

Home with the Armadillo #59 is brought to you by Liz Copeland of 3243 165th Ave. SE, Bellevue WA 98008. Phone number is 425-641-0209. Email is received at lizc@nwlink.com. Started in July 2003, for SFPA 234.

It seems like I learn something new every time I go to a doctor these days. I went in for my annual physical this June, and it turns out my parathyroid levels were elevated as was my calcium level. This lead to a diagnosis of parathyroid adenoma. In a spirit of sharing, I give the following information.

Background: Primary hyperparathyroidism (HPT) is a condition characterized by an inappropriate excess of parathyroid hormone (PTH) secretion. The elevated PTH levels result in hypercalcemia and hypophosphatemia. Primary HPT is caused by **parathyroid adenoma** in 80-85% of patients, by multiple parathyroid adenomas in 2-3%, by parathyroid hyperplasia in 10-15%, and by parathyroid carcinoma in 2-3% of patients (Tallefer, 1995).

Pathophysiology: The primary function of the parathyroid glands is to help regulate calcium homeostasis by producing PTH in response to hypocalcemia. PTH stimulates bone resorption, which in turn releases calcium. In primary HPT, excess PTH release results in hypercalcemia. Hypercalcemia is believed to be responsible for the clinical manifestations of the disease.

Mortality/Morbidity:

Most patients with primary HPT present with asymptomatic hypercalcemia.

Common clinical presentations are believed to result from bone resorption and high serum concentrations of calcium. Common findings include nephrolithiasis (*aka kidney stones*), bone pain, arthralgias, muscular aches, peptic ulcer disease, pancreatitis, fatigue, depression, anxiety, and other mental disturbances.

The symptoms can be remembered with the following expression: stones, bones, groans, and psychic overtones.

Oh, yes. The recommended treatment is surgery. Yet again.

After a visit to the ENT specialist, and an injection of radioactive iodine so that some imaging could be done, I have surgery scheduled for August 26th. I am spending a lot of time reading "The Cat who..." books, and playing computer games to avoid thinking about yet another incision and a fairly large scar on my throat.

All of this is going on while we're doing the usual summer things, and getting Allie ready to go off to university in Canada. And I'm actually still in the recovery time for the last surgery. Feh.

But there have been some highlights this summer. I took a 5-day dyeing course and will now be able to reliably reproduce any of the 1029 colors in the notebook we created during the course. This moves me ahead on being able to do custom colors and gradations in my art, assuming I get back to doing any art any time soon. I have some plans for September, assuming the repainting of the bedrooms gets done in a timely fashion. (Chaos? Moi?) I'm writing down lots of ideas in my notebook and we'll see how things go once we're past the surgery and all the school stuff. (Allie goes to Victoria Aug 22nd, and James starts school September 3rd, I think.)

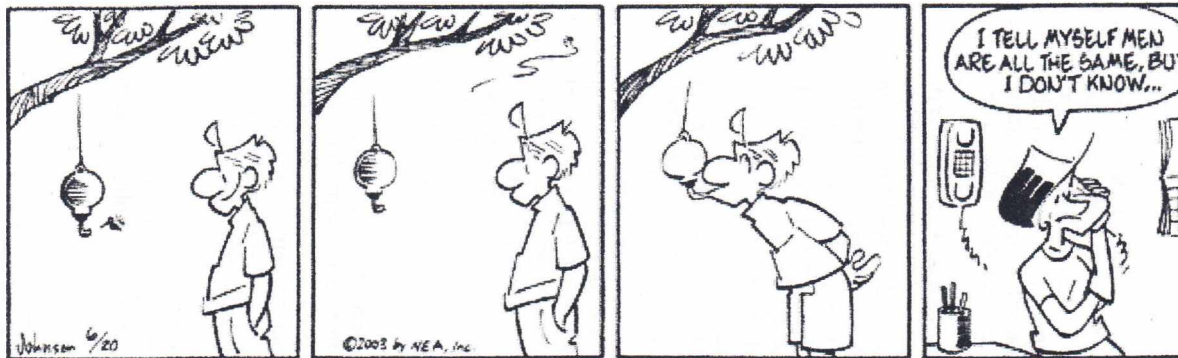
And that's about it for me this time. I have included some comics for Toni and my friend Lisa. (I'm afraid that bird jokes are now catching my eye since I started birding.) Next time I'll talk about how to subscribe to the comics online so Toni can get them via email, just like me.

I've also included a couple of newspaper columns. One of them is a local columnist so no one outside the Seattle area will have seen it. I hope you find them interesting.

I also hope your health is better than mine...

Arlo and Janis

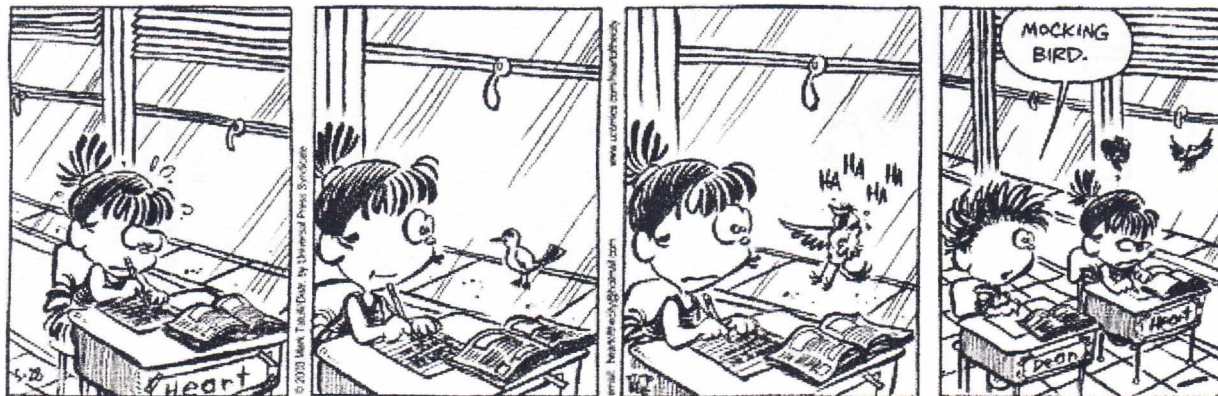
by Jimmy Johns



Sylvia by Nicole Hollander



Heart of the City by
Mark Tatulli



Iraq war like an optical illusion

CHI-DOOH LI

P-I columnist



The Iraq war is a resounding success and an unmitigated disaster.

As outrageous as it might sound, that statement has a perfect explanation in the world of art.

Life, as Oscar Wilde once wryly observed, imitates art.

In art, as in life, perspective can play confounding tricks on the mind.

Stare for a few seconds at the optical illusion created by a field of solid cubes, dark on one side, bright on the other and shaded on a third. At first glance, the cubes seem stacked one way. In a few seconds, however, the cubes seem to flip and will be stacked in another direction.

The discovery that our brain constructs a three-dimensional interpretation when we see a two-dimensional image of a cube is attributed to Swiss crystallographer Louis Necker.

Illustrations of Necker's Cube, first published in the 1830s, set off entire artistic movements that explored the fascinating interplay of image and reality, ambiguity and certainty.

When we look at a field of cubes, we can clearly see the cubes one way or the other. But our brain will not allow us to see both at the same time.

So it is with the war in Iraq.

The war was prosecuted with a rapid efficiency that surprised us all. Elite Iraqi units that were expected to put up stiff resistance in defense of their homeland melted away in the hot desert sun.

Spontaneously joyful receptions greeted advancing Allied troops. The world saw unforgettable images of a jubilant Baghdad crowd toppling an enormous statue of Saddam Hussein and beating the fallen head with their shoes.

A truly despicable tyrant who brutalized his own people and constantly picked fights with his neighbors has been overthrown. His two sadistic sons were recently dispatched to enjoy the eternal company of what will likely turn out to be something other than vestal virgins.

Democratic rule and political self-determination are just beginning to take root. Freedoms that men and women could once only dream of are now a reality.

At the same time, our troops, now an occupying force, seem trapped in a nightmare where friend and foe are indistinguishable, and the smiling face of a pregnant woman can turn in an instant into the gruesome face of death.

The feared weapons of mass destruction have not been found and it increasingly seems that there are none. The Bush administration could have justified the invasion on a number of grounds, but chose to focus domestic and international attention on one that in retrospect was based at best on sloppy intelligence or, at worst, on lies.

Many lives and billions of dollars later, Saddam is still at large. Chaos reigns in much of the country. Early Iraqi feelings of gratitude and good will have dissipated in the midst of lawlessness, power outages and shortages of food, water and other basic needs.

The United States and Great Britain, for

all the talk of a broad alliance, remain alone in this venture. The United Nations and other allies, their views ignored and their usefulness questioned, are content to stand on the sidelines, not altogether unhappy about watching Americans and Brits twist in the wind a little.

M.C. Escher, perhaps the best-known artist of the genre that exploits the ambiguities of visual images, once described his work as "demonstrating the nonsensicalness of some of what we take to be irrefutable certainties."

The passionate and polarized views on both sides of the Iraq war demonstrate that we humans indeed prefer to deal in the world of irrefutable certainties.

Looking at Iraq today is like looking at a field of cubes. We see one image or the other, but never both at the same time. Yet both are irrefutably and certainly there in the picture.

One of Escher's most famous works, titled *Ascending and Descending*, shows a set of stairs set in a square, with men walking both up and down the stairs. The confounding thing is that the edge of the top stair seems lined up with the edge of the bottom stair, so that the man on the top step seems on the same plane as the man on the bottom step.

As with all of Escher's work, there are no tricks. If we were to construct a model of the stairs, we could see that it indeed goes up and down. But from one particular angle, it appears the stairs remain on the same plane.

Were we right or wrong to invade Iraq? Did we succeed or fail?

The answer in each case is both.

The particular angle of our perspective determines which answer we hold true, with irrefutable certainty.

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Nothing frugal about Republicans

JEFF JACOBY

Syndicated columnist

At their national convention three years ago, Republicans pointed with pride to the GOP's record of fiscal rectitude.

"In the four decades from 1954 to 1994," the Republican platform declared, "government spending increased at an average annual rate of 7.9 percent, and the public's debt increased from \$224 billion to \$3.4 trillion." Those were the profligate years, when Democrats usually controlled both houses of Congress.

"Since 1994," it went on, "with Republicans leading the House and Senate, spending has been held to an annual 3.1 percent rate of growth, and the nation's debt will be nearly \$400 billion lower by the end of this year. The federal government has operated in the black for the last two years and is now projected to run a surplus of nearly \$5 trillion over ten years."

Missing from the Republicans' recitation was any mention of the Democrat who had been in the White House since 1993. Didn't President Clinton deserve any of the credit for the spending restraint and budget surpluses?

Not according to Republicans he didn't. In their view, they were the ones who slowed the federal spending train and forced Clinton to curb his big-government impulses. If he had had a Democratic Congress to do his bidding, that train would have raced out of control.

So here we are three years later, with not only a Republican Congress but a Republican president, too – and the federal spending train

is racing out of control. The Bush administration recently estimated that the government will end the current fiscal year with a budget deficit of \$455 billion. Over the next five years, the public debt is expected to rise by \$1.9 trillion. The administration projects next year's federal outlays at \$2.27 trillion, more than \$400 billion higher than when the president took office.

As any Republican will be glad to tell you, the GOP is the party of fiscal discipline. Unlike the wasters of the Democratic Party, Republicans know that all government money is really taxpayers' money, and they take great pains to spend that money frugally.

Sure they do. That's why Republican George W. Bush, backed by a Republican Congress, is on track to become the biggest-spending president since LBJ.

In the first three years of the Bush administration, government spending has climbed – in real, inflation-adjusted terms – by a staggering 15.6 percent. That far outstrips the budget growth in Clinton's first three years, when real spending climbed just 3.5 percent. Under the first President Bush, the comparable figure was 8.3 percent; under Ronald Reagan, 6.8 percent, and under Jimmy Carter, 13.3 percent. No, that's not a mistake: Bush is a bigger spender than Carter was.

To be sure, Bush's budgets have had to account for Sept. 11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But even when defense spending is excluded, discretionary spending has soared by nearly 21 percent in Bush's first three years. In Clinton's first triennium, non-defense discretionary spending declined slightly. If their budgets were all you had to go by, you might

peg Bush for the Democrat and Clinton for the Republican.

The budget cycle Bush inherited in 2001 closed with a surplus of \$127 billion. The deficits that now stretch as far as the eye can see are the result of reckless budget-busting that would have Republicans shrieking if Al Gore were president. To see this kind of promiscuous budgeting come out of a Republican administration should outrage them even more.

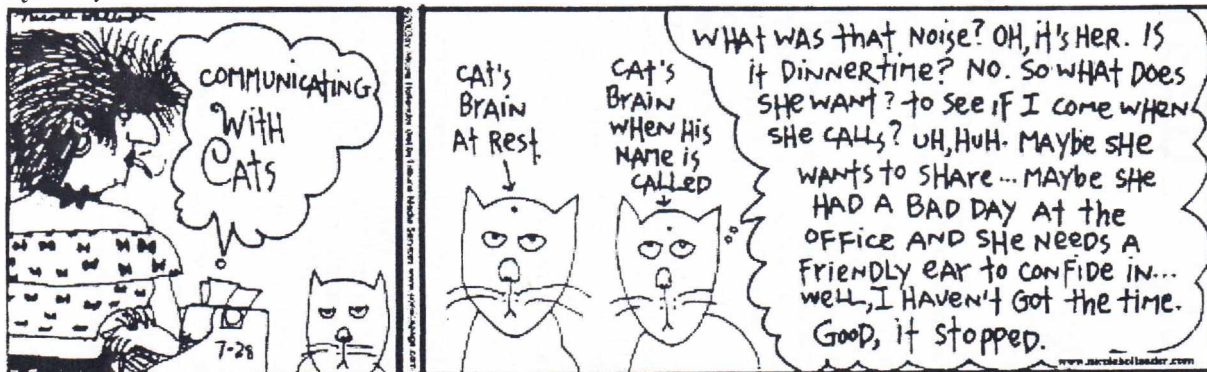
Predictably, liberals and Democrats are loudly blaming the Bush deficits on the Bush tax cuts. But tax relief isn't leaking red ink all over the budget; spending is. In 2008, when most of the tax cuts signed by Bush will be fully phased in, they will reduce federal revenues by \$177 billion. In the same year, total federal spending will be \$494 billion higher than it is today. By the end of the five-year budget plan, in other words, spending increases will outweigh tax cuts by nearly 3 to 1.

From the pork-laden homeland security bill to last year's bloated farm bill, Washington's orgy of spending is bringing on the biggest deficits in American history. The gigantic prescription-drug entitlement making its way through the Capitol will force the budget even further into the red and the nation even deeper into debt. Americans count on Republicans to enforce, or at least invoke, the First Law of Holes: When in one, stop digging. But Republicans rule both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue, and the digging is more furious than ever. How will the GOP explain that at its next convention?

Jeff Jacoby is a columnist for The Boston Globe.

For Lisa & her cat, Maggers

Sylvia by Nicole Hollander



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