

Opinion



Monday's Salute

Thumbs



to . . .

✓**Twila Whitley** — on your 50-year membership in the Colby Chapter No. 442, Order of the Eastern Star.

✓**Sally Michael** — for the outstanding job you have done as Brewster correspondent. Good luck on your pending move to Hays.

✓**McLemore Family** — on your fine performance at last Thursday's "Picnic in the Park."

✓Colby College Student **Rachel Jones** — on your 9th-place national finish in the accounting competition at the Phi Beta Lambda Conference in Orlando, Fla.

✓**Betty Jo Baird** — our new Brewster correspondent.

✓**Audrey Hoyt** — on your performance for the June 30 "Picnic in the Park." The series continues each Thursday thought July 28 at Fike Park and is jointly sponsored by the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce, the Colby Visitors Bureau and the *Colby Free Press*.

✓**Nick Quenzer, Jerad W. Lange, Emily Griffin** — newest members of the Colby Police Department.

✓**Stella Krannawitter** — Hoxie's cinnamon roll queen.

✓**Tom Nickols** — for your years of service to the Colby Police Department, and good luck with your new endeavor.

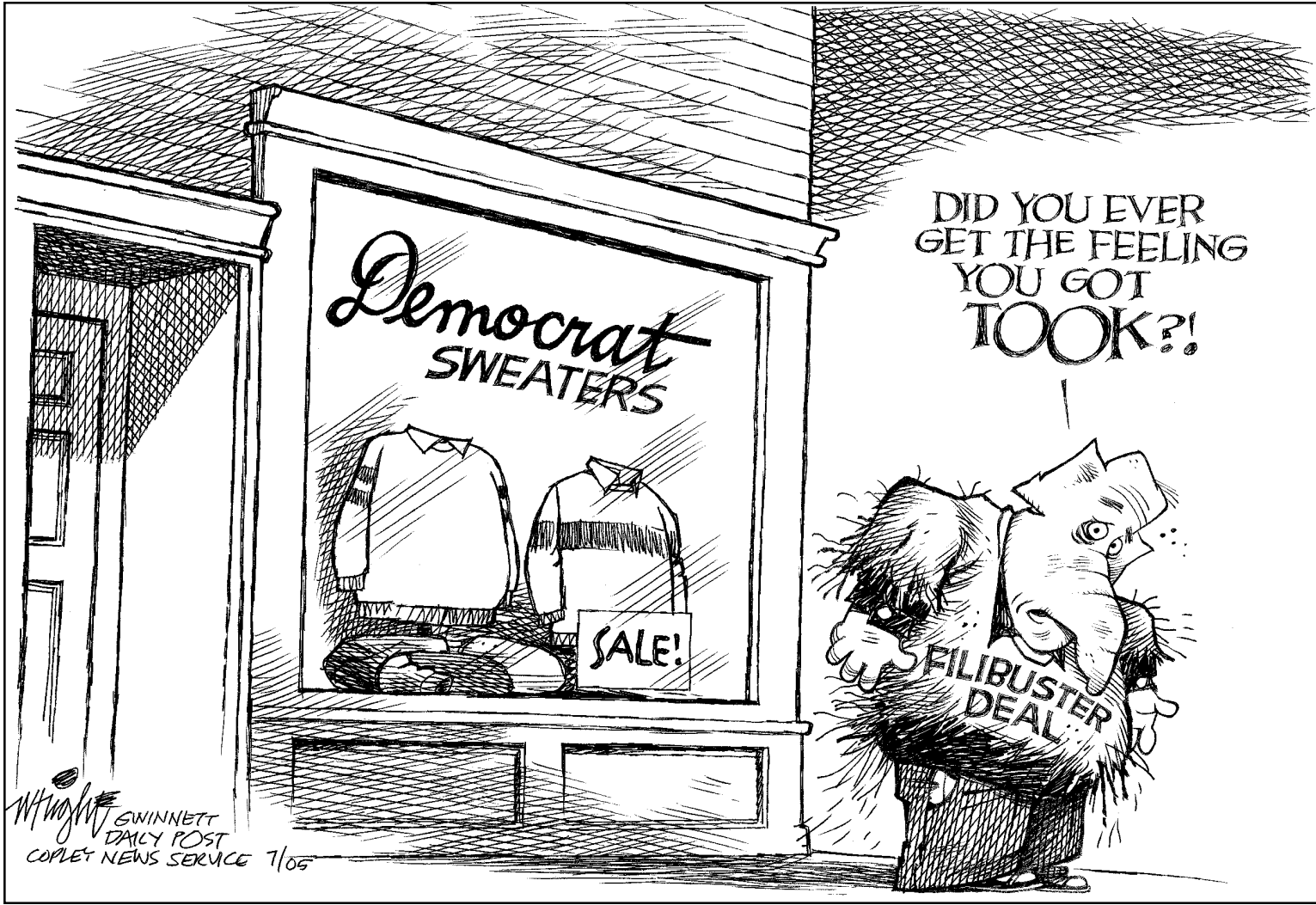
✓**Max Pickerill** — on your 80th birthday celebration!

✓**Alex Kleinsorge and Scott Smith** — on your participation as Colby's delegates to the American Legion Boys State at Kansas State University.

To submit a name, names or group for consideration, e-mail td@nwkansas.com, fax 462-7749 or call the office at 462-3963. Birthdays and anniversaries will be accepted on these conditions: birthdays (80 years or more) and anniversaries (50 years or more). Thanks for your continuing input. - td

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.com web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us



Another dose of book hype



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

A major event is happening this summer. With great expectation and anticipation, people wait. Neither a movie release or a concert, it's something a little more traditional yet no less wanted.

The sixth "Harry Potter" book comes out on Saturday, July 16. I know lots of people are waiting for this book because I'm one of those anticipating its release.

The title is "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince."

The only clue fans have is the cover to the book and the first few lines of the first chapter. Who, or what the half-blood prince is a mystery for now.

I took my first foray into Harry Potter reluctantly before the release of the first movie, then found myself hooked. I read the first three books rather quickly after that. (Which has been much easier to keep up with than Robert Jordan's "Wheel of Time" series. Masochistic reading at its best.)

Presales for the book went online Dec. 21, 2004, making the book a best-seller before anyone has even read it.

In England, there's a push to get people to buy copies of the book from Canada printed on recycled paper.

That's just a tiny tip off a massive iceberg of information and hype running around in the greater world of a book that is still sitting in warehouses waiting for distribution.

The series has also inspired a series of movie adaptations and not to mention lit a passion for reading in young and old alike.

Short synopsis: the series is about a boy wizard named Harry Potter, only in the beginning he doesn't know he's a wizard. He lives with his horrible aunt, uncle and cousin and one day finds

out he is a wizard and goes to wizard school. Big bad enemy named Voldemort wants Harry dead and Harry spends part of his time being a student and the other half having adventures and trying to find a way to defeat the bad before an all-out wizarding war begins.

Some people have taken offense at the series while millions of others have embraced it.

Magic, detractors say, is evil, and because magic is just one thread in the material of the plot, the series is also evil.

Say what they will, there is no denying the magic spell J.K. Rowling cast on readers everywhere.

I guess her own story is even a little more interesting than the books themselves.

She got the original idea for the series one night while riding home on the train, and the rest, as they say, is history. (from <http://www.jkrowling.com>)

And she went from working for Amnesty International then to teaching then to full-time author when the series took off in 1996.

But still, to me, it's hard to believe a book could create so much hype. Don't get me wrong. I love books and I love to read. As a teenager, you could call me "bookish." I had my nose stuck in a book a lot of the time but I don't ever

remember a book coming out with so much speculation attached.

Before taking the "Potter plunge," I had a little misadventure that nearly made me not read the series.

When "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" (book No. 4) came out in 2000, I was living in Golden, Colo. They had a big Barnes and Noble book store there which had a midnight release party for the book.

I pulled that assignment. So, armed with camera and notebook, I walked into the store a little after 11 p.m. and was not ready for the sight that awaited me. Inside, were hundreds of pint-sized Harry Potter wannabes, a horde of bespectacled, cloak-wearing lightning-scarred children running about with wands and all pretending to be their fictional hero.

It was enough to make me question my sanity. I wasn't expecting that for a book release party. Movie, maybe, but a book?

The 2003 release of "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" had me seeing a little less hype. Thankfully, Colby was a little insulated from it but there was still a little local fever pitch anticipation for that book.

Despite the hype and speculation, it's been fun. I can admit I'm eager to find out what happens next. And at least I'm guaranteed a better time than most of the summer movies can offer.

I guess, when it comes down to it, people love Harry Potter. And they're reading.

And that's magic.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcoc@nwkansas.com.

What's all this 'human dignity' talk?

I've been out of the country for the past several weeks, a blissful place to be (unless, of course, you happen to be in Iraq, Darfur, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, a few other nations or a dozen other venues.)

Fortunately I was in none of those places; I was in Italy where the food was great, the scenery terrific and the people in marvelous good humor.

Still, there's certain disconnectedness for an American abroad. One gets news of America in Europe, certainly, but usually in dribs and drabs and late. And so it was with some eagerness that I stepped off the plane last week and began catching up. When I had left, the Senate was considering (or not considering) the nomination of Crazy John Bolton as ambassador to the United Nations, talking about making it easier to break a filibuster and wrangling over a bill to liberalize guidelines for federally sponsored stem cell research. Iraq seemed to be drifting toward chaos like a canoe toward a waterfall, ever faster.

So what had changed in my absence?

Nothing.

Something will change eventually I suppose, but right now Congress is a painted ship on a painted ocean.

Among the dribs and drabs I picked up while I was away, however, the drabbest and dribbiest was the reaction to those prison pictures of Sad Sack Saddam in his underwear. From the cry that went up you'd have thought we'd committed a war crime, for crying out loud. We didn't. It wasn't even a war misdemeanor. In the first place, the United States government didn't release those pictures, so far as we know. Some

Donald Kaul

• Guest Commentary

guard with access to the surveillance film did it, undoubtedly for a buck or two.

In the second place, what's the big deal? We're not talking about Queen Elizabeth here; this is Saddam Hussein, a torturer and mass murderer who poison-gassed his own people and let thousands of children starve while he and his sons looted the public treasury. And some people are worried that he's being humiliated!

Gimme a break.

I spent part of my vacation at Lake Como in northern Italy, a place of surpassing beauty. We were cruising the lake in a tour boat one day when the guide pointed to a house on the shore. That, she said, was where Mussolini, the fascist dictator who led Italy to disaster in World War II, was shot and killed by Italian partisans after his capture in 1945.

Not content with this simple, crude justice, the partisans took the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress to the town square of a Milan suburb and hung them upside down, like sides of beef. I was 10 at the time and I remember the grainy pictures that my local newspaper carried, the pair of them with their arms hanging down, their

shirts gathered at their necks. I don't remember being particularly horrified; at the time it seemed an appropriate end for a tyrant. Still does, actually. Taking pictures of him in his underwear wouldn't have had the same impact.

On the other hand, our alleged treatment of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo does approach the level of war criminality and for the life of me I can't understand why we as a nation aren't taking it more seriously.

Reports indicate that we've been beating prisoners, wiring them like toasters and encouraging their sexual abuse. Amnesty International has said we're "a leading purveyor and practitioner" of torture and prisoner abuse and called Guantanamo "the gulag of our time."

The White House press secretary has dismissed the allegations as "ridiculous" and said that "the United States is leading the way when it comes to protecting human rights and promoting human dignity." Right.

That's what the Soviet Union used to say, and China and Chile and Argentina and Saudi Arabia and any number of protectors of human dignity. Sometimes you have to destroy human dignity in order to protect it.

What in the world are we coming to?

Donald Kaul recently retired as Washington columnist for the Des Moines Register. He has covered the nation's capital for 29 years, winning a number of coveted awards along the way. Email: donald.kaul2@verizon.net. This column is distributed by MinutemanMedia.org.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau



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155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

freepress@nwkansas.com

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Tom (TD) Dreiling - Publisher
td@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor

pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment

tcoc@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter

ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director

crystalr@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Crottinger - Advertising Sales

jasminec@nwkansas.com

Cindy Davis - Advertising Sales

c.davis@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager

lea@nwkansas.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building

japplegate@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator

support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight

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