

POINTS OF VIEW

Feathers fly over 'family values' in show

LIGHTEN UP, FOLKS! IT'S ONLY A TV SHOW!

Whew! That felt good. I've been wanting to say it for almost a week now. Ever since little Danny Quayle, the vice president of the United States, blamed Murphy Brown for the riots in Los Angeles...

OK, so he didn't actually blame her for the riots, but he was blathering about the erosion of family values and the family structure and then he jumped on television for its contribution to this situation.

Specifically he blasted the now-in-famous season closer of "Murphy Brown," in which Murphy, pregnant by her former husband, goes ahead and has the child (shudder) "out of wedlock."

He blamed Murphy for "mocking the importance of fathers by bearing a child alone." Now I've never known of a case in which a woman had much help from a man in bearing a child, but that's another story.

Anyway, the news media reported the speech and everybody got in on the act.

George Bush tried to stay out of it (so what else is new?), but his spokesman, Martin Fitzwater, jumped in and then started scrambling in all directions.

At first, he said he agreed with Danny.

The concern now is that the glorification of life as an unwed mother does not do good service to unwed mothers who are not highly paid glamourous anchor women.

Then, a few minutes later, he called the reporters back to say that he didn't mean to criticize the show.

"The Murphy Brown show is an excellent show," he said. "The fact is she is demonstrating pro-life values, which we think are good."

But then Danny took issue with Fitzwater and said the show didn't demonstrate pro-life values.

Fitzwater buck-pedaled again and it



JACK GLADDEN

nearly offered to marry Candice Bergen, who plays Murphy. The problem, of course, is that while Murphy is single, Candice isn't.

Then Bush finally explained that what Danny meant to say was that Republicans think two-parent families are better than one-parent ones.

And then everybody got into the act, all stirred up, of course, by the news media.

Barbara Lister, head of Right to Life of Michigan, praised Murphy be-

cause she "faced a very difficult situation and accepted a great deal of responsibility."

Pro Choice people, on the other hand, said she simply did what they have been advocating all along — she made a choice and her choice was to have the baby rather than having an abortion.

The news media just swallowed in the frenzy that they were largely responsible for stirring up. They hadn't had anything this good to sensationalize since the Bill Clinton extra-curricular activity affair.

CNN and all the networks aired the story. Newspapers had a field day.

The Free Press found a Birmingham woman who, at 40, had a child out of wedlock and who not only related to "Murphy Brown" episode but was willing to have her story splashed all over Page 1 of the Big Dailies. The same issue carried a column on the opinion page by a Los Angeles Daily News writer who said Murphy was sending

the "wrong message." More columns came later.

The Detroit News played the story on Page 1 and referred readers to an editorial, two columns and a feature on other TV shows that had contributed to the decline of moral values. The latter story was, admittedly, somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

Columnists like Carl Rovin and pop-psychologists like Joyce Brothers took. Make that DR. Joyce Brothers had their say. Headline writers pulled all the stops and the New York Daily News (as usual) came in with the best entry in this category: "Quigley to Murphy Brown: YOU TRAMP!"

But so what?

Why has the country gone nuts over an episode of "Murphy Brown"? IT'S ONLY A TV SHOW! Doesn't anyone understand that?

Jack Gladden is a copy editor with The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

A little corruption helps to smooth things along

Chances are the little leak in Chicago that flooded underground tunnels there around \$1 billion. It could have been plugged earlier for about \$20,000. The problem is the lack of corruption.

There's a certain irony here. If Chicago didn't invent the word corruption, they certainly put it in capital letters for all the world to see.

Actually the word corruption is too strong of a word. It's old style business relationships. In the old days, the current Mayor Daley's old man would have given a brother-in-law the contract to plug the leak for \$30,000. It would have cost the tax payers an extra \$10,000 or so, but who would worry when the big number is \$1 billion?

Making sure something is so squeaky clean it wouldn't make a man blush is one sure way to kill a project or stop needed repairs from being made. A little of that seemed to be happening in Chicago where some government geek was waiting for everyone with a shovel to turn in a bid on the hole plugging project.

And when it comes to construction bids, things are never what they seem. The low bid from a goon ball firm can end up costing the tax payer five times more than the highest bid.

Then there's the world of payoffs in



JEFF COUNTS

the construction business. They happen all the time, and it would take an attorney to sort things out.

At one point in college, I was a big man in the construction payoff system.

Actually it was bottle num... I was putting in gas pipe for a contractor, spending most of my days in a ditch with a shovel.

But when the inspector from the gas company came by, I went into action. The gas company will remain unnamed, but there are only two of the same story could apply to either.

The deal was that gas pipes were to be buried three feet under the ground. That sounds logical on a normal city street, but things are different in rolling terrain where three feet under the ground has different meanings.

Because of that, there were plenty of disputes between the contractor I was working for and the gas company's inspector. These were usually settled by the foreman waving at me to take a case of Canadian Club whiskey out of

his truck and place it in the inspector's truck.

At that point the inspector would usually head back to his truck for a nap.

The result was that for a few bottles of whisky, both the gas company and its customers got the job done cheaper and with no safety hazards.

But that was 20 years ago. These days it would have taken a room full of lawyers and government inspectors a month and about a \$1 million to solve such a dispute with a contractor.

It's just too bad we can't go back to the old days when one bottle of Canadian Club was worth more than 10 lawyers. It's no wonder that things are on the rocks.

Jeff Counts is editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer & Eccentric newspapers.

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