

Can We Talk?

Smart primates work together.

I'm in the middle of a great book: *A Primate's Memoir*. Author Robert Sapolsky has spent 20 years in the fields of Kenya, watching wild chimpanzees. He admires Isaac, who avoids stress by not fighting to be the ruling male, and by spending a lot of time with his chimpanzee buddy, Rachel.

Sapolsky dislikes Nebuchadnezzar, who is simply mean to others and then grabs somebody's baby as a shield when he's about to get his ass kicked. He watches the hermit-like Saul rule for years and then get nearly killed one day when a Gang of Six males pile on him. Inevitably, of course, Sapolsky also runs into the often harrowing human and environmental consequences of Africa's colonial past, including poverty.

With exceptions such as Isaac, chimpanzees are prone to long years of vengeful relationships. As Sapolsky writes, chimpanzees work about four hours a day to feed themselves and "have about a half dozen solid hours of sunlight a day to devote to being rotten to each other ... Just like our society. We live well enough to have the luxury to get ourselves sick with purely social, psychological stress."

This all helps me appreciate (and admire) those who have long worked toward the moment when our own Eugene primate community will start talking together after 20 years of talking at each other about west Eugene traffic. Constructing the West Eugene Parkway, a four-lane highway through west Eugene's national, park-like wetlands, literally couldn't get off the ground. So finally, Oregon Department of Transportation has put their own idea to rest. That saves a lot of legal, political, economic, and social stress.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, watchful over wetlands in general and the restoration that has been accomplished in these wetlands in particular, has long been urging everyone to sit down and talk including planners who think about west Eugene as a neighborhood and not just a thoroughway.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, watchful over the rare critters and complex biodiversity of our almost-gone wetlands, has been urging everyone to sit down and talk, including citizens who believe there are alternatives to the parkway.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management, watchful over the ever-increasing recreational and educational popularity of these treasure wetlands, has been hoping everyone would sit down and talk, and has said they would join in.

A group of citizens has met regularly for over six years, ever watchful over the democratic process by which alternatives to the parkway could eventually reach a big, open table.

When Eugeneans elected Kitty Piercy as our mayor in 2004, we selected someone who had stated in virtually every campaign speech that she thought we could find a way to improve traffic in and through west Eugene *and* protect its wetlands, if only we would sit down and talk together.

So, it looks as if we're not going to behave like most of Sapolsky's tragicomic chimpanzees. If we're smart, we'll encourage a broad range of folks who have been thinking about west Eugene for a long time to come up with the best ideas they think will work for the wetlands, neighbors, workers, and a good future.

I remember admiring how Region 6 Forest Service (Oregon and Washington) behaved in the early '80s after they had lost four court suits to citizens opposing their heavy reliance on herbicide spraying. Region 6 finally and graciously conversed with treeplanters and citizens, who, like them, had been thinking a long time about forests, logging, and regrowth. When we all sat down to look at a genuinely full range of alternatives, everyone came up with a much more ecological approach to forest regrowth.

All of us can probably think of a moment when, having fought a long time, a group of human primates decided to really listen to each other... and found that they didn't have to be rotten to each other for several hours a day.

It's a moment to seize. Collaboratively.

Mary O'Brien of Eugene has worked as a public interest scientist since 1981. She can be reached at mob@efn.org



How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TAX FOR JUSTICE?

I must respond to Jeff Innis' letter (7/20), criticizing the proposed Lane County income tax. While true the discussion first started at only a half a percent tax, then went to 1 percent, and now has a 2 percent cap, it would take another vote by commissioners to raise it above that. And they would NEVER do that.

Our DA Doug Harclerod has made passionate pleas for this tax to be passed. Now he has botched a few minor past issues, such as wrongfully convicting two innocent men of murder, allowing the tape recording of a confession to a Catholic priest, threatening to confiscate the lands of the Oregon Country Fair for drug use, etc. But one cannot blame him for the current mess, despite the fact that he has been responsible for public safety for so long. For as he recently said: "We are living in a crime-ridden county."

So with crime so totally out of control, big new taxes that will give county law enforcement a huge 50 percent increase in their budget are FULLY justified. While the U.S. has more people incarcerated than even China, the truth is that we need to jail much more of our population, in order to solve society's problems.

These are prosperous economic times under the wise leadership of President Bush. I'm sure everyone can afford to give away more of their income for this noble endeavor. Please vote YES to preserve justice in our community.

Lance Jacobs
Springfield

OUT OF PROPORTION

While I don't support the violence used by Hezbollah, the destruction wrought by Israel on Lebanon is way out of proportion to Hezbollah's actions.

Reporting on these events here in America has been equally out of proportion. We seem to forget that this episode began with Hezbollah making a raid across the

border and capturing two Israeli soldiers in hopes of having collateral to make a prisoner trade. In the fray three Israeli soldiers were also killed. Hezbollah did not expect or intend the magnitude of Israel's response, which was to bomb not just the Hezbollah stronghold in southern Lebanon, but infrastructure and homes throughout Lebanon.

While any loss of life is horrible, and it is hard to compare one loss to another, the Israeli air strikes have done damage and killing way beyond Hezbollah's initial actions. The "carefully targeted" Israeli attacks have killed many Lebanese women and children. Their attacks throughout Lebanon have done major damage to a country just beginning to recover from years of civil war and Syrian occupation. The Lebanese government in its newness is unfortunately not strong enough to rein in the renegade Hezbollah extremists but will be expected to repair the damage.

I lived in Lebanon as a child as "a foreign service brat." I returned last summer for a wonderful visit at a time that Lebanon was experiencing the most hopeful period in more than 30 years. It breaks my heart that this beautiful little country once again is in disarray and destruction.

Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to send arms to Israel, because we have a previous agreement that says they can ask for them anytime they want. Hello? Shouldn't we re-examine that agreement under the circumstances? Enough is enough! Why does the U.S. continue to pander to an out-of-control Israeli government? We need an immediate cease fire and international help in stabilizing the area and rebuilding Lebanon.

Karen Stingle
Eugene

REINVENT THE FAIR

There was a funny vibe at the Oregon Country Fair this year. By funny I don't mean humorous. Been going to the fair for more than 20 years, so I used to feel a strong