

Advice for the Easily Offended

“A newspaper should never print anything that might offend someone.”

That’s a quote from a Press-Citizen Letter to the Editor published more than 15 years ago that has always stuck with me. The woman who wrote it was upset about a somewhat graphic photo that had been run in an issue a few days earlier.

I gave it some thought at the time but couldn’t decide whether or not I’d enjoy living in her world. Actually, it might be cool to go through life with absolutely no surprises; everything that happened to me would be exactly what I expected, always reaffirming my preferences and preconceptions.

Similarly, the Press-Citizen’s readership would consist entirely of like-minded individuals who would write Letters to the Editor harping away on subjects upon which everyone already agreed. Editors would systematically screen out news reports and opinions from sources deemed to be argumentative, upsetting or just plain wrong. Wait, isn’t that last part already happening?

I’m probably just oversensitive about the occasional complaint regarding my own fine prose, particularly a letter and online comments about last month’s column. I endeavored to explain (not justify) why young, attractive female restaurant servers tended to receive larger tips from leering geezers like myself. In retrospect I’m surprised that the needle on my Politically Incorrect Meter didn’t budge before I submitted it. It has failed before; it may be defective.

Shortly after publication, a handful of Writer’s Group members participated in one of our infrequent wine socials and I happened to be sitting next to fellow columnist Joseph Dobrian. As far as I’m concerned, as Pariah-in-Residence his primary function is to attract hate mail to the point that the rest of us usually get a pass. He failed last month, but I’m not sure what more he can do.

On this occasion Joe commented that he and I are now being mentioned in the same breath, as purveyors of literary garbage unworthy of publication in any

medium. Especially in a newspaper with as alarmingly low standards as the Press-Citizen.

I had never considered myself to be a rabble-rousing gadfly in Joe's class, and I informed him that in my opinion he deserved his abuse, but I didn't deserve mine. It turned out he felt the same way about *my* abuse.

Being the sensitive type, I conducted a small unscientific poll to determine if I really am clueless. It seems obvious that the clueless would also be clueless about being clueless; someone needs to point it out to us. Fortunately, this turned out not to be the case for me, and not just because those polled were drawn from a pool of close friends deemed highly likely to tell me what I wanted to hear.

Back on topic, if you are the lady who never wants to be upset you probably shouldn't be reading anything at all or even leaving your house. The rest of us are arguably benefiting from being exposed to people with unique perspectives, and the occasional idiot. The Press-Citizen editors will continue to try to figure out which is which, and fail.

I feel fortunate to live in a community where someone can be relied on to object to almost any statement no matter how innocuous or obvious – it keeps things interesting. This is not to say that most or all objections are unwarranted; occasionally the idiots do need to have their tripe published so they may be exposed and shouted down.

And occasionally I may be Exhibit A.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons is pretty sure he's not an idiot, but would hate to live on the difference.