

Ghostwriter

Nancy & Sluggo, LCTA, and other crimes

By PAUL RISMILLER

Finally! The story that has captured the imagination of the world, that morality play on ice, the tale of Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya "Sluggo" Harding, is all but over.

The medals haven't been awarded as this is written, but the "good" girl is in first, and the "bad" girl is a distant 10th after the short technical program. The whole sordid mess has reached its anticlimax, which was as predictable as a professional wrestling match.

I hope that Kerrigan brings home at least a bronze, because she seems to be a nice person, although whatever personality she may possess has never been revealed, at least in the interviews I've read or watched.

Over the seemingly endless weeks of coverage, some reporters, apparently tired of the whole thing, began taking totally unwarranted cracks at Nancy. The efforts to portray the rivalry as some sort of class struggle were particularly disturbing, since Kerrigan, although often compared to the regal Katherine Hepburn, is of blue collar stock.

As for Tonya, although it takes a great leap of faith to imagine she knew nothing about the plot to attack Nancy, it is nonetheless possible, considering the dimwits she surrounded herself with (and married). Although I'm ashamed to admit it, I actually watched "A Current Affair" the night her wedding night "striptease" video was aired. That episode also featured her mother singing a song begging Tonya to bring her to Norway.

I'm hard pressed to decide which was more sickening, Jeff Giloolly, who gives new meaning to the word "slug", and the "Mother from Hell", seem to be ample punishment for any crimes, past or future, that Tonya is guilty of.

And now that she has about 3 minutes left of her 15 minutes of fame, I wish her well.

The latest round of "cut off your nose to spite your face" service

cuts at the Luzerne County Transportation Authority are now in effect, which leads to more questions about this quietly unraveling scandal.

Exactly how much federal money are these cuts going to cost the company? (provided, of course, that the LCTA management gets any more money from the feds. First they have to negotiate in good faith with the driver's union.)

After laying off 12 drivers and 3 maintenance workers, using management's figures of \$43,000 average salary & benefits for the drivers alone, it adds up to \$516,000 a year plus whatever the maintenance people were making.

Wasn't the projected shortfall that started the whole ball of slop rolling around \$600,000? Or are these "savings" only going to make up for the funding LCTA will lose from ending Saturday service and other cuts? Huh?

As usual, LCTA Director Harold Edwards' (whose background is in accounting folks!) numbers are, to say the least, suspect.

And speaking of numbers, why is it that the state Attorney General's office, the Auditor General's office, and the state and federal Transportation Departments flat out refuse to crack the books of the LCTA, unless and until the company goes belly up?

A post mortem won't do anyone a damn bit of good.

On to other high crimes and misdemeanors... the "tough" anti-crime bill that congress is beating it's chest about is, as are most things emanating from D.C., a bag of gas.

Yes, more cops on the beat would be great, and yes, more prison space is necessary, but what is the point of adding more crimes to the federal death penalty list, when the sentence is so seldom carried out?

Since the late 70's when the Supreme Court allowed the death penalty, it has been carried out only 157 times, while there were over 20,000 murders and 1st de-

gree manslaughters in 1991 alone!

And don't forget, violent offenders serve, on average, only a third of their sentences. The fact is, a relatively small percentage of criminals are responsible for the vast majority of violent offenses... why is it so unreasonable to expect that these convicts spend a long time segregated from the society they prey on?

And why are those who commit the ultimate offence, the intentional taking of a human life, not given the ultimate punishment? Knee-jerk opponents will invariably spout such drivel as "There is no evidence that the death penalty is a deterrent."

First of all, it is a specious argument - how can there be evidence one way or the other, if it is almost never used?

And secondly, deterrence isn't the point anyway. What is important is the recidivism rate is 0%.

Like many, I'm tired of the Janet Reno "Root Causes" crap as well. There are many poor in America, and there have been generations of poor that have come before them... and the vast majority of them, while not wealthy in the financial sense, have a wealth of dignity and pride, and would sooner die than break the law.

Poverty does not create criminals, nor does society... criminal acts are a choice made by individuals... a choice that they must be held accountable for.

The truly observant, will have noticed that the last time a piece appeared in these pages under my byline, the heading was "One from the Road". It was so named because the sole subject was the problems of the LCTA.

If you noticed, award yourself an imaginary "Post Ghostie!"

Since other subjects catch my eye and raise my ire, I chose to change the name to "Ghostwriter" for two reasons. First, I sincerely hope to haunt some people with my observations.

And I think its a cool name for a column.

A. Case for conservation

Whales: Amazing mammals of the deep

By ALENE N. CASE

No group of animals has stimulated environmentalist fervor as much as the whales - not the seal pups, spotted owls, snail darters, or green sea turtles. Everywhere you look you see t-shirts, bumperstickers, posters, and other memorabilia featuring various kinds of whales or dolphins. My favorite gift for Christmas was an oversized sweatshirt with dolphins on the back. My husband drinks his tea from his favorite whale mug. I imagine that there is at least one calendar in your house that portrays some of these graceful leviathans.

As this winter "cooped me up" more than usual, I was drawn to the fabulous photographs in a couple of coffee-table books that have been lying around for a few years. Both of them contain fascinating information on cetaceans (that's the scientific word for the group of marine mammals that include whales, porpoises and dolphins) and led me to find out more from other sources. The 1991 book *Realms of the Sea* was published by the National Geographic Society. The author, Kenneth Brower, uses the movements of whales to introduce the reader to various regions of the oceans. The other book was Jacques Cousteau's *The Ocean World* which is not as up-to-date but no less spectacular.

We all know that whales are not fish. They are mammals who bear live young after a year-long pregnancy. The calves feed on mothers' milk for their first 8 to 18 months of life. They once had hair like other mammals but now have smooth skin in order to be as streamlined as possible in the water. Nobody knows exactly what their ancestors looked like. They came from one or more kinds of land-dwelling animals (probably hooved) about 60 million years ago. The front flippers are vestiges of forelimbs and still have bones similar to wrists and feet or hands. The hind limbs have disappeared and are now replaced by flukes which create the strong dolphin-type swimming action. The nose has moved to the top of the head and is called a blow hole. Whales are divided into two

groups, not by how large they grow but by how they eat. The toothed whales live on various kinds of fish and squid. They do not chew their food but grind it up with stones in the first of three stomachs. Toothed whales range in size from the huge sperm whales (55 feet long) to the small river dolphins and porpoises that frequent estuaries and navigable rivers in many parts of the world. The Arctic narwhals also belong to this group although one of their two teeth has been modified into a long twisted tusk of unknown use. The other tooth rarely appears at all.

It always seemed ironic to me that the largest animals in the world thrive on some of the smallest food. The baleen whales have developed a very efficient sieving device. Their mouths are fitted with comb-like plates of baleen (made of the same material as hair or nails). They swim through the water with their mouths open, push the water back out through the baleen with their giant tongues, and then lick off the inside of the baleen. In this way, they can filter out huge quantities of tiny plants and animals. Their favorite food is a small shrimp-like creature called krill which forms huge schools in the waters of Antarctica. During the fairly short feeding season, they must eat several tons of krill a day in order to store enough fat to last through the breeding season in warmer waters where food is scarce.

Unfortunately, people have taken advantage of the efficiency of whales and have hunted many to the brink of extinction. We have used dolphins as markers for the tuna which they hunt. They must breathe air and, thus, are visible on the surface. We set our nets to catch the tuna and drown the dolphins in the process. Dolphins are now safer because of the recent public protest of this practice.

The right whale was so named because it was the "right" whale to catch. It floated alongside the ship when it was dead because its blubber layer could be as much as two feet thick. And, you can guess how much oil can be extracted from that much blubber!

Now, the right whale is extremely rare especially in the northern hemisphere. There are probably only about 2000 in the whole world and about 300 in the North Atlantic. Many of the ones that remain show scars from collisions with ships.

Other whales were over-harvested because they tend to congregate in certain regions to feed or mate. Gray whales migrate along very predictable paths - such as just off coast of California. This behavior has actually made them easy to protect. When the United States declared a 200 mile limit within which it could regulate fishing these gray whales were automatically protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. They are now well on their way back to sustainable levels because they breed more rapidly than most other whales.

There is still much to learn about the habits and physiology of whales. It has recently become clear that regulations regarding the capture or killing of whales need to be more individualized. Some whales are listed as endangered when they could probably be safely hunted. One example is the sperm whale which yields an excellent lubricant. There are now nearly two million sperm whales, almost as many as the estimate of the population size prior to hunting. Yet, several small whales and dolphins are desperately in danger and are not listed on the endangered lists. Some these live in rivers or estuaries where pollution, boat traffic, and decreasing food supplies are larger problems than hunting.

As we deal with the challenge of protection of these animals, we need to avoid sentimentality. We need to work with the people whose way of life is being threatened or destroyed by moratoria on killing cetaceans. There are ways to allow some harvest without returning to the excesses of the past. There are also ways to maintain the dignity and livelihood of humans by shifting their work from harvesting to eco-tourism or conservation activities. Creativity will be rewarded by viable whale populations, stable human cultures and sustainable ecosystems.

Library news

Library will note anniversary March 4

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library is celebrating a "Dream Come True" on Friday, March 4. Ever since the library opened on Main Street in 1945 in two older buildings, the dream began. The dream was to one day have a larger building, completely new or renovated, with all facilities on one floor. Nine years ago, that dream came true! The library association was able to purchase the former Dallas Borough school building on Huntsville Road and, thanks to a major capital campaign supported by the community, the building was renovated and has become a dream of a library facility. The library is doing well and is growing!

Our "Pennies for Periodicals" project is being well received by the community and there are many pennies in the green bottle. We will accept pennies or any money for the jar until March 2. At that time, we will sponsor a

contest, from March 3 until March 9, and ask for guesses on how many pennies and other money is in the jar. The jar will be available for viewing at the time of the guessing contest. There will be a special price for the person guessing closest to the correct amount and a 2nd and 3rd place prize, also. Come to the library and tell us how many pennies you think are in our green jar.

Some new children's books have arrived at the library: "A Great Miracle Happened There" by Karla Kuskin is a very special Chanukah Story. On the first night, the young narrator invites his friend Henry to join the family celebration. Henry is not familiar with this Jewish holiday, and his questions provoke a thoughtful, retelling of the historic events.

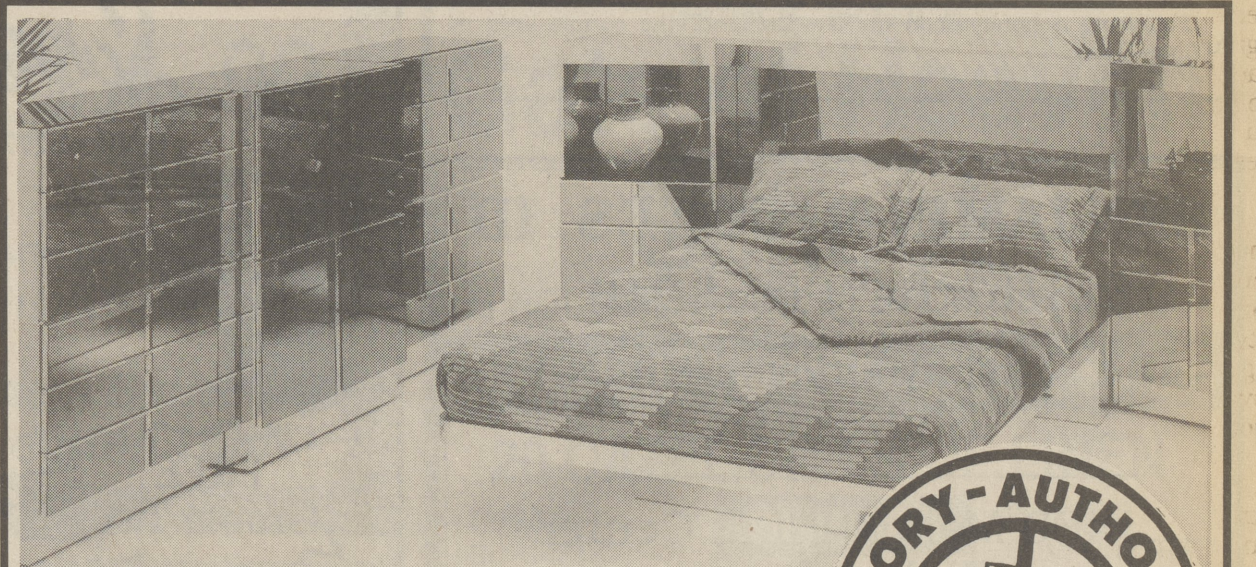
"The Great White Owl of Sissinghurst" by Dawn Langley Simmons is a delightful story based on fact, that takes place in the beautiful gardens of Sissinghurst Castle in Kent,

England. Three young children visiting the castle, are fascinated by the great white owl, named King, who sleeps under the roof of the caretaker's garage during the day.

"Babushka Baba Yaga" by Patricia Polacco is a folktale of Russia, enlivened by rich, vibrant art and we are reminded to judge not by rumor and appearance, but by what we know in our own hearts to be true. Stories are told of the terrible, horrible Baba Yaga. In truth, Baba Yaga is kind, and very lonely; and she longs for a grandchild of her own.

"Hunting the White Cow" by Tres Seymour is a luminous picture book, in which a young girl, like the maiden searching for the unicorn, tells all that happens when she sets out to do what the menfolk cannot. Somewhere north of Priceville there's a white cow nobody can catch. Not Daddy. Not Mr. Matthew, nor Uncle Bob, or Uncle Bill, not even Papaw, the cow caller.

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