

Features

'Coffee-cup conversation' avoids world problems

Columnist provides trivial details for comic relief

United Press International
WEATHERFORD — There will be no quiz on this later, but rest for your fleeting enlightenment, the Statue of Liberty's mouth is 3 feet wide and about 15 percent of all obscene phone calls are made by women. And by the way, the top speed of a running chicken is about 9 mph.

You will soon forget the above, no doubt, which is as it should be. When considered with meatier topics like the Russian army in Poland and presidential assassination attempts, those tidbits of trivia don't matter a whit. Their sole purpose is to bring a little comic relief, says L.M. Boyd, one of the foremost masters of trivial details.

Beginning in Seattle in 1967, L.M. Boyd column has been syndicated in newspapers around the country, advising readers that gorillas outnumber tigers by 3-to-1 in a typical box of animal crackers and that 42 percent of the nation's population doesn't eat breakfast. Nothing heavy, nothing important — just light patter pro-

viding a diversion from the weightier matters of the world.

"Years ago it became apparent to me that as people gathered in metropolitan areas and lost contact with the butcher and the drugstore and the barber shop kind of things; they were becoming more and more isolated," Boyd said.

"And a subscriber to a newspaper didn't actually have somebody on the newspaper to talk to. He would read editorial opinion and hard-breaking news without a coffee-cup conversation with someone.

"So I set up the column designed to trade conversation and trade notes on a one-to-one basis. There are a lot of lonely people out there and they can't find anything in the paper any more to which they can relate personally."

Boyd's tool for fashioning that one-on-one relationship is the purpose of the daily column comprised of 10 to 15 unrelated, inconsequential items presented in a chatty style, with puns and per-

sonal observations mixed in.

"I use the trivia as a vehicle — a vehicle to carry on the conversation," he said at his home-office a few miles outside Weatherford. "I wanted a column that wasn't a performance. I wanted a graceful routine that didn't call for me to juggle and show off everyday.

"Some newspaper people sit down and write a pompous story about a movie review or if it's a police reporter's story it's a hard, crackling thing. But somewhere there's got to be someplace for somebody who isn't on an ego trip, but still is talking to the people."

Before syndicating his trivia, Boyd was a reporter and editor for newspapers in Seattle, Pittsburgh and Houston, where he ran the Houston Chronicle's popular "Watchem" column, one of the first newspaper action lines. He came to realize newspapers did not always have the room or place to print the things he found truly interesting.

"You've heard that song 'Hold that Tiger' that some schools use

for their fight song? I went out to cover a shooting at an after-hours club and there was an old black man on piano who I got the information from about the shootings. I don't remember anything else about the killings but I remember something else he told me.

"He said that when he was in New Orleans the lowest possible poker hand a man can hold — seven on down with no straights or flushes or pairs — was called a 'tiger' in jazz lingo. 'Hold that Tiger' didn't have anything to do with a big cat."

Later there would be a prison riot where the inmates had two complaints: the food was atrocious and they weren't allowed to have seconds. The incongruity of it all was terribly appealing.

"The things that stuck in my memory were less significant but more humorous and interesting than the things I was supposed to cover," Boyd said.

"There's a kind of ant that chews its vegetation, forms it into little droplets and deposits it on rocks

and lets it solidify in the sun. The incongruity that I see is that this ant is the only animal besides man that bakes its own biscuits."

Trivia is his medium but not his life. Boyd says he is not the sort who can enthral cocktail party audiences with tidbits like "Catch 22" originally was titled "Catch 18" or that Albert J. Parkhouse invented the wire coat hanger in 1903.

"I just can't call them up on command," he said. "I don't have them indexed in my head."

Boyd's writing style is a transitionless grab-bag of questions and answers, one-line statements and light musings along the lines of his love for trout ("Not only do I intend to raise them but also breed them for show, train them to cut minnows, maybe even race in New Mexico if the creek ever comes up). His writing guidelines are a conversational approach that delivers the goods quickly and obviously and with diversification of subject.

"Most columnists and feature writers take a subject and expand on it," Boyd said. "I take as many ideas as I can get and strip them

bare and run in just the bare bones of a selected few. How are you going to explain this any more: yaks give pink milk?"

Life not so serene down on the farm

United Press International
URBANA, Ill. — A farmer's life is stressful one despite an image of serenity, experts say.

Jerry W. Robinson, who conducts a stress-management course for farmers through the University of Illinois extension service, said the stress a farmer faces is aggravated by the fact much of his worry about things he can't control.

The weather, international markets and inflation are all key components in a farmer's business and they cause a lot of headaches.

"We know that stress is most damaging to people when they are helpless, powerless to control that's causing the stress," Robinson said.

Further, he said, farming is stressful because there are times of high activity mixed with relatively slow periods.

"We have peak periods like spring and fall, planting and harvest, especially for grain farmers," said Robinson, a U of I professor who teaches rural sociology on the Urbana-Champaign campus.

And then there isn't much to do in the winter.

Both too much and too little pressure has been found to create stress, he said.

"I think that's one reason why basketball is so popular in rural

Illinois; it's something to do in the winter," he said.

The healthy environment of the farm is a myth, said Benton Bristol, a professor of agricultural mechanics at Illinois State University in Normal.

"Most people don't have to worry about things like the Russian grain embargo and other government interference to that extent," Bristol said.

"And when so many things like this come up that farmers aren't really warned about, they have no way to prepare for them and lack of preparation is a stressful thing in itself."

The ever-fickle weather is a major concern for the farmer. He worries that it is either too wet or too dry or whether the rain will come in time to pollinate the corn.

"When you have much work which needs to be done in a relatively short period of time, the weather definitely is something that causes stress, not only for the farmer but for every member of his family," Bristol said.

Farming also has become an experiment in high finance. Farmers must take out large loans just to put in a new crop every spring.

"Farmers are big businessmen and some farmers are not equipped to handle it," Robinson said.

While farmers don't punch time clocks, Robinson said, they have pressures similar to those who do.

"They have to get the hay in before it rains, they have to get their crop in by a certain time," he said. "Instead of nine to five, sometimes it's dawn to dark and sometimes they're out there with the lights on."

To deal with the stress, Bristol suggests farmers not rush their chores and take several short rest periods rather than one long period between times of work.

In Robinson's course on stress management, he teaches an integrated approach involving several different aspects of a lifestyle. It promotes good nutrition, exercise, a well-balanced social life and relaxation, but most of all, awareness of the problem.

There has been little research done on farmers and stress and Robinson is considering conducting his own study on the farmer's lifestyle from a medical, physical and social perspective.

He also is planning to work with another U of I professor to develop a retirement-planning program for farm couples in their late 40s and early 50s.

"We want to get these farmers to sit down with their wives and plan what they're going to do in

retirement because they don't have John Deere, they don't have the federal government and they don't have the university," Robinson said. "They've got to do it on their own."

Nearly one-third of all farmers in Illinois are over 65 and another third are between 50 and 65.

Many families now are going through the process of passing the farms on to a younger generation.

"There is a lot of stress out there with the transfer of this capital and this management from the older generation to the younger or from the owner to the leasor," Robinson said.

Ad campaigns get lift with hot-air balloons

United Press International
NEW YORK — The billboard is taking to the air — via the hot-air balloon.

The surface of a hot-air balloon cannot carry a message as easy to read as a highway billboard, but it does carry corporate image ads that can be seen for many miles. A billboard can usually be seen from the ground for a few hundred yards.

Balloon races and rallies lend themselves to all sorts of television, newspaper and dealer demonstration promotions. Such an event will be held in September with a race of 50 teams with 200 balloons from Las Vegas to Atlantic City for \$960,000 in prizes.

First prize is \$5 million dollars in gold bullion. Twenty teams already have corporate sponsors and all are fairly sure to get sponsors.


The race is the creation of Anthony J. Reichelt of Rutherford, N.J., who formed a corporation called the World's Greatest Balloon Race to organize and promote it.

Reichelt is a veteran sales and trade fair promoter who became interested in the balloon's advertising possibilities when he found there are between 2,000 and 3,000 balloonists in the United States alone. He also discovered many blue chip national advertisers recognize the value of balloon advertising and would be willing to put up \$100,000 or more to sponsor a team in a single big race. Some advertisers pay active balloonists up to \$30,000 to keep their emblems on the balloons the year around.

The race will cover 2,250 miles and make 24 stops. Conditions for flying hot-air balloons are ideal only from dawn until about 11 a.m., so there will be plenty of time for promotional activities on the ground. Even ordinary balloon rallies often attract crowds of 5,000 or more.

Each balloon in the air must be followed by a tracking car on the roads and the logistics of the race involve moving 120 vehicles and 500 people over the whole course, in addition to the balloons.

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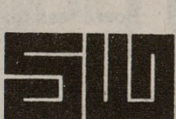
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