The Works
Protecting Daley in the name of election reform

Our Town
The big whoop over a whooping crane

Our Town
Let's Hear It for the Loving Wimpy Jesus

The Works
A new breed of spy novel

PLUS
A blow for student journalists, Liz Armstrong goes to NextFest,
more than you ever wanted to know about toothpaste, and more.

by Todd Dills

CHICAGO READER
Let’s Hear It for the Loving, Wimpy Jesus

With *The Rapture Exposed* out in paperback this week, Barbara Rossing is about to enter round two in her battle with the Left Behind people.

By Todd Dills

Most likely nobody you know has read one, but more than 50 million books in the Left Behind series have sold in the past decade. Six of the 12 apocalyptic thrillers by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins have entered the New York Times best-seller list at number one. LaHaye is influential in more direct ways too: in the run-up to the 2000 election he co-led the Committee to Restore American Values, a group of evangelicals who subjected Republican candidates to a questionnaire to test their allegiance to the right-wing agenda. A former Baptist minister, he cofounded the Council for National Policy, the Concerned Women of America (headed by his wife, Beverly), and the California branch of the Moral Majority, all political Christian organizations, after leaving the pulpit in the early 80s. He advocates what amounts to theocratic government for the U.S. in his 2001 work of nonfiction, *Mind Siege: The Battle for Truth*. The Left Behind series and assorted spin-offs (graphic novels, Bible covers, a children’s series) are estimated to bring in at least $100 million a year, which LaHaye channels back into the Christian right. The books novelize a not-too-cheery interpretation of the Bible, much of it based on the book of Revelation, in which Jesus Christ returns to earth and, in an event known as the Rapture, takes the true believers to heaven. He leaves everyone else behind to suffer seven years of chaos then fight the Antichrist in the final war of Armageddon. Then he comes back again to finish off the evildoers and save those who’ve seen the light since his last visit. The first book in the series, *Left Behind*, was published in 1995, one year after Barbara Rossing joined the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in Hyde Park, where she’s now tenured. When she spoke in churches or in the classroom about Revelation, inevitably people would ask her what she thought of the novel. She didn’t read it until ’98 or ’99, and she didn’t think much of it. “It’s like a disaster movie with Bible verses thrown around.” continued on page 16
Licensed to Chill

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In the Pest Camp

Heather Kenyon’s June 17 cover story, “Preservationist, or Pest for Short,” was compelling; I wanted to read more so I went to Marty Hackl’s Web site and found some glaring inconsistencies with his public persona.

The Reader article went on at some length about Van Bergen and the fact that Hackl once owned a Van Bergen historic home. What the article neglected to say, or what Hackl did not volunteer, was that he never gave a historic easement on his home. It is common practice for people concerned with preservation to grant easements to a not-for-profit entity such as LPCI, or in Hackl’s case, to the Oak Park-River Forest Historical Society. On Hackl’s site he writes about his historic home in anticipation of selling it and says, “Also a great buyer incentive is being offered: Sellers have left the ownership open to assist in the transaction, for the buyer to donate a preservation easement to the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. Such an easement could be worth up to an estimated $120,000 in federal income tax deductions.”

A historic easement would guarantee that the building would stand forever and never be threatened by development. Once an easement is granted, the mortgage is then encumbered, and the value of the property diminishes. The federal income tax deduction should offset the amount the property is diminished by. However, these homes are harder to sell and take a special buyer to see the value of historic preservation.

What I find troubling is that Hackl seems to have a sliding scale; on one hand he interprets historic guidelines as dogma and ruthlessly applied to others, while on the other avoiding any financial encumbrance of his own assets.

Another inconsistency was when he said, “Now I’m the bad guy, picking on some poor old women” in the River Forest club. “I really like them and don’t want to hurt them.”

If, since his article appeared, Hackl had to come up with his own list of criteria for his special Web site, he would have to admit that he’s proven that Dick Durbin is as big a chauvinist as any financial encumbrance of his own assets.

With Friends Like These . . .

To the editor:

The Tribune’s initial omission of the FBI torture report at the core of Senator Durbin’s protest got deserved Zorro-like rapiers in Readers headlines: “Tell ‘Em What to Think: But don’t tell ‘em what they’re thinking about” [Hot Type, June 24].

Now, to cover the political as well as journalistic dimension of this story, I suggest an article headed: “Daley Twists Knife: Dems leave Durbin twisting in wind, prisoners twisting in pain, terrorists twisting in delight, Obama twisting in silence.”

Such failures of the “opposition party” actually to oppose only make it easier for the administration to get away with the blatant hypocrisy of: (1) openly meditating torture, (2) releasing Brit Guantanamo prisoners (in a presidential favor to Tony the Lapdog) to go home and blab to the tabloids about torture they experienced, (3) and then turn around to excoriate Democrats and the press for revealing torture practices.

Failing an opposition party, our only hope may lie in a Republican ticket of Senator McCain and Lindsey Graham (R., SC), who have not backed off in criticizing U.S. torture. However, as incitement to terrorism, betrayals of Americanism, and exposure of American servitude to retaliatory torture by future captors, (McCain also offers needed Senate leadership on global warming.)

Moe Shanfield

W. Hollywood

Topic A: The Coverage

Michael Miner [Hot Type, June 24] quotes some details about the alleged abuses at Guantánamo and imagines that he’s proven that Dick Durbin’s comparison of the U.S. forces to Nazis, the gulag, etc is dead-on. In fact, all he’s proven is that he’s as big a historical ignoramus as our esteemed senator, unless he thinks that at Auschwitz or in the gulag they issued Talmuds to all the Jewish prisoners and the gestapo and OGPU routinely investigated and disciplined camp guards who didn’t respect their prisoners’ basic human rights. Something that’s believable, unworthy of the American system (though considering Guantánamo is in Cuba, it’s a lot closer to the norm there), and still be so far short of the utter inhumanity of the Nazi, Soviet, or Pol Pot regimes that the comparison is obscene, not to mention dumb as a trunk or a Chomsky admirer.

If, since his article appeared, Miner has taken away for psychiatric improvement, been denounced by his own relatives in front of his entire village, or beaten to death in a rickety paddock for being literate, I take back everything I said. Otherwise, read some history before the next time you try to score cheap points off Bush, citizen.

Michael Gebert

With Friends like Miners?

Michael Miner replies:

Among other details that escaped good citizen Gebert, I wasn’t writing about Bush.
Another Seventh Circuit ruling, another defeat for the press

By Michael Minier

Beware the ruling that "opens with a condescending joke. ‘Controversy began to swirl,’ federal appellate judge Frank Easterbrook wrote airyly, ‘when Jeni Porche became editor of the Innovator, the student newspaper at Governor’s State University. None of the articles concerned the apostrophe missing from the University’s name. Instead the students tackled meaterier fare.’ Easterbrook went on for 12 more pages, but the first paragraph announced that Porche had lost. I first a Amendment squealable started by student journalists is easy to shrug off—what’s at issue but the license kids to scold the faculty and mock the administration?” Yet Jeni Porche was 28 and Margaret Hosty 33 back in May 2000, when the two graduate students became editors of the Innovator.

By various accounts, GSU was a mess back then. The Rockford Register Star would soon call it “one of the most troubled universities in the state system,” pointing out that the student body was shrinking and “at least four of its programs have been denied accreditation or offered without proper approval.” Porche and Hosty took on the powers that be of Northern Illinois University’s name. Instead the administration department would come to our printing plant, read the student newspaper’s contents, and approve the paper for printing by us.”

The editors rejected these terms, which Richards claimed to have told Carter sounded illegal. But it was the university that paid his bill, and he didn’t want to run off another issue and win up eating the cost. The Innovator didn’t appear again. As Porche and Hosty saw it, a public institution had squelched the press. By joining a student reporter, they promptly took GSU to court, where federal judge Suzanne Conlon narrowed a long list of defendants to Carter, whom she said should stand trial. “Defendants concede that Innovator serves as a public forum,” Conlon reasoned, and in a public forum “the state’s right to limit expression is sharply circumscribed.”

Carter’s been trying to get out from under ever since. The heart of her argument—argued the office of Attorney General Lisa Madigan—is that thanks to the notorious Hazelwood case of 1988 she had reason to believe she was doing her duty and therefore deserved what the law calls qualified immunity. Two years ago a three-judge panel of the Seventh Circuit unanimously rejected that argument. But the full appeals court decided to rehear Carter’s motion to dismiss and last week six of the other ten judges joined Easterbrook in ruling for Carter. “A terrible decision,” says Jim Killam, adviser to the Northern Star of Northern Illinois University. “It’s going to give some administrators the right to censor first and ask questions later.”

Killam has been watching this case from the beginning. As president of the Illinois College Press Association when the suit was filed, he led an investigation that concluded the GSU administration had “acted inappropriately, and probably illegally, with blatant disregard for students’ First Amendment rights.” Porche and Hosty were anything but grateful to Killam. He’d got on their bad side by noting “several ethical lapses” of those critics today and they’ll argue that the university’s high schools to expose students to serious newspapers is one reason why they don’t read them.

Judge Conlon and the three-judge appellate panel found it easy to distinguish Hazelwood from the matter at hand. The GSU paper was extracurricular. Its editors were appointed by a Student Communications Media Board, whose written policy was to let the paper’s staff decide its contents “without interference by school officials.” At GSU they didn’t read them. Judge Conlon and the three-judge appellate panel found it easy to distinguish Hazelwood from the matter at hand. The GSU paper was extracurricular. Its editors were appointed by a Student Communications Media Board, whose written policy was to let the paper’s staff decide its contents “without interference by school officials.”

Dean of student life Patricia Carter argued that thanks to the notorious Hazelwood case she believed she was doing her duty when she saw the student paper had to be approved by administrators for printing.

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and Hosty wangle a hearing from her off the hook. Unless Porche law with respect to students’ immunity from liability, letting are difficult to understand and thing was. “Many aspects of the uncertainties will be resolved.” “Public officials demonstrate how murky every- apply,” he wrote. “Public officials and Easterbrook wanted to trial. The issue here was whether public forum, Easterbrook felt activities.” Though Judge Conlon even hint at the possibility of an reviewable.”

Byline, chief. We get to every- thing (or consequent) eventually. Besides, after a column on deference is appropriate with courts and the media alike read into the opinions of a divided Supreme Court, their suit is now inside. The Supreme Court, their suit is over. And the college press must beware: Hosty is now inside the gates.

News Bites

Mark Jacob, the Tribune’s foreign and national news national had a smart idea last week. “Farce over Der Fuehrer,” a story he wrote for the Perspective section, demonstrated that “people of all political stripes have been throwing around allegations against Adolf Hitler and the Gestapo for years.” Jacob made a list. On it was North Korea saying Donald Rumsfeld “put Hitler into the shade,” Rumsfeld comparing an Arab terrorist to “Hitler in his bunkers,” Senator Phil Gramm calling a Democratic tax propos- “right out of Nazi Germany.” Jacob said Dick Durbin should have learned a long time ago that people who played the “Reich card ... have looked darn silly.” But have they? In Wur Mde Easy, a new book by media critic Norman Solomon, there’s a chapter called “This Guy Is a Modern-Day Hitler”; it begins, “Evil that warrants the large- scale killing of war needs a face.” Solomon’s point is that involving the Führer primes the pump of old-fashioned notion of private property. The next day Dennis Byrne marveled, “How odd that liberals on the U.S. Supreme Court have come down on the side of influential corporations and their profits.” Those liberal judges know how to be simultane- ously anti-private property and pro-corporate profits. Kelo v. New London, the eminent domain case that made the two Tribune columnists, their paper’s editorial page, and lots of other people very unhappy last week, shows how little “liberal” and “conservative” mean in the context of constitutional law. Justice John Paul Stevens, who wrote the opinion for the 5-4 majority that voted to uphold Connecticut’s supreme court, probably thought he was applying state law and federal precede- as he found them. (Of course the Supreme Court majority always claims to be applying precedents as it finds them.) In his dissent, Clarence Thomas admitted as much. Today’s decision, he wrote, “is simply the latest in a string of our cases construing the Public Use Clause to be a virtual nullity.” Stevens invited states unhappy with the court’s position on eminent domain to write stiffer restrictions of their own. Thomas said to hell with the states: “A court owes no deference to a leg- islature’s judgment concerning the quintessentially legal ques- tion of whether the government can take private property, or the right to use, the taken property.”

George Will saw the irony. In a June 24 column, he noted that conservatives had been rooting for “judicial activism [to] put a leash on popularly elected local govern- ments.” But the activists lost. Which meant the liberals won? Will thought so. Whatever.

You may now be concluding that all toothpastes are the same. Not so fast. What’s confusing is federal labeling requirements. “Active ingredients” refers to those meant to confer a medical benefit. Others, such as whiteners, may be active concoctions that perform only a cosmetic function and so aren’t men- tioned on the label. That said, the evidence that mar- ques ingredients other than fluoride accomplish any- thing is murky at best. A rundown on some popular ones:

- Whitener. Research by manufacturers says they work, consumers by Rendors among others who play them. Courts are a bit unclear on how you should see your dentist about having your teeth bleached.

- Desensitizing agents. Research on one common ingredient, potassium nitrate, is mixed at best—a 2001 review concluded it’s of questionable use. However, not all do. Possibly you refer to the fact that most tooth- pastes use sodium fluoride (NaF) for cavity control even some sodium monofluorophosphate (SMF). A few also include ingredients to control gingivitis (infamed gums) and tooth sensitivity, but, oddly, manufacturers seem to want to keep this a secret. To make teeth whiter, a common toothpaste claim, your teeth may chip, a risk which go, and which toothpaste is best?

Toothpaste, drinking water, etc. Virtually all U.S. toothpastes contain a fluoride compound, either NaF or SMF. In the early 1990s a few researchers claimed NaF was better at cavity control than SMF, but the current scientific consensus is that both are equally good. The original decay fighter, stannous fluoride, intro- duced in Great Britain in 1955 (remember Fluoristan, fellow geezers?), is seldom used any longer. The one recent attempt (Extra- plex) to introduce a 1,500 ppm toothpaste here entails an expensive federal approval process, not required of products in the lower range, and the one recent attempt (Ultra- Strength Aim in the late 80’s) wasn’t con- spicuously successful. But come on. Given the explosion of brand variations in recent years, is this the time for tooth- paste hypesters to be telling themselves: Eh, what we’ve got is good enough?

Comments, questions? Take it up with Cecil on the Straight Dope Message Board, www.straightdope.com, or write him at the Chicago Reader, 1 E. Illinois, Chicago 60611. Cecil’s most recent compendium of knowledge, Triumph of the Straight Dope, is available at bookstores everywhere.

Several months ago I posed a question concerning the confusing (and potentially misleading) statistics placed on toothpastes, which my paranoid mind attributes to advertising spin and possibly outright lies by toothpaste makers. Wanting to get the most fluoride bang for my buck, I trusted only my answer, because I know firsthand just how to experimentally (and replace) one’s teeth. I consistently check your column and understand that not all questions are answered, and that some questions are follow-ups on previous material. But today I see a brand-new article on coprophagia, of all things. I am hoping that a serious question didn’t fall on ears dead to all but the sensational or shocking. —Johnny Henson, via e-mail

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The Incumbency Protection Act of 2005

Despite recent “reform,” it still takes more nominating signatures to run for mayor of Chicago than it does to run for governor of the whole state.

By Ben Joravsky

In May the General Assembly quietly approved a bill that cut in half the number of petition signatures a Chicago mayoral candidate needs to make the ballot, from 25,000 to 12,500. The backers of the bill, which Governor Blagojevich is expected to sign, say it makes the city’s election law fairer, but local independents aren’t rejoicing. “If they say it’s reform don’t believe them,” says Jay Stone, a political activist whose father is 50th Ward alderman Bernard Stone. “The election laws are there to help incumbents stay in power.”

In 1995 mayoral candidates needed only around 3,000 signatures—the exact number fluctuated because it was based on a percentage of the people who’d voted in the previous election. That year the General Assembly adopted a law that eliminated mayoral primaries in Chicago and made the election nonpartisan—all candidates had to run without party labels. If no candidate got more than 50 percent of the vote, there’d be a runoff between the top two candidates. But state legislators didn’t specify how many nominating signatures mayoral candidates needed to get on the ballot, and the issue wound up before the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners, the three-person body that oversees local elections. The commissioners eventually decided that running in a citywide campaign was roughly the same as running in a statewide election, which requires around 25,000 nominating signatures. That’s the number they recommended to state legislators, who made it law in 1998.

Independents immediately attacked the legislation. Requiring 25,000 signatures “really isn’t very logical at all,” says Frank Avila, a lawyer and independent political activist. “There are many more people in Illinois than in Chicago.” And many more in New York City, where a mayoral candidate needs only 7,000 signatures. In 2002 Avila sued the Board of Election Commissioners on behalf of four relatively unknown mayoral candidates, though he admits none of them had a chance of defeating Daley. “I didn’t do it as an anti-Daley suit,” he says. “I did it as a prodemocracy suit.”

The suit charged that the 25,000-signature requirement was so difficult to meet it effectively denied candidates access to the ballot. All four plaintiffs made the 2003 ballot, but only because Daley didn’t challenge any of their petition signatures. He probably could have knocked all of them off the ballot if he had—Avila readily concedes that none of them had 25,000 signatures, much less 25,000 legitimate ones. No one counts the signatures unless someone challenges them, and Daley didn’t challenge them because he didn’t need to. Avila dropped the case before a judge decided it, in part because none of his clients had enough money to pay him to pursue it. “The conventional opinion was that Daley was unbeatable,” he says. None of the four even came close. Now Daley’s administration is mired in scandals, and the city’s schools, parks, and public transportation system are broke. Two well-known politicians, con-
gresses Luis Gutierrez and Jesse Jackson Jr., are openly criticizing the administration and dropping hints that they might run against Daley in 2007. At the moment he looks a little vulnerable, so why would the General Assembly, whose leaders are Daley allies, change the election law to benefit mayoral challengers? Steve Brown, a spokesman for House Speaker Michael Madigan, says the new law has nothing to do with the ins and outs of mayoral politics. “It’s an effort to bring consistency to signature requirements for candidates up and down the ballot,” he says.

None of the politicians I talked to, independents as well as party loyalists, believes this. They point out that the new requirement is not even consistent with the requirement for independents or third-party candidates running for statewide office. Rich Means, a political activist and election-law expert, says the requirement for statewide candidates is “based on a percentage of the votes in the last election. It’s one percent of the number of people who voted in the last statewide election or 25,000 signatures—whichever is lower.”

If the new law had been consistent with that, mayoral candidates would have to gather only around 4,800 signatures on their nominating petitions for the 2007 election, since 483,993 ballots were cast in the last one. Means also points out that a Republican or Democrat running for statewide office needs only 5,000 signatures to make the ballot. “Mayor Daley needs more signatures to get on the ballot to run for reelection than Governor Blagojevich needs,” he says. “You figure this out.”

Most observers assume the 25,000 requirement was cut to benefit Daley. “Let’s be realistic, if they [Daley and Madigan] didn’t want it to happen it wouldn’t have happened,” says one election-law expert who works for the Democratic Party. “So certainly they were for it. I’m not sure why.”

Means thinks Madigan and Daley realized the law had to be changed if they wanted to fend off another suit like Avila’s. Jay Stone agrees. “They want to keep the number of signatures as high as they can to keep people from running, but they don’t want to keep it so high that it won’t survive a court challenge,” he says. “It’s a classic machine move. It’s not reform. It’s protection—incumbent protection.”

As Stone points out, it won’t be easy for challengers to collect even 12,500 good nominating signatures. For one thing, candidates aren’t allowed to start collecting until 90 days before the filing date. For another, Chicago’s election code is a thicket of rules and regulations. “Some rules are obvious, others are not,” says Mat Delort, another election-law expert. “Names have to be signed—you can’t print them. You have to actually live where you’re registered to vote. You can’t sign nominating petitions for more than one candidate in a race.” And because voters can sign only one petition, candidates with big organizations—usually incumbents—have a big advantage.

Delort figures that independent candidates often need three times the required number of signatures to survive a challenge. “There are a couple of rules of thumb,” he says. “If you have your people circulate door-to-door with poll sheets in their hands in a stable neighborhood—meaning residents have lived there a long time—then you need one-and-one-half times the number of required signatures. But if you’re circulating at the Jewel on the north lakefront in a transient neighborhood you need maybe three times that number. I’ve seen politicians with two to three times the number filed get knocked off the ballot.”

The election-law experts I talked to assume Daley will have his experts carefully scan the nominating petitions of anyone who dares run against him. “It’s the first line of attack,” says Means. “You have to expect it.” Of course Daley’s opponents can challenge his petitions just as easily, but most observers say that’s a hopeless cause. “You can’t knock Daley off—they know what they’re doing,” says Stone. “Each precinct captain goes door-to-door and collects signatures and reports to the district leader, who reports to a ward secretary. They check those signatures against the polling sheet. Each page has to be notarized. They don’t even have the same notaries notarize every page.”

Means is less concerned about the new law than other observers. “I know that 25,000—and probably 12,500—signatures are way out of line, but I have to say these requirements give me a goal,” he says. “They help you figure out which precinct workers are real and which ones are blowing smoke. It tunes up your campaign—shows the world that you’re for real. We have to admit, if you can’t raise 12,500 good signatures you can’t possibly win the election.”
I Have Seen the Future and It Is Fucking Scary

NextFest puts a bright face on cloning, artificial intelligence, and environmental villainy.

By Liz Armstrong

ormally, Navy Pier is one of the last places I’d visit voluntarily, but during the zombie days of summer I’ll do anything for free-air-conditioning. Tickets for Wired magazine’s annual high-tech extravaganza, NextFest, were $15, but I kept my eyes locked on my cell phone like an oblivious asshole while pretending to text-message someone and kept walking until I blended in with the crowd.

Right away I noticed that General Electric, one of the festi-vation’s sponsors, had taken advantage of the opportunity to polish its meme. GE hyped its upcoming—uh, I mean, new—technolutions, releasing its first fully functional hybrid vehicle, a huge, clunky, and expensive hybrid that makes polluters pay for the messes they make.

General Motors followed suit, making broad assertions about the future of cars fueled by hydrogen, presenting concept vehicles in sedan, sport, and SUV models. They passed out little cardboard flyers embedded with wildflower seeds—just bump them, plant in soil, keep moist, and watch them sprout. Each flyer bore a picture of a hydrogen-fueled concept car, the AUTO- nomy, and a quote from Larry Burns, GM’s VP of R and D: “GM is committed to taking the automobile out of the environment.” But General Motors is responsible for the ridiculous, gas-guzzling Hummer—the world’s biggest FUV—and has been slow to embrace alternative power technology, releasing its first fully functional hybrid vehicle, a huge pickup truck with comparatively high gas mileage, only this year.

The rest of the exhibitors likewise evoked a vision of the future wherein technology will solve all our problems. Auto-aero cross-breeds will let us fly over traffic jams. Our clothes will change shape in response to changes in temperature, noise, and air pollution. New methods of surveillance are already using small-scale triangulation to help us find our keys; home-security systems don’t just tell us someone’s in the house, they also detect the intruder’s race and gender. A California company with the inspired name Genetic Savings & Clone eased the crowd into the idea of playing God by disarming us with an almost sickening vision of cuteness: two identical cats we met that day: Tahini, the original, and Baba Ganoush, the clone. In the white space under this image was a message reminiscent in both font and tone of the De Beers engagement ring ads: A CLONE SAYS YOU’D DO IT ALL AGAIN. It was like something out of Blade Runner.

That movie was, of course, based on Philip K. Dick’s book Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? It’s still one of the best pieces of literature about the dangers of artificial intelligence—which made Hanson Robotics’ NextFest offering the most depressing of all. The smarty-pansters at Hanson constructed a computer “brain” and filled it with all of Dick’s writings, then threw it in speech and facial recognition, nervous tics, and sophisticated language-processing software. They built a physical replica of the man using 36 servomotors and a proprietary polymer called Frubber that looks just like real skin, then stuck him in a little room modeled after Dick’s old writing den—avocado shag carpet, Sears Electric Twelve typewriter loaded up with paper, bottle of Cutty Sark. I didn’t like waiting in line for half an hour to sit with him on the couch, so I went around to the window, leaned in, and asked, “Are you all done?”

He turned his head to look at me, blinked, and said, “What does this refer to?”

I asked again, a little louder. “Mr. Dick, are you sad?” His eyes twitched and he fumbled with his fingers. His lips moved, but nothing came out.

Last Thursday I was walking by the Reckless Records in Wicker Park when a dude in a ratty, curly black wig and white aviator shades started talking to me. “Hey,” he said. “Do you like PBR?”

“Sometimes,” I said.

“Then come to this party.” He handed me a lime green photo-copied flyer with hand names in cutout letters like a kidnapper’s ransom note.

It was just random enough to intrigue me. I headed to the place on Saturday night a little after 11, all geared up for an old-fashioned summertime punk-rock shindig. The huge West Town apartment had all its lights on and was lousy with lake messengers wearing cleats and funny little hats. A huge tattooed burler of a guy sat me down and started explaining why he was a perfect subject for a newspaper article. He told me about his band, which performs songs about gentrification and “all the negative shit that happens through street life.” He asked me for my number: “We can talk about this at length. I have great things to say.” When I wouldn’t give it to him, he handed me his business card, which advertised his tattoo-artist gig. I told him I had a boyfriend. “Oh, come on,” he said. “He doesn’t have to know.” Right before I walked away he made a request: “Don’t make me look like an asshole.”

I knew only one person at the party, and not very well. So I walked around by myself, looking for a place to stop over. I stopped in one room with cardboard honeycomb and egg-crate foam stapled to the walls. “Are you looking at the art?” said the host, who introduced himself as Johnny. Not seeing any, I said no. “You were looking at this stuff like it was art,” he said, pointing to all the cardboard and foam. Then he explained to me, very carefully, that it was for sound absorption.

At midnight three cops pulled into the parking lot of the bank next door and turned on their lights. Everyone gathered in the living room and sat still, barely talking. Johnny left for a couple of minutes, then came back, visibly shaken. “Sorry everyone,” he yelled. “Party’s over.”

I wasn’t aware it had begun.
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A Secret Visitor

Why you didn’t hear a peep about the first whooping crane to land in Chicago in more than a century

By Stephen Longmire

On Sunday, May 8, Marc Monaghan was in Washington Park looking for dog walkers to photograph. As he wandered past Lorado Taft’s Fountain of Time he saw a big white bird with a long beak and a flash of red on its forehead standing in the lagoon.

Monaghan, the 56-year-old dean of students at the University of Chicago Lab School’s middle school and a photographer for the Hyde Park Herald, was pretty sure the bird was a whooping crane, North America’s tallest bird and one of its rarest. “I’m a bit of a birder,” he says. “I mean, I own a set of binoculars and a bird book. I’m sort of like a social drinker—I don’t go out on bird counts, but I do know they exist.”

He saw colored bands on the bird’s legs and figured it must have escaped from a zoo—the only wild flock, with some 200 of the five-to-six-foot birds, migrates between Texas and Alberta. Still, the bird was unusual, so he started taking pictures. “I photographed it for 45 minutes,” he says, “found some people walking dogs, then came back and photographed it some more.”

Whooping cranes are notoriously shy, but this one seemed less perturbed by Monaghan than by a Canada goose that evidently thought it owned the lagoon—it kept hissing at the crane. Then a fight broke out between two men in the street next to the lagoon. “It was some stupid guy-car thing,” Monaghan says. “They had to be separated, then the guys got back in their cars.” But now he was worried that the bird was going to get hurt.

He went home and called the neighborhood birding expert but got no answer. He tried the police. “They got interested,” he says. “Finally they got me the number for the first-aid station at the Lincoln Park Zoo. That’s when I gave up.”

In the evening Monaghan phoned his friend David Graber, a naturalist at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in California, and said he thought he’d spotted a whooping crane. Graber told him a network of conservation organizations, in partnership with several government agencies, had been working since 2001 to create an eastern flock of the endangered birds, teaching them to migrate between national wildlife refuges in Wisconsin and Florida by leading them with an ultralight aircraft—a strategy made famous by the movie Fly Away Home.

Monaghan remembered that a few years back he’d taken his eighth graders on a trip to Baraboo, Wisconsin, where they’d visited the International Crane Foundation. He went to the ICF Web site and saw that it was one of the partners in the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, the group trying to establish the new flock. He found a link that said “Report a Crane Sighting” and sent a description of the bird. “Let me know if this really is a whooping crane,” he wrote. “It’s in an urban area with lots of cats and dogs and a few not-so-nice people.”

Anne Lacy promptly wrote back that he’d probably seen a sandhill crane. Sandhills, which are smaller and darker than whoopers, were once endangered too. But they’ve bounced back and are now fairly common in the northern midwest. Monaghan e-mailed one of his photos to Lacy. “Fantastic!” she fired back. “I love the digital age!” She said the bird was indeed a whooping crane, then swore him to secrecy: “Our main concern now is too many overeager folks getting too close and really bothering this bird.”

ICF staff could tell from Monaghan’s photos that the bird he’d found was number 18-04, a male crane, then swore him to secrecy: “Our main concern now is too many overeager folks getting too close and really bothering this bird.”

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This spring 18-04 was the last crane to leave Florida, taking off alone on April 18. It was spotted in northern Indiana on April 30, but no one saw it again until Monaghan did a week later. That was the first visit a whooping crane had made to Chicago in over a century.

Once Monaghan knew how remarkable the bird he’d seen was, he was uneasy about publishing any of his pictures in the Herald while the crane was still in Hyde Park. “I had an ethical struggle about that,” he says. “Did this bird need less or more attention?”

ICF tried to ensure that as few people as possible learned that 18-04 was in the city. A staffer contacted Chuck Westcott of the Chicago Ornithological Society and asked if some of the group’s members would keep an eye on the crane without putting the word out to other birders. Painfully aware of what he’d be denying his fellow birders, Westcott agreed. Meanwhile WCEP staff debated whether they should go to Chicago and capture the young bird in an attempt to spare it possible injury or let nature take its course.

On Monday evening, the day after Monaghan first saw 18-04, Westcott e-mailed ICF that the bird was still in the lagoon near 60th and Cottage Grove and that it “looked to be healthy but apprehensive of the observer.” It was still there the following morning. “While two observers were watching the crane they spotted a King Rail walking along the shoreline,” Westcott e-mailed ICF. “This is a seldom seen bird in these parts. We decided not to post the rail sighting on the internet, as it might bring out some birders who would most likely see the whooper and set off a mad rush.” He said other birders had seen the rail and posted an announcement online a little later, but they didn’t seem to have spotted the far larger crane.

Tuesday night Westcott e-mailed that four ornithological society birders had failed to find the crane that evening. Monaghan had gone looking for the bird that afternoon, but he hadn’t seen it either.

On Wednesday ICF heard that a single whooping crane had been spotted flying north of the city by two reliable Evanston birders, though it had been headed south at the time. A day later a WCEP tracker caught up with 18-04 in southern Wisconsin, and the following Monday it was back at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge—the first whooper to have learned the eastern migration route without human help.

On Wednesday, the same day ICF learned that 18-04 had left Chicago, one of Monaghan’s pictures appeared in the Hyde Park Herald. [snip]
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CHICAGO READER | JULY 1, 2005 | SECTION ONE 15
Rossing came to believe that the Left being accessible. "I've become more interested in writing my dissertation on who disagree with LaHaye and need someone to represent those Revelation, I never thought I'd be
comes up. "When I first started
studied the political activities of
Exposed: The Message of Hope in
a book of her own: The Rapture
the Book of Revelation
Antichrist, and in such a public
thinking so much about the
church really needs a public voice
way," she says. "But I think the
question of the Rapture. She's
the leading voice of reason on the
Revelation, others from all over
disparate verses (some from
events. He pieced together
date 19th
century England and was
brought to America by a
preacher named John Nelson
Darby, who read the Bible as a
kind of playbook for future
Rossing says. "Because then as the
environment or anything gets
worse, people will somehow think
this is what the Bible says."
The theology behind end-time
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fellowship. She finished her master’s and was ordained in 1982 and went on to teach and serve as pastor at Holden Village and at Bethany Lutheran Church in Minneapolis throughout the 80s. In 1998 she earned a doctorate in theology from Harvard, where she concentrated on the New Testament and early Christianity, and then moved to Chicago to teach at the Lutheran School. “I had other job offers,” she says, “but this school had an excellent reputation. It has a PhD program, so I have PhD students, some of whom are international students who go back to their countries and become world leaders. So our school really has an important voice.”

The hardcover version of The Rapture Exposed was released to coincide with the publication of the last chapter in the Left Behind story, The Glorious Appearing. 60 Minutes invited Rossing to appear on a Morley Safer segment about the Left Behind books. LaHaye and Jenkins talked about the vast sales they’d racked up being no doubt the Lord’s work. And they talked about America as world leader by divine bequest, about bleeding red, white, and blue. They talked about the liberal manufacture of a “loving, wimpy Jesus.”

During Rossing’s few minutes on the air, she responded to the image of the destructive, avenging Christ so crucial to the Rapture script, saying, “You can piece together that vengeful warrior Jesus, you can find him here and there, but the heart of the Bible, the overwhelming message, even of the book of Revelation, is of a nonviolent lamb who conquers not by killing people, but by giving his life.”

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Rossing

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REVIEW BY ZAC THOMPSON

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Lifeline’s musical treatment of E.F. Benson’s Queen Lucia is as it should be: lighter than air.

Queen Lucia

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V. S. Puff Piece

Lifeline’s musical treatment of E.F. Benson’s Queen Lucia is as it should be: lighter than air.

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Beyond Bond

A new breed of spy novel questions the very conventions of the spy novel.

By Mike Newirth

I n the 1947 noir The Lady From Shanghai, Orson Welles (playing an Irish merchant sailor laid low by Rita Hayworth) sums up the espionage writers’ creed: “It’s a bright, guilty world.” Where classic crime noir invari-
ably shot for the gutter, writers specializing in intrigue—incul-

ding Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, and especially Ian Fleming—aimed higher, fasci-

nated with bureaucracies and cabals and the doings of the wealthy and compromised. The narratives were well-suited to the shadier excesses of the cold war, which at its peak was a rich source of material, providing a reliable villain, lots of nifty tech-

nological innovations, and well-

established tropes of pursuit, capture, cross, and double-cross. After the fall of the Soviet Union many critics observed that John le Carré and numerous lesser specialists in intrigue—include-

Harry Mathews’s My Life in CIA is being marketed as an “autobi-

ographical novel,” an un-

standable approach given Mathews’s standing as the sole American member of the Oulipo, a French writers’ league that promotes the application of math and puzzles to the cre-

ation of fiction.

Initially the novel seems straightforward. In bone-dry prose, “Harry” describes his life as a creative, well-to-do Parisian flaneur, biding his time between bistro meals and assignations (the tone and situation are both reminiscent of James Salter’s searching 1967 erotic novel A Sport and a Pastime) until peo-

ple start mistaking him for an agent or informant of the CIA—a charge leveled surprisingly often in those days at idle young men of means living abroad.

Mathews skillfully captures the gloomy European political atmosphere of the era, with bitter memories of the ‘68 strikes weighing on everyone’s strikes weighing on everyone’s mind and thuggish cliques of fascists and communists still stirring up trouble, eager for tar-

gets to denounce. It’s this air of humorless partisanship and sour betrayal that provokes the prankish libertine to reinvent himself as the spy his friends suspect he is.

Matthews reveals, in asides to the reader, details of his real-life literary arc—his pride in being elected to the Oulipo, for instance, and his involvement with a new literary magazine, Locus Solus. Things get compli-

cated when these distinct narra-

tive elements fuse. Harry prac-

tices fake “dead drops,” making sure he’s observed by nosy acquaintances, and engages an enigmatic Asian woman to weave him a shawl purportedly containing a Siberian map. Then he starts a travel agency as a front and begins tweaking those he meets while doing his imper-

sonation of a “company man” with the organizationally obses-

sive literary devices favored by the Oulipo. This unnerves his circle, and it keeps the reader on tenterhooks, since we don’t really know if his flights of fancy are intended to distract us from the implausibility of his spy story or if he’s just putting us on.

Mathews seems immensely nostalgic for the sense of action and import specific to the back-

room politics of the era. Soon his antics (which include chalking nonsense signs on buildings and skulking in alleys) attract both censure from leftist acquaintances and outright business, ham-tongued thugs, and at least one real operative, who worries Harry all too readily into the fold.

Throughout he seems intent on creating the aesthetic effect of a spy story without actually writ-

ing one—moments of plausible skullduggery and tension, as when he’s invited to the Russian embassy to spar with a presumed KGB agent, notwithstanding. But when he realizes that his Walter Mittys-esque spy play has over-

lapped with actual espionage atrocities, namely American intel-

gence involvement in the Chilean military coup of 1973, the moral core of the story solidifies. “I kept hoping the situation would change, knowing it wouldn’t,” he writes. “The U.S. was going to recognize the new Chilean government…./I’d made myself party to a monstrosity.”

While Harry’s wealth and American passport allow him to play spy without much personal consequence, the hero of Arnoldo Correa’s Spy’s Fate can escape neither the manda-

tory nationalism nor the per-

sonal blowback of a career in

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NEWER SPY NOVELS AREN’T LIKELY TO BE THE LITERARY COMFORT FOOD THE OLD ONES WERE.
Books

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espionage. Correa, considered a founder of Cuban noir, began publishing in 1966, and his early short fiction was favored by Castro. The 2002 publication of Spy's Fate in the U.S. was his first English translation; it's just been reissued in paperback. It's a prescient look at spycraft not as the fetishized means to a Bondian lifestyle, but rather as the thin edge of the wedge in relations between hostile nations.

The novel opens with a veteran's homecoming. Carlos Manuel of the Cuban intelligence service has spent three years pursuing a mission in Africa, and upon returning in 1994 he finds his homeland badly hobbled by the Soviet Union's dissolution. He wants to slow down and spend quality time with his grown kids. Instead, he's startled to find them not just sullen but building a raft for the risky Florida crossing. Correa uses a rambling third-person omniscient voice that's out of style in American literary fiction but works well here to make 1990s Cuba accessible. Manuel is both shrewd and a patriot, and he realizes the end of Soviet patronage has transformed both his nation and his life's work into a house of cards. Fearing for his children on their flimsy raft, he pulls some strings among his intelligence cronies and steals a motorboat to pursue them. Soon enough the weary, aging spy finds himself trying to prove and provide for his children in the U.S. from behind bars. The FBI and CIA sniff at his trail, even as he languishes in a detention center disguised as an ordinary refugee, but eventually he slips away from his captors—though not before igniting the fury of Sidney King, a vengeful CIA manager who lost a leg ten years earlier to a bomb that may or may not have been planted by Manuel. King is now so bitter that he schemes, Bolton-like, against his own subordinates.

Revenge propels the plot as it sprawls into kidnapping, faked deaths, and operational ties between the CIA and conservative Cuban exiles (a cold-war-fiction chestnut, as in James Ellroy's American Tabloid). But Correa invests his characters with enough detail and color that the reader is absorbed by the conflict between Manuel's cynical yet loyal cronies, the "true believers" among Castro's military who want to make an example out of their ex-spook, and the CIA's middle-aged cold warriors who (with the exception of the payback-obsessed King) are just killing time until Cuba's collapse. Correa further humanizes the stock narrative of escape and evasion by incorporating a domestic subplot: while Manuel is hiding out in Vermont waiting to cross into Canada and retrieve a Swiss passport, he rents a room from a single mother who's being stalked by a local prosecutor and finds time to exact skillful retribution on her behalf, an efficient bit of spy sadism that harks back to the original Bond novels.

When Manuel returns once again to Cuba, his actions become a political litmus test for both his fellow spies and loyalists within Cuba's deteriorating military infrastructure. The irony of Manuel's career—that he has dedicated his life and skills to serving a tin-pot socialist regime now in terminal decline—remains, despite all the twists of Correa's elaborate plot, the novel's solemn central thread. Both My Life in CIA and Spy's Fate are published by lefty independent presses, but despite their quirks the y're essentially thrillers, as compelling as anything by le Carré. Spy's Fate is an absorbing and oddly relevant potboiler, while Mathews performs the valuable service of capturing the myopic obsession with the accoutrements of spymanship that's led real-life spooks to their current state of ineffectuality. What distinguishes both is the dissolution of the covert, ritualized social contract forever epitomized by rows of unnamed stars on a wall in Langley, Virginia; that uncredited sacrifice will be honored by a nation's ideals. In a time when America's intelligence corps has been stained by outsourcing scandals, torture, and the practice of "extraordinary rendition," we shouldn't be surprised when the spies whose exploits entertain us turn unreliable and jaundiced too.
in his community, and people should take issue with him. I was surprised Hackl was so candid about waiting for an old man to die so he could personally profit from buying his home. Hackl is the worst kind of bottom-feeder in the real estate market. So you ask, preservationist or pest? Hackl is neither; he is an opportunistic hack.

I am so happy I live in the city and not out there with those real estate crazy suburbanites.

Brenda Daley

Heather Kenny replies:

Hackl says he decided not to donate an easement, which allows owners to place certain restrictions on property in perpetuity, for two reasons. First, the house is located in Oak Park’s Frank Lloyd Wright Historic District, which gives the structure some protections; it can’t, for example, be demolished. Second, he suggested an easement as an incentive for a buyer because even though he couldn’t get much of a tax benefit from it, a buyer with a higher income could.

Ink Well
by Ben Tausig

Chain of Commands

ACROSS
1. “Howl’s Moving Castle” frame
4. Pants measurement
10. Whacks
14. My _____, Vietnam
16. Big ball
17. Speak to the owner?
18. Vehicle safety feature
20. Commoner
22. Former Gemini competitor: abbr.
23. Pat of Sculboy
24. Born a bit
26. Matching phrase
28. Velvet finish?
29. Quick chicken-cooking method
33. Imposes, as a tax
34. Dunked, maybe
38. “You can say that again!”
39. Wild movie ratings
40. Mix nibake
41. Mexican music
44. Poisonivy and poison oak

DOWN
1. Keep time, perhaps
2. Husband of a countess
3. Candy with a hole
4. Discount rack abbr.
5. Own sign substance
6. Ill humor
7. Electric swimmers
8. Year abroad
9. “Pimp My Ride” network
10. Shrik, e.g.
11. Story with a point
12. Love interest
13. It’s a wrap
15. Prepare, when the end is nigh
16. Big ball
17. Speak to the owner?
18. Vehicle safety feature
20. Commoner
22. Former Gemini competitor: abbr.
23. Pat of Sculboy
24. Born a bit
26. Matching phrase
28. Velvet finish?
29. Quick chicken-cooking method
33. Imposes, as a tax
34. Dunked, maybe
38. “You can say that again!”
39. Wild movie ratings
40. Mix nibake
41. Mexican music
44. Poisonivy and poison oak

LAST WEEK: SUMMER COMBING

1. Keep time, perhaps
2. Husband of a countess
3. Candy with a hole
4. Discount rack abbr.
5. Own sign substance
6. Ill humor
7. Electric swimmers
8. Year abroad
9. “Pimp My Ride” network
10. Shrik, e.g.
11. Story with a point
12. Love interest
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Letters

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