

# The Bandera PROPHEET

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Proving My Case

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Special to the Prophet

My teenager tells me I'll never make a good columnist. He looks me in the eye with condescending compassion and tells me I'll never make it because I don't have any issues: I'm not gay. I wasn't abused as a child. I'm not grappling with bulimia or chronic fatigue syndrome, I don't collect rooms full of newspapers nor brush my gums raw.

On the whole, it seems I present a normal façade, and apparently this eliminates me from a category of potentially great writers. It's not something I feel good about. Because the truth is I DO have issues. For example, I'm pagophagic. That's right. It's true. Look it up. See, that's a strike against me, right? And what's more, I've got dental phobia.

Although this is not one of those phobias that requires explanation (I compete with 14 percent of the population) does that make me any less of a study? Of course not. It's a legitimate 'issue'. I'm as eccentric and tangled up as the next talented writer.

I am not at peace with my bodily self either. I'm 40 years old and I can't decide if I'm blond or gravy gray. My nose is plump and my knuckles are knotty. I've got bony ankles. My rib cage is too big and I have Popeye elbows. I am neurotic about certain smells, particularly halitosis. Everyone should have a Binaca dispenser permanently implanted on the roof of their mouth, not unlike those bathroom deodorizers that squirt citrus every three minutes or so. If I find a hair floating in my bathwater I tend to pitch a blue fit. Wrinkle my sheets and I need therapy, wash

your hands in my kitchen sink and it's the last time you'll be invited for supper.

Not convincing enough? Well, what about my revulsion to brown paper? Especially cold, dry brown paper. Gives me the shuddering willies. Ask me to carry a paper sack full of frozen goods on a cold, dry winter day and I'd just as soon you scratched all 10 toenails slowly down a rough, black chalkboard. And when I find one of those ghastly gristly things in my chicken cacciatore, I'm liable to throw up, no matter how legitimately a part of the chicken it used to be.

I do so have issues. Just like the next gifted eccentric. A latte is no latte without a measured dash of Irish Cream. In the right cup. At the right time of day. I must have light but not too much light. I demand that napkins be folded and that the fork be to the left of the plate. I hate plastic drinking cups. Especially the commemorative ones like from baseball games or Taco Cabana. Improperly folded washcloths are intolerable.

Almost convinced? I can't stand the smell of popcorn or dill pickles on my fingers. Scratchy ball point pens are beyond detestable. And, although I love adjectives and adverbs, the use of exclamation marks pushes me over the edge into the yawning crevasse. It does. Really. Ask my editor. I compulsively pull hangnails. I will only eat anchovy pizza. Perhaps there is hope for me as a writer. Perhaps I do have the right credentials. Perhaps I'm just loopy enough.

Put it like that, and I'm sure my teenager will agree.