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Tsunami, Computers Collecting Dust, Welfare; I Was Not Expecting This

By Mary Snauffer
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times
Editor's Note: Mary Snauffer is serving a two-year assignment with the Peace Corps in Thailand. She is writing first-hand accounts of her experiences in this column for *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*. Her first column appeared in the February 16 edition.

I visited the town I will be living in last week. "This is where they stored many of the bodies," a co-worker said out of nowhere, pointing to a temple. "There was a tsunami here last year. Did you hear about it?"

Last year, one of my favorite rants involved the tsunami in Southeast Asia. I don't know why it got to me so much, why I became so passionate. There was something about it that I saw as truly unjust. And the more I thought about it the more it annoyed me.

I'm not talking about the tsunami itself or the loss of life. I mean, obviously, that was horrible but that's not what got me. It was the outpouring afterwards. It was the constant news coverage. It was the enormous relief efforts. All those humanitarian groups that came out of nowhere. It was Bill Clinton and former President Bush telling the country to donate. It was all those actors pretending to be humanitarians. It felt like a trend. And it began to make me uncomfortable.

Maybe it was just bad timing for me. More and more of my attention was being focused on things like malaria in Africa. About how every five months the amount of people who die from preventable diseases in the Democratic Republic of Congo totals up to the same amount of people who died in the tsunami.

I was reading about the genocide in Sudan. How no one is doing anything about it. I was reading about all sorts of crummy stuff. So when the tsunami hit it appeared to me to be the easiest disaster the world has seen in a long

time.

It was an earthquake in the ocean. It was an act of nature. There were no grinning politicians riding in on the crest of the wave. There were no secret intentions. It was a black and white issue. We were left with victims and the only spaces remaining were reserved for heroes. There was no one to blame.

It was perfect. It was easy. And what I'd always conclude, a beer or two in on those snowy college nights last year, is how guilty we are feeling as Americans. How much we have been feigning to do something that, unlike just about everything else that is going on in the world, is clearly the right thing to do.

My friends told me to shut up a lot. Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn't. It pretty much depended on the amount of beer.

Now, a year later I find myself living in Thailand. Before I left people would ask if I was going to help with the tsunami. I'd quickly say no — I'm probably going to live in the north where the poorest people live and I'll have nothing to do with it.

I was wrong. I have been chosen to work in the south, in the province that has the highest death toll as a matter of fact. Over 6,000 people died. It is more than half the people who died in the country. I was not expecting this.

I was not expecting to learn how to spot signs of posttraumatic stress in my students. I was not expecting to learn whether it is riskier to run during the tsunami alarms or to stay. (There have been two false alarms since last January. It causes mass chaos.) I was not expecting to come into contact with people who have become so dependent on the donations they are given that they have stopped working entirely and just wait for the next check.

In some areas, it has created a welfare state. I was not expecting to see classrooms filled with fancy donated computers collecting dust because no one knows how to use them. I was not expecting this.



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions — only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly — good guess. If you get two — well-read individual. If you get three — word expert. If you get all four — You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Succor - Aid or assist
2. Oneiroscopist - One who interprets dreams
3. Sudor - Sweat or perspiration
4. Winkernel - The European water hen

TAMPOON

1. A plug, such as in barrels
2. A slipper
3. A marsh or swamp
4. A wax candle

HYLOBATES

1. Having many legs, such as with centipedes
2. A whirlwind; a firework that rises with a spiral motion
3. Afflicted with gout
4. A genus of apes including the gibbons

INFIBULATION

1. Humiliation; shame; falling from grace
2. An intestinal infestation causing severe cramping and associated spasms
3. Claspings with a buckle or padlock
4. An abnormal fear of falling

AURIGAL

1. Pertaining to a chariot or carriage
2. Pertaining to the fleece of sheep
3. The north wind
4. A Roman mineral bath

Is Astro-Turf Necessary For Amateur Sports?

I whole heartily agree with the letter from Cathy Smith regarding Brookside Park last week. There are too few natural places in Scotch Plains where families can go to picnic, enjoy a shady spot, and let kids explore the woods.

Is cutting down trees really what we voters voted for when we voted for open space?

Is Astro-turf really necessary for amateur sports teams?

I hope everyone in town wakes up before this gem is destroyed and replaced with plastic and macadam.

Pat Leonard
 Scotch Plains

Latinos Should Support Sen. Tom Kean, Jr.

Editor's Note: This is the full statement by Assemblyman Eric Munoz (R-21) in response to U.S. Senate hopeful Bob Menendez's opening remarks to kick-off the 2006 Latino Leaders Luncheon Series last Wednesday, March 8, in Washington, D.C.

"The Hispanic community is a group of honest, intelligent and hard working people who want to live the American dream and choose leaders who will fight for lower taxes, a better economy and ethics in government. Mr. Menendez does not represent these values — and the Hispanic community will not blindly follow a leader based solely on ethnicity.

There is a clear choice in this election for New Jersey voters. Do they want a career party boss or a person who truly idealizes public service, honesty and inclusion? I want to see Tom Kean, Jr. elected because the people of New Jersey deserve better."

Eric Munoz
 Assemblyman

Kean Comments On Dubai Pull Out

Editor's Note: U.S. Senate Candidate Tom Kean Jr. made the following statement on the decision by a Dubai company to give up interest in U.S. ports:

"This is a very promising step. Those of us who feel strongly about this topic believe that foreign government-owned companies should not control U.S. ports. Moving forward, Congress needs to change the homeland security funding formula to ensure that security funds are distributed based on risk.

Tom Kean, Jr.
 U.S. Senate Hopeful

Street Won't Be Same Without Larry

I think everyone in my neighborhood knew Larry. He was the elderly gentleman who lived on the corner of Coolidge and Benson and could be seen slowly walking his dog, Harry, up and down Wells, Coolidge, Harding, and Benson Streets at all hours, day and night.

Larry often stopped when he arrived at my house so that Harry could visit our dogs through the fence. We would exchange a few words and then Larry and Harry would be on their way.

We never knew much about Larry, his life history, or his family. We just knew that he seemed to be a simple man who loved his neighborhood and loved his dog.

Our neighborhood won't be the same without you, Larry. We hope your dog has found a new home. Rest in peace, Larry.

Marcie Horowitz
 Westfield

WHS Production Was Amazing Performance

We are writing this letter to commend Westfield High School on another excellent play.

We were fortunate to see the Saturday night performance of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on March 4 at the high school. It was an amazing performance. The music was top notch and all of the actors performed their parts with the skill that we might expect on a professional stage. While we hesitate to single out one performer, the portrayal of the part of Judas was extraordinary! For all those who were involved in putting this play together, we say congratulations — it was superb!

Walter Korfmacher
 Westfield

Letters to the Editor

Board's Approval of Central, Myrtle Building Was 'Monumental Mistake'

I am a resident of Central Avenue in Westfield between Washington and Grove. I have lived here practically all my life. As a resident we have to deal with the inconveniences and dangers of living on this busy road but until now it was never really a tragedy waiting to happen.

I sat through a planning board meeting last night (March 9) where I naively thought because I recognized a few faces who had previously expressed their concern for the safety of the children and animals who reside on Central, they would be compelled to vote down a request for a variance to increase the size and parking configuration of a building at the corner of Myrtle Avenue and Central (the old Croll-Reynolds building) wherein doing so would so drastically affect the traffic patterns on Central as to make it almost impossible for the residents to exit their driveways without forcing a stop of the oncoming traffic not to mention the impossibility of making a left out of Myrtle.

The board decided in their infinite wisdom to allow the restructuring of the existing building to include a bank on the first floor, commercial/professional on the second floor and residential (three, three-bedroom apartments) on the third floor would be a great way of continuing the revitalization of our section of Central. Although the residents of Central Avenue, Windsor Avenue and Myrtle Avenue came to voice their concerns, opinions and disapproval of this proposed restructure, it was all for naught. The planning board thought it was a great

idea, even though the applicant did not have a traffic study in hand to lull the board members and residents concerns as to how this building will impact Central Avenue and Myrtle Avenue.

I just wonder how many of the residents of Westfield will agree with them when they sit in a few more hours of traffic during the school and evening rush hours trying to get home or on Saturdays and maybe even Sundays while trying to get to town. I wonder how many accidents due to increased hostility of drivers sitting in traffic it will take before the planning board realizes what a mistake they made.

It's easy to think that what happens on Central does not concern the other residents of Westfield, but only the very naive believe that the most used roadway into and out of the center of town can withstand the additional increase in traffic this proposed new building will cause. I do not know what can be done now that the board has rendered its decision, but if there is anyone out there who believes as we do that this is a monumental mistake and knows a method of overturning the board's decision, the residents of Central Avenue, Windsor Avenue and Myrtle Avenue would love to hear from you.

It has been confirmed for me that the owner to the said premises is also a planning board member. To his credit he did recuse himself from voting.

Maria Binetti
 Westfield

Attanasio's Letter on Taxes Was 'Rife With Partisan Rhetoric'

Anthony Attanasio's response to the letters written by myself and David Kofrage is inaccurate and rife with partisan rhetoric. First of all, he asserts that these tax cuts went to "every single taxpayer in America" and then provides the 2003 capital gains tax cut as an example. This is a disingenuous statement because focusing on the number of households claiming capital gains and dividend income does not tell the whole story; it is far more important to look at the amount of capital gains and dividend income collected by various income groups.

Fifty-four percent of all capital gains and dividend income flows to the 0.2 percent of households nationwide with annual incomes of over \$1 million. Eighty percent of this income flows to 3 percent of households across the country, which leaves the remaining 20 percent of capital gain and dividend income to be distributed across 97 percent of American households. Mere crumbs from the supply-side cookie baked by Congressman Ferguson and President Bush. Additionally, while more Americans than ever have money in the stock market, much of this money sits in retirement accounts. These accounts, such as IRAs, 401(k)s and 403(b)s, do not receive a tax benefit from cutting the capital gains and dividends tax because this income is not subject to taxation.

Mr. Attanasio further claims that these tax cuts have "swelled" federal revenues. This implies that tax cuts pay for them-

Chris Sdao
 Westfield

Cryan and Other Undersheriffs Have Full Use of Union County Vehicles

Editor's Note: This is the full statement from Union County Sheriff Ralph Froehlich on the use of county cars by under sheriff officers.

The Union County Sheriff's Office is a law enforcement agency that has 24-hour, seven day a week public safety responsibilities.

Joe Cryan is one of three under sheriffs in my department who are all in the second line of command, directly under my authority. The sheriff (myself) and my undersheriffs are authorized full and unrestricted use of an agency vehicle to

assist in fulfilling the requirements of our offices. Quick professional responses to emergencies in our county depend on our ability to get to a scene.

Joe Cryan is a true professional and I would be at a loss without his guidance and that of my two other undersheriffs. My guys are great guys and we work well together. They are a constant resource to myself and the residents of Union County, and each one brings their own expertise to our organization.

Ralph Froehlich
 Union County Sheriff

Happy St. Patrick's Day: In Fact And Fantasy, When All are Irish

Tomorrow, everyone's Irish. We'll be 'puttin' on the green and 'lovin' it. "The Wearing of the Green" also symbolizes the birth of springtime. Irish legend states that green clothes attract faeries and aid crops. Celebration of St. Patrick's Day is just fun for most with little other meaning. Some other holidays are similar fun like Halloween and, perhaps, Mardi Gras. In this complex world, immersing in fantasies and lore of folk fairies can be necessary escapism for the inner human spirit.

The Leprechaun, catch him and steal his crocks of gold; the Curlicuan is said to rob wine cellars; the Ganconagh talks of love; the Fear Darrig is a red man and joker who gives evil dreams; the Pooka takes drunkards on wild rides; the Dullahan might throw a basin of blood at you as a death omen; Leanhaun Shee is the fairy mistress who enslaves the love of men; the Fear Gorta brings good luck to those who give him food; the Banshee fairy is a woman who wails for the dead and the Fear Sidhe is the male fairy. There are other fairies not to forget — those for the home, for water (sherie), light Soullh and a host of lake fairies, dragons and ghosts.

The lore and the story telling of the Irish are famous. Who else could convince the world that if you catch a leprechaun, a little fairy shoemaker, you should never take your eyes off him, for if you do, you lose all hope of finding his treasure.

And Blarney isn't Gaelic for baloney, it refers to the Blarney Stone from a castle and all the Irish must have kissed it, for doing so has cured their shyness.

I'm not sure why, but if you wear green on St. Patrick's Day, you've agreed to get pinched, presumably at worst on the buttocks and not by a NYC cop with a shillelagh. In Ireland, the color green stands for hope and the shamrock signifies the number three. But why does Chicago attempt to color their river green this day?

The Irish brought all this to America in 1737. There seems to be a dispute about Boston being the first to have a St. Patrick's Day celebration, but there is no dispute that New York City stages the largest parade since it was initiated in 1762.

During Roman times, Maewyn Succat was born in Kilpatrick, Scotland in 387 AD. His parents were Romans, Calpurnius and Conchessa. We know him today as St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, becoming so posthumously. The holiday that celebrates his death at the age of 73 on March 17 — although translation of the calendar from that time is unclear.

He was a missionary, bringing Christianity to the Gaels of Ireland, a land of paganism and druidism. *The Irish Times* in Dublin says it's not so that he used the

shamrock to explain the trilogy. He became fluent in the Irish language and knowledgeable in druidism.

From his work in France, he became a bishop in 432 and Pope Celestine conferred him with the name "Patercius," two Latin words "pater civium" meaning the father of his people.

One of the many legends surrounding St. Patrick is that he drove the snakes from Ireland. Snakes were a symbol of paganism, therefore the legend explains that he expelled paganism from Ireland. Still, there were never any snakes or other reptiles for that matter in Ireland.

Craugh Patrick by Douglas Dalby
 "Patrick was a gentleman. He came from decent people, he built a church in Dublin town And on it put a steeple. The Wicklow hills are very high And so is the hill of Howth, sir, But there's a hill much higher still, Much higher than them both, sir. On the top of this high hill St. Patrick preached his sermon Which drove the fogs into the bogs And banished all the vermin. There's not a mile of Erin's Isle Where dirty vermin musters But there he put his dear forefoot And murdered them in clusters."
The Solitary Fairies by W. E. Henley, July, 1893

"I could not pass the half-door where the cobbler sat in view - Nor figure me the wize Leprechaun In square-cut, old-world reds and buckle-shoes - Bent at his work in the hedge-side, and know Just how he tapped his brogue, and twitched His wax-end this and that way, both with wrists And elbows. In the rich June fields, Where the ripe clover drew the bees, And the tall quakers trembled, and the West Wind Loll'd his half-holiday away."

"Erin Go Braugh," Ireland forever. For all that the Irish are and for all that they mean for America — Happy St. Patrick's Day. For more insight into wonderful imagination, see Megan Gill's article on page 22.

Government Reform Thought for the Week

The government pension system in New Jersey is being seriously abused at the expense of the taxpayer. Officials and appointees double-dip along with police chiefs, superintendents and others padding their last year of salary to artificially boost their retirement pay. We call for the legislature to bring an immediate end to this.

We'd like to hear your thoughts for government reform.

See More Letters
 Pages 5 & 18

Letters to the Editor

Keeping Best Teachers and Reaching Fair Contract Settlement Is BOE's Goal

By Linda Nelson, President
 SP-F Board of Education

Editor's note: The following is a response to a letter from Patricia Walsh-Pierce published in the February 23 issue of *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

Thank you for taking the time to write and share your thoughts and concerns regarding negotiations with the board of education. We agree that the staff in our district continue to provide an excellent education for our students and we are glad that you are pleased with the education your children are receiving.

Perhaps this information will help you understand the board's concerns and what has led to this stage in our negotiations. You asked in your letter if the board is proposing cuts in benefits. The answer is "no." The board has asked the association to work with us to help control costs so

that we can maintain staff and not have a big impact on taxes. We have asked that Scotch Plains-Fanwood Education Association members make more cost-effective choices in benefit plans or negotiate with us some other cost savings.

The rising costs of health benefits are a great concern to us. For a number of years the cost of our employees' benefits have risen between 15 and 20 percent yearly. It becomes harder and harder to maintain our programs and level of staffing in the face of our state-imposed budget cap and ridiculously small amount of state aid without trying to realize some savings in health benefits costs. This is a problem that all boards of education in New Jersey, and probably the country, are facing.

You question if our salary proposal matches other teacher salaries in the county. The board has always agreed to a salary package that is in line with the rest

of Union County and with other high achieving districts like ours. But before agreeing to an affordable salary package, we must see savings elsewhere. Otherwise, we would have to cut a number of teachers to find money for salary increases, which would benefit no one — teachers, students or parents — as class sizes would go up.

You also mention that the teachers are working without a contract. This is not correct. They are working without a new contract. All of the terms and conditions, salaries and benefits of the current contract remain in effect until the new contract is signed.

We agree that we will all benefit from keeping our fine teachers in the SP-F Schools, and we certainly intend to settle a fair contract.

Thanks for your recognition of the board's dedication to providing a strong educational program.

