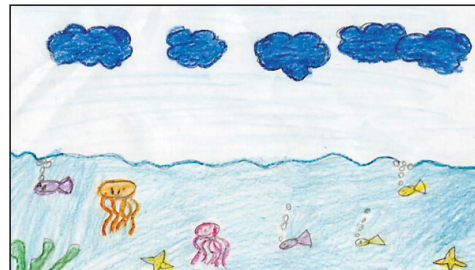


# The Columbian Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by Marina Livarchuk, 10, Battle Ground Captain Strong Elementary School



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2006



DAVE BARRY

## Sting like a geography bee

Most Americans are pitifully ignorant of geography. This was clearly demonstrated recently when the Gallup Organization sent its pollsters to Chicago to ask randomly selected residents if they could name at least three of the six major continents. The results were shocking: Most of the pollsters never found Chicago at all; of those who did, all but one fell into the Chicago River.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident of American geographical ignorance. Just last month, the major U.S. airlines, investigating an increase in the number of delayed flights, discovered that many of their pilots cannot read maps and are finding their destination cities by, in the words of an airline spokesperson, "flying real low and following buses."

What is the cause of this disgraceful lack of knowledge? I blame the same institution that is responsible for crime, sex, godlessness and millions of square miles of badly drawn refrigerator art: our school system. I studied geography in the fifth grade, and I remember that instead of just TELLING us where things were, the teacher insisted that we make relief maps of the United States by mixing flour and water into a paste and smearing it on a shirt cardboard so as to form important geographical features such as the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains, Disneyland, etc. Evidently I put too much water in my paste, because my United States was a featureless amoeba-like blob, with whole population centers such as New England oozing completely off the cardboard and forming new, uncharted territories on the floor.

As a direct result, I grew up, like most Americans, with a poor grasp of geography. That is why, in a recent column about nude TV weather forecasts in the Czech Republic, I made the following statement, which turns out to be incorrect: "Until 1993, the Czech Republic was connected with Slovakia; together they went by the name 'Hungary.'"

This is simply not true, as was pointed out to me by many informed readers. Some of these people were quite upset, as we see from these quotes from their letters, which I am not making up:

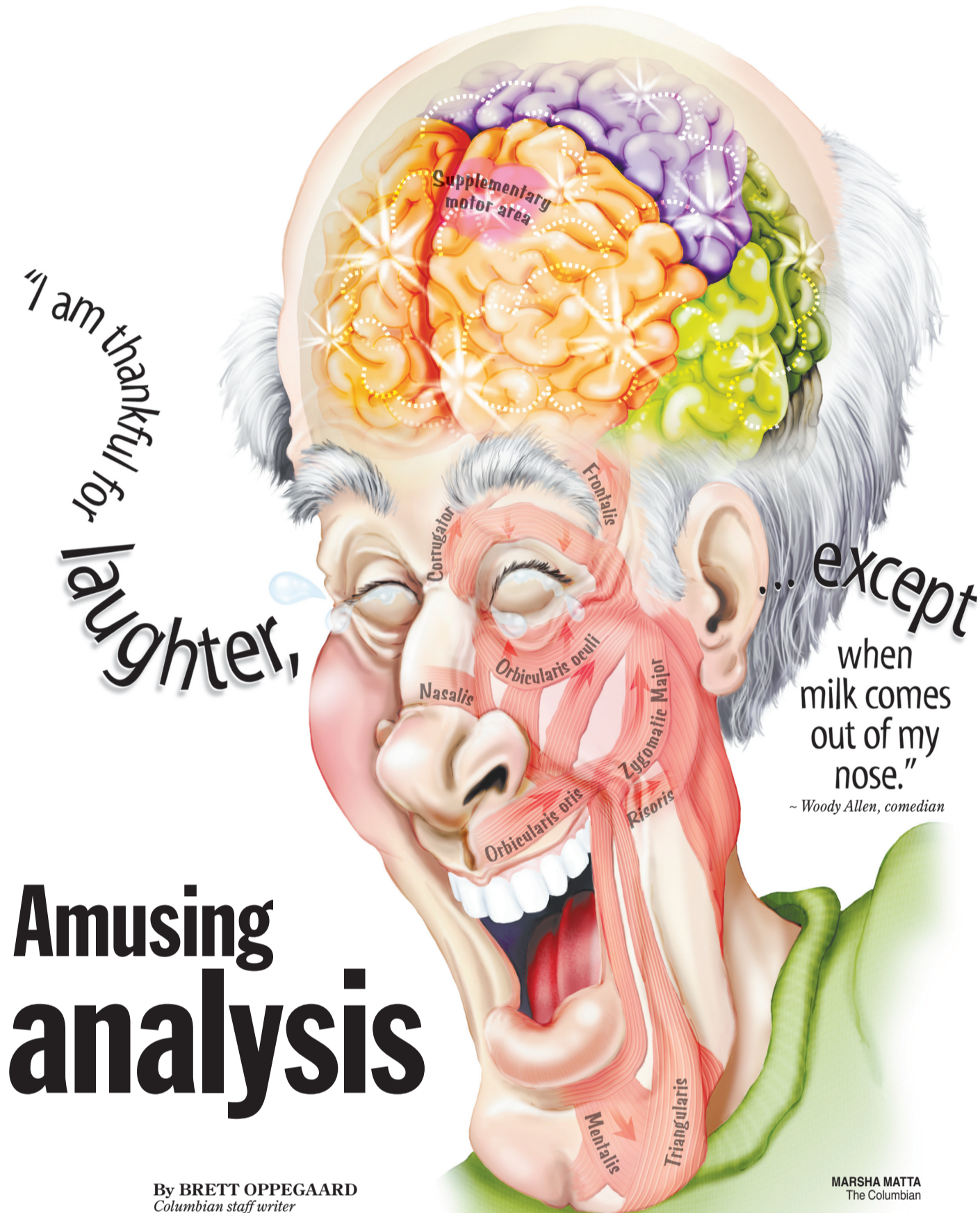
■ "Clearly, your knowledge of historical facts is a clear example that the dumbing down of America has succeeded."

■ "It is disgusting to find out that you columnists know so little. You probably do not

DAVE BARRY, page D7

DAVE BARRY is a columnist for the Miami Herald. His classic column was originally published Aug. 1, 1999. He is currently taking a leave of absence from writing his weekly humor column. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.

## ANATOMY OF A LAUGH



MARSHA MATTA  
The Columbian

## Amusing analysis

By BRETT OPEGAARD  
Columbian staff writer

When Glynda and Pat Hamilton celebrated their 38th wedding anniversary recently, Pat gave his wife a dozen roses. He told her those were for the 12 good years.

The Vancouver couple have been in Texas much of the summer, helping Pat's ill 91-year-old mother, Kathrin. During their stay, Glynda was giving her mother-in-law a sponge bath, when the matriarch quipped, "I bet when you and Pat came down the hall to tell us you were engaged, you didn't know you would be doing this."

In the Hamilton household, Glynda says, humor is the preferred method of handling most situations — no matter how joyous or difficult. Such an approach has changed their

lives, and Glynda has become a modern mirth missionary, joining a growing chorus of people who think humor is hardly trivial.

As scientists amass quantifiable evidence of the health benefits of laughter, humor-based social organizations such as the Laughter Club are rapidly gaining members. It all plays into the Mark Twain remark: "The human race has only one really effective weapon and that is laughter."

A broad social movement in support of such an idea started about a decade ago in a public park in Bombay. Dr. Madan Kataria, a physician in India, noticed that his more jovial patients seemed to heal faster and stay healthier. So

he went to a park and simply stood around with a few people and told jokes.

The program he developed around that concept combines laughter and childish exercises with gentle breathing and other yoga techniques. The first club to practice this technique had five people. Today, there are reportedly more than 5,000 of these clubs of various sizes throughout the world — in countries such as Australia, France, Switzerland, Hungary, Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai — including 2,000 American organizations, with both Portland and Vancouver in the fold. The movement's

LAUGHTER, page D7



Photos by MIKE SALSURBY/The Columbian

Glynda Hamilton is selling her east Vancouver house with the idea that she wants to spend her retirement years traveling the country via motor home. The certified laughter leader plans to stop in Wal-Mart parking lots and put on free seminars about the therapeutic benefits of laughing. Julie Nguyen, above left, is one of Hamilton's students.

## The joke's ... in you

Laughter not only is a full-brain experience, it also sends positive waves throughout the body that various experts consider beneficial to health. Here are some of the most significant physiological and psychological findings from studies of laughs, according to a trio of top scientists working in the field, Lee S. Berk, Loma Linda University; Michael Owren, Georgia State University; and Steven M. Sultanoff, Pepperdine University:

### It starts with anticipation

Berk and colleagues found that significant positive mood changes can occur even when just thinking about something funny or something about to be funny. Those include an increase in beta-endorphins (pain reducers and mood enhancers) and human growth hormones (which tune up immune cells). A one-hour session of humor can create biological effects that last from 12 to 24 hours. After the session ends, the scientists found that their subjects had less tension, depression, anger, fatigue and confusion, and increased vigor.

### From the left

Humor starts getting processed in a part of the mind called the supplementary motor area, Berk says. From there, it flashes throughout the brain and triggers chemical and hormonal reactions across the body. That includes igniting the nucleus accumbens and its production of dopamine, which elevates emotions and pleasure, as well as the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis. That axis reduces stress hormones, such as cortisol.

### About face

Counts vary widely on the number of muscles used in each act, but the consensus is that it takes more effort for the human face to frown than smile, Berk says. Those muscles include the frontalis (for eyebrow raising), orbicularis oculi (for eye-squinting), the zygomatic major (for pulling corners of the mouth into a smile), the risorius (lip-stretcher and dimple-maker) and the orbicularis oris (for curling and tightening lips).

### Hear this

Owren, who specializes in the acoustics of laughter, says instead of ho ho ho-type sounds, humans actually convey mirth through a series of grunts and snorts. Laughter, he says, is a way for people to change the emotional state of those around them. In short, like primate sounds, human laughter is not primarily about the person laughing. It's primary role is to have an impact on the listeners, changing their emotional states for the better. When everyone is laughing in a group, those good feelings get contagious and spread around.

### Joyful tears

Humans distinctively shed tears due to emotional states, including for joy. When crying as part of laughter, the composition of those tears is different than ones created to simply wash away irritants. In particular, more proteins are expelled, according to a study by William Frey and Muriel Langseth, circling back to Aristotle's suggestions in "Poetics" that tears purge toxins — even emotional ones — from our bodies.

### Mind-shifting

Mechanically, the mind cannot experience joy and pain at the same time, says therapist Sultanoff. Humor and distressing emotions simply cannot occupy the same emotional space. There has been an enormous amount of research, he says, that shows negative thought patterns lead to all sorts of health problems. He contends that positive thoughts can have the opposite effect, leading to improved health. For such treatment, Sultanoff has patients imagine a time in which they laughed so hard that they fell over. He encourages patients to use the medium that they enjoy the most, from comics to movies, and spend about 30 minutes a day with it.

## your Guide:



Promise of river of gold lures its own kind of gamblers /D3



Books: Kathleen McGowan risks all to tell 'real' story of Mary Magdalene /D9



Monopoly abandons Atlantic City in favor of more-recognizable landmarks /D10

## Coming Monday:

Largest known dwarf planet named after Greek goddess of chaos /D1

ANATOMY OF A LAUGH

“Man is distinguished from all other creatures by the faculty of laughter.”

~ Joseph Addison, English essayist and co-founder of The Spectator

Laughter:

From page D1

Mecca, Matlani Garden in India, now hosts eight laughter sessions a day, year-round, starting as early as 5:45 a.m. and lasting until after 7 p.m.

Glynda Hamilton, the local proponent of the idea, has been preaching a lighter perspective on life for a long time, she says. But being certified as a laughter leader through the international group, plus the experiences she has had making people around her laugh, has inspired her to take her quirky sense of humor to the masses. The Hamiltons, who are retired, now are trying to sell their east Vancouver house to spend the next few months driving cross-country in a motor home. Glynda wants to stop along the way in Wal-Mart parking lots and make even more people laugh.

This idea has gone well beyond a trivial whim, she says. Academics and scientists in the fields of humor and laughter have been gradually revolutionizing alternative medicine.

One of the top physicians in the field is Lee Berk, associate director of the Center for Neuroimmunology and an associate research professor of pathology and human anatomy in the school of medicine at Loma Linda University in California.

He and colleagues have gathered numerous studies over the years that indicate tangible benefits of humor and laughter in such areas as

cardiac rehabilitation, pain perception, discomfort thresholds, coping with stress and boosting immune systems. Research also shows that laughter goes beyond muscular and vocal behavior, according to work by Berk and others.

“We seek humor and laughter because it feels good,” Berk says. “It feels good because it’s triggering the entire limbic system.”

Like listening to a beloved piece of music, humor ignites activity throughout the mind and body as it is interpreted by the brain. Blood flow increases. Positive hormones and endorphins are released. Energy grows, and negative chemicals, interpreted as stress, are suppressed.

“The joy of the world can’t be experienced at the same time as the pain,” says Steven Sultanoff of Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. The psychologist has been incorporating therapeutic humor into his work for 20 years. He says that the clearly established connection between negative thinking and poor health has convinced him that the opposite is true.

Sultanoff says that he’s not naturally a funny person but that he works on his humor capacity, like honing any other skill. He watches comedies. He reads jokes. He carries around props, such as a clown nose, wind-up toys and an Elvis Presley driver’s license. When a clerk asks him for identification, he gives that mock card, then a few seconds later quips, “You didn’t say it had to be mine.”

He suggests to clients that they dedicate a portion of each day to being funny.

“Medical science is starting to get serious about positive emotions,” Berk says. “For the most part, medical care is concerned

with disease and dysfunction. Not about the positive stuff. But the public increasingly has been demanding that we look at those things that are good for us. Things that keep us healthy, well and happy.”

He adds, “Religion and spirituality have some health benefits. Optimists versus pessimists. Happiness versus sadness.

There’s a biology involved, and it appears that humor and laughter are significant components in keeping things in balance.”

Glynda Hamilton says she instinctively used comedy as a coping technique while growing up. Her father’s Air Force career moved their family 12 times before Glynda graduated from high school, constantly making her the new kid in class.

“We laugh to survive’ has been my motto for years,” she says.

That kind of attitude has been particularly helpful in dealing with the deterioration of Glynda’s elderly mother-in-law. After a sponge bath recently, Kathrin perked up and told Glynda that she had just needed to be watered. When Kathrin does arm exercises, the family jokes that she’s building her bust. She had a double-mastectomy years ago.

After Glynda’s children were born, she started keeping a journal of everyday happenings on her calendars. The Hamiltons now look those over and laugh together about the notes every Thanksgiving.

Glynda recalls that her son TJ, at 5, told her that all he wanted for Christmas was to be an only child. When she told him that she couldn’t do that, he asked to be a foster child. Glynda told him she would work on it.

Daughter Stacia, when she was in high school, asked if she could help with dinner. Glynda

told her to boil some carrots, and when she did, Glynda heard the teen saying softly over the pot, “Hey, you sexy little carrots. You’re really looking hot tonight.”

When TJ was in high school, he was being lectured by Glynda about his behavior when he told her, “I’ve never done anything as bad as what Dad did when he was a teenager.” So Glynda turned to Pat, still shaking her finger, and said, “Quit telling him what (you) did as a teenager.”

Glynda was visiting Stacia in Florida a couple of years ago when she heard about a three-day Laughter Club certification that was taking place in a nearby city. So she enrolled. Now she’s become one of the group’s advocates. She’s led dozens of free sessions throughout Clark County at churches, family reunions, birthday parties, schools and community festivals.

The first time she taught the techniques in a nursing home, about a year ago in Brush Prairie, Glynda encouraged everyone to get involved. That included a feeble woman with a walker and oxygen tank. By the end of the session, the elderly woman was standing and clapping her hands and laughing. She made sure to thank Glynda afterward, and that appreciation resonated.

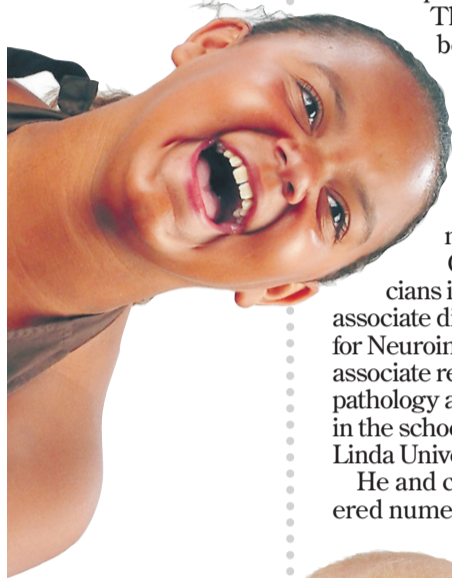
“When I believe in something, I want to share,” Glynda says.

“And it’s fun. ... It’s the way of getting away from thinking about whatever it is that’s bringing you down. The stresses of life. Or the pains of the body. If you can find a way to laugh, it can pull you out of that. It can bring you up.”



“Seven days without laughter makes one weak.”

~ Mort Walker, cartoonist

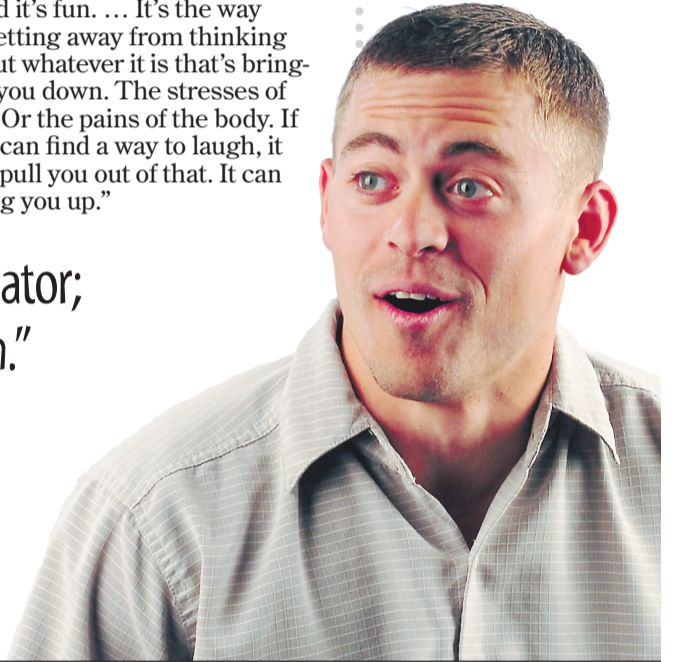


“In those whom I like, I can find no common denominator; in those whom I love, I can: They all make me laugh.”

~ W.H. Auden, English poet

Some of the people who have participated in Glynda Hamilton’s local laughter club exercises include, counter-clockwise from above left: Angela Bergeron-Burns, Alex Schreiber, Ryan Sutton and Rosie Schleif.

Photos by MIKE SALSBUROY of The Columbian



Magazine helps guide would-be philanthropists

By AILEEN JACOBSON Newsday

Bloomberg, Buffett, Bono, Gates: For people with lots of money, giving away tons of it may be the new black.

But for anyone else interested in spreading a little of their wealth around the world where disaster churns through the news daily, philanthropy can be tricky. Will their dollars be used wisely? Will it go to the most deserving charity?

Lisa Gyselen and her husband, Garry, contemplated these questions last summer as they were readying their new magazine, Contribute, and floodwaters coursed through New Orleans. Contribute, which premiered in April, helps donors explore their options in the increasingly complex field of philanthropy.

Its third issue, for September/October, features a cover interview with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg,

who regularly gives away millions and says he wants to go into philanthropy full-time after he leaves office. A column by Nelson W. Aldrich Jr. (author of “Old Money” and himself part of the Rockefeller family) discusses the \$30 billion-plus that Warren Buffett recently donated to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The landscape of philanthropy has changed since Sept. 11, says editor in chief Marcia Stepanek: “People are not content to be simply passive anymore.”

In the U.S., the number of nonprofit organizations has doubled in the five years since Sept. 11, Stepanek says, to 1.7 million. And people also want to make a difference by working for or investing in companies that do good works, she says, and by investigating the efficiency of charities. Her magazine reviews nonprofits using such measures as how much of their spending goes to those served.

Dave Barry:

From page D1

know where Vietnam or Indonesia is located. It is not uncommon that the American children do not even know or care where Mexico is situated. And your adults are not better. Thank God, I received my education in Europe.”

■ “The column’s credibility was tainted by the gaffe.”

■ “How in the world did this get through the editors?”

In response, let me first state that, in the famous words of Thomas Jefferson, “The buck stops here.” If there is a gaffe tainting my column, I take full responsibility for it. It is NOT the fault of the editors; I’m sure they never saw it. Modern newspaper editors don’t have time to read the newspaper; they spend their days in lengthy “brainstorming” sessions with other editors wherein they try to decide what to do about the Internet.

Second, Mr. “I-Was-Edu-

cated-In-Europe”: I do TOO know where Vietnam (or, as it is sometimes called, “Indonesia”) is located: It is located overseas. So there! And speaking of locating things: If the people in Europe are SOOOOOO smart, how come so many of them can’t seem to locate the deodorant, huh?

But there is no need to become petty or defensive. The simple fact is, I “blew it,” and I want to set the record straight now: When the Czech Republic and Slovakia were connected, they were called — this now seems SO obvious, when I look at the names “Czech” and “Slovakia” together — “The Netherlands.” (Incidentally, this was the original location of the Leaning Tower of Pisa.)

I pledge that from now on I will strive for geographical accuracy in my columns. You parents can also help to raise our national “Geography IQ”: The next time your kids ask if they can watch TV or play a video game or take their insulin, you should say: “No! Not until you name all six major continents!” (Answer:

America, Central America, South America, Latin America, Euthanasia and Shaquille O’Neal.)

In closing, I wish to apologize to any readers of Czech descent whom I offended by my error. I also want to thank

those who sent nice letters, especially Ed Cerny of Conway, S.C., who wrote to tell me that at one time the motto of the official Czech airline was: “OK and Getting Better.” This really makes me want to go there. By bus.

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