

Salvi case raises guilt-by-association specter

OUR OPINION: The murderer, not the groups he belonged to, is responsible for the crime

On Dec. 31, 1994, John Salvi walked into a Planned Parenthood clinic in Brookline, Mass. and fired bullets into a receptionist and three clients.

He then drove five miles to the Preterm clinic and shot its receptionist and two more people. Both receptionists were killed.

Salvi, 23, is a Catholic and is fanatical in his anti-abortion beliefs.

Over the years he has attended Operation Rescue protests in front of clinics that provide abortions and other services for women, compared himself to John the Baptist and told his parents that he was the thief on the cross next to Jesus Christ.

He believes that abortion providers are murderers.

Today, Salvi stands trial for his murders, and amid the continuing debate surrounding his sanity, many people are placing partial responsibility for these and other abortion-related deaths on anti-abortion extremist groups and the Catholic church.

These groups, they say, create a climate of intolerance fueled by religion that attracts people like John Salvi. These groups gave Salvi a target for a gun that he was destined to fire.

As comforting as this blame-laying may feel to pro-choice activists, it is neither fair nor valid.

Regardless of on which side we land in the abortion debate, any reasonable person would recoil at the murder of these two women. What makes these killings

more appalling is that they could have been avoided if someone, anyone, would have realized how dangerous Salvi was.

As such, we search for a rationalization. Many of us would like to believe that the rhetoric of anti-abortion activists, whatever their level of fervor, pushed Salvi over the edge. In truth, however, the only person responsible is Salvi himself.

Certainly, Operation Rescue's messages that refer to abortion providers as killers incite hatred among its believers. And yes, the Catholic church continues its stance that abortion is a mortal sin.

But these do not reach the level of criminal solicitation. No one within these groups told Salvi to kill. They cannot, therefore, be held legally or morally accountable for his actions.

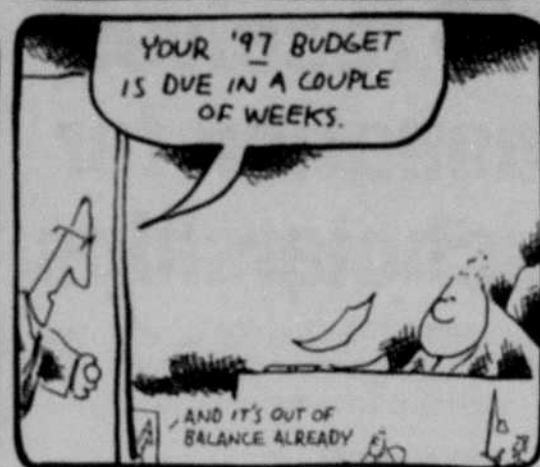
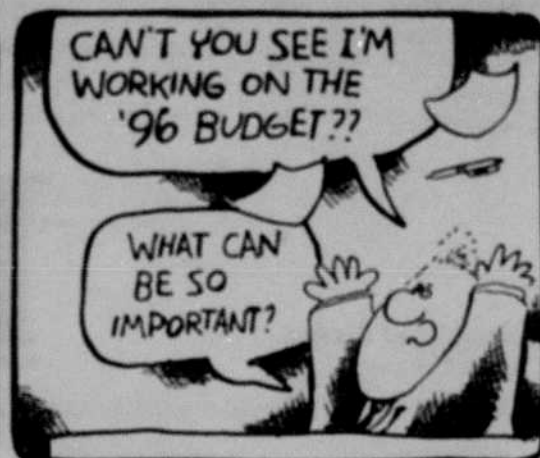
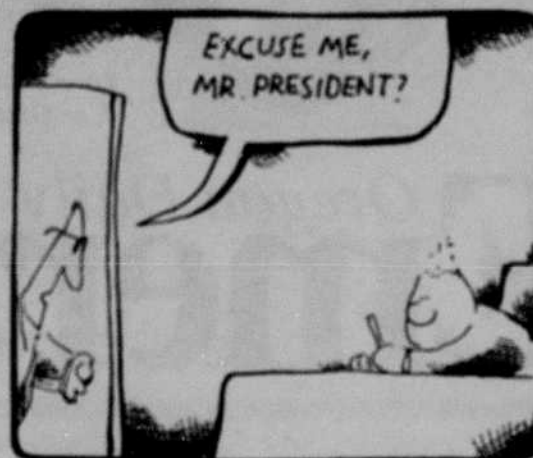
If we are to place responsibility for the actions of sociopaths on the shoulders of organizations they choose to join, we will be forcing all people to be accountable for the actions of the people they associate with.

Not only is this unfair, it is also a barrier to First Amendment freedoms.

All people have a right to speak their minds about any issue they choose in this country. Shy of criminal solicitation or advocating overthrow of the government, nothing should deter them from doing so.

If we must concern ourselves with how our words will be perceived by irrational people, we will stifle that freedom and silence many.

John Salvi picked up the gun and killed. He is the only one who is guilty.



Brother's nasty habit creates huge crisis

Relations between Japan and the U.S. seem to be at an all-time low — and it's all my little brother's fault. I know, I know. You thought the friendship between the two powers began souring after George Bush leaned over and gleeed (more like turbo-hurled) his meal all over that unsuspecting Japanese dignitary's lap during a trade-related banquet several years ago.

Never mind that the on-going trade war has been enough to make either of the two countries want to pick up its toys and go home in a huff.

However, there is one incident that stands out as the single cause of America's crumbling camaraderie with Japan — and it's because of a bumbling stunt my wacky little brother pulled about 10 years ago.

For many years, my parents graciously hosted international students from a number of countries. Although none of the students ever actually lived in the house with us, Mom and Dad often invited them to go on special family outings to the coast, the mountains or to our country home for a summer barbecue and yellow-jacket dodging contest.

On one particular trip, the folks invited two sweet Japanese girls to go with the family to Blue Lake in Central Oregon. Mom, Dad, my older sister, "Devil Boy" (my brother Tom), the two girls and I, all climbed into our nine-passenger Chevy van and headed east for the mountains.

I sat in the back seat with Tom and a cheesy book; the girls sat in front of us, and Dad drove while Mom kept up a polite and intermittent banter with our guests.

The only reason I feel I can now tell what happened next, is that the statute of international humiliation limitations has expired. Otherwise, I would have been forced to testify before the Council on Foreign Relations and a series of United Nations hearings about being an accessory to "Embarrassing Pranks Committed Against Humanity."

As we traveled blissfully along, I sat reading my mediocre novel unaware that I was on the threshold of being pulled into a vicious plot that would forever tarnish U.S.-Japanese relations — and little Tommy the Terrible was the raving mastermind. It happened suddenly and without warning.

"Hey Dave, look at this!" I glanced up, annoyed at the interruption, and beheld what my monstrous brother had wrought.

There, perched firmly atop this menacing 9-year-old's index finger, was the biggest, gooiest, multi-colored booger this side of the Cascades.

Let me clarify that. It was a HUGE, SCARY AND EXTREMELY UNATTRACTIVE booger. It was both disgusting and big — In fact, I'm sure it was a living organism.

"GET RID OF IT," was the only thing I could think of hissing at Booger Boy as I covered my mouth to stifle a roar of laughter and despair. Tom looked at me and said, "OK."

OPINION



David Bartlett

With that, he promptly flicked "THE BIG GREEN THING" off his finger, apparently launching the particle of nose putty somewhere into the van's passenger area in front of us.

I sat there (losing my battle against laughing out loud), horrified but relieved that the sinister wad of goo hadn't attached itself to me.

Tasmanian Tommy sat there chuckling deviously.

Then suddenly, one of the Japanese girls turned halfway in her seat and faced us.

She wasn't smiling. "What is it?" she asked curtly, pointing to a gooey, greenish glob parked fiendishly on her forearm.

Yep. Tom's nasty nose nodule landed smack-dab on one of our guests. Its impact sent a shockwave rippling all the way to Tokyo.

As Boy Blunder literally exploded into a life-threatening fit of red-faced laughter, my mind reeled for some kind of rational explanation.

"I think it's a bug!" I blurted, hoping to avert another Pearl Harbor.

"I don't think so," the martyred woman replied as she abruptly wiped away the offensive entity with a Kleenex and a frown.

At that point, Tom and I were completely incapacitated by laughter. Time stood still. We were dying. Life as we knew it ceased to exist. I may have tried to offer up the Lord's Prayer, but can't remember if I even got past "Our Father."

But God did intervene, and we miraculously survived the rest of the trip.

I realize now my brother and I unwittingly rewrote history at that moment. I also realize the incident was a classic case where it was entirely inappropriate to laugh and absolutely impossible to keep from doing so.

Tommy the Tyrant is all grown up now. In fact, he's in Japan this month for three weeks of winter training with his Army National Guard unit.

I should've called the State Department to prepare them for the looming international crisis.

Japan is one of America's most important allies, but I'm afraid our already fragile friendship might not survive my little brother's visit.

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