

EDITORIAL?

OP ED? FEATURE? AD? WHO KNOWS ANYMORE!



OK. How stupid do those McClatchyites over at the Beaufort Gazette think we are? Just the other day, they constructed an entire page to explain, to us “unedumecated” readers, the difference between an Editorial; an Op-ed opinion piece; Letters to the Editor etc. They had little numbers in circles and little guide paragraphs and everything. Yet, right on their own front page, supposedly reserved for pure news reporting, was a highly and amazingly opinionated, reporter-identified Associated Press piece about the execution of Saddam Hussein. It should have been a “feature story” or an Op Ed and allowing it to masquerade as a news report is an example of the growing liberties being taken with “news” by news organizations. Making sure we understand the difference between opinions and facts is of value. Immediately breaking that rule is, at best, a poor way to make the point and, at worst, uncaring laziness.

BOVINE ODORS

It was actually reported on January 2 (this part is true) that King Abdullah of Jordan has demanded that Israel do something about a herd of flatulent cows who graze the grasses just north of Eilat, a nearby Israeli town. Seems that when the wind is out of the west the fumes are blown straight at the monarch’s Aqaba Palace and he is not amused. Eilat and Aqaba are two resort towns; one on the Israeli side of the Gulf of Eilat and the other on the Arab side of the Gulf of Aqaba. It’s actually the same Gulf but there remains a gulf between the two sides, so each calls it what they like; although in law accepted by both, the border is right down the middle of the water. Well, this bovine odor is quite serious and could endanger the fragile peace treaty between the two nations.

My frequently unreliable sources in the middle east have it on valueless authority that, a week earlier, (this part is not true) when the breezes were blowing in the opposite direction, the King and Queen had eaten way too much falafel and were plagued through the night with exceedingly embarrassing gaseousness. The Israel Defense Forces, with their superior high tech abilities, were able to pick up the scent and sound of this passage of Royal Wind and, with that information in hand, the Israeli Prime Minister called the King and asked if he would consider stopping. Sadly, it continued and the Israelis claim they had no path but retaliation. Thus, the PM instructed the Eilat farmer to immediately change the cows’ diet from free range grasses to Bush’s Beans with Raw Onions and now we see the resulting escalation. As is sadly the case in the Middle East, this is likely to result in a series of UN Security Council resolutions, vetoes by the US and an attempt by leftist radicals to take the cows before the International Court of Justice in The Hague

ON BEING SERIOUS:

As the previous piece clearly demonstrates, it’s quite easy to be silly, even a little flippant. Allowing oneself to explore the realms of the nonsensical (the second paragraph of my writing

about Israel and Jordan), is actually therapeutic and probably even some kind of useful release.

The Middle East is a terribly complex place. I spent a lot of time there. I have friends on both sides. I've watched Israeli soldiers uselessly (and I think stupidly) chase after five year old Palestinian kids who threw a few pebbles at a bus and I've run for my life when a terrorist's bomb blew up 20 yards away, killing several people on King George Street in a part of Jerusalem that has never been "occupied" territory, but leaving me and my colleague untouched except for ringing ears and racing hearts. I played a role in 1988 in quietly bringing together an Israeli Cabinet Minister and a member of the PLO at a time when they were not "officially" talking to each other. I used to write about it for a large circulation Montreal weekly in the late 1980s and early 1990s and I believed then as I do now that both sides have legitimate claims. It is astonishing and terribly depressing to read those articles, now 15 and 20 years later and to realize that except for the dates and some of the leaders' names, the stories are the same.

There is a great sadness in all of that and my sense is that it's not a conflict that can be resolved or understood through sound bites and incessant coverage of a wound here; an injury there; an injustice on this side a travesty on that side. In the end, it will have to be understood and resolved in the context of practical geopolitics, intelligent strategic alliances and some hard-nosed policing by nations that care enough to insist on an end to it.