

Tony Auth



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Letters

Model of democracy

I'm a business person who comes and goes among Philadelphia's business and political personalities on a regular basis as part of my job. This time of year, holiday celebrations occupy a great amount of my time. This year, I decided to wear an American flag pin on my lapel. The few times I was asked about it, the answer didn't come freely since I never had the privilege of serving in our armed forces.

Later, I contemplated my response in case I was asked again. And when asked a few times more, I simply stated, "I'm proud to be an American, and proud of our country's place in the world." I tried to keep it simple despite the diatribes directed toward us, not only from our enemies abroad, but also from within our own political system.

We need to elevate our thinking above the issues of Iraq, Social Security, the energy crisis, and Hurricane Katrina. We make mistakes. We should apply perspective to our place in the world among our sister nations. We are the model of democracy, economic strength, and diversity among the nations who value the democratic process and respect for human dignity.

Who cares about those who don't? We are the model for religious freedom, despite our petty disputes over separation of church and state. And we still revere the brilliance of our founding fathers and respect and abide by the product of their sacrifices.

In the overall scheme of life and civilization as we know it, we have no reason to be anything less than boastful of our accomplishments and influence on the world.

Mike Novak
Philadelphia

ID can't be tested

I applaud the ruling of U.S. District Judge Judge John E. Jones 3d, that the Dover School Board's decision to include "intelligent design" (ID) in its science curriculum was unconstitutional ("Intelligent design is struck down," Dec. 21).

There is no observational or experimental method to test ID theory. On the other hand, the evidence for evolution of all living creatures over billions of years is incontrovertible. Charles Darwin's theory is accepted as fact by 99 percent of biologists because the scientific evidence for it is as strong as the evidence that the Earth revolves around the sun. Yes, for some, both of these proven "theories" diminish man's role in the universe, but we human beings still have to live with them and accommodate our religious beliefs to these facts.

Some of the strongest evidence supporting evolution has come from the recently determined genome sequences of a variety of organisms. These DNAs show that all living things are closely related, and that small incremental changes in DNA are accompanied by change from one species to another. Human genes are marginally different from genes with the same functions in mice, chickens, fruit flies, worms, etc.

Teaching ID, a theory that cannot be tested, has no place in the public-school curriculum.

Haig Kazarian
Chair

Department of Genetics
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Police must do more

The Philadelphia Police Department needs to stop making excuses as to why crime is increasing and starting doing its job: proactively, and aggressively enforcing the law ("Three homicides add up to grim total," Dec. 19).

Sylvester Johnson must lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Nikola Sizgorich
Philadelphia

Killing Christmas

What have we done to Christmas? The need to sell. The push to buy. Putting the real meaning of Christmas on the back burner.

Christmas is not the same. It hasn't been for a long time. I felt sick watching people break down doors to get a bargain. Some people actually got stomped. If that weren't bad enough, people at malls carrying many packages said they were mostly buying for themselves.

Isn't Christmas supposed to be about giving to other people? This holiday season showed one thing: greed.

The saddest part is that Christmas trees go up earlier and advertising starts at the beginning of November, instead of after Thanksgiving. Do we enjoy the holiday? Do we stop and think about the real meaning of Christmas? By the time the day finally gets here, we're sick of it.

What have we done to Christmas? We killed it! May God have mercy on all of us.

Barbara L. Ceo
Philadelphia

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Ugandan Girl and a Community's Kindness

Face of a faraway war

On this Christmas Day, Christians celebrate that a child was born, a child who became a beacon of compassion and faith through the centuries.

Tonight and tomorrow, candles will flicker for Hanukkah and Kwanzaa, illuminating the ideals of unity and identity.

In our region, the season shines this year with something else, something splendid: a community's kindness, born of a Ugandan girl's suffering.

The Inquirer Editorial Board would like to thank the hundreds of readers who have responded so generously to the plight of 15-year-old Jennifer Anyango.

Thanks to you, she was set to arrive in Philadelphia yesterday to undergo surgery at Fairfax Hospital, INOVA Health Systems in Fairfax, Va., on her severe facial burns.

Jennifer was profiled in an Editorial Board series in May. It described a long-running civil war that has battered hundreds of thousands of children and families in the northern part of Uganda, a nation in East Africa.

Jennifer was in her hut when a rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army or LRA, attacked her village. Rebels forced her to stay inside her hut, then set it fire. As she screamed, she heard them laughing. Passersby saved her.

The LRA is led by Joseph Kony, whose war with the Ugandan government is devoid of purpose or plan. His methods are madder still: He has filled his ranks by kidnapping an estimated 30,000 boys and girls and forcing them to become soldiers and sex slaves.

Jennifer's story brought tears for many readers; the photo of her wounds brought determination.

Scores of you asked to help. Many offered sewing machines to fulfill her desire to learn how to sew.

Readers' interest and efforts helped lead to Jennifer's plane flight last week to Philadelphia International Airport.

She is being accompanied by a remarkable woman named Abitimo Rebecca Odongkara, who runs a school in northern Uganda that Jennifer now attends, and who will be her medical guardian here.

Odongkara was born in Uganda and



All Join Hands

An Editorial Board series on violence against children.

became a U.S. citizen after her family settled in Philadelphia in the 1970s.

Her story of persistence through hardship and selfless service to children also was told in last May's series.

Thanks to donations from more than 250 people, the Jennifer Anyango Fund at Sovereign Bank totals about \$17,000. That money will go toward supporting her while she is in the United States, which probably will be at least four months.

(Donations can be sent to Sovereign Bank, 1500 Market St., Philadelphia 19102. Attention: Betsy Smith.)

Any funds left over will go to Jennifer's family in Uganda, and to establish a sewing class at Odongkara's school so that Jennifer and other children can learn a vocational skill.

Some donations to Jennifer's fund were for \$5. Most were for \$25 or \$50. Many came with Christmas cards and notes wishing Jennifer well. The messages will be passed on and read to her. (Her English is limited.)

Most who wrote wanted to tell Jennifer that she should know there is more good in the world than evil. Their own actions serve as evidence.

Orgelius Wolff is a hurdy-gurdy street performer in Chestnut Hill and elsewhere in the region. He wrote that one day's worth of "'donations' which end up in the little wooden bucket guarded by a toy monkey, I will donate to Jennifer."

Students at Sacred Heart School in Mount Holly sent \$229.90. Denise McCarthy and her girls dance team at Interboro High School are raising money during basketball games this season.

Three eighth-grade girls in Maryland — Maddie Magnusson, Kiara Pusey and Madeline Goldberg — read about Jennifer and asked guests at their joint birthday party to give money for her rather than presents for them. They collected \$1,000.

Caroline Brooker McGrath, director

of AVANTE Tutoring in Philadelphia, offered a gift of one-on-one tutoring.

Oliver St. Clair Franklin, Davida Berger and Ana Stanciu-Odongkara helped Inquirer editorial writer Carolyn Davis make arrangements from Philadelphia for Jennifer's trip and treatment.

And, of course, there is Abitimo Rebecca Odongkara, in her early 70s, who splits her time between Philadelphia and Uganda. She was supposed to have come here earlier this year to be with her grown children and their families, who remain in this region.

Had she returned right after her story was told in May, she could have reaped accolades and fund-raising for her school from admiring readers such as Marion Stephens of Upper Darby. So taken was she with Odongkara that she asked U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.) to nominate her for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Instead, Odongkara stayed in Uganda for months longer than she had planned, helping to arrange Jennifer's passport, visa and other travel details. This is Odongkara's way.

So grows Jennifer's extended family, this community of support for a girl who has become the face of a faraway war.

Having connected personally, the next step for readers is to act on the backdrop of Jennifer's tale: Contact President Bush, your U.S. senators and representatives, and ask them to lead a determined peacemaking effort in northern Uganda.

Ask U.S. leaders to more vigorously assist in capturing Kony and his top aides, who have been charged by the International Criminal Court with crimes against humanity. Ask them to implore Uganda President Yoweri Museveni to protect civilians in northern Uganda.

Jennifer will doubtless be amazed to hear how many strangers care about her. She would be even more stunned to live in a country where all children were safe to play and live and learn, where good did indeed prevail over evil.

Jennifer's journey will be chronicled in the newspaper and online at go.philly.com/uganda. The May series also can be found online at that Web address.

Readers Respond

Pa. follows federal emission standards

The Inquirer's Dec. 18 editorial, "Pa. needs fewer bad air days," about clean-vehicle standards is a disservice to readers on an important issue now before the General Assembly.

The Inquirer is wrong that former Gov. Tom Ridge ever intended to let California set our vehicle emission standards or that he endorsed them. To the contrary, in 1998 the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) endorsed continued use of the federal standards. The current DEP has failed to update our regulations, all the while arguing the last few years that the federal standards it now abhors were, in fact, protective of public health. (Even the Philadelphia Department of Health references the federal vehicle rules, not California's, as part of its strategy to attain carbon monoxide standards.)

The argument that Pennsylvanians would have more vehicle choices with California's stricter air pollution laws is simply false. Vehicles not certified by California will not be sold in

Pennsylvania. Furthermore, California's regulations are leading to the prohibition of diesel-fueled, light-duty trucks and cars — some of the most fuel-efficient vehicles available. That is substantially less choice, not more.

While some manufacturers are temporarily absorbing the higher costs to make a California-certified car, they won't continue to do so when the new carbon dioxide emission standards go into effect in 2009. By then, cars may cost \$1,000 to \$3,000 more than a comparable federally-certified model. Nothing slows down fleet turnover more than higher prices for new cars.

The Inquirer leaves its readers with the impression that absent California regulations, no safeguards are in place. The truth is that we are currently under very strict federal vehicle emission standards, as are about 40 other states. These standards were crafted by former President Clinton and former Vice President Gore.

President Clinton hailed the federal rules as reducing emissions by 95 percent, calling them the "most dramatic improvement in air quality since the catalytic converter."

We agree. Pennsylvania can use President Clinton's standards to substantially clean up our air without imposing undue costs on citizens.

Roger Madigan

Chairman,
Senate Transportation Committee

Mary Jo White

Chairman,
Senate Environment Resources & Energy Committee

Year-in-Review Puzzle

The Editorial Board's annual crossword puzzle with clues looking back on the events of 2005 will appear tomorrow in this space. Solve it and you may be one of four prize winners.