VIEWPOINT

Who's raising our children?

Amid its flood of dismal findings on young adolescents — who are killing themselves, killing others, getting pregnant and doing drugs, all near a record clip — a new Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report reveals that smoking by eighth graders rose 30 percent between 1991 and 1994.

But how can that be? During this same period, the last states were raising the smoking age to 18. This paradox says much about the feebleness of law to stop youthful pathologies when the family fails.

To observe that the middle-school years are tumultuous for kids is like observing that Medusa is having a bad hair day: It has always been thus.

Between ages 11 and 13, most children go through great biological and social changes on the road to puberty. But while a "tweenie" of yesteryear might have suffered from nothing more serious than the unrequited love of Clark Gable, Carnegie's "Great Transitions" report makes plain that middle-schoolers today face many outright dangers.

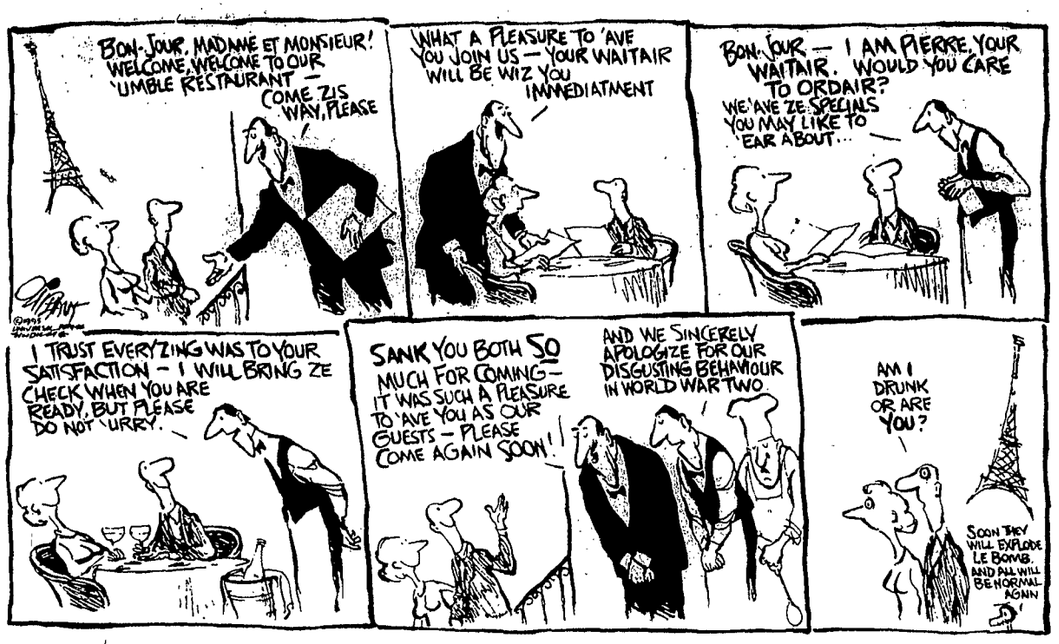
Many children are imperiled because of family decomposition — a highfalutin term to describe adult irresponsibility. In his book "Fatherless America," David Blankenhorn writes, "Tonight, about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep in homes in which their fathers do not live." In 1960, 17.5 percent of children lived apart from their biological fathers; by 1990, the percentage had doubled.

It has been said that in a culture as aggressively decadent as ours, a child needs four parents. A rising number of children have only one.

Thus, simple mathematics tells us that many children gravely lack parental supervision. Who's raising them? Peers, Calvin Klein and MTV. The Carnegie report notes that eighth-graders spend more than 20 hours a week after school watching the tube (versus seven on homework and outside reading). There's not a middle-school role model on TV that's normal. No wonder a bumper sticker advises: "Shoot your television." We would add just one word: twice.

While there's no magic formula for steering a middle-schooler through the difficult years, parents can rely on common-sense guidelines: Push involvement in sports or other edifying activities. Filter out as much cultural drek as possible. Urge association with decent peers. Set a good personal example.

Don't count too much on lawmakers. They can't even make eighth-graders put the Luckies down.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hospice affair successful

To the Editor: The 11th Annual Hospice Dinner again raised thousands of dollars in support of Hospice of the North Country.

St. Mary's Gym in Champlain was full to capacity on Sept. 17. Four-hundred people were served dinner within 30 minutes due to the efforts of all those who so generously volunteered their time.

We are thankful to Church Women United of the North Tier for their work in planning, organizing and conducting the event and to the many young people who did such an outstanding job of serving beverages and desserts. The success of this event was due to their hard work and the generosity of the many merchants of the Northern Tier who made contributions toward food and/or donated food, supplies and raffle items. It was truly a community effort.

Hospice care is managed by an interdisciplinary team that includes physicians, nurses, pharmacists, counselors, clergy, social workers and trained volunteers. The generosity of all those involved in the Hospice Dinner helps to assure that our compassionate care is available to the terminally ill in our community and their families.

Helena Madison
Executive director
Hospice of the North Country
Plattsburgh

'Jeopardy!' replaced

To the Editor: WPTZ should be ashamed for downgrading their evening programs and forcing people to switch to other channels at 7 p.m., since Channel 5 dropped "Jeopardy!" at that time.

WPTZ underestimated the intelligence of its viewers when it replaced "Jeopardy!" by yet another stupid sit-com. "Jeopardy!" followed by "Wheel of Fortune" has been a family-oriented series that so many enjoyed for years. With dinner behind us we could match wits with high school and college students and senior citizens, and other lucky contestants.

In response to the gentleman from Malone, I checked with Falcon TV in Plattsburgh. We are unable to get CJOH, Ottawa, which still features "Jeopardy!" at 7 p.m.

If all the people unhappy with WPTZ would appeal to the sponsors of "Jeopardy!", maybe we would get some results, as appeals to WPTZ fall on deaf ears.

Elizabeth Heins
Plattsburgh

Wrong solution

To the Editor: I must agree that the lack of adequate parking space is a problem campus-wide. But I take strong exception to the solution of converting the tennis courts behind Hawkins Hall to 49 parking spaces.

Those courts are an institution in and of themselves. They continue to serve neighbors and community members, students and staff alike, as they have for many years past, being the original courts on the campus. My parents taught me to play there, I taught my children, and am now looking forward to sharing that same special place with our next generation.

As the sun rises, the sound of tennis balls pinging can be heard every morning, and people are always on the courts squeezing the last strokes in as the sun sets. The courts are in good shape, even though they are occasionally abused by roller bladers, and they are most certainly used by more than 49 people daily for eight months of the year.

Please consider this alternative plan. Extend the Draper Street lot to the corner of Cornelia Street, forming an L behind the utility works, thereby connecting the Cornelia Street lot. There appears to be plenty of grassy undeveloped land. The traffic flow would be improved and there may even be parking for 52 cars.

I would welcome the additional parking spaces, just to relieve the congestion along neighboring streets. Change and progress are necessary, but not at the cost of losing one of our few remaining treasures. As is so often the case, young people have a way of simplifying complex thoughts. After learning why I was writing, my son quipped, "Should we chain ourselves to the fence, Mom?"

Allison Smith Condo
Plattsburgh

Tamer supported

To the Editor: I would like to express my views on Marguerite Tamer, who is running for councilperson for the Town of Plattsburgh.

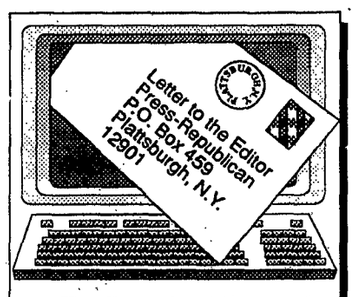
Marguerite is a very honest, down-to-earth person who is not afraid of hard work. She has a proven record of hard work and dedication to the community with her past and present jobs and has also proven her dedication to the community in her former position as councilperson for the Town of Plattsburgh.

I worked for Marguerite Tamer for 6½ years and she was a wonderful boss. She was very hard-working and dedicated to her job and never hesitated in putting in extra time in the evenings and on weekends. Her ability to see both sides of an issue and discern the facts to make an appropriate decision is very admirable. Although Marguerite left to pursue her current position as principal and dedicate her life to the education and well-being of the children of the community, her influence and impact will always remain with me. She is a role model in which many have been able to look up to.

I believe that as a councilperson for the Town of Plattsburgh, Marguerite will work hard to evaluate the issues and pursue those that are fair and beneficial to all concerned.

Vote wisely on Nov. 7.

Kim Marie Devins
Peru



The Press-Republican welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed (except e-mail) and include the address and telephone number of the author. Letters must not contain more than 300 words. They should be typewritten. Those letters not meeting the criteria will not be published and will be returned. The Press-Republican reserves the right not to publish letters it judges to be inappropriate.

By mail: Letters to the Editor
Press-Republican
P.O. Box 459
Plattsburgh, N.Y.
12901
By e-mail: PRepub@aol.com
By fax: 561-3362

Donah for coroner

To the Editor: The Clinton County Fireman's Association endorses David F. Donah for Clinton County coroner.

Mr. Donah has a background in law enforcement which will enhance his position as county coroner.

There is a misconception by many people that the coroner has to be a licensed physician, which is not a true fact.

Many coroners across the state do not hold a physician's license.

Autopsies are normally done in a hospital setting, as is true in Clinton County, and a physician other than the coroner has performed these autopsies.

The Clinton County Fireman's Association, therefore, has unanimously endorsed Mr. Donah for your consideration in the 1995 election.

This is the first time that the association has endorsed a candidate for elected office.

Leon H. Clodgo
President, Clinton County
Fireman's Association
Plattsburgh

Missing 'Jeopardy!'

To the Editor: I'm writing concerning the move of the "Jeopardy!" show from 7 to 5 p.m. It's simply not a good time for this show, and prevents many people from watching it. I seem to forget about the change of time, and so, miss it.

A response to someone's letter concerning this time change stated that it was moved to put it with a similar program. At 7 p.m. it preceded a similar program. At 5 p.m. it plays opposite the Simpsons, certainly not a game show. The replacement 7 p.m. program is at best insipid. Please return "Jeopardy!" to its old time slot.

Phyllis L. Wells
Plattsburgh

Albany Armchair

Caffeine: the legal drug of choice

Marc Violette
Ottaway News Service

Confession: I've started doing drugs at work to increase my productivity.

I'm not proud of it, but it's a fact. After 42 years of clean living I've joined the mainstream of American workers who rely on artificial stimulants to get cranked and stay cranked in order to push out product and make it through the day.

Before anyone calls the cops, you should know it's caffeine I'm talking about, not cocaine, heroin or angel dust.

So far, my personal on-the-job drug intake is limited to coffee. After watching my brother-in-law die of lung cancer, I doubt I'll ever smoke.

In an era where managers cut costs by milking more production from fewer and fewer workers, the workers need an edge, any edge. Coffee may be mine.

After years of casual observation I'm convinced that caffeine and nicotine — two powerful but legal drugs — are the chemical foundation that props up the American economy. Deprive workers of coffee and cigarettes and the whole economic house of cards will topple and crash.

And I'm even more convinced that my coffee-swilling, chain-smoking colleagues enjoy a significant performance advantage over me and other non-users.

Don't buy it? Listen to a pro.

"Both of those drugs, caffeine and nicotine, increase performance," says Dr. Stanley Glick, chairman of the Department of Pharmacology and Neuroscience at Albany Medical College. "Nicotine has been shown to improve learning and memory and caffeine increases attention."

There, smokers and coffee drinkers are more alert and focused. And they absorb more information.

Glick doesn't stop there. He says that users of caffeine and nicotine "may have a big advantage" in workplace productivity compared to their non-using colleagues.

A few weeks ago I was a non-using colleague.

For years I moved to nature's rhythms. In my days B.M.C.E. (Before My Coffee Era) I woke gradually and became more alert and productive as the hours ticked away. Most days I'd start hitting on all cylinders by late morning before beginning a gradual taper about mid-afternoon.

In B.M.C.E. days I even felt a sort of mild pity for friends and colleagues who limped through the day on the twin crutches on nicotine and caffeine.

Now I realize they were never limping.

They blow into work pin-eyed and torqued up on three cups of java and twice as many cigarettes.

They tear through the day devouring assignments and asking for more.

They need only occasional breaks to stoke up and keep going.

They blow me away.

So I joined them, the users.

My own experiment in on-the-job drug use began about a month ago.

Now every morning I shuffle off the elevator, hang a right and drift over to the gourmet coffee stand.

I plunk my coins on the counter and soon I'm mixing cream and sugar into a cup of "Breakfast Blend — For the perfect first cup. A blend of two very full-bodied aromatic coffees."

Within minutes I begin to feel it at the back of my skull, the dzzzt-dzzzt neon snap of chemically goosed neurons crackling into action.

Soon the caffeine is snaking though my blood stream and I feel the need to call people, interview sources, talk to editors, buttonhole policy makers.

Right now I've got my hands wrapped around a go-cup of "Kenyan AA — A snappy coffee with a distinctive winey flavor and a lingering aftertaste."

Snappy doesn't begin to describe this little brew.

My fingertips are tingling and my toes are tapping thanks to Kenyan AA's liquid thunderclap.

Although it's too early in my personal caffeine experiment for any conclusive results, I do feel with each passing day that I'm closer to being on a level playing field with my colleagues.

I'm more energetic.

I'm outlining a novel.

I'm talking to shadowy sources in dark parking garages.

I'm bopping to the beat.

Now if only I could get some sleep.

Violette covers state government for Ottaway News Service. Readers may send their comments to Ottaway News Service, Press Room, The Capitol, Albany, New York, 12224.

Your voices in government

—In Washington—

Rep. John McHugh
24th Congressional District
Room 416
Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-4611
(518) 563-1406

Rep. Gerald Solomon
22nd Congressional District
2265 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-5614
(518) 477-2703

Sen. Alfonse D'Amato
520 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-6542

Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan
Room SR-464
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-4451

—In Albany—

Sen. Ronald Stafford
45th Senatorial District
Room 502, Capitol
Albany, N.Y. 12247
Phone: (518) 455-2811
(518) 561-2430

Assemblyman Chris Ortloff
110th Assembly District
Room 450
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248
Phone: (518) 455-5943
(518) 562-1986
(518) 483-9930

Assemblyman James P. King
109th Assembly District
Room 722
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248
Phone: (518) 455-5565
(518) 792-4546

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