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Jacquelyn Mitchard

THE REST OF US



At times we are hated for helping

Everyone from Leo Tolstoy to Ben Franklin has said that there is no element that can freeze-dry a relationship quicker and more completely than a request for money.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be. Those always seemed such callous words to me.

My teenage son reminds me what the good rabbi said about the nature of charity — the superior gift of teaching a man to fish, so that he can feed himself for a lifetime, rather than giving him a fish so that he may feed himself for a day.

I know that I've written about this subject before, but never have I felt it quite so personally. I'd always believed that giving must be a sacrifice, that it means you must yourself go without something you want in order for it to be meaningful.

What I've learned, though, is that giving until it hurts . . . well, hurts. And it isn't necessary to speak the hurt you feel for the person to sense it.

People hate you for giving them financial help.

From having been a, well, not impoverished, but certainly financially challenged widowed mother, only 10 years ago, I thought I knew that. I thought I knew how much I appreciated, and how much I needed and yet resented, the bags of children's clothes left anonymously on my porch. Worn-out clothes, too shabby or unstylish for the doctor's kid, with a cartoon character who was, as my children would say, so last year, pictured on the T-shirts. How full the hearts were of the people who left the clothes. How broken the hearts of my kids were when someone at school recognized their hand-me-downs.

When I had some luck, and was better off economically, I forgot that understanding. I felt almost absurdly eager to help where I saw need; I forgot the rabbi's admonition.

It must have felt I was not just giving them a fish, but throwing them a fish.

A few nights ago I was discussing the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" with my 15-year-old son, particularly the part in which the 8-year-old innocent, Scout Finch, learns how the pro-bono work her father, Atticus, has done for clients who could not afford his services are as much humiliation as gift. Maybe more.

No one likes to need, except freeloaders, and I think there really are very few freeloaders.

I don't think people, for example, ever beg because it's easier than working. Even if they look able-bodied, they may not be able-minded. While there is a culture of grifters in the world, they're either sick or sitting at polished tables in corporate boardrooms. Or both.

It shrinks the spirit to take what you didn't earn.

For nothing is ever free, no matter how badly you wish it could be.

Over the past year, relationships I thought were sealed for life have broken open and festered over the subject of money.

When the time came that I had to say no, or refuse to co-sign for the loan, I only infected the wound. I broke hearts. They broke mine.

Having vowed never to turn away anyone in want, or certainly anyone in need, I've had to make rules for myself about giving. I learned that, if I was giving to someone who was using what I gave for pleasures I deny myself and my family, I resented it.

I resented it, and I hated myself for resenting it, and a cycle of shared guilt and resentment was born that had to be severed by distance.

The same dreams apply to everyone, which is why I marvel when pundits criticize so-called welfare mothers for buying their children high-priced athletic shoes. Every person wants to sample our absurdly excessive banquet of material pleasures. While I still think we all have an obligation to help when the need is there, I never want to be thanked again. I'll never give anything of major significance to someone I know unless I can be sure that person doesn't know the source.

The obligatory rose offered in return has a thorn in it. And it always will.

Jacquelyn Mitchard welcomes readers' responses sent in care of this newspaper or to Tribune Media Services Inc., 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60611 or e-mail: tmseditors@tribune.com.



Former Madison City Council member Barbara Vedder is launching a new business — Brazen Video Productions — with her husband, Luciano.

A brazen venture

Former council member Vedder launches new video business

By Debra Carr-Elsing
The Capital Times

Political activism and community involvement are high on Barbara Vedder's list of priorities.

She's passionate about her beliefs — which include an avid interest in theater and art — so it's not surprising that Vedder developed a reputation for being outspoken when she served on the Madison City Council from 1995 to 2001.

"I'm hoping to serve people in a different way with my new business," Vedder says.

It's called Brazen Video Productions, and Vedder's husband, Luciano, is her business partner. Vedder handles marketing and promotion from a home office, and Luciano — who uses just the one name — does



These images are from projects done by a new Madison business, Brazen Video Productions.

most of the videography and editing. "Interesting things are always going on," Vedder says. "There are stories everywhere you go."

"It's very gratifying to develop a project that helps people share something they want to make available for others to see or to learn about or to witness in some way."

Initial work has included community outreach videos for nonprofits, artistic productions and documentaries. Other small businesses request high-quality, in-house training videos.

Sometimes, Brazen's video projects have an educational focus at a workshop or symposium, for example. Other video projects are simply entertaining. Some record personal memories.

"We're open to a lot of different venues," Vedder says.

Their latest project was a 50-minute documentary for Reentry Productions, a Madison-based company that specializes in community re-integration education media.

In the video — which is available online at [See VIDEO, Page 4F](#)



Two buttoned-up suits from Oscar de la Renta's fall 2004 collection exemplify the startlingly respectable mood of clothes for the post-sex era. Is it Janet Jackson's fault?

No sex, please, we're fad-conscious

Sex is over. To those of you fortunate enough to be marooned out there in the still-sex-drenched hinterlands, where teenage girls are still buying super-low-cut jeans and crop tops, this may sound wildly unlikely. For one thing, how on Earth would the fashion, advertising and entertainment industries — to name only three — survive without it? And not only sex itself, but the references to it, the spoken and unspoken promises of its imminence, the veiled allusions, hints, intimations, implications, double entendres, gestures, come-ons, smoldering glances, swaying hips, and so on and so forth?

But if you'd recently spent the better part of a week watching tall, thin women walk up and down the runway in next fall's clothes, you couldn't have missed the handwriting on

the wall: Sex has finally gone out of style. Clothes harking back to the styles of the 1950s are the latest thing — or will be by September.

Doing without sex will tax the ingenuity of designers, ad men, marketers, screenwriters, stand-up comics, fashion designers, composers of popular music, makers of music videos, sitcom scriptwriters, fire-and-brimstone televangelists and the folks who put out the Victoria's Secret catalog, among many others. It'll probably be terrible for the economy.

The big question, of course, is: Can we blame Janet Jackson for this backlash? Or would that be indulging in illogic of the post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc (i.e., x came after y, therefore x must have been caused by y) variety?

I hate to admit it but, like President Bush, I too missed the infamous Super Bowl halftime show. Wouldn't you know? Not since Isadora Duncan was throttled and dragged bodily out of her open car to her death on some Nicoise cobblestones by a long silk scarf caught in a back wheel has a wardrobe malfunction

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Patricia McLaughlin
REAL STYLE



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