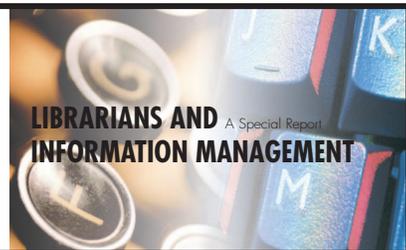


'I Am in Love With Blogging'

The 'lesser Perfesser' makes a case for strong opinions and instant chatter.



BY ANN ALTHOUSE

Hello. Maybe you've noticed me. I've been writing for 1262 days straight on a blog called Althouse. I've been writing law review articles for much longer than that. I'm a law professor at the University of Wisconsin and have been since 1984. But that sort of laboring over footnotes and transitions, with multiple edits and years between conception and publishing, is not, I think, where I've found my readers.

These days, I amuse or enrage about 12,000 readers a day, writing about whatever catches my attention—much of it law-related, some of it rather frivolous . . . even when it's law-related.

You may remember the Plaidgate controversy of July 2005. I took the position that *The New York Times*' biography of Judge—now Chief Justice—John Roberts Jr. included a photo spread designed to plant the notion that the man was gay: “Just look at the series of photographs they chose: young John in plaid pants, young John with his boys' school pals, young John in a wrestling suit with his fellow wrestlers, John with footballers, and—the final pic—John smiling in an all-male wedding photograph.”

I riff on miscellaneous articles about science and sex and art. I write at least something about every episode of “American Idol.”

I talk about politics. My perception of Freudian meaning in the carrot sticks and onion rings at the center of Hillary Clinton's new video set off a tirade of abuse against me in late June. And some people are still steamed about the long post, called “How Kerry lost me,” that I put up a few weeks before the 2004 election.

AND THEN THE LAW

There's plenty of law stuff in there, though.

I'm carefully following the lawsuit that two female Yale law students have brought against some pseudonymous writers who said a few outrageously nasty things about them on an Internet message board called AutoAdmit. (Quoting the plaintiffs' lawyer, I wrote: “Isn't 'the scummiest kind of sexually offensive

tripe' exactly what we always used to say people had to put up with in a free country?”)

I'll write thousands of words within hours of the Supreme Court's announcement of a new constitutional law case. About *Morse v. Frederick*—the “Bong Hits 4 Jesus” case—I said, among many other things: “Justice Thomas practices originalism, and that has him looking back on old school traditions: ‘[I]n the earliest public schools, teachers taught, and students listened. Teachers commanded, and students obeyed. Teachers did not rely solely on the power of ideas to persuade; they relied on discipline to maintain order.’ And no one was unfurling wacky, druggy banners.”

Sure, I could go more deeply into a case in a law review article, but it's important to translate it immediately and to open a forum for people to debate about it. Please, come join my comments section!

Unlike mainstream journalists like Linda Greenhouse and David Savage, we law bloggers are not limited to describing the case and posing as neutral. We can take unusual digressions and express strong opinions.

Readers don't need to confine themselves to conventional journalists anymore on the day the case comes out. We law bloggers have a conversation up and running even before those journalists put up the sort of basic descriptions that used to be all we had until the law professors had cranked their way through the law journal process.

I don't want to knock that hard and deep intellectual work that goes into producing scholarly articles for law journals, but I am in love with blogging.

DROPPING THE INHIBITIONS

I'd been longing to write a blog and fretting that I didn't have a blog for years before that day, Jan. 14, 2004, when I impulsively dropped my inhibitions, went to blogger.com, filled out a simple form, and wrote my first few words . . . about how I was impulsively dropping my inhibitions.

And now, here I am, 1262 days. I haven't missed a single day, doing the kind of writing I love so passionately.

I've written 9081 posts. That's an average of seven posts a day. Am I crazy?

One thing about blogging is that other bloggers will tell you what they think of you, and I have lost track of the number of times I've been called crazy. The Google search "Ann Althouse' crazy" yields 115,000 hits. I know those aren't all people calling me crazy, and I haven't read all 115,000 pages, but still. I've read plenty of blog posts that inform the world that I'm crazy.

What are they saying? On Firedoglake—a political blog with more than 50,000 readers a day—they're saying, "I've maintained for months that the Lesser Perfesser was a few balloon animals shy of a birthday party, but today, oh, today she has hopped on the short bus to Woof-Woof Land and left a note (in crayon) behind saying that she hates us all and she's never, ever coming back."

(I'm the "Lesser Perfesser" because I'm not Glenn Reynolds, the University of Tennessee law professor whose blog, Instapundit, gets more than 150,000 visitors a day. If I count as second to him, hey, I'm happy!)

Of course, they're usually calling me crazy because of what I say. (And they love to add, "This woman is supposedly a law professor.") That Firedoglake post, for example, asserts that I'm crazy because I perceived sexual connotations in a Hillary Clinton video—a takeoff on the final scene of "The Sopranos"—where she offered Bill Clinton a bowlful of pared-down carrots and he was sad that there were no onion rings. (And, yes, I know that there were onion rings on "The Sopranos" and that carrots are more healthful than onion rings, Hillary's concerned about health, and Bill has a heart problem. Jeez! Enough already!)

Those bloggers who call me crazy don't usually focus on the very strange fact that I've been writing for 1200-plus days without one day off. But if they did, I would readily confess to being crazy in love with blogging. I love reading miscellaneously and

responding spontaneously in writing, in public, and creating a forum where people from everywhere can have a conversation that I've started.

Last month, I agreed to let a Web site called Politico do a profile of me, and one of the stock questions was: "What's your biggest blunder?" Nothing sprang to mind. I could certainly think of dozens of things that got other bloggers mad at me, but I've always defended myself. I believe in recognizing the pushback and standing my ground. And anyway, there was another question about your "biggest dust-up." (Oh, how I wish I'd answered that question by saying, "I don't want to kick that dust up again!")

Stalling for time, I asked how other bloggers were answering the question. The interviewer told me some bloggers said things like supporting the war in Iraq. I said I didn't think things like that counted as blunders in blogging.

To blog is to be committed to putting your thoughts in writing, in real time, I said. There are some things I won't talk about. Despite badgering by some of my more insistent commenters, I've resisted writing about whether President Bush violated the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. I'm not going to use my status as a law professor to essentially vote against a program people want me to oppose. I would need to do a long, careful study of difficult statutory provisions to have a legitimate legal opinion, and I won't be pushed to give an instant answer that would be only what I want to be true.

So I figure out ways to write what I can appropriately say at the time. Sometimes that requires finessing, and other times it means knowing when to keep silent, but once I've written a post, I stand by it: This is what I thought then. Check the time stamp. That is absolutely true, and it cannot be a blunder, because, in the logic of blogging, that is what I thought exactly then.

If I think it's wrong now, then it's time for a new post. There's always a new post in blogging.

Ann Althouse is the Robert W. and Irma Arthur-Bascom professor of law at the University of Wisconsin Law School.