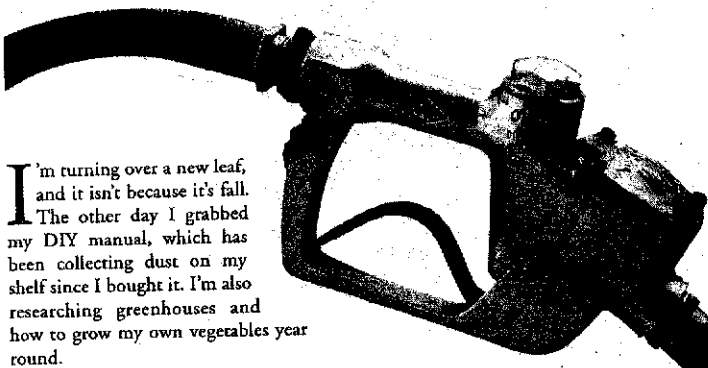


# FOCUS

## Dayton Voices

### Do-It-Yourself Optimism

By Holly Hudson



I'm turning over a new leaf, and it isn't because it's fall. The other day I grabbed my DIY manual, which has been collecting dust on my shelf since I bought it. I'm also researching greenhouses and how to grow my own vegetables year round.

The reason for my domestic panic?

I learned a new phrase recently, which I can't get out of my mind: "Perilous Optimism." It is — according to Ernest Partridge of the University of California Riverside — a dangerous state that we human beings like to live in where we ignore a body of evidence that suggests danger is ahead and still proceed without changing course. Kind of like driving a car after having had a few beers, having unprotected sex, or even rebuilding a city on a coastal swamp. However, he was being less prosaic and referring to the phenomenon of "Peak Oil," the point in time when there will be half the oil left in the world of what there was to recover.

Okay, I know, the supermarket shelves are full and I can still afford a tank of gas. But the current, heated debate about Peak Oil seems to turn not on the "if" of it happening, but the "when," with geologists and many energy experts predicting its occurrence within two years while the U.S. Department of Energy and several economists paint a rosier picture of the peak coming around 2030.

Whenever it happens, the era of cheap oil as we know it will be over. We can only hope that the development of renewable energy proceeds quickly, but even then, will it be enough for our rapacious appetites? Apparently, the perilous part of the optimism comes in when our insistence on looking at the glass half full blinds us to a pending reality and "leads us to courses of action and inaction that will eventually result in the loss of our prosperity, our livelihood, our liberty, and even our very lives."

But we humans thrive on hope. Don't give up yet, Ernest Partridge believes that with-

I would go a step further and say that this is a particularly deep-seated, core American belief.

I have just moved back to my native Ohio town after many years of living in England, where there is a much more pervasive credo that you are what you are from birth, and no amount of individual effort is going to do much to change that.

But back to "Peak Oil." The 21st century could look as different for our children as the 20th did for our grandparents — which brings me to my child. As a newly single mother, I have now become one of those prepare-for-a-rainy-day types. Necessity breeds invention. So now I am trying to invent a sustainable life for my 5-year-old son and I. At the moment, it means sustaining a roof over our heads — period. Forget about hurricanes, tornados or electrical grid failures. Most of the time, I'm too busy trying to find some bacon to fry up to feel very politically motivated about the world's problems. But this particular issue of having to be prepared for changing the way we live has gotten under my skin.

Perhaps the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina has left many others in addition to myself to

be as prepared as I can be. There is not much danger of me becoming a survivalist, stockpiling freeze-dried food and potassium iodide tablets.

But I have concluded that the least I can do for my son and I is to learn to live simply, to refuse to subscribe to mindless consumerism that only enslaves people into debt and a false sense of prosperity. With Americans' current savings rate standing at less than 2 percent, I am determined to buck the trend by buying less plastic Power Ranger toys.

I have also promised to tune up my rusty bicycle and to make my own cleaning products and forget about the Joneses. They're probably in debt anyway. Most importantly, I will raise my child to be self-reliant as he grows older. Yes, mine, like many, is already adept at navigating a computer keyboard. But just for good measure, I should make sure he knows how to fix an engine and maybe even build a house. After all, what if his future looks more like *The Road Warrior* than *Minority Report*? In that case, he might need more than a wrench and a level to see him through and I might need to parse out his tutoring to the professionals.

In the meantime, the other evening we switched off the TV, went for a walk down the road where we found our local deer family enjoying their dinner in the woods. We crept slowly closer until we were within 15 feet of the fawns before they scampered off. My son was infinitely delighted and I felt momentarily awed by the simple magnificence of nature that lies, usually ignored, just outside our doorstep — our collective cocoons of homes and SUVs.

On the way back, we took in dew drops scattered like

diamonds, a spiderweb, and a giant cicada resting on a blade of grass. It was a much-needed reminder to slow

down, to not panic, that the

now is just as important as the future and we'll get there one step at a time. But I still think I better learn how to fix that bike. Just for good measure.

## News Shorts

### DISCRIMINATION SUIT SETTLED IN CLEVELAND

Five black firefighters in Cleveland have been awarded damages totaling slightly more than \$206,000 after a jury in the U.S. District Court found the city guilty of discrimination in promotion practices and for failing to stop racially motivated harassment in the workplace. One of the five told of a white co-worker throwing a lit firecracker at him and suffering no penalty or disciplinary action beyond a reprimand. Defense attorneys insisted that such incidents were only "pranks" meant to reduce stress.

### FOX IN THE DOCKS

The Fox News Network is facing a federal lawsuit brought by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which is seeking damages for sex discrimination and harassment. The suit was filed after the EEOC investigated complaints made by former Fox employee Kim Weller. The investigation allegedly found that the company's female employees are regularly subject to discrimination such as being consigned to freelance work instead of more promising positions. The suit also states that Fox Vice President Joe Chillemi often used obscene and vulgar language when speaking to women at the company, sometimes berating them to "be a man."

### DRAWING LINES

An Episcopal church in Pasadena, California, is under investigation by the IRS due to a sermon given last fall in which the Reverend J. Edwin Bacon spoke out against the Iraq war and Bush's tax cuts. The IRS sent Bacon a letter stating that such a sermon could be grounds for the church losing its tax-exempt status. Bacon denies having advised anyone to vote for one candidate over another.

### FREE-FOR-ALL SPEECH

The nomination of Samuel Alito, Jr. for the Supreme Court has some worried that the conservative Alito will turn back the clock on gay rights. In 2001, while on the Third Circuit Court, Alito sided with plaintiffs who claimed in *Saxe vs. The State College Area School District* that the public school's anti-harassment policy protecting gay students was a violation of the First Amendment, since it prevented them from carrying out their "Christian duty" to speak out against gay students.

### UN CONTINUES DRILLING

India's foreign minister Natwar Singh was removed from his post after being fingered as a profiteer by the UN investigation into the Iraq oil-for-food scandal. Both Singh and India's majority Congress Party have been accused of benefiting from the program, which was supposed to permit the Iraq government to exchange oil for humanitarian necessities only. Singh has denied the charges but allegedly stepped down voluntarily pending a judicial inquiry.

### IN MEMORIAM

Ninety-five U.S. and coalition soldiers were killed in Iraq during the month of October, with an additional eight killed in Afghanistan. Among them were Sgt. Bryan W. Large, Cuyahoga Falls, Lance Cpl. Daniel M. McVicker, Alliance, Spc. Jeremy M. Hodge, Ridgeway, Spc. Richard Hardy, Newcomerstown, Staff Sgt. Richard T. Pummil, Cincinnati, Captain Tyler B. Swisher, Cincinnati, Lance Cpl. Robert F. Eckfeld Jr., Cleveland, and Pvt. Adam R. Johnson, Cleveland.