



# Dave Barry comes to Capital Times

Dave Barry is a humor columnist who is published in 500 newspapers in the U.S. and abroad. He won the 1988 Pulitzer prize for Commentary and has published 24 humorous books.

When he isn't making millions laugh with his humor, he plays in a literary rock band called Rock Bottom Reminders. Other band members include Stephen King, Amy Tan, Ridley Pearson, and Mitch Albom. He and his wife, Michelle, live in Miami with their two children Rob and Sophie.

## Come on, baby, light my carrot

By **DAVE BARRY**

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Can carrots burn down your house?

This urgent question comes up thanks to reader Doug Forand, who writes to describe an alarming discovery he made recently while experimenting with carrots in his microwave oven. (You may be wondering why he was experimenting with carrots in his microwave oven. He had a solid scientific reason: His wife was not home.)

Doug claims that if you break a carrot into two pieces, then place the pieces on a plate so they're just touching, then cook them in the microwave, "intense flames will start to shoot out of the carrot at the contact point."

As a journalism professional, I am always interested in new ways to make things burst into flame. (All guys are. That's why we have a Defense Department.) So I decided to try to reproduce Doug Forand's experiment. Because of the potential danger that I would turn my house into a raging inferno, I took the safety precaution — originally developed by scientists conducting nuclear tests — of placing the beer outside.

I used two types of carrots: regular supermarket carrots containing harmful chemicals, and organically grown carrots containing insect eggs. I followed Doug's directions carefully. Tragically, neither carrot burst into flames. However, in each case I did see a major spark leap between the carrot parts. This suggested the obvious scientific conclusion that — California, take note — carrots contain electricity. But clearly further research was called for.

So I checked on the Internet, where the only mention I could find of carrots bursting into flames in a microwave was on the discussion board of the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI). There, a health inspector reports that he got a phone call from a woman who said that when she placed some boiled carrots in her microwave, "the carrots lit on fire."

You can check this for yourself at the CIPHI Web site — <http://www.ciphi.ca/> — where you can also read "Up the Years," a riveting account of the history of Canadian health inspection for the crucial years 1934-1970. The largest section is devoted to the dramatic, topsy-turvy, emotion-charged battle to (I am not making this up) come up with the organization's name. Initially, there was strong support for "Canadian Institute of Sanitarians," but after heated debate, the organization voted, by a slim majority, for "Canadian Association of Public Health Sanitarians." The matter appeared to be settled, but then the unthinkable happened: the Canadian secretary of state ruled that the new name was too similar to "Canadian Public Health Association."

At this point, to quote from the CIPHI history: "All hell broke loose. Hot letters streamed across the country violently objecting or making suggested changes." Over the next several years, more than a dozen names were considered before "Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors" was finally made official.

Too often, we U.S. citizens ignorantly assume that our "neighbor to the north" is nothing more than uninhabited tundra festooned with frozen moose poop. Yet here we find that it can also be the setting for an intense human drama, featuring hot streaming letters. If this powerful story would not make

an excellent movie starring Julia Roberts as a beautiful yet busty female Canadian public-health inspector and Keanu Reeves as a salmonella virus, then I frankly do not know what would.

But getting back to the topic: What the heck is it? Wait, I remember: flaming carrots. After more research on the Internet, I found a Web site called "The World Carrot Museum" — <http://website.lineone.net/~stolarczyk/> — which reflects a level of interest in carrots that would probably trouble a psychiatric professional. It has many *Amazing Carrot Facts*, such as: "The last meal on the Titanic included creamed carrots in the fifth course." And here's a shocking fact: "Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny, was allergic to carrots."

Speaking of shocks, this Web site offers a detailed scientific explanation of why carrots spark when microwaved. I frankly do not understand this explanation, but it involves the phrase "high voltage," so as a safety precaution I am advising every American who owns, or has ever owned, either a microwave oven or a carrot, to immediately file a huge class-action lawsuit. If you win any money, you will naturally want to give me some. I'll be outside, with my beer.

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