

The Quietest Room In Town

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THE QUIETEST ROOM IN TOWN. They have been expecting you. They knew that eventually you'd show up. It won't be possible for you to know what is happening, so I'm going to take the liberty of filling you in.

The beginning for you will be when you stagger to your car. The beginning for them will be when a bulletin goes out on the police radio reporting the location of a serious accident with instructions to "proceed at once."

You won't hear the sirens. The ambulance and the police car will

arrive together. They will check you over and pronounce you dead. A few curious motorists who heard the crash will stop their cars and walk back to look at your broken, bloody body. Some of them will get sick.

The ambulance driver will roll out a leather-covered stretcher. The attendant will stuff your hands under your belt and grab you under the arms. The driver will take hold of your legs. You will be placed on a stretcher and covered.

They will drive you to the coroner's office, where a deputy coroner will wheel you over to a big scale. He will remove the blanket, shake his head and say, "Another one."

In an hour or so, they will come back and move you again. You will be placed behind a large glass window so your wife or your husband or your parents or a friend can identify you. You won't see the agony and pain in their eyes, and it's just as well. Nor will you hear the screams and sobbing when they lower the sheet and ask, "Is this your husband - wife - son - daughter - brother - sister - friend?"

As I was saying, they are waiting for you - the police, the ambulance crews, the coroners at the morgue and the morticians. They are expecting you. Remember this tonight, when you toss down that last drink and climb behind the wheel.

Your clothes will be cut off with scissors. You will be weighed and measured. The deputy coroner will make a record of your injuries, cover you up, and wheel you to a room with white tile walls. There are hoses in that room. Traffic victims are almost always a bloody mess.

You will be cleaned up (as much as possible) and moved to a long hall with several stretchers lined up against its pale green walls. In that hall are 41 crypts. If it has been a slow evening you will have a stretcher and a crypt all to yourself. But if it's Christmas, New Year's, or Memorial Day weekend you may have lots of company. They will go away and leave you there in the quietest room in town.

Cultural Comparison

by Saswatti Datta

After being in the United States for over six months, the basic differences in human behavior between the two countries of India and the United States becomes evident from time to time. The difference in behavior and self-expression is remarkably noticeable in the behavior of the women of the two countries. It would be good to point out that the differences are mainly because people in both the countries bring up their children in a different atmosphere, governed by a different set of values. I am taking this opportunity to present to the western world a glimpse of the gradual upbringing and later on, the role of women in the Indian society. As I come from Bengal, and have encountered Bengali society thoroughly, I would like to introduce Bengal, Bengali family structure, and Bengali women in general. Time to time, I will refer to the importance of the historical part and geographical significance of Bengal. This is not necessarily a generalization about Indian women as a whole.

The state of West-Bengal is at the eastern end of the gangetic plain of Northern India. It is protected by the Himalayan Mountain region in the North and the Bay of Bengal in the South. Because of the natural boundaries protecting her, Bengal flourished in isolation, and gained significant superiority in folk culture and religion. Investigation into its history reveals that any outside invader, including the British considered Bengal as a dangerous and superior land. People of Bengal are basically a mixture of four ethnic groups known as Kols, Drauidians, Mongolians, and Aryans. The capital of today's Bengal is Calcutta. This city owes its origin and supremacy over the whole country and its position as the imperial Capital of British India entirely to the British influence. In history, the rise of Calcutta also marked the tilting of the modern Hindu culture towards European civilization. This modernization and Westernization was the result of the impact of British economy, administration, and educational system.

Even the strong British influence on the local culture could not alter the life pattern of men and women inside a family. It is important to mention that the present middle and upper class people in Calcutta do not actually originate from Calcutta. Most of them belong to big joint-families in the rural Bengal and at some time in the past a fraction of the family had migrated to the city. Most of these families still have properties in rural areas.

Let us now look at the concept of joint-family. A joint-family is like a fraternal family, where the head of the family is the father, then on the eldest brother. With rapid urbanization and modernization, the concept of joint-family is quickly vanishing from Indian society. Still then, the root and affiliation of all family culture and function originate to a joint-family. It is the most important group an individual belongs to and towards which an individual has rights as well as duties. An ideal joint-family demands that brothers and their family units should live together in the same household, sharing equally the economic fund as common property, and contributing to the family to the best of their ability. The property ownership is also joint. The principal function of any member of the family is to contribute economically and gather together with the other members on social occasions like weddings, funerals, and religious festivities.

Unlike rural families the urbanized middle to upper class families do not consider the birth of a girl as an unfortunate affair anymore. Often if she happens to be the first-born, the family rejoices at her birth and welcomes her in the same way they rejoice at the birth of a male child.

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Abortion And The Next Four Years

by Colman McCarthy

Citizens opposed to abortion had unexpected victories on Election Day. In Michigan, an amendment barring Medicaid funds for abortion passed 58 percent to 42 percent. In Colorado, the use of state money for abortions was defeated 60-40. Arkansas voters, in a similar denial of funds, passed an amendment stating that "the policy of Arkansas [is] to protect the life of every unborn child."

With that progress, and with the Republican Party platform stating that "The unborn child has a fundamental, individual right to life which cannot be infringed," and with George Bush and Dan Quayle both opposed to abortion, the next four years ought to be a safer time for fetal life. It could well happen that the number of annual abortions-1.5 million, or one life destroyed every 20 seconds-will decline.

Two difficulties are in the way: Bush and Quayle. In the weeks before the election, both flubbed chances-in answers to reporters' questions-to show they had a grasp of the moral, legal and medical complexities of abortion. By their answers, both revealed they aren't prepared to lead, only to muddle on.

Bush says his views on abortion are "evolving in favor of life." While this evolution proceeds a pace-Bush has shifted positions four times in the past 10 years-what's needed is a sign that he has gone beyond anecdotal arguments. In the Oct. 13 debate he told a story-"I hope it doesn't get too personal or maudlin"-about the death of a daughter to leukemia. The answer lacked connection to the question, which was about aborting babies that are discovered through amniocentesis to be severely sick.

This paint-him-into-the-corner question is regularly thrown at opponents of abortion. If the answer is, "no exceptions, abortion is killing even when the fetus is sure to be born retarded or with Tay-Sachs," the prolife

position can be dismissed as heartless and dogmatic. If the answer is, "exceptions can be made," the obvious comeback is the one Michael Dukakis in fact did come back with: "Who are we to say? Well, under certain circumstances abortion is all right but, under other circumstances, it isn't."

An advance in the prolife position-often misunderstood or deliberately distorted-would have occurred had Bush said that tragedies like deformed or imperfect fetuses are not resolved by imposing a second tragedy of willfully destroying what is alive and growing. Instead, he delivered a rambling nonanswer that was unpersuasive in helping the country think through the slogans and screaming.

The who-are-we-to-say question, raised by Dukakis, has an answer: We aren't to say. In Rachel Weeping "The Case Against Abortion," James Burtchell writes, "Women should have control over their own bodies, it is said, and I agree; but not life-and-death control over the bodies of their children."

A growing coalition on the left-feminists, environmentalists, animal-rights advocates, pacifists-is arguing that life-and-death control shouldn't belong to anyone on any issue. Not hospital mercy-killers, not judges or juries who sanction death-row executions, not militarists who dispatch the young to war, not corporations selling the unsafe or untested, not handgun owners wanting self-protection, not those who want to eat, wear, dissect, cage or hunt animals, not exploiters or rapers of the land, and not destroyers of human life when found in its weakest form, the fetal state.

Dan Quayle has been attacked for saying that he would advise an impregnated rape or incest victim-even his wife-to carry the child. This position

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