

Century Marks

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Rosa Parks, Seated in History J.D. Crowe, Mobile Register

Looking for love: The producers of MSNBC's *Headliners and Legends with Matt Lauer* were initially unenthusiastic about their assignment to interview Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy* magazine. They decided to attempt a different sort of interview—explore Hefner's background to see why he became the person he did. Hefner talked about his legalistic and loveless parents, and said his mother never hugged or kissed him for fear of germs. He sought solace in a blanket framed by bunny rabbits—a blanket his mother burned after his puppy died while lying on it. Hefner called that experience his greatest childhood loss. He concluded that he's still a little boy in search of love. Afterward, Hefner's public relations person said: "This wasn't an interview; it was a therapy session" (*Behind the Screen*, edited by Spencer Lewerenz and Barbara Nicolosi, forthcoming from Baker Books).

Lion and lamb: A recent meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and liberal Catholic theologian Hans Küng had an unpredictable outcome. They had first met in 1962 when they were both young and progressive. Joseph Ratzinger, the future pope, had taken a turn to the right and is believed to have played a role when Küng was later stripped of his privilege to teach as a Catholic theologian on the grounds that his theology was incompatible with Catholic doctrine. Küng had accused Ratzinger of being a "grand inquisitor." But after their recent four-hour meeting, Küng said the

pope isn't as reactionary as many liberal Catholics assume, and that he needs to be given time. The two agreed in their exchanges not to delve into their shared past. Instead, they focused on two issues dear to Küng: the notion that science and religion are not incompatible, and the role of the church in a secular and pluralistic world (*New York Times*, September 27).

Pestiferous pesticide: Although the United States banned the use of DDT in 1972, advocacy for the use of the pesticide is on the rise again, especially to control the spread of malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. A headline last year in the *New York Times Magazine* read, "What the World Needs Now Is DDT." But opponents of using DDT say the malaria problem is often exaggerated, and that a better, long-term strategy for saving children in the developing world would be to ensure access to clean drinking water, adequate diet and better living conditions. Some researchers argue that the use of DDT could cause as many infant deaths as it would prevent (*American Scholar*, summer).

Become what you watch: Older people tend to be either absent from popular TV shows or portrayed in stereotypical fashion as grumpy, senile, helpless or sick. Worse, the more that seniors watch TV, the more these stereotypical images influence their own self-image. The antidote: either watch less TV or be mindful of the images being projected. A researcher at Yale University asked a group of seniors to keep a diary of their TV impressions for a week. They didn't think the images of seniors were very funny, and they pledged to watch less TV (*Yale Alumni Magazine*, September/October).

Lost cause? As of late September, President Bush had raised a mere \$600 in his appeal to Americans for contributions to the Iraqi reconstruction fund. In contrast, during the past 12 months Americans have given some \$250 billion for other charitable causes, including assistance for victims of the Asian tsunami (*Observer*, September 25).

Evolution of irreligion: Scholars in the natural sciences are more likely to declare themselves nonreligious than their counterparts in the social sciences, according to a survey released by the Association for the Sociology of Religion. This finding is in contrast to the results of some studies in the mid-20th century that revealed that the social sciences tended to be the least religious of all academic disciplines. The recent study indicates that biology is the least religious of disciplines (63.4 percent of biologists declared themselves nonreligious) and economics is the least

nonreligious (45.1 percent) (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 2).

What would Hoover say? News that the Washington field office of the FBI is recruiting agents for a new antiobscenity squad has been a source of jokes and quips within FBI ranks: "I guess this means we've won the war on terror." "Honestly, most of the guys would have to recuse themselves." "I already gave at home." The FBI has not said where fighting obscenity fits into its priorities. It's stated top four priorities are: terrorism, foreign espionage, cyber-based attacks and public corruption (*Washington Post*, September 21).

They said it . . .

"Make Levees, Not War."

—Sign spotted at the antiwar rally held in Washington, D.C., September 24 (*Washington Post*, September 27)

"A prayer is not necessarily religious. Everybody prays."

—A FEMA representative explaining why FEMA's order to have a chaplain bless all recovered bodies after Hurricane Katrina was not a mixing of church and state (*Newsweek*, September 26)

"There are no atheists in foxholes or hurricane zones."

—Comment by Bill Weir, weekend anchor on *Good Morning America*, which he later retracted after an organized reaction from atheists (RNS)