



## Cheering tidbits lighten otherwise grim week

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In an otherwise grim week — at least on unimportant peripheral matters like Iranian nukes — three things cheered me up. The first was the decision of Iran's bakers to rename Danish pastries "Roses of the Prophet Muhammed pastries." Has a ring to it, don't you think? If they're looking for a slogan, how about "Iranian pastry: There's nothing flakier. Except our president."

The second cheery sight was the destruction of a McDonald's in Lahore by the usual excitable young lads from the religion of pieces. Apparently the lively Pakistanis had burned every single Danish target in the city — one early Victor Borge LP left behind by the last British governor — and had been obliged to diversify. So they dragged Ronald McDonald out of the joint, torched him in the street and danced around his flaming remains shouting "Death to America! Death to Britain! Death to Tony Blair!"

I'm not sure I even get that. Ronald and Tony seem kind of similar from a distance but even on the all-infidels-look-alike-to-me-especially-when-they're-alight thesis you'd think they weren't that easily confused.

The third jolly event of the week was those other excitable fellows — the Big Media White House reporters — jumping up and down shouting "Death to Dick Cheney!" NBC's David Gregory, the George Clooney of the press corps, was yelling truth to power about why the Elmer-Fudd-in-gun-rampage story was released to "a local Corpus Christi newspaper, not the White House press corps at large." I know how he feels. I remember, like, four or five years ago — early September, maybe second week — there was this building collapse in New York and I had to learn about it from the TV because this notoriously secretive paranoid administration couldn't even e-mail me a timely press release. For an NBC guy discovering that

some hicksville nowhere-burg one-stop-light feed-price sheet got tipped off before he did is like a dowager duchess turning up at the royal banquet to discover the scullery maid's been seated next to the queen.

So anyway David Gregory's going bananas and yelling "I will yell!" and "Don't be a jerk!" at the White House press secretary, and there's more smoke coming out of his ears than from Ronald McDonald in Lahore, and I'm thinking, you know, maybe Karl's latest range of Rovebots that he planted in American media corporations are just a wee bit too parodically self-absorbed to be plausible. And then this lady pipes up and asks, "Would this be much more serious if the man had died?"

Well, maybe. And maybe it would be even ever so much more serious still if, after peppering him with birdshot, Cheney had dragged him into a safe house in the Sunni Triangle and decapitated him with a rusty scimitar while shouting "Allahu Ahkbar!" and then sold the video to al-Jazeera.

Fortunately, the Washington Post had that wise old bird David Ignatius to put it in the proper historical context: "This incident," he mused, "reminds me a bit of Sen. Edward Kennedy's delay in informing Massachusetts authorities about his role in the fatal automobile accident at Chappaquiddick in 1969."

Hmm. Let's see. On the one hand, the guy leaves the gal at the bottom of the river struggling for breath pressed up against the window in some small air pocket while he pulls himself out of the briny, staggers home, sleeps it off and saunters in to inform the cops the

following day that, oh yeah, there was some broad down there. And, on the other hand, the guy calls 911, has the other fellow taken to the hospital, lets the sheriff know promptly but *neglects to fax David Gregory's make-up girl!*

One can only hope others agree with Ignatius' insightful analogy, and that the reprehensible Cheney will be hounded from public life the way Kennedy was all those years ago. One would hate to think folks would just let it slide and three decades from now this Cheney guy will be sitting on some committee picking Supreme Court justices and whatnot.

Meanwhile, from Malaysia to Jordan to Scandinavia, it was a bad week for journalists increasingly constrained – not to mention fired and otherwise humiliated – in their ability to cover the big story of our time. If I had to pick a single moment to contrast with the hilariously parochial narcissist buffoons of the Washington press, it would be another press conference in another government building, this time in Oslo, called by Norway's minister of labor. Surrounded by cabinet ministers and a phalanx of imams, Velbjorn Selbekk, the editor of an obscure Christian publication called *Magazinet*, issued an abject public apology for reprinting the Danish Muhammed cartoons. He had initially stood firm in the face of Muslim death threats and the usual lack of support from Europe's political class, but in the end Mr. Selbekk was prevailed upon to recant and the head of Norway's Islamic Council, Mohammed Hamdan, graciously accepted the apology and assured the prostrate editor that he was now under his personal protection. As the American author Bruce Bawer commented, "It

was a picture right out of a sharia courtroom."

In Canada, by contrast, the Western Standard (for which I also write) stood firm in its decision to publish the cartoons, and as a result is suffering legal harassment from Muslim lobby groups and has been banned from both Air Canada and two of the country's leading bookstore chains, Indigo-Chapters and McNally Robinson. Paul McNally of the latter defended his action this way: "We feel there is nothing to gain on the side of freedom of expression and much to lose on the side of hurting feelings." Not exactly Voltaire, is it? "I disagree strongly with what you say but I will fight to the death for your right to say it as long as it doesn't hurt anybody's feelings." Maybe it could be Canada's new national motto.

It's easy to be tough about nothing.

The press corps that noisily champions "the public's right to know" about a minor hunting accident simultaneously assures the public that they've no need to see these Danish cartoons that have caused riots, arson and death around the world. On CNN, out of "sensitivity" to Islam, they show the cartoons but with the Prophet's face pixilated so that he looks as if Cheney's ventilated him with birdshot and it turned puffy and gangrenous. C'mon, guys, these are interesting times. Anyone can unload the umpteenth round of blanks into the bulletproof Chimpy Hallibushitter, but why not take a shot at something that matters?

Or perhaps it would just be easier to change the term "free press" to the "Roses of the Prophet Muhammed press."