a mix of rodeo-like activities and re-creations of frontier events, real and imagined. Cody, who had assumed legendary proportions in the public's imagination, appeared daily and became one of the great stars of the nineteenth century.

Cody broke with Carver after one season and entered into a partnership with Nathan (Nate) Salsbury, a popular actor and song-and-dance man. Salsbury, a thoroughgoing theatre professional,

brought discipline to the unruly *Wild West*. By the end of the summer of 1885, it was one of the most successful outdoor attractions in the United States.

At the beginning of the summer of 1886, Cody and Salsbury settled into a long run at Erastina on Long Island. By now the company included two hundred and fifty cowboys, cowgirls, and Indians. Its headliners included sharpshooters Johnny Baker, Annie Oakley, Lillian Smith, and Buck Taylor. It even had a small herd of the then rare buffalo.

Audiences came from as far away as New England. During one week in July, 193,960 attended performances. Its many distinguished visitors included Governor David B. Hill, the noted British actor Henry Irving, P.T. Barnum, Mark Twain, Thomas A. Edison, and Prince Dom Augusta of Brazil, who anchored his battleship in the bay while he attended a performance.

Among these visitors were Steele MacKay and Matt Morgan. According to MacKaye's son, Percy, "At once [my father] was enthused by the genuine qualities of the great frontiersman and his gallant exhibition of Western life ... a roisterous 'get-together' of authentic skill, nerve, and audacity, based in true pioneer experience. It was a new species in the 'entertainment field, fresh from the soil'."

After the performance, Salsbury introduced Cody to MacKaye and Morgan. Percy MacKaye writes, "...my father ... made a proposal, which soon afterward led to a significant and delightful interlude in his career."

What MacKaye proposed was a winter season at Madison Square Garden. By late September, plans for a

truly original theatrical event were underway. At the outset, Salsbury gave MacKaye one instruction: "By Jesus Christ, I don't want any circusing." He also demanded, "Remember that *Cody* is the *Star*, and introduce him to the audience in a heroic and hoopla way."

Salsbury and Cody wanted to instruct as well as entertain. In years to come, they never referred to the *Wild West* as a show. To them, it was an educational exhibition.

In October, while the *Wild West* was performing in Chicago, MacKaye heeded Salsbury's advice by creating a loose plot line:

First, this scenario follows the *historic order* in the presentation of the various features of the "Wild West." Second, it introduces *new* features, notably:

- The aboriginal savage in his garb of skins, and with the weapons used before the white man appeared.
- The Emigrant trains.
- Prairie fire.
- Stampede of wild cattle.
- Life of mining camp.
- Life of fort.
- A realistic presentation of the formation and bursting of a cyclone in the mountains.

This he grandly titled *The History of American Civilization*. Salsbury responded, "Your Scenario is a corker." He commented, "How in the hell you are going to work out that cyclone, I don't know, unless it is done with gauze." Then he cautioned, "Let me impress upon you that in dealing with Wild West actors, you must try to get broad effects without burdening their minds too much."

Madison Square Garden was an imposing structure built between Madison and Fourth Avenues and Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh streets. At the Fourth Avenue end was a stage area 150 feet wide. It opened on a playing area that was slightly larger than a football field. It was a space built for spectacle, and it got one.

An unidentified newspaper article

reported, "Mr. Matt Morgan is painting a picture half a mile long and fifty feet high." This may have been the total length of the four panoramic and six straight drops that stage manager and technician Nelse Waldron listed in his inventory. The *New York Times* reported that the drops covered 15,000 yards of canvas.

To accommodate the scenery, the roof of the Garden was raised 25 feet to create a fly loft. MacKaye told a newspaper reporter: "The very construction of rollers large enough to carry the 'drops' was a feat of mechanical engineering."

Waldron engineered two special effects. The most elaborate was a prairie cyclone. According to Cooke, "Trenches had to be dug across 27<sup>th</sup> Street to connect with the steam plant in the old Stevens car shops...to supply batteries of six-foot exhaust fans." A two-hundred horse-power engine drove three fans. To enhance the effect, three wagons of dried leaves were thrown in front of the fans at each performance."

A prairie fire effect was attained by putting gas jets in front of scenic ground rows. Then the performers and livestock rode behind the rows. In an era when theatre fires were a great threat, it was risky business.

Percy MacKaye insists that his father invented the effects and that Waldron was merely "an honest and capable machinist, formerly on the staff of the Madison Square Theatre." He also quotes a letter from Salsbury to Steele MacKaye that says, "Waldron is all right, if he don't get full at a critical time."

In addition to the buffalo, steers, donkeys, and horses Cody carried, Adam Forepaugh, who worked with Barnum, supplied trained bears, antelopes, and moose for the opening scene.

The *New York Times* reported that "over \$60,000...will be spent in the alterations to the Garden before the doors are opened."

The venture was an enormous financial gamble. General admission

was only 50 cents, and children under 9 were admitted for a quarter. Reserved seats were 75 cents, \$1, and \$1.60. First tier boxes for six were \$3, \$10, and \$12; second tier boxes were \$5. With a capacity of 6,000, the new *Wild West* had to draw full houses over a long run to break even.

The New York newspapers were filled with advance hoopla. On November 14, the *Times* reported that "the Indians would arrive from their reservations tomorrow."

They did, and they were the real thing. An invitation was issued to local dignitaries and the social elite of New York on November 17:

*Dear Sir: The Chiefs of the Pawnee and Cheyenne Tribes ...will meet for the first time off the war path at Madison Square Garden, Friday next...These two tribes have always been hostile, and have never...made a treaty of peace. The traditions of their race forbid them to go into camp together, until they have gone through with the Ancient Aboriginal ceremonies...the Hon. W.F. Cody would be glad to afford you the opportunity of witnessing a spectacle so unique...Respectfully, Steele MacKaye.*

Remember, the Indian wars were not over in 1886 and most of the Native Americans who appeared with Cody had fought in the Indian wars. Whether a lasting treaty was attained was never reported.

A light-hearted account of a rehearsal on November 20 gives some idea of the difficulties MacKaye encountered as a director:

The Sioux did fairly well as 'light comedians;' the Pawnees appeared to grasp some idea of the duties of 'walking gentlemen;' but the Comanches were 'rotten;' and the Crows were simply 'hams.' There was not a Pluto in the Garden who was good enough to play 'utility man' in a company of 'turkey actors.' ...Mr. MacKaye posed and drilled the Indians, the cowboys, the old settlers, and the mules in picturesque groups. He tried to get the Old Settler to look as if he was lying when he was

telling stories.

Mr. MacKaye was vastly tired, when he got through the day's rehearsal.

All aspects of production were running behind schedule, so the opening night was moved from November 22 to November 24, the day before Thanksgiving. The opening performance was preceded by a street parade featuring the *Wild West* performers and Buffalo Bill himself.

The opening was a gala event. *The New York Tribune* reported, "Fully 6,000 people were present, and the whole circle of boxes was gay with men and women in evening dress." Among those present were Henry Ward Beecher, General William T. Sherman, General P.H. Sheridan, Pierre Lorillard, and General Wesley Merritt.

Most reviews were enthusiastic. *The New York Tribune's* critic wrote, "...last night was ...a spirited series of Tableaus and pantomimes...If the drama is somewhat bald and crude, the design is a praiseworthy one and the swiftly changing scenes have color and variety and novelty enough."

*The Spirit of the Times* complained, "The *Wild West*...is no longer wild. Steele MacKaye has tamed it and transformed it into a series of living pictures. The wildness, which was its greatest charm, its distinctive peculiarity, has been taken out of it."

The *New York Times* was mostly affirmative:

*Patriotic playgoers crowded Madison Square Garden last evening to applaud the first performance of Mr. Steele MacKaye's last great drama, which was acted with great spirit and power by Buffalo Bill, several dozen cowboys, cowgirls, and genuine greasers, besides a hundred and fifty Indians of various tribes in full fig and feather.*

Its reviewer attacked one of MacKaye's additions: "The most prominent drawback to enjoyment is afforded by the "orator," who prefaces each scene with a pompous and insufferably long and unnecessary

description of what is to be. The orator should be boiled down or lassoed...The pantomimes describe themselves, and need no assistance."

*The History of American Civilization* began with a procession that included the entire company. Between the main scenes were three interludes composed of shooting exhibitions and rodeo-like entertainments.

A collage of the *Times'* and *Tribune's* coverage gives a sense of the evening's entertainment:

The first epoch [precedes] the discovery of America. The primeval forest is shown—a really beautiful scene, by the way, and with happy moonlight effects. It is the hour preceding the dawn. A bear lazily shuffles to the spring, gazes curiously around, and disappears. Two timid deer peer from behind the trees, then come forth, followed by a herd of elk. As they are gathered by the spring, several Indians steal upon them and a shower of arrows is fired. A herd of deer was also introduced, and an elk, who jumped the netting which fenced the stage in and tried to make friends with the spectators in the boxes.

The sun rises. A band of Sioux and a band of Cheyenne meet, hold a pow-wow, join in a friendly dance, and make peace. The...dance is interrupted by an onslaught of a band of Pawnees, a fight ensuing in which Derringer revolvers and other antique weapons figured, closes the scene.

The *Times* vividly describes the second epoch:

*A dozen live buffalo are at the waterhole. Suddenly Buffalo Bill's wild yell shrills through the silence, and the cheerful pop of the Winchester stimulates the herd in its mad flight to safety. The emigrant train comes on; the prairie schooners and their oxen, burros, and mules; the going into camp; the supper and preparations for night; a natural and interesting picture. Darkness comes. All are sleeping. Suddenly a distant glow on the horizon, brightening and widening—nearer and*

*nearer 'til the prairie is a sea of rushing fire—deer, buffalo, mustangs, Indians, and emigrants all fleeing together—a stirring scene.*

The third epoch included several acts from the summer *Wild West*. The *Times* reported:

The third epoch—but why epoch?—is the cattle ranch, illustrating the cowboy in his glory, riding the bucking mustang and lassoing the bounding and bumptious steer. Suddenly comes the curdling whoop of the Comanches and Kiowas...who go into the hair-raising business with a painstaking enthusiasm which fanned the audience to an uproar. Just at the most exciting point of the massacre, a troop of cowboys arrive and the noble red men are sent to the happy hunting ground in a body.

The *Tribune* reported that Buffalo Bill led the rescue party. The fourth epoch was set in and around a mining camp in Colorado.

There is considerable fun, according to the frontier notion of fun, including a duel to the death with revolvers. The lightning like arrival and departure of the pony express and some rather tame rifle shooting are among the incidents. The Deadwood stage appears. The horses are quickly changed, and it rolls away. The scene changes. A dark and dangerous [canyon] is shown. Passing here the stage is "jumped" by a band of road agents.

The cyclone effect ended the evening's entertainment when the scene shifted back to the mining camp. According to the *Times*, it fizzled:

*Thunder is crashing and lightning is flashing, and one absurd sentinel, supposed to be a United States Calvaryman, is patrolling the line of tents. Suddenly comes a roar, the tents sway, and they are leveled, several dummies are whirled wildly in midair, and the curtain drops upon what is supposed to be the terrific destruction by a cyclone.*

*The Spirit of the Times* was more impressed: "...the cyclone...blows

down the camp and sweeps the passengers from the top of the coach.” The *Times* returned on November 28 and was more enthusiastic:

The patent “hurricane raiser” – a huge complicated apparatus that serves to send a gale of wind...with a velocity of 60 miles an hour, and with a roar as if 100 buildings had simultaneously crashed to the ground...creates a sensation nightly. Nearly all the theatrical managers in town have visited the Garden to witness the working of this novelty.

It must be remembered all this was accomplished in an era before electricity. Later in the run, a reenactment of Custer’s Last Stand ended the evening. Elizabeth Custer, Custer’s widow, supervised this new attraction to assure it was done in good taste. Leading the attack were Chief Gall and other Lakotas and Cheyennes who were in the battle. The event was a landmark in entertainment history. For the first time, Native Americans were allowed to reenact their greatest victory in the Indian wars.

On Thanksgiving day—November 25—19,800 people attended the afternoon and evening performances. More than a million attended before the season ended in late February.

MacKaye and Cody ended their association, and on March 31, 1887, *The Wild West* sailed to England. It opened outdoors in London on May 9, 1887, as an annex to Whitley’s American Exhibition as part of the celebrations during Queen Victoria’s Jubilee year. The company included 200 performers, 180 horses, 18 buffalo, 10 mules, 10 elk, 5 wild Texas steers, 4 donkeys, and 2 deer.

The *Wild West* returned to its outdoor format and performed in an amphitheater that was a third of a mile in circumference. It was backed by an enormous painted backdrop. When Queen Victoria requested a Command Performance on May 11, she made her first appearance at a public entertainment since the death of Prince

Albert in 1861. She intended to stay only an hour, but she saw the entire performance and received the company afterwards. During the summer stand, it played to two-and-one-half million people.

A semblance of the MacKaye and Cody indoor spectacle was performed in a new exhibition hall at Manchester that autumn. A reenactment of the landing of the Mayflower was an added feature.

While *The History of American Civilization* never existed in its entirety again, the *Wild West* always contained dramatic elements. These included recreations of battles in the Indian wars, an incident in the Boxer Rebellion, and Teddy Roosevelt’s charge up San Juan Hill. All used veterans of these battles. Steele MacKaye, in search of another spectacle, designed a vast playhouse for the Chicago World’s Fair in 1894. Called the Spectatorium, it would have had a huge cyclorama and the most recent Continental theatrical equipment. It was never realized. Years later, theatre architects drew on MacKaye’s ideas, mainly for massive widescreen attractions at world’s fairs. Vestiges of it are seen in today’s Imax theatres.

MacKaye’s visionary productions had an impact on his son, Percy, whose masques *St. Louis* and *Caliban* were even grander in concept than anything his father realized. From these, it was one step to the outdoor historical and religious spectacles that now entertain tourists on summer evenings throughout the United States.

MacKaye and Cody’s influence on the western film is profound. The basic plot elements of classic westerns were inherent in the *Wild West* and MacKaye’s scenario.

Buffalo Bill made sure that his *Wild West* was preserved on motion picture film. In 1913, he and Essanay Films produced *Indian War Pictures*, a feature length film that recreated four fights in the Indian Wars. It concluded with a recreation of the tragic 1890 encounter at Wounded Knee. Again Cody used

original participants. Sadly, the film is lost. It was a predecessor of the “big western,” a genre that was born with the 1923 release of *The Covered Wagon*.

From 1872 to 1916, when Buffalo Bill made his last appearance in an arena at Norfolk, Virginia, he toured from California to Bulgaria and from Texas to Canada. He played to at least 50 million viewers, and millions more saw his parades.

To millions of viewers, Buffalo Bill was a living representation of the American West. More importantly, he was instrumental in the shaping of our national image, an image Cody himself reflected in his performances.

On January 10, 1917, William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill) died; but his legend and the legends he helped create endure. Whether they are true does not matter. Legends are more than truth. We live with them every day of our lives. They are us.

*For those interested in pursuing this subject further, notes and bibliography are available upon request. Contact the author at [WilliamS.E.Coleman@att.net](mailto:WilliamS.E.Coleman@att.net).*

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“Semantics,” from page 6  
language to shape our thoughts. Language is more than the way we express ourselves; language is our world, for it is the way we understand the world around us. An early philologist said that language is like a veil which lies close to the eye, and is therefore barely perceived. But if language is the medium not only for the construction of thought, but also for the construction of perception, understanding its nature will not only give us insight into the nature of human cognition and consciousness, it will give us insight into the nature of our world.

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"Nicknames," from page 8

at a table near a window. He asks the man if he may join him. The man bids him take a chair. They drink in silence for a few minutes before the old man observes, sotto voce,

"You see that church there, lad, the sturdily built one across the road?"

"I do," the visitor replies.

"I built that church with my own two hands, but do they call me Seamus the Church-Builder? They do not."

The visitor murmurs a few commiserating words.

"And do you see that road that runs right beside that church, lad? It's stood bravely against the weather and many rude forms of transportation this twenty some years. Well, son, I built that road too, but do they call me Seamus the Road-Builder? They do not."

The visitor once more expresses his dismay at such unconscionable neglect.

Fixing the younger man with a lugubrious look guaranteed to raise a tear even from the most stony-hearted, the old man quietly says:

"But you shag one goat ..."

Seamus, alas, is a victim of sobriquet over-simplification, or the ultimate in nasty nicknames. It's one thing to be called a name that truly sums

up your most important accomplishment: Jack the Ripper comes to mind. But poor Seamus, he was only exploring a momentary pastoral idyll. It wasn't as if he was Zeus taking on the guise of a bull to mate with Europa, for Heaven's sake!

I am fortunate enough to have outlived Ike the Kike and have not been goatish, like Seamus. In fact, I have had the good fortune, in my late fifties, to have been called "Dude" by an undergraduate student who admired something I'd said to him in my humble station as a university reference librarian. But no honorific has pleased me as much as the one I received, out of the blue, a couple of years ago at a girl's softball game. This affectionate sobriquet more than makes up for Ike the Kike. (And calling the common English nickname by the fancier French name sobriquet gives this whole subject not simply a higher tone, but a real cachet.) One of my then eleven-year-old granddaughter's Little League teammates called me "Grampster" a couple of years ago. I didn't ask her why she used this particularly felicitous name. I am often known as Helen's Grandfather, Grandpa, Grampa, Gramps, and, perhaps at my most curmudgeonly, as Grumps, or the Grump. But I think Grampster is an inspired neologism, one I am very proud to wear. It must be a blend of Gramps with some word ending in the suffix "ster." I'd like to think that word is youngster, but that might be pushing my luck too far. Because I sometimes indulge myself by making various animal imitations with these girls, Alyssa Macbride could just as easily have blended Gramps and hamster. Everyone who watches Alyssa play softball knows she has game. That's why, when this now thirteen-year-old young woman struts up to the plate ready to send one downtown, we call her A-Max. Her last name is MacBride and the A not only stands for Alyssa, but links her with one of her heroes, the New York Yankee slugger, Alex Rodriguez, more familiarly known as A-Rod.

What's in a nickname is much the same question as what is in a "real" name. However ill-advised or unfair, spot-on accurate, or wildly off the mark, nicknames are the verbal equivalent of Elmer's Glue. Sometimes nicknames are just casual additional names. Everyone knows my real name is David and that I don't usually like the diminutive "Dave." But as long as it doesn't mean death or infinite ostracism, even a nasty nickname like "Ike the Kike" is better than having no name at all. It is also comforting to know that the boy who slew Goliath played a very dulcet harp, and grew up to be King (with a little dalliance, just to prove he was human, with a girl named Bathsheba) was also named after me.

.....  
"PR," from page 11

thanks for the meals, the concern, and the comfort. They had been given enormous amounts of each.

What kind of company, what kind of PR director does this?

Her company does, and she does. That company is D&E Communications in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, and she is Angela Anderson, manager of corporate communications. And although her contribution went well beyond what many PR directors do, it was not unique, especially for her. There are others, acting quietly and without publicity, doing similar things.

That's what fine PR can be and should be. It's the difference between ballyhoo, huckstering, spin doctoring, and professionalism. It's PR at its best, serving its publics, not manipulating them to one's own ends.

Edward L. Bernays, known as the father of PR and the master of showmanship, understood exactly how to move people and became one of the most influential pioneers of American public relations. He was named by *Life* magazine as one of the 100 most influential Americans of the twentieth century.

When Stuart Ewen began work in the 1990s on his social history of public

relations, he called the 99-year-old Bernays to set up an interview. During the extensive taped interview, Bernays mentioned that he had rarely contacted the media. How could this be?, asked Ewen. Bernays replied: "News is any overt act which juts *out* of the routine of circumstance. A good public relations man advises his client to carry out an overt act interrupting the continuity of life in some way to bring about a response." Think Ballet Russe, and Calvin Coolidge. The overt act was his key in getting the media to come to his door.

So what have we learned about PR? We have learned about its beginnings and the man called Edward L. Bernays. We have learned that PR is far more complex than we may have thought, with many publics to serve. We have learned that its practitioners range from the devious to the ethical, with more in the latter category, mirroring any other profession. We have also learned that it is far more common and pervasive than we may have thought.

In fact, public relations is a universal activity. *Everyone* practices principles of public relations in seeking acceptance, cooperation, or affection of others. Public relations professionals only practice it in a more professional way as they begin the researching, the analyzing, the developing, the strategizing, the molding, the communicating—the engineering of consent.

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Various websites including:

The Museum of Public Relations. [www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays\\_1990](http://www.prmuseum.com/bernays/bernays_1990).

Prime Point-Public Relations and Image Management Advisory-Bad PR. [www.prpoint.com/bad%20pr](http://www.prpoint.com/bad%20pr).

Publicity Club of Chicago. [www.publicity.org/rapsept03](http://www.publicity.org/rapsept03).

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"Gay Marriage," from page 16

and medical systems, the radio-active isotopes used to make atomic weapons, and the very roads we are driving on are decaying faster than anybody's morals."

Making a scapegoat of sexual minorities may help us displace our sense of helplessness; but in so framing our problems, hides the true structural social problems which call for solutions. Just think of the better outcomes that might be possible if the energy that now goes into homophobia went instead to organizations for promoting secure family and married life, consumer safety, environmental cleanup, a just economic system, alternative energy sources, and national health care.

Instead, suppression of diversity results in social turmoil. Families and communities are divided. Suicide and disease rates increase. Persecution of gays also endangers freedom of other groups, for persecution rarely confines itself to one group.

Because of the individualistic temperament of our society, we tend to define problems we encounter as personal troubles. Unless a public issue is defined as such, it will remain a problem without solutions. Millions of gays and their families, people here in this room, are looking for solutions. What are they?

As is happening already, and as the U.S. Constitution wisely provides, the states will function as the laboratory for trying out versions of increased rights for gays—civil unions in Vermont, marriage in Massachusetts, and living in sin here in Virginia, one of the most anti-gay states in the nation. In fairness, long-term gay partnerships must be

given legal protection no matter what our view on traditional marriage. Likewise, the institution of marriage must be strengthened gradually, allowing it to better meet the needs of the true diversity of family structures in America today.

But where do solutions begin to any great issue that divides people? Solutions begin now, by understanding that the real, not just ideal, American family needs strengthening and protecting. And let's not be fooled by political rhetoric. In the upcoming years, legislators will be listening—let's be sure to remind them of that great institution, the Constitution, and the pivotal place it has in maintaining our collective well-being.

To close, our first-born son, born under a rainbow, is now 26. He has thoughtfully shopped for wedding gifts and reveled at bachelor parties. He has made toasts at rehearsal dinners. He has proudly served twice as best man and loyally stood by as a groomsman many more times. He has attended fifteen weddings since college graduation.

This mother wants to know, when he finds *his* heart's missing half, will they be welcomed to the table?

Then, we'll be strangers no more.

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"Youth Voting," from page 19

at Wilkes University in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, I am the mother of six children and the grandmother of seven. I have a miniscule study of age groups at my fingertips. I think today's young people are the best and the brightest ever, and their potential is enormous. But these young people who are so dedicated to causes and solving societal problems, whose energies are witnessed every day in the causes they champion, cannot seem to connect the issues with the causes they so believe in. They know how to protest, they don't know how to effect change.

Let me illustrate by using just one of hundreds of examples I could give – the environment. Young people protest so sincerely the abuses of big business on the environment and come out by the

thousands to demonstrate against these abuses. But do they know how to identify the bills, the laws struggling to get past the House and the Senate to make these things right? Could they differentiate between the Congressman or Senator who champions the cause from the one who is blocking the bill or the law that would solve the problem? Could they read a Congressman's or Senator's voting record to determine the difference? Could they vote intelligently on the issue? Most could not. They need to be taught to do so.

What can be done? The encouraging part is that something is already being done by CIRCLE and by other like-minded organizations with clout. The rest of us can begin to be aware of curriculum and, if you agree that it needs attention, to work for change in whatever capacity available to you.

Kevin Mattson, Professor of History at Ohio University and former Associate Director of the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy, in his book, *Engaging Youth*, recommends that we reconnect voluntary service and political education in our schools. "If participants in service programs can see the connection between their service and the wider world of public policy, then these programs will cultivate more engaged and thoughtful citizens."

My own mission is to work with my committee, with the local chapters of the League, with the Pennsylvania State League, the League of Women Voters of the United States, and with CIRCLE on any agenda that encourages the teaching of democracy in our elementary schools.

I can't attribute this next quote but use it, with my apology to the author, because it fits so well: "...for if we lose our precious democratic process whom shall we blame?"

.....  
"Poetic Relief," from page 23  
uses the writing process to experience anew the realities of living and, if observant enough, take from that experience the courage to create anew.

Writing helps us forge new ideas by tapping into our soul and its reactions to the vents around us. The more events of life experience around us, the more fertile the ground is for writing. The incessant autonomous stream of conscious thought and subconscious connection directed by our genetic heritage and produced by our experiences may provide insights for daily living or may even lead to new discoveries. The window of creative insight offered by writing is therefore forsaken at the professional's peril...or at least at the professional's continued parochialism.

All of us are writers. As professionals, we are the backbone and often the leaders of our communities. We owe it to ourselves to learn from ourselves through writing. The insights, intentionality, and clarification of purpose obtained through creative writing can guide us in our professional pursuits.

I close by sharing one more of my mother's poems, written near the end of her professional career.

*How do you handle stress? the rehab student asked*

*Her tape recorder rolling while our staff sat there...*

*And each of them came forth with pertinent remarks*

*"We share our problems," someone said,*

*"We know that we will lose the patient and we are prepared..."*

*"As long as we can feel we did the best we could, we are reassured"*

*Another said..and on and on...*

*Each statement made was good*

*But I sat there and thought and did not say a word*

*There were too many things to say—and I have said them all*

*So many times*

*Too many times.*

*"It's not the patient care which gives us stress," said one,*

*It is the paper work—the picky things—the politics*

*And she was right.*



# Call to Annual Business Meeting & Torch Convention

Richmond Torch Club, Virginia • June 14–17, 2007

Omni Richmond Hotel • Richmond, VA

Theme: “400 Years of American History”

## Convention Schedule

### THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2007

9:00–3:00 IATC Board Meeting  
12:00–6:00 Registration  
3:00 Torch Officers Forum  
4:00 Business Session I  
5:30–10:00 Welcoming Reception, Dinner  
Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*  
at Agecroft Hall

### FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 2007

8:00–5:00 Registration  
8:00–9:00 Business Session II  
9:45 Torch Paper #1: “Virginia in  
Colonial Times” and meet  
Gov. & Mrs. Kaine  
11:00–Noon Tour of Virginia State Capital  
12:00 Box Lunch and Tours (see  
Registration Form)  
5:30 Reception: Cash Bar  
6:30 Dinner & Silver Awards  
8:00 Torch Paper #2: Thomas  
Jefferson re-enactor

### SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 2007

8:00–5:00 Registration  
8:15 Meet the Editor  
8:15 Torch Foundation Board Meeting  
9:00 Membership Development  
10:00 Torch Paper #3: “In the Cause of Liberty”  
11:30 Box Lunch and tours (see Registration  
Form)  
6:00 Reception & Cash Bar  
7:00–10:00 Annual Banquet, Gold Awards, and  
Paxton Award Lecture  
10:00 President’s Reception

### SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 2007

7:30 Interdenominational Service (optional)  
7:00–8:00 IATC Board Meeting  
9:00 Paper #4: “Virginia and the  
Presidency”  
10:00–10:45 Business Session III & Closing of  
Convention  
11:00–4:30 Post-Convention Optional Tour to  
Jamestown and Yorktown

## Gold & Silver Torch Awards

At our annual convention, special Gold and Silver Torch Awards may be given to individual members for truly outstanding service, through nomination by their local clubs, submitted in advance through the Awards Chairman.

### Gold Award

The Gold Torch Award honors members who have served Torch at the local, regional, and—most importantly—the International level. To qualify for this award, the nominee must have been a Torch member for at least 10 years. In any one year, the number of Gold Torch Awards may not exceed .01% (rounded to the nearest whole number) of the membership of the International Association of Torch Clubs (i.e., three awards for membership of 2,500 to 3,499).

### Silver Award

The Silver Torch Award recognizes members who have served in an exemplary manner at the local club level. To qualify for the Silver Torch Award, the nominee must have been a member for at least 5 years. In a given year, the number of Silver Torch Awards nominees by a local club may not exceed one for each 25 members or portion thereof.

Nominations for both Gold and Silver awards should be sent by March 31, 2007 to Stephen T. Toy, c/o IATC, 749 Boush Street, Norfolk, VA 23510-1517, with copies to your regional director.

**International Association of Torch Clubs, Inc.**  
**Annual Convention – Richmond, Virginia**  
**June 14–17, 2007**  
**Registration Form for Torch 2007**

**1. Contact Information**

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ M.I. \_\_\_\_\_

Torch Club Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Profession \_\_\_\_\_

Guest Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) Desired on Convention Badge (if different from above)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Special Needs (e.g., vegetarian meals) \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Comments \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Tour Information (see [www.orgsites.com/va/torch](http://www.orgsites.com/va/torch))**

Please rank your choice of tours each day (1=top choice, 2=second, 3=third)

**A. Friday, June 15, 2007**

- F1. Citie of Henricus. The site of the second successful English settlement in Virginia, where Pocahontas lived and married John Rolfe. Wedding re-enactment.
- F2. Berkeley and Shirley Plantations. Stunning 17th century plantations on the James River.
- F3. Bus Tour of Historic Richmond. Stops at historic Church Hill to visit St. John's Church, inside a Federal Period home, and elsewhere.
- Tour on Your Own. Nearby sites include the Museum and White House of the Confederacy, the Valentine Museum, the Edgar Allen Poe Museum, Hollywood Cemetery, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Information available at the Registration/Hospitality Desk.

**B. Saturday, June 16, 2007**

- S4. Monticello. Thomas Jefferson's masterpiece plantation and grounds.
- S5. Pamplin Park National Museum of the Civil War Soldier and historic Blandford Church. An exciting recreation of life as a soldier.
- S6. Bus Tour of Historic Richmond. See Friday.
- Tour on Your Own. See Friday.

**Registration, p.2** Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Optional Jamestown Tour for Sunday, June 17, 2007

Q **Jamestown.** Transportation, ticket, and tour of the first permanent English settlement in North America. Founded in 1607, Jamestown celebrates America's 400th anniversary of European colonization in 2007. **This tour is Not included in the registration fee. Cost: \$65 per person.**

### 4. Payment

Registration Fee: \_\_\_\_\_ Persons at \$\_\_\_\_\_ Total \$\_\_\_\_\_

\$310 per person if payment postmarked by February 1, 2007

\$330 per person if payment postmarked by May 15, 2007

\$350 per person if payment postmarked after May 15, 2007

The **registration fee** covers Thursday's welcoming reception and dinner at historic Agecroft Hall with the presentation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the gardens, tour of the Virginia State Capitol, box lunch Friday, dinner Friday, box lunch Saturday, dinner Saturday, the choice of one of three tours on Friday, and one of three tours on Saturday, convention meeting spaces, and all regular program admissions and fees.

Jamestown Tour: \_\_\_\_\_ Persons at \$65/person Total \$\_\_\_\_\_ (Optional)

**TOTAL:** \$\_\_\_\_\_

Make payment in U.S. Dollars to Torch Club of Richmond, with notation of Convention 2007. Persons attending jointly may submit one check. Mail the completed form(s) with your check to:

Torch Convention 2007  
Mary M. Maxwell  
607 Gardiner Road  
Richmond, VA 23229

### 5. Hotel: Please make hotel reservations directly with the Omni before May 1, 2007:

**Toll Free: 1-800-843-6664**

Omni Richmond Hotel  
100 South 12 Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
(804) 344-7000  
[www.omnihotel.com](http://www.omnihotel.com)

**\*Daily Rates:** \$122 plus tax for single or double occupancy

- Please mention IATC Convention 2007
- Block of rooms held until May 1, 2007 after which reservations may be made on a space-available basis.

### 6. ANY QUESTIONS?

E-mail: [mmaxwell@richmond.edu](mailto:mmaxwell@richmond.edu) or **Website:** [www.orgsites.com/va/torch](http://www.orgsites.com/va/torch)

Regular mail: Mary Maxwell, 607 Gardiner Road, Richmond, VA 23229

Telephone: Ellen Goodpasture (804) 264-6323

**The International Association of Torch Clubs, Inc.**  
**749 Boush Street**  
**Norfolk, VA 23510-1517**  
**www.torch.org**

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## *Reflections*

“There are some things  
only intellectuals are crazy  
enough to believe.”

George Orwell, quoted in  
*Forbes*

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