



## ink spots: opinions, news, and reviews from an inkjet

*"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Psalm 24:3*

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There's no such thing as "away"—because it's *someone's* backyard

### Picking up the trash.

When you go for a walk, do you pick up discarded cans and cigarette butts? Do you wonder which generation wasn't taught not to throw trash in someone's yard? One of the characteristics of Bangladeshis we most admired when we visited in 2004-05 was that they scour the streets and reuse everything. Fortunately some concerned US citizens spend thousands of their own dollars on cleanup: see *Readers Digest*, August 2007, "A Mighty Armada," the story of four cousins who built their own boat to do trash retrieval in Tampa Bay in hopes of inspiring others to stop trashing it.

I saved the July 2006 *National Geographic* for its 21-page cover story, "Loving our Coasts to Death." The beginning of the article describes a 64-year-old "God-fearing surfer" who spends an hour before he surfs cleaning up the beach from its "morning after mess" on the 5th of July. Skip Frye says, "It's like they took the landfill, backed it up, and dumped in on the beach. It's the sickest thing you ever saw...In Genesis, God lays it out," Frye says. "We're in charge of the Earth, but we have a responsibility to take care of it." He and his wife Donna, who won two terms as mayor, have researched coliform bacteria, for example. They found that San

Diego's most popular surfing beaches had "disgusting" coliform bacteria counts: as high as 1.6 million ppm fecal coliform. To be safe for swimming it should be no higher than 200 ppm.

**Replacing household items.** Most of our 25-year-old appliances have whispered "done" within the past three years. Using *Consumer Reports*, we have replaced them with energy-efficient ones from a local appliance store that makes sure they are recycled. We also recommend [www.GreenerChoices.org](http://www.GreenerChoices.org) for reliable environmental advice to consumers. "If just one in 10 homes used ENERGY STAR\* appliances, the environmental benefit would be like planting 1.7 million trees." *US News and World Report*, Oct 2, 2006.

Electronics are big ticket items with ridiculously short lifespans and high energy use. Here are some tips from a variety of sources:

**Pulling the plug.** "Production of electricity is the single largest cause of global warming," says Noah Horowitz, senior scientist for the Natural Resources Defense Council. Households in the US consume 25% more electricity than they did 25 years ago, and we are expected to add an additional 25% over the next two decades. Unplugging your unused electronic devices not only reduces pollution,

but also can save up to a quarter on your energy bill. Suggestions:

- *Plug electronics into power strips. After hitting the "off" button, also switch off the power strip.*

- *Unplug your charger unit when you are not charging your cellphone, camera, PDA, or MP3 player; otherwise it will continue to draw electricity.*

- *Unplug electronics or appliances that feel hot to the touch when not in use. Elevated temps mean that the product is wasting energy as heat.*

- *Swap inefficient products for those that use fewer watts. Visit [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) for recommendations.*

**Signing up for direct bill pay.** Every 38,000 bills paid electronically, preserves two tons of trees, eliminates 60 lbs of air emissions, conserves 16,459 gallons of water, and saves you \$150 per year in postage; visit [www.electronicpayments.org](http://www.electronicpayments.org)

**Being committed to recycling.** Little things count. We use back sides of our 30% post consumer recycled paper for drafts. We learned at [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org) that it takes 70% less energy to produce a ton of paper from recycled paper than from trees, so we keep baskets for recycling on both levels of our house. When we clean our basement, we sort for different destinations. Locally, we have the senior

center's *Used a Bit* shop for donating miscellaneous household items, and a consignment shop for women's clothes. A Salvation Army store in another community gets the rest. *Bikes Not Bombs* in Boston collects used bicycles, refurbishes them, then ships them off to regions where affordable transportation is difficult to come by. Chances are your community prints a list of which items can be recycled. Be diligent about avoiding landfills, when possible.

**Paint.** Instead of stashing whole cans of leftover paint, invest in small plastic containers with a built-in brush. Pour in a little to save for touchups. Track down the nearest paint recycling facility. Paint that is fairly new can be donated to a charity.

**Batteries** can leak hazardous elements, so don't just throw them away; dispose of them properly. Some disposal facilities will only accept certain types. You'll need to do your homework.

**Computers.** If your computer is still usable, be sure to remove personal information before you donate it to charity. If it doesn't work, most major retailers have recycling programs described on the "about us" sections of their home pages. You can also visit [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org) to find drop-off centers in your local area, because **recycling matters.** +++

## Exploring options: can alternative fuels reduce our dependence on foreign oil ?

***“Inside that dilapidated structure stood an old-fashioned gas pump—an industrial relic more typical of lonely highway outposts than this urban neighborhood’s mix of residential and light industrial space. But Whitney did not come to admire an antique. His interest centered on the long-overlooked technology gurgling within the pump’s hoses...[A] waiting attendant ... promptly squirted 13-plus gallons of modified vegetable oil into the Jetta’s fuel tank....”***

***Whitney, who calls himself “a serious tree hugger,” said, “Biofuel, from all the research I have done, is just consistent with my personal values.”***

***“Greener Pastures,” *World*, March 17, 2007.***

We drive relatively small, somewhat older cars, including one that is obsolete: a 2000 Ford Escort and a 2002 Focus. We do not plan to replace them any time soon, but when we do, we may consider the relative merits of some sort of hybrid. I am not aware of any local source for biodiesel but I find the discussion of alternative fuels interesting.

Example: An article called “King corn,” in the June 27, 2007 issue of *World*, describes the impact of ethanol on dairy consumers:

“Question: What do you get when you mix a potential drought with the global warming debate and a presidential campaign season? Answer: At least this year, much higher prices for milk and cheese. The prices are shooting up this summer and one of the reasons is the unintended effects of government subsidies and regulations.”

We made a trip to Iowa this past weekend. Gasoline for our Focus cost about \$60. Our cars do not tolerate ethanol, but that doesn’t deter the presidential candidates whose trips to Iowa, where federal subsidies for ethanol are hugely popular. Their transportation is paid by the rest of us.

The President in his State of the Union address called on Congress to “require 35 billion gallons of renewable and alternative fuels by 2017.” If the ethanol makers use 3.2 billion bushels of corn [to produce 4.9 billion gallons of ethanol, as they did in

2007, according to the July/August 2007 *Vegetarian Times*, [whose source was the Renewable Fuels Association], corn futures will continue to rise, which means higher prices for the dairy products that cows make from the corn they consume. Michael Hutjens of the University of Illinois predicts that “milk prices will rise 40 cents per gallon this summer and cheese prices will jump 60 cents per pound. Poor families, which spend a greater share of their incomes on food than other families will be hit the hardest.”

So, are soybean oil and recycled French fry fat the answer? The March 17, 2007 issue of *World* explores that issue in “Greener pastures?” by Mark Bergin in Seattle.

The retail side of the biodiesel industry, so far, relies on ideologically committed consumers, like Joe Whitney, owner/founder of an organic, fair-trade chocolate factory in Seattle. Joe is willing to “bypass the area’s petroleum-based diesel stations for more expensive biodiesel.” [See sidebar.]

“As a niche market product, biodiesel delivers what conservationists demand—a clean, home-grown fuel manufactured either as a byproduct of various food crops or from recycled vegetable oil that restaurant and potato chip plants would otherwise throw away. Low blend biodiesel, such as B2 and B5, is equally sustainable and popular with farmers throughout the South and Midwest.” But problems

lurk below the hype.

Sadly, the global market has responded with new vegetable oil supplies that run counter to the environmentalist’s aims. “Tropical countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia are rushing to slash their remaining rain forests to make room for palm oil farms, the cheapest means of producing biodiesel’s raw materials. Such deforestation threatens to increase worldwide carbon dioxide levels far more than the use of biodiesel fuels could ever reduce them... The European Union has admitted the problem but decided against banning imported biodiesel fuels due to potential hang-ups with world trade rules.”

Conclusion? The jury is out. Mark Bergin says: “Biodiesel, like ethanol and biofuels, is not a magic solution to the issues of foreign oil dependence and greenhouse gas emissions. Contrary to the oversimplified contentions of committed biodiesel ideologues, the choice between fossil fuels and biofuels is inescapably tragic: Both products raise problems.”

Mark Bergin says that the Renewable Energy Group, an Iowa-based company produces non-blended diesel made from soybeans grown within the US. Company spokesperson Alicia Clancy told *World* that genetic engineering might help a soy shortage by increasing how much oil soybeans yield. GMOs to the rescue! Monsanto will be glad to help, I’m sure. +++

## *Big business vs Little Prairie, round one; community wins—for now*

Our local newspaper has been covering the anti-ethanol wars for about a year; a huge ethanol plant and new railroad tracks threatened farms and a church that had been in Little Prairie for generations. We watched the controversy unfold in stories and letters to the editor. I finally wrote my own, based on my research in several publications. Here's what the *Northfield News* published on May 5, 2007:

We concur with Winnifred Taylor's letter ["Why even consider it?" May 2] regarding ethanol.

We read about twenty magazines, including *The Economist* and three other newsmagazines. We have not seen one article that was pro-ethanol. On the other hand, the cover story of the October 2006 issue of *Consumer Reports* ran five pages under the headline, "The ethanol myth," and the February 12 edition of *US News and World Report's* cover story "Overselling Ethanol" spent seven pages showing that "politically it's a winner. But experts aren't sure ethanol can deliver on its promise."

I am not convinced that bringing an ethanol business to our community will serve local farmers or the rest of us well in the long term. Taxpayers will underwrite much of the cost of bringing this new technology to rural America, because of ethanol tax breaks, now at 51 cents per gallon. But as *US News* says, "The new ethanol surge could cause more problems than it solves. Last year's astounding growth in ethanol gobbled up 20 percent of the US corn crop, surpassing all the corn Americans consumed last year...And the strain has become serious on the nation's primary use of corn—as feed for dairy and beef cattle, pigs, and chickens. Meat, dairy, and egg producers are reeling from corn prices that doubled in one year—now trading at \$4 for the first time in a decade." Our neighbors to the South are suffering because of the corn price increase in Mexico. *World* magazine, March 10, 2007, reported on the "tortilla wars." Corn is a staple for our NAFTA partners, and the poor suffer while US agribusiness is building huge refineries to jump on the ethanol bandwagon. ["NAFTA allows a flow of labor northward and a flow of goods southward, doubling US corn exports to Mexico in ten years."—*The Week*, February 9, 2007.]

If farmers grow their corn on acres they would normally rotate with soybeans, topsoil will be depleted of nutrients, exacerbating pest proliferation, and requiring more fertilizers and insecticides, which will end up in our water supply. Dan Becker of the Sierra Club says that ethanol could be "a disaster for the environment."

Perhaps the "Live green, go yellow" slogan adopted by General Motors to advertise their hybrid cars will be a good thing for US automakers. *Consumer Reports*, however, says that E85, which is 85% ethanol, "provides fewer miles to the gallon, costs more, and is hard to find outside the Midwest." The article, which is worth reading in its entirety, concludes: "Even with the most optimistic estimates, ethanol on its own will never be able to provide

Americans with energy independence." It ethanol is only one in a "portfolio that could include biodiesel, electric, hydrogen, natural gas, and efficient gasoline cars, we still have multiple problems...to think that one solution can take care of all of those is naïve."

We appreciated Cathy Larson's guest column in the December 6 *Northfield News*. We care about Little Prairie. We oppose the plan to build an ethanol plant less than a mile from the Little Prairie Church. The history of the area is important to farmers who have lived there for generations. The amount of water required to produce a single gallon of ethanol—4 to 4.8 gallons, using 400 million gallons a year—ought to concern all of us. **Carol and Dick Cover, Northfield.**

Press coverage of the ethanol issue has not stopped. The headlines of two related articles in *Co-Op America Quarterly*, Summer 2007, "Corn ethanol isn't the answer: a *Co-Op America* exposé", and "Plug-in hybrids: our best hope," reveal that organization's position. 1) Because corn is such an energy-intensive plant to grow, and because the methods to process corn are also energy intensive, it takes seven barrels of petroleum to grow and produce eight barrels of corn ethanol. When you factor in production, corn ethanol curbs climate-changing vehicle emissions by either 12 or 11 percent, depending on whether it is "pure" or 85% ethanol, according to a 2006 study at the University of Minnesota. Ethanol is "*no panacea for the climate crisis.*" Other sections of the exposé are sobering: 2) "*no solution to oil independence;*" 3) "*creating a global food crisis*"—"Corn used to fill a 25-gallon vehicle tank with ethanol one time could feed one person for an entire year;" 4) "*a danger to our health and the earth*"—a recent study at Stanford concluded that "widespread use could cause possible increases in respiratory-related deaths and hospitalizations" because it produces more smog than gasoline; 4) "*an increase in genetically modified crops;*" 5) "*a sucker punch for family farmers*"—as corn prices continue to rise, impacting animal feed prices for dairy and meat farmers, farmer-owned cooperative ethanol plants may have to be sold to Archer Daniels Midland. Companies like Monsanto are likely to increase the cost of GMO ethanol breeds they have developed [see above], squeezing out any advantage to family farmers; 5) "*standing in the way of cellulosic ethanol*" or biodiesel, a clean-burning fuel made from vegetable oils.

To send a message to your elected officials, use [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) and type in your zipcode to get a list of those who represent your district and state. And write your newspaper. We did. +++

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## "But I don't have time!" Are you sure?

Life is about making choices. We convince ourselves that we don't have time to make good ones. But consider the following:

**One second:** Are you feeling blue? You can boost your mood by simply saying "thank you."

**One minute:** Do you want to reduce your risk of osteoporosis? It takes one minute to eliminate soft drinks from your home.

**Two minutes:** Can you keep your brain in shape? Sure. Just one and a half cups of vegetables a day can lower your brain age by five years. A salad of leafy greens based on spinach and romaine lettuce has the biggest effect. To get all the nutrients, dress your salad with a good fat like olive oil.

**Thirty minutes, three times a week:** Do you want to lose about a half pound a week? Find a workout you like and commit to it. In a year, you could weigh 25 pounds less.

**Seventy-two minutes:** Is indulging your sweet tooth worth it? That's the time it takes to walk off a Snickers bar.

**Five minutes:** Can you estimate the time you save by **not** buying a Snickers bar? Assuming five a week, use the time/money saved to invest in the gym or fitness program that will result in the weightloss described above. +++

—adapted from *Today's Health and Wellness*, January/February 2007.

## Notable Quotables:

- **Talking trash**—What does this say about our culture? "A huge island of discarded cups, bottle caps, plastic laundry baskets, rubber sandals, and other garbage has formed an area of sluggish current and slack winds halfway between California and Hawaii. The Eastern Garbage Patch, as it is called, is twice the size of Texas." *Los Angeles Times*, quoted in *The Week*, August 18, 2006.
- **Getting an energy audit**—In Minnesota, various energy improvements pay for themselves. Insulating ceilings: 3-7 years; insulating walls: 6-12 years; insulating floors: 2-5 years; sealing large air leaks: 1-2 years; sealing ducts: 1-2 years; replacing storm windows: 4-10 years; windows: 15-30 years; adding a programmable thermostat: 1-2 years; installing efficient showerheads: 1-3 years; insulating water heater: 1-2 years; getting a heating tuneup: 1-3 years; replacing furnace: 5-20 years. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, October 30, 2005.
- **Bringing your own canvas bag?** *The St Paul Pioneer Press*, June 29, 2007, reported that paper shopping bags are the latest casualty of the transition from Marshall Field's whose stores Macy's bought. Here's the scoop on PAPER vs PLASTIC, in case you have wondered: Paper bags break down in the environment; plastic bags are not biodegradable. Paper bags cost the store more; plastic bags are less expensive to produce. Paper bags use trees and harmful chemicals; plastic are made with natural gas or oil. Paper bags are required for sorting recycling; plastic can also double as garbage bags. But billions of plastic bags end up in landfills each year and are among the 12 items most often found in coastal cleanups. Many countries, including Bangladesh, have outlawed them.
- **Letting your views on alternate fuels be heard**—write, call, or e-mail National Biodiesel Board, 3337A Emerald Lane, PO Box 104898, Jefferson city MO 65110-4898, 800.841.5849, [www.NBB.ORG](http://www.NBB.ORG), and/or the Earth Policy Institute, 1350 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington DC 20036. 202.496.9290 or [www.EARTH-POLICY.ORG](http://www.EARTH-POLICY.ORG)
- **Buying local and organic to help prevent climate chaos**—Efforts to reduce greenhouse gases have typically involved calls for increased gasoline fuel efficiency. But did you know that 20-25% of global greenhouse gases are created by the long distance transportation of our food? The mayor of London is taking strategic measures to boost locally grown and organic foods. "I want London to set a standard for other cities around the world." Mayor Ken Livingstone, [www.organicconsumer.org/btc/london022706.cfm](http://www.organicconsumer.org/btc/london022706.cfm) +++

## A challenge: eat local, eat in season, eat fresh, eat for taste

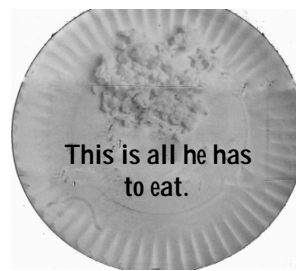
Don't offer me California strawberries in December, or any other time. There is only one week to eat strawberries and there is only one place to get them: Lorence's berry farm a few miles from our home. Why would we want to eat those big, hard, tasteless berries with the white middles? Sean and Noah, newly graduated in early June, will be going on a missions trip to work in New Orleans, with a

local church youth group. The Sunday before we left for Orlando, they announced that they were raising money for their trip by picking strawberries. This week we have been eating the juiciest, sweetest strawberries this side of eternity—three quarts. It's our strawberry fix till next July. Two young men whom we have known since they were babies did the backbreaking work; and our tastebuds are

rejoicing. Lorence's has asparagus and raspberries in their seasons too.

The average distance a food item in your cart traveled before it got to your store is 1,300 miles. Twelve co-ops in our area are sponsoring an *eat local* challenge. From 15 August to 15 Sept, participants will try to base 80% of their diets—four out of five items or ingredients—on fruit, vegetables, meat/poultry/fish, dairy,

baked goods, and grocery items grown within our five-state region. Co-ops will mark shelves as they did when we tried the 60-mile radius challenge previously. Best of all, the concept supports the local economy, honors regional farmers, and protects the environment by minimizing transportation fuel emissions. We wish all of you had an opportunity to invest in this win/win project. Yum! +++



## LET'S TALK ABOUT "ENOUGH"

Generally speaking, North Americans have a disproportional impact on our planet because we have too much money. We spend \$40 billion a year, for example—more than the gross domestic product of Vietnam—caring for our lawns. We also have too much stuff; each of us is responsible for producing about four pounds of garbage a day, according to John Ryan and Alan Durning, authors of *Stuff: the Secret Life of Everyday Things*. If we have basements, they are overflowing. If we don't, our garages are filled with stuff. I write newsletters about recycling to preach to myself. We teach nutrition classes not only to our circle of influence, but to preach to ourselves, because, like those in the rest of our culture, our bellies are full.

According to the *New York Times*, we now receive more than 114 billion pieces of bulk mail from marketers annually, up 15 percent from five years ago, according to the US Postal Service, exceeding that of first class for the first time. Our mailboxes are jammed with appeal letters, and telemarketers for charities interrupt our dinner hours, perhaps because they think that we are more likely to give to the poor when we are eating well. We know that we have too much, so we contribute to the Salvation Army's red kettle. Or we send a few dollars to organizations that feed the hungry or the homeless, like *Food for the Poor, Inc.*, whose appeal letter contained the graphic of a paper plate with a little white rice, for us to contemplate when we eat *our* holiday meals. By the way, in "Junk the junk mail," from the May 12, 2007 issue of *World*, the newsmagazine with a Christian worldview to which we subscribe, Joel Belz, founder and regular columnist, has a unique idea of how to deal with multiple mailings from charitable fundraisers. He says that if you send them \$10, you become known as an "active donor." So over the next two to five years, you can count on receiving several dozen more appeals, costing the organization a minimum of 50 cents each. His rule of thumb is that if he cannot send \$100, he doesn't send anything. In addition to giving to his church, he has reduced his list of charities to a number to which he can afford to give \$100. He sends a form letter to the others telling them "lovingly" that he has chosen a handful of organizations to support significantly. He appreciates what they

are doing, but for their mutual good, they should remove him from their mailing lists, to save them money and him some "future frustration." He has other excellent suggestions as well. If you are not a *World* subscriber, ask me for a copy.

Advertisers pretend not to notice that we already have more and eat more than we need. I don't watch TV, except in hospitals or motels, but that's enough to note that a lot of money is spent on pitching useless products, especially junkfood. "Why are we getting so fat?" asked Tim Hartford in the *Financial Times*, quoted in *The Week*, October 2006. Economists Patricia Anderson, Kristin Butcher, and Philip Levine note a link between increases in childhood obesity and the rising number of households in which both parents work. In fact, they found that every 10 hours a mother works increases a child's chance of obesity by another 10%. Perhaps that issue was not a factor in the 60s. I worked long hours teaching when our children were small. Both of them were slim and strong. But they rode their bikes after school and played outside with their friends until dark. Video games were not yet invented and we did not have a TV. We bought them a box of Lucky Charms only occasionally. Soft drinks and Koolaid were consumed at birthday parties, not at home. Now North Americans spend about 30 minutes a day preparing dinner, down from two and a half hours in the 60s, according to a new market research study, reported in the *New York Times*.

Soft drink consumption troubles me the most. 1) As if Coke's so-called energy drinks weren't bad enough, now the company is telling us that drinking three cans of their Enviga will actually burn calories. On January 7, 2007, *CompuServe News* reported, "Buyer beware! Pharmacology experts warn that the initial data on the [green tea/soda combo] is far from proven or verified." There's also CocaCola blak: coffee/soda. Or try Celcius, No Fear, Red Bull, Monster Energy, Joker Mad Energy, Adrenalin Rush, Amp Overdrive, Rock Star Double Strength, or Full Throttle Fury. Guess which ones are being marketed to kids. 2) Visit [www.organicconsumers.org/foodsafety/benzene060303.cfm](http://www.organicconsumers.org/foodsafety/benzene060303.cfm) to see how the US, UK, and China have launched investigations into benzene in soft drinks.

Results of independent lab tests in New York show a couple of soft drinks in the US contain as much as four times the legal benzene limits for drinking water. Benzene, a known carcinogen, is formed when two ingredients in the beverage react with each other: sodium benzoate and ascorbic acid. The FDA will not release the names of the beverages with high benzene levels but says the companies are being asked to change their ingredients. 3) Carbonated beverages are hazardous to your esophagus. Study author Dr Stuart Quan told the *New York Times* that a survey of 15,000 Americans over age 40 found that those who drink large quantities of soda often experience heartburn. Carbonation is acidic, can irritate the stomach, and promotes the opening of the muscle that usually keeps stomach acid from flowing upward. Acid can damage the soft tissues of the esophagus over time, causing lesions that can turn into cancer. Ask me for "The Sinister Side of Soda," *Real Money*, Jan/Feb 2007. 4) The October 2006 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, reported that when researchers looked at the diets and bone strength of more than 2,500 people, they found that a daily cola, diet, decaf, or regular, was linked to lower hip bone density in women. The phosphoric acid, especially when it is not balanced with calcium-rich foods [like BarleyLife®, kale, or spinach?] may prompt women's bodies to pull calcium from the bones; men's bones were not affected. Actually, *Let's Be Well* has been teaching that for years, using Dr John McDougall's videos and the cassettes/videos by Dane and Vicki Griffin PhD who spoke here in 2000. I stopped drinking Pepsi in 1993. I have osteoporosis, and I broke my hip/wrist in a fall on thinly-carpeted cement in October 2006. Katherine Tucker, a nutritionist at Tufts University recommends that women not make cola a daily habit. She doesn't say how to erase past usage. Dr John R. Lee's books advocate natural progesterone cream. I haven't mentioned it for a while. Enclosed is a piece that Vicki Andren, a member of our AIM network, wrote some years ago. Renewed Balance® still comes in a jar, and also in a metered pump now that some women [and men] prefer. Be in touch with your AIM sponsor, or us, if you don't have one, for more information. +++

**Promotions:** to *Preferred Members*: **Rosann Brawley**, Northfield; **Susan Ferrozzo**, Farmington MN; **Irene Noterman**, Faribault MN.