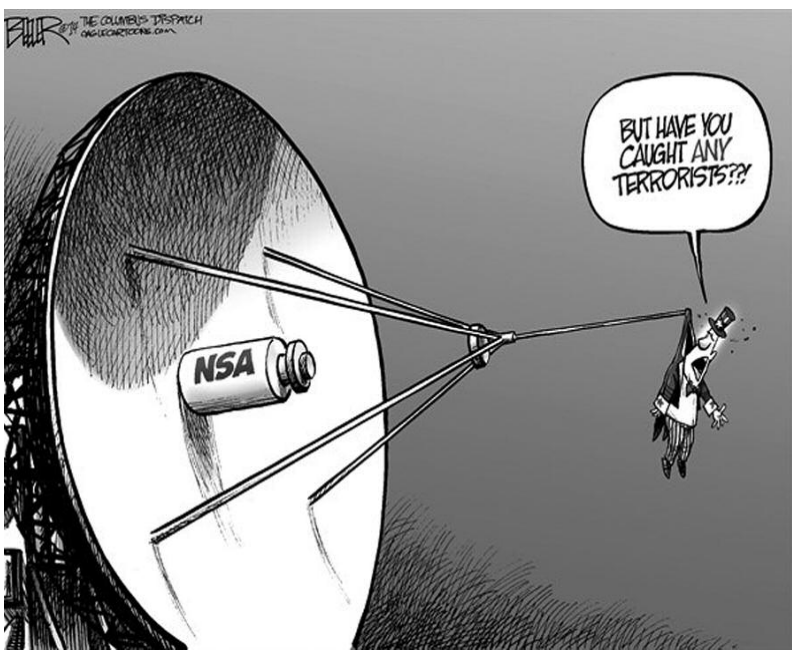
OPINION

Privacy? Surely you jest!

By Tom Purcell



Ring. Ring.

"Hello, this is Tom."

"We know who you are, Tom. In the digital age, you will be shocked by what we know about you."

"Who is this? The National Security Agency? I thought President Obama issued orders to rein you in!"

"That's a good one, Tom. Obama told the NSA to stop storing bulk phone records on millions of Americans. The NSA can easily access that information through phone companies. I'm not from the NSA, however."

Then who are you and what do you want?"

"What is more important, Tom, is who are you and what do you want? Lots of government and private organizations are interested in that information and you are making it easy for them to get it."

"I have given no one permission to access my information!"

"Really, Tom? Didn't you hand over your address, Social Security number and other information to buy a car, get a credit card, apply for a job or vote?"

"Maybe a few times."

"Did you know that since 1961, various Congresses and presidential administrations have enacted more than 40 laws, regulations and policies that require the use of Social Security numbers? That is a godsend to people like me — and that was before the digital era made my job easier!"

"What do you mean?"

"Every website you visit, every online purchase you make, every email, text or online comment you make leaves an incredibly rich electronic trail that defines who you are and what you do."

"You are bluffing."

"Really, Tom? That 32-year-old Bolivian flight attendant you've been flirting with on Facebook?"

"What about her?"

"He's 45 and he's an undercover surveillance expert for a large retail outfit."

"Oh. My. God."

"You should be more careful with your password selections, Tom. It took me less than a minute to access your credit card account. Only a fool would use '123456,' the worst password of 2013, according to PC World."

"You are invading my right to privacy."

"Really, Tom? There is no mention of any right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution. Sure, the Fourth Amendment stops the police and other government agents from searching our property without probable cause. And, says the American Civil Liberties Union, 'other amendments protect our freedom to make certain decisions about our bodies and our private lives without interference from the government.' But a specific right to privacy does not exist."

"You must be breaking some law!"

"That's a good one, too, Tom. There are no laws to prevent us from knowing about you — particularly when you so willingly hand over so much private information to so many strangers! You have no idea how vulnerable you are!"

"Vulnerable?"

"Identity theft is a growing problem, Tom. The personal information you willingly gave about yourself exists forever in the digital ecosystem. That gives savvy technical people lots of opportunities to steal your identity and destroy your finances."

"I didn't realize it was that easy."

"Identity theft is less worrisome than what government entities could do to you. Look how the IRS has been used to attack political enemies. Now imagine what government entities can do when they know EVERYTHING about you! That's why I called you today, Tom. I called to help you."

"Help me how?"

"You know those new anti-terrorist scanners they use at the airports? Well, at your age, you might want to consider switching from briefs to boxers."

"That, sir, is an outrage. I demand to know who you are and what you want!"

"Sorry, Tom. That information is private."

©2014 Tom Purcell. Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood" and "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!" is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.

A grandparent's musings

By Pat Parish

Recently my son came home to visit and brought my grandson over. My son and his wife were planning to see friends that night and asked if Nate, my grandson, could stay with me for the night. I said yes, as I planned to go fishing the next morning.

My son said he would be out early in the morning to get with us and went on his way. We had planned to meet at Sacy's for breakfast early and leave from there.

Well, morning came and I went to wake my grandson. He said, "Grandpa, I don't feel good, my testicles hurt. "

Taken aback, I replied, "Did you say your testicles hurt?"

He said, "Yes, they hurt all night."

I then called my son Josh and told him what was going on and that we had better get Nate to the emergency room. When Josh arrived he started asking Nate what had happened to make his testicles hurt.

"Did you get hit? Did you fall?" Josh asked.

Nate said that during the night he went into the bathroom and checked his testicles in the mirror and found small white puss sacks on them.

His dad and I were really confused now. We asked him to show us the white sacks he was talking about.

He then proceeded to open up his mouth wide and show us his *tonsils* — red and swollen.

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Keep bossy, ban pink ribboning

By Tina Dupuy

"Lean In" Author and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's campaign to cheer young girls to participate launched last week. Sandberg claims little boys get called leaders and for the same behavior little girls are branded as bossy. "Together we can encourage girls to lead. Pledge to Ban Bossy," reads the site.

"There are tons of hurdles female leaders must leap, all while being thin, pleasing to the eyes of men (but not so much you intimidate women), perfect mothers, fashion conscious, hyper competent, ageless and never angry."

It's only a word that's keeping women from leadership?

What happens the first time these imagined little girls get called something truly awful? "You know, some people think of you as an inspiring female attorney and mother. Other people think of you as the overbearing yuppie wife from hell. How would you describe yourself?" That's what a reporter asked Hillary Clinton—when she wasn't actually running for office—on the campaign trail in 1992. Bossy is one of the nicer things Hillary gets called.

So a billionaire has decreed from the bubble of privilege that little girls are negatively affected by the term bossy? You know what impacted my self-assurance and kept me from leaning in as a little girl? The fact that I was known as the kid who wore the same (my only) pair of jeans every day. Confidence is a thing people trapped in the hamster wheel of poverty never worry about.

#BanBossy is a perfect example of the Pink Ribboning of evils. Instead of a candid assessment as to why there are fewer female leaders than male followed by real world solutions to the inequities in education, lack of opportunities and economic stresses that contribute, what's proposed is something gimmicky with celebrity endorsements. The Pink Ribbon answer is, in the most literal way, the very least we could do: remember; get a sticker; pledge to ban a word.

It's less about encouraging girls to raise their hands and more about encouraging armchair activists to log on. "Please retweet." Change your Facebook avatar and change the world. Put a pink ribbon on breast cancer—buy a couple of pink hair dryers—and be satisfied you're doing your part. The problem with Pink Ribboning is it alleviates alarm by giving people something easy yet empty to do. It softens the concerned, warding off a real response. Done. Next issue.

"Awareness" is a consolation for actual quantifiable change.

Meanwhile, women still make a fraction of what men earn. Texas Attorney General and gubernatorial candidate Greg Abbott said he's for equal pay, but also stated if elected governor he'd veto the state-level Lilly Ledbetter Act because it wasn't necessary. Then data out this week shows women in Abbott's own office make less money on average than their male counterparts doing the identical job.

At the same time our country lags behind in women leadership. According to ElectWomen.com "The U.S. ranks 89th in the world for female political involvement." There are two states in the union that have never had a female governor or one represent them in Congress. One of them is the state that holds the first electoral event of the nominating process for president, Iowa (the other is Mississippi).

This is all just a little more deeply ingrained than a not-really-derogatory expression. We're still fighting over whether the pill will make women into unbridled nymphomaniacs. The jury is still out whether women should legally be public incubators for a "life" or capable of making their own decisions about their reproduction. Women are the majority of food stamp recipients. One in three American women (42 million) are living in poverty or on the brink. There are 28 million children who depend on them. Half of those children are little girls.

The concern transcends any one word—or even an entire lexicon. We still care about what Hillary wears and what work Nancy Pelosi has had done (Vladimir Putin and John Kerry BOTH get Botox and in the dust up over Crimea that fact has somehow not been a sidebar story on Huffpo).

There are tons of hurdles female leaders must leap, all while being thin, pleasing to the eyes of men (but not so much you intimidate women), perfect mothers, fashion conscious, hyper competent, ageless and never angry. And yes, they also have to endure criticism, prejudice and unpleasant things said about them.

But Pink Ribboning tells us all we need to do is very little.

Just buy a pink toaster.

Tina Dupuy is a nationally syndicated op-ed columnist, investigative journalist, award-winning writer, stand-up comic, on-air commentator and wedge issue fan. Tina can be reached at tinadupuy@yahoo.com