

I'm a little ashamed of myself. I usually let headline news come to me. I don't seek drama out. However, when the tragedy at Virginia Tech unfolded and we learned that Cho had mailed a multi-media information package to NBC the same day of his deadly massacre, I went to nbc.com to view the video. Because of blocks put on my company laptop, my access was denied and I was almost relieved when that prohibitive screen popped up. I never did view the video or hear Mr. Cho speak. Probably for the best. His message seems to be one of misguided retaliation and his methods left me speechless in our common quest to understand why.



Recently, we lost a Blue Angel, an unfortunate way for Beaufort to make national news. I learned about the crash while shopping for groceries in the commissary on Parris Island. The butcher came from behind the door at the meat counter and was quickly recounting the news to a Marine shopping for a roast. I overheard that a plane had gone down and either the pilot or a resident was killed. Upon hearing that "a plane went down," I interrupted the conversation by asking the butcher to repeat what he had just said. My intrusion wasn't invited into the conversation but my curiosity got the better of me. Just an hour earlier, I had seen a billowing, black plume rise from the trees across the Beaufort River. The news circulating in the grocery store about Pilot #6 confirmed my suspicion that the sighting was not good.

What drives us to want to ingest the details of awfulness? Some of our exposure to our reality is unconscious. We learn about tragedy because it is woven into our exposure to the world around us. Television, radio, the newspaper and Internet are as inherent to our daily activities as brushing our teeth, washing our faces and getting dressed in the mornings, and every format witnesses to catastrophe. Some of it is force fed to us like an intravenous solution of media plasma and, like babies who spit out their pureed peas disgusted by the taste or turn their heads to signal enough, eventually we tune out and turn off the all-too-real stories, half out of boredom or because we've learned all we want to know or can stand.

I think I was traveling on business by car when Anna Nicole was discovered dead and because I had windshield time, I paid more attention to the event than I normally would have. As I tuned in to multiple radio stations, I wanted to know why a 39-year-old Anna Nicole died after becoming a new mom. Later, I was curious about the DNA testing and my distant nosiness was satisfied in learning that Dannielynn's father was Nicole's younger lover. And what was it that Imus said? Who cares, right? His ignorance vanished in the hazy news vapors of college killings and the never-ending carnage in the Middle East. But for a moment, I wanted to know exactly what this radio talk jock had said that was so insulting and infuriating. What was it? I wanted to know what kind of slander gets you in trouble with Al Sharpton, MSNBC and NBC. The answer? Thoughtlessness, racism, bigotry. But I already knew that. I understand common courtesy in a nation that reads Miss Manners but cannot comprehend the dry wit of etiquette and self-control and will not implement it.

Morbid curiosity can get the better of us. Sometimes it's a part of why we visit the sick and dying, why we attend funerals. We're curious about our own fates. We want to understand the depths of our own mortality in a futile search for answers to open-ended questions.

But I hate unhappy endings because, time and time again, my daily routine is laced with hope. I strive to replace morbid with a genuine curiosity in nature, politics and humanity. As I was filling my watering bucket the other day at the sink in our guest bathroom, I heard a noise from inside of it. For a moment, I wondered if it could be a small snake and then, from the tip of

the nozzle, the tiny head of a tree frog with black beady eyes looked at me. I quickly urged him to stay right there, stay right there, as I headed for the front door. But he leaped onto the hardwood flooring and I scrambled to catch him to release him to the outdoors.

Curiosity can get us into trouble. Maybe the tree frog wanted to explore the unknown darkness of a cool, wet watering can and was almost a victim of flooding. Maybe our curiosity about the lives of others can dampen our spirits and derail us from more important goals, but without it, we become stale. Like everything in our lives, there is a happy medium. When I went back into the garage the other day to see if a roach that had landed on its back was still alive, my curiosity was answered as its legs moved in a futile dance to find traction in the air. I flipped him over to watch him scurry out the door. On that day, because of my curiosity and some strange sense of redemption, even a roach got a second chance at life.