

Green dorms, cable's creator, etc.

From the Scrapbook.

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How Green Was My Dorm?

Last week the Washington Post offered suggestions on ways students can "go green" in their dorm rooms. As staff writer Jura Koncius notes, "Students this year will be spending about \$600 each for back-to-college products, according to a survey by the National Retail Federation, down 7 percent from 2007, in part because of a faltering economy and \$50,000 annual tuition, room and board at some local private colleges and universities."

Not that this should discourage an incoming freshman from taking advantage of the environmentally friendly products listed, including: "eco-fabric shoe bag made partially from recycled water bottles" (\$29.99), "garment rack made of renewable, sustainable bamboo" (\$129), "Alena pillows woven with sustainably harvested hemp," (\$31.95), "round storage barrel, \$80, and rectangular storage basket, \$60, made of scraps from flip-flop factories," and our favorite, "Smencils, scented pencils made of recycled newspapers" (\$59.99 for 50 Smencils).

Apparently it's going to take a lot of "green," in the sense in which THE SCRAPBOOK understood that word back in the previous century, to "go green" in the up-to-date sense of the term. But really, What student is going to spend \$60 for pencils that smell? On the other hand, we have a sneaking suspicion that some of those pillows are going to be smoked.

The Man Who Brought Us Cable

Clay Whitehead died last week, at the comparatively early age of 69, after a long battle with cancer. His name is not likely to resonate with the public, but Whitehead was one of those people, briefly in public life, whose influence was decisive, even historic--and decidedly benign.

An MIT-trained engineer and administrator, he was the first director of the old White House Office of Telecommunications Policy, during the Nixon administration, where his agile brain and conservative politics antagonized the Democratic Congress and Washington press corps of the late 1960s and early '70s. But it was Whitehead who fought for, and achieved, a market-based "open skies" policy for communications satellites and cable television licenses, ending the monopolies controlled by the federal government, and leading to competition, variety, and abundance on the airwaves.

The televised world we inhabit today--hundreds of channels, C-SPAN, Classic Arts Showcase, ESPN, Turner Classic Movies, the Weather Channel, Fox News, Animal Planet, you name it--is made possible by the work of this smart, personable, dedicated man whose premature death we note with regret.

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"'I have always loved longitude,' Nancy Pelosi says before breaking into laughter. 'I love latitude; it's in the stars. But longitude, it's about time . . .'" ("Pelosi: 'I'm trying to save the planet,'" Politico, July 29, 2008)

Mistaken Identity

THE SCRAPBOOK, which is sometimes mistaken for a Diarist or an Editor's Note, sends its condolences to Harvard's president--who is also Harvard's first woman president--Drew Gilpin Faust.

In the July 23 edition of the Times Literary Supplement, editor Peter Stothard wrote a brief item about President Faust's recent book on death in the Civil War, which has just been published in Britain, explaining that "he applies the same process of demythology . . . that Paul Fussell applied to the First World War and Nicholson Baker has just attempted for the Second" (see Page 37 for our review of Baker). Which is all very well, of course--except that, as noted, Drew Gilpin Faust is a she, not a he.

Now, you would think, THE SCRAPBOOK believes, that the editor of the Times Literary Supplement would know the name of the president of Harvard University, as well as the interesting fact that the president is a woman. But then again, would he? It is true that, in the past, certain college presidents in America were minor celebrities (Robert Maynard Hutchins, Chicago) or famous for their gravitas and longevity (Nicholas Murray Butler, Columbia). But nowadays they seem to come and go with the swift regularity of Italian prime ministers, even at such high-octane institutions as Harvard. Quick! Name the presidents of Yale and Princeton! See what THE SCRAPBOOK means?

The crisis in American higher education is not just in curriculum, or political correctness, or moral relativism on campus, but in the fact that the national stature of college presidents ain't what it used to be, and that yesterday's leaders in education, civic responsibility, and public morality, are today's fundraisers and arbiters of faculty parking space.

(Answers: Richard C. Levin, Shirley M. Tilghman)

Sentences We Didn't Finish, II

"IGNATIUS: Zbig, few people in America have lived with the tumult of the Iranian revolution in quite the way that you have. You were national security advisor to President Carter at the time of the revolution. You struggled with the horrific months of the seizure of the U.S. Embassy and the hostage crisis. What are your starting points? How do you see the strategic issues?

"BRZEZINSKI: Well, my starting point would be somewhat . . . " (America and the World: Conversations on the Future of American Foreign Policy, by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft, moderated by David Ignatius)

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