

# OPINION

A4

Monday  
November 12, 2007

THEIRS

## The miracle of an orange cat

Sometimes the stars line up in such a way that coincidence and fate become inadequate explanations for the things that happen in our lives, which brings me to the story of a Rapid City councilman, his sister, a stranger and an unexplainable orange cat.

Several weeks prior to Rapid City's mayoral election Bonnie Matulka learned that efforts to radiate and remove entirely a rare cancerous tumor had failed. She came from Omaha to be with her brother, Sam Kooiker, for an election night that proved to be a disappointment.

It was the last Sunday in August as leaves on trees in the Black Hills were just beginning to turn, when Bonnie learned that more tumors had appeared and that her cancer was inoperable this time.

She was told get her affairs in order and prepare to die sometime in the following two weeks.

While talking on the phone to another brother, Ben, in Iowa, Bonnie asked if he could bring his orange cat Sherbert to her. Bonnie loved orange cats and wanted to hold one. The world's smartest, most powerful and famous cats were orange, she explained, citing Heathcliff, Morris and Garfield. Ben sadly told his sister that Sherbert did not travel well.

And so the search was on. Sam said his cat was not orange and was not particularly sociable. A neighbor's kitten had not had its shots and wasn't orange. Rapid City Regional Hospital allows well-behaved animals with all their shots to visit terminally ill patients.

By the following Tuesday, the family had all but given up on finding an orange cat for Bonnie to hold.

Then came a knock at the door. Bonnie's father, John, answered and the stranger on the other side of the screen door asked, "Did you lose an orange cat?"

The woman at the door was Sandy, (she asked that I not use her last name) who on the Saturday evening prior had whisked up from Eighth Street traffic a stray orange cat — the day before Bonnie asked her brothers to find one.

Sandy spent several days looking for the cat's owners. The feline's identification chip yielded no results. And by Tuesday, she was randomly knocking on doors several blocks away from her own home when she chose the Kooikers' door.

Bonnie's father explained the situation and Sandy took the orange cat to the vet, got it current on shots and took it to Bonnie's side. Three times. And the cat knew its business there. It lay peacefully on her bed, comforting her for more than an hour at a time.

Through the kindness of many others, including Sandy's husband, Bonnie and her husband Mike were able to make the trip back home to Omaha.

Bonnie lost her battle on Oct. 20, one day shy of eight weeks after she was told she would die in two.

And, on the same day that hundreds of people in Omaha were paying their last respects to Bonnie, Sandy's mother died.

That night, and every night since, an orange cat comforts her.

Mike Sanborn lives and works in Rapid City. Write to mikes@sanbornads.com.



Mike SANBORN

OURS

## Bill to ensure VA will meet health needs of women vets

**THE ISSUE:** Veterans Day.

**OUR VIEW:** Officially, it was Nov. 11, but President Bush has proclaimed this coming week as National Veterans Awareness Week. To all our veterans, regardless of age or gender, a heartfelt thank you for your service and sacrifice.

Here in South Dakota, we have about 75,000 veterans living among us, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating more of them each year.

The faces of those returning veterans are young, they are increasingly likely to be female and many of them are at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, since more than 75 percent of our military's fighting force is now combat experienced.

The Veterans Administration has established screening and treatment programs for soldiers returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. One clear trend from that screening is that the prevalence of PTSD in women veterans is rising rapidly.

It has grown from afflicting just 1 percent of women veterans at the start of OIF/OEF, to 19 percent in recent VA studies.

More women are answering the call to serve. Since September of 2001, more than 177,000 women have served in the military and almost 27,000 women are currently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, more will need medical and psychiatric care as wounded or disabled veterans upon their return from a war zone.

The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act, introduced last week in Congress by Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, who sits on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, seeks to ensure that the VA has the authority and the ability to meet the unique challenges and gender differences when treating women veterans.

The legislation requires the VA to study the health, the medical needs and the barriers to treatment faced by women OIF/OEF veterans. Since women have different health care needs than

men, it makes sense that their treatments for PTSD, substance abuse, sexual trauma and mental illnesses would also differ from that given to men.

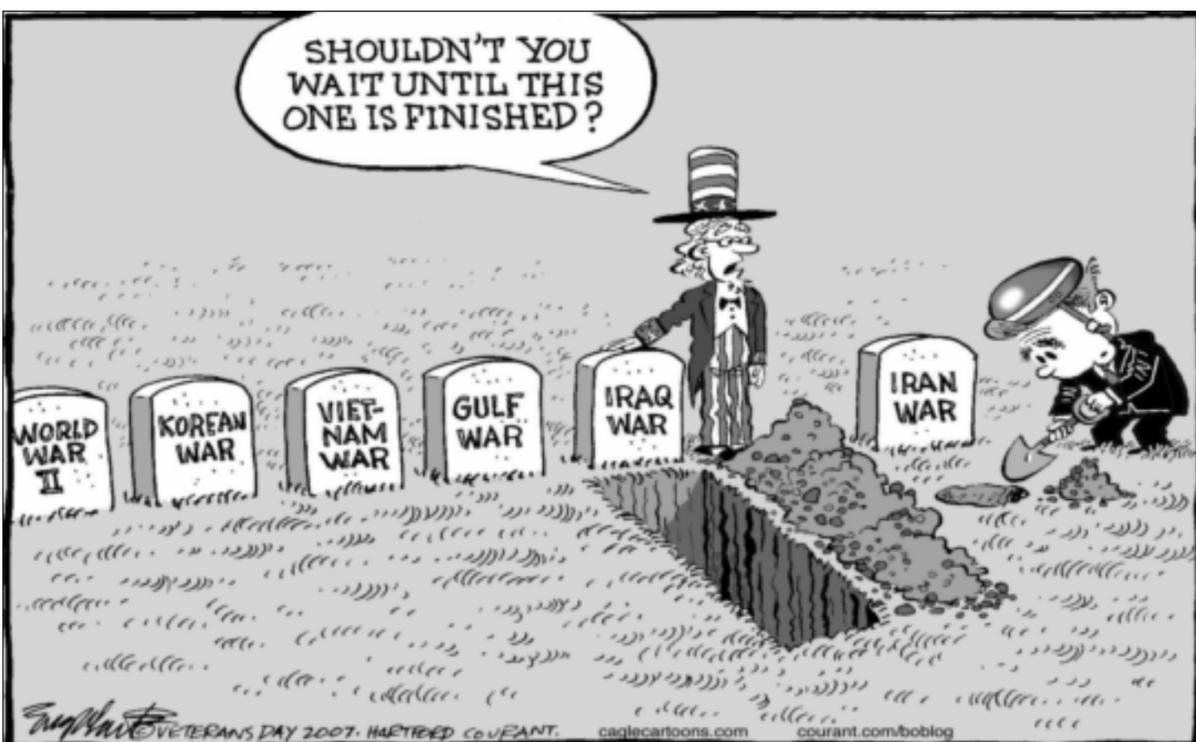
Women veterans require pregnancy care, of course, but they also have different heart health issues and different orthopedic needs from men.

Herseth's bill would also require the VA to establish small pilot programs on child care assistance and counseling for women veterans.

The theme for this year's Women's Veterans Conference, held this past weekend in Rapid City, was "Celebrating Women Veterans: Wisdom from the Past, Mentoring for the Future."

We think a pro-active approach to the health care needs of women veterans is wise and should be welcomed by both the VA and the rest of America.

ARTISTS'



YOURS

### Man is a spoiler of creation, not a good caretaker of it

Patriarchs wrote history, starting the "battle of the sexes," a war men have always won — not magnanimously.

Women were burdened by constant childbearing and defined as property, men had both church and law on their side — followed by wealth and power, after all, it was their idea.

Of course, this "Image of God" does the really important things — killing the competition, turning the planet into a disaster area with bloody wars, trying to turn women into a yearly production line of little, expendable troops.

If man is a god's "ultimate creation," he is a spoiler, not a caretaker.

Male supremacist religion always was about blame and sin, following the "law," no matter how much it hurts people.

More laws, more people in prison, but hey, more jobs!

Religion is the only acceptable drug, so sexual predators and other addicts fill the cells.

Punishment is what it's about, not how or why these "evil" people got "that way."

Ignorance versus the complexity of the human psyche. And why lying about sex is worse than killing and torturing people.

MARGARET MINKEL  
Rapid City

### Has Andy been watching too many Al Gore documentaries?

I've concluded that Andy Hollander has been watching too many Al Gore fantasy flicks and sucked in a lot of hot air. The facts are, if real Christians were still running the country our kids would graduate from school able to read, write, and be knowledgeable in math and science. They would know the difference between evolution and creation science. They would be taught respect for our flag, our laws, and our way of life.

If real Christians were running the country Mr. Hollander there would be no abortion on demand, no same-sex marriage and no coddling of criminals and their ilk. Insects and wildfire wouldn't be ravaging our forests because they would still be under management; prairie dogs wouldn't be devastating the National Grasslands and forcing ranchers to sell out. If Christians were running the country we wouldn't be standing around wringing our hands in fear and paranoia over ozone holes and weather changes which have occurred throughout history. We would have learned that in school.

And Mr. Hollander, try not to tie Jimmy Carter into conservative Christianity. He's the product of liberal mentality. That is, no guts, no commitment, no understanding and the continual emission of whining sounds.

DON KOPP  
Rapid City

### Time for Herseth Sandlin to embrace her Republican self

I have followed Stephanie Herseth's congressional career with great interest.

In the early stages Stephanie was a cheerleader for Bush's invading Iraq. More recently, Stephanie has sided with Bush taking away our constitutional rights. Now the House has finally voted out a mining reform bill, and Stephanie votes against it. For 100 years the mining companies literally stole the minerals from our public lands and have not adequately compensated us, the people who own those lands.

I, as a Democrat, can no longer give Stephanie a pass. I can no longer vote for her and urge my fellow Democrats to not be deceived by the smile or "Hello, how are you?" but look at the record. George Bush must be proud of her.

What can we do as fellow Democrats? Write letters. Contact Stephanie's office. Write to Nancy Pelosi. No longer vote for someone who votes against us.

If you can't stand to vote for the other person, there is a third vote, don't vote for either one of them.

I also ask a fellow Democrat to stand up and challenge Stephanie in the primary. That person will do well. I have not met many Democrats who are not troubled by her voting record. Stephanie be true to yourself and become a Republican.

GARY HECKENLAIBLE  
Rapid City

THE GOOD,  
THE BAD,  
AND THE UGLY



Today's Good, Bad & Ugly was submitted by Dianne Dailey of Rapid City.

**THE GOOD:** Health insurance for all children.

**THE BAD:** Some doctors, dentists, and medical facilities don't accept Medicaid (CHIPS) patients. It is their choice.

**THE DIFFICULT:** Finding a facility which will accept the child insured by CHIPS as a patient.

Call Bullseye with a Good, Bad or Ugly on a current news topic at (605) 394-8296 or e-mail: goodbadugly@rapidcityjournal.com Name and hometown required.

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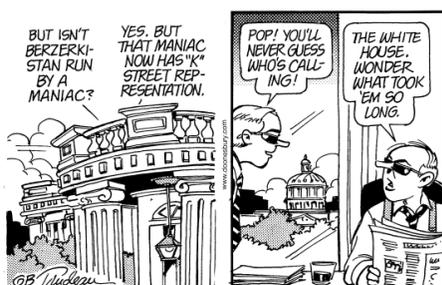
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