

On My Mind
by Ruth L. Tighe

Some "housekeeping" details: The url for this column has apparently been changed. If you've had it bookmarked, please check your bookmark, and change it to: <<http://net.saipan.com/personal/omm>>. If all else fails, this column can be reached by going to the Saipan DataCom home page (saipan.com), clicking on "Personals" and then clicking on my name. I haven't checked it out since the system change, but clicking on "Archives" from the column should take you to any back columns you may have missed.

And a correction. The new appointee as administrator of the Northern Mariana Island Retirement Fund pled guilty to only one banking violation rather than several, as this columnn erroneously stated last week. He did not violate a condition of parole; he was on probation. The condition in question had to do with applying for a position at, or being employed specifically by, a bank, rather than in any fiduciary capacity. My apologies.

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Political campaigning can get pretty weird - here as well as elsewhere - what with the devious strategies and odd partnerships developed by aspiring candidates. One of the oddest things I've seen was the full-page ad placed in last week's <I>Tribune</I> inviting people to attend a fund raising dinner for Benigno Repeki Fitial. What made it so weird was that the ad said, "Proceeds of this Fundraising Event will be donated to the Golden Jubilee Committee of the Mount Caramel Cathedral." I kid you not. That is what appeared on page 23 of the 10/8/99 issue of the <I>Tribune</I> - in color.

How can a dinner be both a fund-raising event for a political candidate and a benefit for the church at the same time?

Apparently it wasn't. Apparently that ad was pure political propaganda, for on the following Tuesday, 10/12/99, the <I>Tribune</I> carried another full page ad, also in color, and with the same family picture taking up half the page, to say thank-you to all Fitial's supporters. The ad said it wanted to thank everyone "who generously supported my Fundraiser" There wasn't a single word to be found on the entire page having anything to do with the Golden Jubilee Committee of the Mount Caramel Cathedral - no word of thanks, no nothing. Weird.

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I've been told all the reasons why the CNMI Government feels it necessary to confiscate imported medicines that do not carry English language labels, that are not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. I understand the concern about possible black-marketeering of illegal drugs. I agree that controls are needed.

Yet I still believe that the CNMI's laws in this regard are too harsh, too restrictive, too discriminatory. It isn't as though every country's medicines are the same. It isn't even as though

all things medical are pure science. Medicine - treatment of the sick - is an art, not a science. There are many illnesses, and many cures, for which science has not yet found an answer. There are many people in the U.S., let alone the rest of the world, who believe in the curative effects of everything from red rags tied around the throat to a salve made of exotic crushed roots.

The Chinese, in particular, are noted for their wide use of plants and herbs as well as a great variety of strange and unconventional ingredients in their medicines. None of those "indigenous" cures bear English language labels. None of them bear the approval stamp of the FDA. Nowhere else has their use been forbidden, except here in the CNMI. Yet over time any number of those Chinese cures have been found to have scientific merit - and have been incorporated into commercial products sold on the open market. The same is true of cures used in other societies, from the South American to the American Indian to the Chamorro and Carolinian.

The law provides that visitors may bring in a 90-day supply of medications that do not meet U.S. standards, but that is all. Given that so large percent of our population is from China, and given that their stay is normally for two years or more, the law, in effect, denies them access to their native, natural, local medicines. Prohibiting them - and the many Filipinos, and the Koreans, and the Micronesians, and all the other "non-locals" on island, from access to their own local medicines is, I would submit, xenophobically discriminatory.

Perhaps not all their pills, powders and potions are medically, scientifically proven. But faith plays an important part in healing, and if the Chinese workers, the Filipinos, the Koreans, the Micronesians, believe that their medicine works, do they not have a right to exercise that belief? What right does the CNMI have to deny them access to it?

It would be more humane, more reasonable, to deal with the problem of the importation of foreign medicines - and their possible abuse - by allowing their entry under controlled conditions, and by setting up criteria and standards for their sale on island. The CNMI could require that people be licensed to sell the drugs, that quantities be limited to individual use, that banned, illegal drugs not be marketed, and that licensees be held responsible for proper dispensation of the medicines.

Though allowing foreign workers access to their own medicines might have an adverse impact on the income of CHC's PHI pharmacy, there is also the possibility that it might cut down on the over-all traffic at CHC. If their home remedies are as effective as they - and many others - believe they are, those workers would stop coming to CHC for their lesser aches and pains. Access to their own medicines might also result in better health for those workers who are reluctant, for whatever reason, to come to CHC for treatment.

The question, of course, is whether anyone in a position to change the law will take the time, cares enough, to do anything about it.

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According to a book I just finished reading, the people who read a daily newspaper, watch daily

newscasts, are less informed about what is really going on in the world than those who don't. "Wisdom has to do with seeing things in their larger context, whereas news is structured in a way that destroys the larger context," says author C. John Sommerville in his book, "How the News Makes Us Dumb." Newspapers are in the business to make money, Newspaper therefore need to print stories that will make their readers buy another paper every day. Which forces reporters to find new and "exciting" events to write about every day. And to write attention-grabbing headlines.

For example, Sommerville believes that stories about airline crashes belong on the obituary pages. There isn't anything particularly notable about them - more people die in car crashes around the world on any given day than die in a single plane crash. "Those deaths <I>are</I> part of a pattern, but that pattern doesn't make the news. And yet people will stop flying after reading about a plane crash and pile into their cars instead. This is what news does to our thinking."

Other random quotes:"There is no extended thinking in news reports because it takes too much space to explain something." "...news has no sense of scale. It concentrates the mind when we though it was to broaden the mind." "Really important information still circulates by word of mouth, not in the news media." "...news isn't a reflection of the world but only of what has gone wrong in the world." "Isn't it odd that we trust the news to cover a typhoon in Bangladesh when we know it can't get the local school-board issue straight?"

"If we wanted to read about acts of moral decency, we have come to the wrong place. Moral decency is very rarely news. That is because it is expected and common - in real life. It will become less common as life comes to imitate news."

"News has little to say about our ideals. They change too slowly to be part of the news"

"If we thought about it, we could probably agree that the solutions to our deepest problems lie in attitudes, not in power or money. What is usually needed is hope and love and personal goals. But if a politician made this point, he or she would be accused of being irresponsible. He or she wouldn't fit the news paradigm of a serious politician."

I purchased my copy on the web.

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Language usage note of the day: a quote from the front page of a recent issue of the <I>Marianas Variety</I>: "Governor Pedro P. Tenorio is frowning a move that will increase...." Is it then possible to frown a book? Or frown a ditch? Or a dish? Hmmmmmmm.