

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Why the gun?

To The Free Press:

This letter is in response to the article in Wednesday's, Aug. 28, paper by Patty Decker concerning the Umberger's dog.

His name was Aussie. He was an Australian Shepherd. He was almost eleven years old. He had been a devoted and loving member of the Umberger family.

His owners had a six-foot high re-enforced fence, two dog houses and access to the garage for added shelter in case of inclement weather. They had asked me to feed and water their beloved "buddies" while they were out of town. How much more responsible could they have been?

I was greeted each day with tails wagging, bodies shaking. I was jumped on and licked everywhere. They barked their happiness at seeing me.

Who was to know a bad storm would scare one of these dogs to climb the fence. Signs of muddy paw prints were all around the home indicating Aussie wanted in the house where he felt the safest. His home. His right to protect.

Why was a gun the first and last resort?

Where was animal control?

What about pepper spray?

What about trying to call the Umberger's son, he only lives a few miles away?

Doesn't the law protect the Postal Service? They could have left the mail and told the Umberger's why it had not been delivered. They would have understood that. They would not have been hurt by that.

Why was a gun the first and last resort?

Was the delivery of the Umberger's mail more important than their dog's life?

By the way, in the eleven years of Aussie's life, he had never bit anyone. Yes, dogs can and do bite. They protect their homes and families even to the death. In this case, it was death.

If someone has to feel the need to place blame, then I should be the one to blame, not the Umberger's. I had been asked by responsible people that loved Aussie very much to care for him and I guess since someone needs to blame, blame me.

I still have to ask the one question that continues to haunt me: Why was the gun the first and last resort?

**Sherye Elliott
Colby
(Letter #120)**

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Ever wonder where idioms come from?

A friend and colleague in the office shared some interesting facts with me this morning about hygiene and I thought it would be worthwhile passing the information on.

Personally, I think storytelling is vital in any culture. It is what allows people to communicate, work together and live together. It is what forms the basis for communities.

This particular group of stories have been passed down over time and are explanations for many different things, such as bathing and why June weddings were so popular, along with a few other tidbits.

So, to start this off, remember the next time you are washing your hands and complain because the water temperature isn't just how you like it, think about how things used to be.

Whether fact or myth, here's the explanation, which dates back to the 1500s. Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and still smelled pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the body odor. Hence the custom today, of carrying a bouquet when getting married.

Baths consisted of a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children-last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually lose someone in it-hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs-thick straw-piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the dogs, cats and other small animals (mice, bugs) lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof-hence the saying "It's raining cats and dogs."



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed.

Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt. Hence.... the saying "dirt poor."

The wealthy had slate floors that would get slippery in the winter when wet, so they spread thresh (straw) on the floor to help keep their footing.

As the winter wore on, they kept adding more thresh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed in the entranceway-hence, a "thresh hold."

In those old days, they cooked in the kitchen with a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot.

They ate mostly vegetables and did not get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner, leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been there for quite a while-hence the rhyme, "Peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork, which made them feel quite special. When visitors came over, they

would hang up their bacon to show off. It was a sign of wealth that a man "could bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning and death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whisky. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days.

Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up - hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small and the local folks started running out of places to bury people. So they would dig up coffins and would take the bones to a "bone-house" and reuse the grave. When reopening these coffins, 1 out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive.

So they thought they would tie a string on the wrist of the corpse, lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night ("the graveyard shift") to listen for the bell; thus, someone could be "saved by the bell" or was considered a "dead ringer."

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Thursdays.

Three women, Ashcroft, death

Faye Girsh

- Another Viewpoint

Every day people with horrible illnesses jump out of tall buildings, swallow medications that may not work or shoot themselves. If they're lucky, they get help so they don't have to die violently and alone.

Three women have provided this help and have been jailed for their efforts. All are over 60, none have a criminal record; all are in different stages of their legal ordeal.

Donna Trautman, 60, was the caregiver for a deaf and mute 66-year-old man dying of metastasized prostate cancer. She bathed, fed and medicated him—for friendship, not for pay. He was in severe pain, despite huge doses of morphine. He tearfully wrote her a note asking for her help to die and she tearfully said no. But, later that night she put a pillow over his face and he stopped breathing.

She turned herself in and will be in a Wisconsin prison for two years.

Carol Carr, 63, shot her two sons, 42 and 41, who had Huntington's Disease, a fatal, degenerative genetic disorder that diminishes a victim's ability to talk, walk, reason or care for themselves. Her hus-

band had it and, in 1995, shot himself. When her sons developed the disease she cared for them, but in January, she had to put them in a nursing home. Watching them lose all dignity, she shot them to death.

She has been charged with murder in a rural Georgia town.

Evelyn Martens, 71, grandmother of six, was arrested in July for "aiding and abetting" and "counseling" the suicides of two different women. She works with the Right to Die Network of Canada which provides information and resources to desperately ill people whose diseases are so bad that dying is pref-

erable to living. She is out on bail.

Hopefully her case will clarify what exactly is wrong with counseling people who want to die peacefully and aiding them to have a gentle death.

Meanwhile Attorney General John Ashcroft is pursuing his ban on the Oregon Death with Dignity law by appealing the decision of the Oregon District Court that said he was out of bounds.

Until there are more laws like the one in Oregon, we will be arresting mothers, caregivers and others of good will who cannot bear to see people being forced to live when they beg for an end to their suffering.

Faye Girsh is president of the Denver-based Hemlock Society. Founded in 1980, it is the oldest and largest right-to-die organization in the United States. Hemlock has more than 27,000 members in chapters across the country. Contact www.hemlock.org. The views expressed are those of the writer, not necessarily those of the Colby Free Press. Feedback to td@nwkansan.com.

About those letters . . .

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Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

