

I'm not a robot



like mine was 90%. Thanks, Reagan and Bush I and III! Frankly, in so far as it affects me at all, this war has been very good to me. Still, I see it as a series of mistakes. Intellectually, I consider our entire enterprise in the Middle East to be futile at best; and at worst, harmful to our country and the world. So? The result is a troubled ambivalence. As long as nothing is asked of me personally, I'll continue to support this war-- by my passive acquiescence. The moment a sacrifice is asked of me? I will turn acutely against it. By sacrifice I mean ANYTHING. One extra dime in taxes, one mandated gas rationing, one hint that a cousin might be drafted-- ANYTHING would be too much. I'd be out of here. The women in my family are apple shaped. Like my Mom and Grandma and my aunts, I carry whatever little extra weight I have right in front- in the belly. I'm not fat, not according to what I weigh for my height. But because I have a round tummy and no real hips I guess to some people I look pregnant. Three times last month somebody asked about my "pregnancy"! Talk about embarrassment! I don't even have a boyfriend. One person who asked was an intern in the office where I work. She said to me, "When are you due?" I think she may have confused me with an older woman in the office who actually is pregnant, but still.... Even if I were, how could she be so rude and nosy? Then last week a man, a complete stranger, came up to me on the street and told me I should quit smoking-- for my baby's sake! Who raised these people? Don't they realize that if their assumption is wrong, it's humiliating? I was, like, numb with shock. I just stared at this guy, speechless. The man I was walking with was shocked, too. But he was able to say, "My friend is not pregnant, and I think you owe her an apology!" The rude guy just looked confused, as if he didn't understand why I was upset. The he said-- and I couldn't believe this was happening: how could he make it worse? -- "When I see a young woman with a big belly, I think she's pregnant." For a minute I thought my friend was going to sock him. But no- my friend took my arm and started walking me away. By then I was wishing I'd socked the guy myself. When I was a kid I never gave in to other people's opinions about how I should look or how much I should weigh. Dieting was for weaklings. I felt superior to kids who were always talking about their weight and how little they ate. If a girl turned down dessert for fear of getting fat, I'd roll my eyes and order the hot biggest fudge sundae on the menu. I never got on a scale, because I felt fine the way I was. Some people referred to me as chubby. I didn't care. But when my cousin got married and asked me to be in the wedding, I had to be fitted for a bridesmaid dress. I'd always hated shopping. I wore whatever my mother got for me. With elastic waistbands. Now I had to face a mirror, and the fact that I was a size 16. The biggest size the bridal store sold! I got a scale, weighed myself, and found I was what the chart called "obese". I went on the South Beach Diet. I gave up sugar and started obsessing about food and weight, including noticing other people's weight and judging them on it! I'd never that done before. I was really strict, and lost nearly 2 pounds a week for six months-- until I had some kind of breakdown. I was depressed and faint and went on crying jags-- just like those dieting weaklings I used to feel superior to in seventh grade! Now I've gained back half of what I'd lost, but I think I'll be all right. Even though I'm not strict any more, some of the better eating habits-- more vegetables, more protein, less pasta and sugar-- have settled in. I'm a veteran teacher in what used to be a good school, and I can tell you dozens of horror stories about how education has changed for the worse since "No Child Left Behind". Sure, it would be great if teachers got together and took a stand. But there's not much chance of that. Teachers, and especially the teachers' unions, have been under attack for so long that all the fight has gone out of us. We're breadwinners, most of us. We have children of our own and we need our jobs. I have two master's degrees plus some psychology, and I know how to diagnose learning disabilities and how to help all different types of learners-- but it just doesn't matter any more. Our students are tested every month in both reading and math- - and our monthly teachers' meetings are totally focused on how to raise the test scores and keep the school's superior rating. I can't reach the students I need to reach, because it is all about the scores. I hope the public wakes up soon. We're losing a whole generation of young minds. From outside the field of education, "No Child Left Behind" seems like a great program, one that will force America to live up to its ideal: a free and equal education for everyone. We will train good citizens and productive workers, no matter where they live or what the economic status of their parents. But I can personally attest to the fact that this program has stunted children's growth. It created unrealistic and underfunded goals. From elementary school up to our universities, the "No Child Left Behind" focuses on frequent testing and punitive sanctions. This combined with budget slashing shrinks standards-- on every level. The saddest thing of all is that so many parents have been led to believe that rote memorization of facts to get the "right answers" is education! They think the tests will help their children be successful. They don't realize the kind of "success" kids who learn this way will have: The "success" of performing boring meaningless work for low wages. Good jobs require creativity and critical thinking, both of which are being pushed out of the public schools. Poor children who don't do well on standard tests feel as if they will never be good enough. They may have an abundance of talent and skill, but in areas the tests don't measure. I see this all the time -- I'm a teacher. Politicians who send their children to private schools and create tax breaks for wealthy business people who send their kids to private schools have no stake in the improvement of public education. Middle class parents are now working 70 hour weeks to pay for their kids to go to private school, because they can see that public education is being re-designed to create an obedient working class of ill-educated graduates. That, plus an unemployable underclass of the less obedient who are pushed into dropping out. You're all upset that the voters of one of the United States have sent a Muslim to congress? You say Islam is a terror cult, not a "real" religion? You say you've never heard of a religion where devotees carry weapons and have "hit squads"? Read history! War gods who favor the tribe that worships them are the most popular form of religion, historically. Most of the Old Testament is a "My God can beat up your god" story. Capturing and torturing and sacrificing enemies was the main form of worship in Mayan and Aztec cultures. Ever hear of the Assassins? Of Ninjas? The Catholic Church burned an entire town of 7,000 people, saying "Kill them all, God will sort out the innocents from the guilty Heretics". Nobody around was keeping count, of course, but many historians think that more people have been killed by Christians than any other religion. I believe this is true, although I am personally a Christian and try to follow Christ's teaching of "turn the other cheek". The issue of this Islamic politician shouldn't upset you. If the people don't like him, they won't vote for him again in two years. It's that simple. If you want something to be upset about, why not the fact that this Administration is putting in place an override of constitutional democracy? They are closing the borders. They are monitoring the phones and computers of people who disagree with them. Free speech and assembly, habeas corpus, trial by jury -- all slated for extinction. If you understand from History that "Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely", you will recognize this as the first stage of tyranny. Forget about a lone Islamic legislator. What about the right to elect legislators, and to expect that the laws they pass will be faithfully executed? With "No Child Left Behind", more and more young people will have no choice but to 'volunteer' for military service. Social Darwinists don't want the disadvantaged to pull themselves up. Their goal is to keep them under control, ready to serve in the trenches. That's the reason I took my kids out of public school. My son was in fifth grade and had huge loads of take-home material to wade through. He got no help or guidance, and lost all enthusiasm for learning. To make matters worse, the math teaching was terrible. The teacher barely spoke English, and allowed calculators to be used in tests. Supposedly the students were learning theoretical concepts, but my son couldn't understand basic math, let alone the advanced stuff, even with tutoring from me. Testing was nearly constant and the stress was making him sick. And this was a top school, considered one of the best public schools in the state! Now, my eleven year old son is in a Friends school. My son learns science outdoors, exploring the pond and woods near the school, and brings specimens back to the school lab. He's learning how to write, how to research and understand things for himself. Math is based on real-world problems that the students work out in teams. The teachers know my son, they relate his lessons to his interests and guide him into art and music and games that will make him a rounded, grounded, adult. He's got back interest and self-confidence. Oh, I do love Christmas. The best part starts with putting up the tree, listening to seasonal music while we drink egg noggs and munch on popcorn. The ornaments we put on include ones my sister and I made back in elementary school, but the oldest are a set of painted gingerbread boys that my mother made for her parents' tree before she married Dad. Places of honor go to the bedraggled survivors of the flock of all-too-realistic birds that our family cat thought were her particular playthings. There's a picture of Tigriss with her mouth full of feathers and a mangled birdie-lump between her paws in our Christmas photo album. We have annual snapshots of our family around the tree, going all the way back to before the advent of color film. You can see the changes from year to year, the friends and family members that have come and gone. One year we all caught the flu; we woke up, threw up, went back to bed, and celebrated Christmas a few days late, once we all felt a bit better. There's a "before" and "after" picture of that memorable occasion. But I don't really need pictures-- the smells and the sounds and the decorations bring it all back. It's the layers of shared experience that make Christmas special. I loved Christmas when I was a kid, but these days I just can't stand the relentless materialism. The obnoxious ads that equate money spent on consumer goods with "love" make me sick to my stomach. I'm not giving you the Puritan rant about plastic Santas and American kids who gobble sugary junk and have too many toys. I'm not against pleasure. But somehow we have to face the cost to everyone else on the globe of this "richness", this "freedom", this "generosity". There's a link between global suffering and exploitation and the way mammoth corporations like Target and Walmart operate. It's not enough for Americans to drop a few dollars in the Salvation Army kettle before they sit down to unwrap gifts made by poverty-stricken children and their overworked mothers and fathers-- gifts made from materials that poison the workers who make them. If every American could see the process that results in that designer outfit, that diamond ring or electronic gizmo, I think people would realize that the world would be better if it had never been made. We're not only buying in to this destructive system, though our movies and music and TV and the Internet we're advertising our free, rich, wasteful life as a standard for the rest of the world to follow. Once everyone wants it and works for it there will be no saving our earth. We will all die in the trash heap we are making of it. Is there a "War on Christmas"? I don't believe it! What's the matter with "Happy Holidays"? People said "Happy Holidays" when I was little. Nobody got all hostile about it. After all, Christmas and New Year are two holidays, aren't they? You want to wish people happy for both-- or happy whatever they celebrate. My atheist aunt celebrates Christmas. So does my atheist Chinese boss and my Jewish girlfriend. A Muslim coworker always gives me a Christmas present. "Holidays" sales are what stores are supposed to have! Are they going to tell people that they're not allowed to buy for Kwanzaa or Hanukkah? Spring Break or Summer Solstice? Why not, if that's what they want to spend their money on? Or should stores to sell only to Christians? Is that even legal? People are so ready to take offense. The fundamentalists get offended if you don't say "Merry Christmas", while other people get freaked if you even mention the word. I read about some carolers who were turned away from an ice rink where skater Sacha Cohen was going to perform, for fear that their Christian songs would offend her. If they're going to send away carolers for the sake of a single person, how about at least asking that person if carols upset her? Maybe, like my Jewish girlfriend, she's a big fan of Christmas. The Mexican Guest Worker plan is a great idea. It will give lower class guys like me the opportunity to spend the rest of our lives without working-- or at least without a regular paycheck. Why not replace us all with people who will work for five bucks an hour and sleep ten in a room? We just waste the money we earn anyway. Buying ridiculous stuff like shoes and food. I had a seasonal job in Death Valley a while back-- the hotels ran a little short of Mexicans that year-- and I was amazed at the number of Europeans vacationing . They come to the Valley for warmth, side trip to Las Vegas and Disneyland, see the redwoods and Hollywood, relax for a solid month. I figured they must be bankers or real estate agents or something, but they told me that they were just ordinary workers: butchers and bakers. I couldn't believe it when they told me that this was the European standard-- everybody, even the janitors, gets at least a month of vacation! And the workers take it, too-- they aren't stuck at home because they have to show up on time for a second job. I realized then that for the people I know, vacations aren't part of our lives any more. If I'm lucky a relative will put me up when I get laid off, and I can hang out at the beach or the bowling alley until I find the next job. But it's getting harder and harder to find the next job. And I'm running out of relatives who'll put up with me. But hey, it's not hard times for everyone. If you're a CEO you've probably seen a triple digit increase. But probably you don't get a vacation, either. What if while you were gone somebody got a good look at the books? Having been raised in The Heartland by strict conservative parents, I have some personal experience with how religion can crush the Spirit. The God of my childhood demanded that I be a submissive daughter, and I was supposed to grow up to be someone's submissive wife. According to those standards, I've been quite the sinner. But as a single mom living in "wicked" New York City, I can tell you that I have a closer relationship to God now than I ever did growing up - even though I haven't set foot in a church in years! I currently have no problem submitting to something greater than my own self will -- I learned that during the process of childbirth. And I make choices to "do the right thing" every day, out of love for my beautiful daughter. There's a big difference between behaving well out of love, and giving in to powerful people who bully and humiliate you. Today I give thanks to God that my daughter and I are alive and healthy. It's a genuine feeling of gratitude. I'm not tempted to do things that are forbidden or self-destructive any more-- but not out of fear. In fact, I'm certain now that God doesn't want to be feared-- because the closer I feel to God the more fearless I become! Christmas three years ago I gave my brother-in-law a wallet as a gift. He and my sister were having a rough time that year-- he lost his job, their baby needed an operation-- so I put some cash in the wallet to help them out. This year at our family Christmas get together, I opened a box from my brother-in-law and I found --the same wallet! I kept a straight face and thanked him casually without saying anything. Then I walked into the dining room and checked the inner compartment. My 800 bucks was still in there! I could have really thanked him-- and had a Christmas blow-out with the cash! But they still needed money more than I did, so I called my sister out of the family room and gave her the \$800. You should have seen her face! She laughed so hard she finally had to tell everybody what her husband had done, so they could laugh too. I guess I'd advise that that if you are going to re-gift something, at least take a good look at what it is you were given. My dream? You'd never guess, to look at me. But when I was a little kid? I spent summers on a farm. My Dad's grandparents'. Till I was six. When I was seven my parents divorced, and the summers stopped. My Great-Grands passed away not very long after. I don't remember much about it, really. Except that I was happy. I fed the chickens and rode a pony. And I remember smells: the country air. Sometimes, now, a fresh rain on grass in the park? Takes me right back. Anyway, that's my dream: to own a farm. A small one, where I can grow my own food, and ride a horse. Maybe grow some fancy stuff for gourmet restaurants? Asparagus and herbs and free range chickens. A couple of big old brown-eyed milk cows. I want an old fashioned wood barn-- I love that smell: a wood barn filled with hay and animals. I want plenty of trees, a brook with a pond, some mountains in the distance. I dream about it day and night. I calm myself looking at seed catalogs. Or I sketch out designs for my farm house. I search through the real estate photos, looking for just the right place: far, far away from the city noise, and from the stink. Be best if my nearest neighbor is out of sight. Thing is, I've had enough of people. And I wouldn't be surprised if they've had enough of me. When did it become a rule that "bought new" gifts are the only ones acceptable? That handmade gifts, or things once owned and loved by the giver, are "lacky"? All I can think is that the stores' barrage of "Buy, buy, buy! advertising has discomobulated people's brains. When the kids were too young to shop, they drew me a picture or made lumpy ceramics. I loved these gifts. I keep them on display in my kitchen, and whenever I see them, I smile. I love the home made fruitcake my sister bakes for me every year-- despite all the dumb fruitcake jokes, she knows my taste exactly. Even that I prefer pecans to walnuts and rum flavor to brandy. "It's the thought that counts", isn't it? Decades ago, when shopping and cooking became difficult for her, the family stopped gathering at my great aunt's house for holidays. Aunt Sarah was sad because she no longer had a use for her table-setting treasures. I told my great aunt that I would be delighted to be given as a Christmas present anything she was ready to part with. By the time Sarah died at age 86, I had candlesticks and lace tablecloths, glassware and antique platters. Every time I set a festive table it is beautiful with her things, and with the memories of my aunt and our happy times. These are what I treasure-- not the drawers full of gloves and scarves and necklaces bought by my cousins and in-laws. See also: One-Minute Mouthoff Monologues for: Younger people | Men | Women | Anyone Conservatives | Liberals | War in Iraq | Religion