

Among Friends

TAD BARTIMUS
For the Journal

Thrifty pal's happiness comes cheap

MY FRIEND very carefully spooned the Kung Pao chicken into the paper carton, then made room beside it for the extra white rice. She put the dab of steamed vegetables into another box and tucked her unread fortune cookie into her purse.

"Supper," she cheerfully announced. "I like this place because there's plenty to take home."

My once-a-month lunch partner always gets the leftovers. Out loud we say it's because I live two hours from the restaurant, while her refrigerator is just a few blocks away. But we both know she gets the doggy bag because it's more important to her than it is to me.

My friend is thrifty. Tight as a tick, you might say.

She swears her financial ethic evolved while rearing five children, but I think she was born that way. She claims she's never coveted a single article of clothing and always saved string, I, on the other hand, have always been a spendthrift. I was in ninth grade when I bought my first sweater on installments. It feels like I've been paying for it ever since.

My friend is a stay-at-home mom whose husband has a blue-collar, middle-income job. Years ago they decided they didn't want to worry about money, so they pledged to always live within their means and, except for a few medical crises, have done so.

This concept stunned me. No debt? No credit card bills?

Absolutely not, says my friend, who pays cash or does without. She's stayed in the same house long enough to own it. Her 13-year-old car runs like a top. She always looks nice, but her clothes come from second-hand stores. Dining out is for special occasions; rice is a nightly staple, meat a treat.

She doesn't have a home computer, the kids don't own video games, and the television is hardly ever on; until just a couple of years ago, it was an old black-and-white set. Recreation means long walks, the children's school sports events. Scrabble and Monopoly on rainy weekends, books, books and more books. The family has never taken an expensive vacation away from home; instead, summers are spent at public ball parks, swimming pools and the beach.

"We don't need that stuff," says my friend, waving her arm vaguely in the direction of the shopping center. "Buy, buy, buy — everything's always trying to get us to buy things we already have. Why not use them 'til they're worn out? Why do I need a bigger house when this one fits? Why do I need a fancier car with more things to break when mine runs fine?"

Gee, I don't know. I thought it was the American way — the more you get, the more you spend, the more you have to earn. Her serene face made me wonder; could Madison Avenue be wrong?

I looked out at my friend's carefully waxed old Chrysler and was reminded of my 1965 Mustang I paid \$2,500 for in new and sold it for \$100 eight years later. Now it's worth \$25,000. Clothes from my youth also have become collectibles: retro couture, the fancy auction houses call it.

"Listen," I said to my frugal friend, "I think you're onto something. The next time you go to the thrift shops looking for bell-bottoms take me with you."

Visit Tad at www.tadfriends.com and send your own great stories — 300 words or less — to among-friends@hotmail.com or c/o The Women's Syndicate, P.O. Box 128, Painesville, OH 44068. Include an e-mail or postal address.

TRENDS



REACH OUT:
The Zia Eagles Razzle Dazzle drill team is one of the community activities that takes advantage of the space at the Family Focus Center.

CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL:
A rugged and frightening exterior hides a compassionate heart. 7

GET UP

fallen women

San Francisco intervention program helps prostitutes break cycle of drugs and violence and get off the streets

How it adds up

- San Francisco's First Offender Prostitution Program has two components: SAGE — Standing Against Global Exploitation — is the prostitutes' part. It includes community outreach, counseling, job training, drug treatment and body care.
- Men attend the Johns program to get their arrests expunged from their records, but the girls find it also destroys their fantasies about prostitutes. They learn the women don't admire their sexual prowess, often they just need money to cover their drug habits. The fee the Johns pay — as much as \$500 each — goes to pay for prostitutes' treatment.
- Between 500,000 and 750,000 women in the U.S. sell their bodies in American cities.
- Girls enter prostitution as young as 14.
- San Francisco sees 4,000 to 5,000 prostitution arrests every year at police and court costs of \$2.8 million.
- Up to 30 percent of prostitutes carry the AIDS virus; treatment of each uninsured patient isn't less than \$150,000.
- Monthly care for one child can cost \$1,400 — and prostitutes have, on average, two children.
- Most men arrested on a first prostitution offense in the city are 25 to 40, college educated, employed and earning more than \$30,000.
- Through the program, 380 women and 120 girls have successfully exited prostitution.
- By last spring, of 1,512 men who had completed the Johns program, only 14 had been arrested again.



MICHELLE FRANKFURTER/NEWHOUSE

PAINFUL MEMORIES: Visiting the Tenderloin district where she used to work as a prostitute, Tracy Helton sees the same drug dealers, prostitutes and Johns that she worked with. "It's just like I never left," she says.

The local option: 'Send them to jail'

By RICK NATHANSON
Journal Staff Writer

ALBUQUERQUE IS NOT among the 10 American cities that have programs to help women escape street prostitution.

"Money is what drives programs," said Albuquerque Police Capt. Ruben Davalos, head of the vice unit. "And in Albuquerque, no money has been allocated to establish such a program, he said."

"You need rehabilitation for the girls on the streets. They need psychological help, they need help for alcohol and substance abuse, they have health issues, they have safety issues. You need diversion programs for the customers," Davalos said.

"We have one option — to send them to jail." Davalos, who has been working in vice since 1981, has arrested prostitutes as young as 15 and as old as a 63. Their average age is in the mid-20s.

In general, he said, the vice unit deals with the same 35 to 45 women each year and another 40 "circuit girls," who travel from city to city. Most of the women ply their trade along East and West Central Avenue, he said, and that's where the five-person vice unit concentrates its efforts. The unit makes about 115 prostitution arrests each month, which includes about 20 Johns, or male customers.

Davalos said there are two sentencing classifications for prostitutes. One is for an initial offense, which is a petty misdemeanor and carries a possible sentence of up to six months in jail. The other classification is for repeat offenses, which is a full misdemeanor and carries a possible sentence of up to one year.

"I can't think of any success stories," Davalos said when asked if street hookers eventually pull their lives together and walk away. "The only time prostitutes get off the streets is if they go to jail for a long time, or if they're dead."



LIGHTING THE WAY: Norma Hotelling calls upon 20 years as a heroin addict and prostitute to convince women there is a way out of a premature, anonymous death.

By DELIA M. RIOS
Newhouse News Service

SAN FRANCISCO — Busted heroin balloons litter Fern Alley on the damp winter afternoon that Tracy Helton allows herself, for a very few minutes, to step back into that other life, the one that very nearly left her dead.

Traffic on Van Ness Avenue moves noisily past this obscure alley, oblivious to what Helton sees. Over there, that's where she heard the rats. There, that's where the cops arrested her, cooking her heroin fix, a bust that cost her six months in jail. And there, that's where the truck woke her. It's as if she can see herself, see how skinny, sick and filthy she was.

The repulsion — and compassion — that the man should have felt, but didn't, echoes in her voice.

"He approached me to do a date. Can you believe that?" Her early 20s were lived like that and, at 28, she doesn't want to give that life one more minute. Shivering in the alley, Helton wonders, "Was it really that bad?" There is pain in the question, just as in the plea she used to make to God: "Please, please ..."

She was a fallen woman. That's what she thought.

But fallen women can get up.

Joint frustration
A remarkable 380 women and 126 girls have, in the language of the local criminal justice system, "successfully exited prostitution" through the city's First Offender Prostitution Program.

It was formed only four years ago out of the joint frustration of a former prostitute and the cop who once arrested her. They'd found themselves caught in a revolving door of prostitution arrests, with players and outcomes maddeningly, and tragically, predictable.

These are not Heidi Fleiss call girls, nor politicized women lobbying for legalized prostitution. These are women and girls subject to the vagaries of pimps, street violence and gnawing cravings for drugs; women whose every experience on the street tells them they are nothing.

Success may be measured by a drop in the 4,000 to 5,000 prostitution arrests every year in San Francisco, or by dents in \$2.8 million police and court costs. Success may be tangible in the public health system — up to 30 percent of prostitutes carry the AIDS virus, and treatment of each uninsured patient until death runs more than \$150,000. Or success may be measured in the foster care system, where monthly care for one child can cost \$1,400 — and prostitutes have, on average, two children.

But how do you measure what it means to Helton to know that a soft bed and warm blankets wait for her now, not a cold doorway and the rustling of rats? How do you calculate the value of reclaiming a sense of confidence, self-worth, and potential?

See PROGRAM on PAGE E6

Want to end sexism in language? Just make it 'they,' singular or plural

By DONNA PEREMES
The Washington Post

BELLS HAVE BEEN tolling for he — the generic masculine pronoun — for years. Why have so many grammarians turned a deaf ear?

In A Dictionary of American Usage (335, 1998, Oxford University Press), author Bryan A. Garner, a lawyer and lexicographer, believes the term eventually will be replaced by a catchall they, to be used in both singular and plural

COMMENTARY

sentences. "Speakers of American English resist this development more than speakers of British English, in which the indeterminate they is already more or less standard," he writes. "That it sets many literate Americans' teeth on edge is an unfortunate setback to what promises to be the ultimate solution to the problem."

The problem? Codified sexism in

language, still on the books in so many places, like many another archaic law. A small item tucked away in Psychology Today a couple of years back helps put the lie to arguments that the linguistic lie to her that they will send people into tailspins of confusion.

The genderless "plural singular," already in widespread use in conversational English, was studied in University of Wisconsin researchers found that substituting they for he did not

slow subjects down in their reading of sentences a bit. The headline for the item? "Don't Read This If You Teach English."

As contrast. I'd argue that those teaching the lay of the language are the very people who need to read such items. The tacit understanding has been that he is understood to be a "common-sex" pronoun; that arguments that the term is not all-inclusive are small-minded, petty unimaginative. (At least that was the

unspoken subtext when I raised such issues as a student in the mid-'80s, before nonexistent language guidelines were widely adopted.)

But who can seriously argue that he has abilities far beyond other singular pronouns, when the evidence so clearly suggests otherwise?

It's only common sense to see that he is not "common-sex."

Why is this foolish consistency being kept on the books?

