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A royal pain won't shut up

Though she has

lots of good reasons for it, Annette Zender is a pain.

Ask almost anybody in the local court system. She raises a stink. She won't go away. She is relentless.

She's a royal pain in the place where we all sit down.

She's been told to sit down on that part of the anatomy and be quiet ... or else.

She does not deal well with "or else"— or the "be quiet" part, either.

So Zender dropped by our offices this week, as she has done in the past, and this time she had a slightly different story.

You probably saw her picture on Page 1 Thursday. She came to the office proudly and defiantly wearing her own purple gag, occasionally emitted muffled strains of anger through it and — and I hope the law isn't listening — took it off and chatted amiably.

She's not supposed to do that, though she didn't talk much about the specific legal imbroglio that ignited the most recent fuss.

Annette Zender tends to create a stir everywhere she goes, and therein lies her great strength and her burden. Some people are energized by her message and fortitude; others (usually local judges and lawyers) are peeved by her rancorous obsessiveness.

I have no way of knowing whether the case of bias she makes against the Lake County Family Court is valid, and that's not really the point.

Her drive to regain custody of her now-14-year-old daughter is the essence of her life. This pursuit has metamorphosed into public advocacy for other children similarly trapped in custody purgatory. She even raises children as a foster parent, and the state thinks she's trustworthy enough to raise strangers' children.

But her failure to get the local court to agree with her about her own child has now produced a legal order gagging her from talking about it.

Evidence and facts aside, here's my unsolicited advice to the local court: Sorry guys. It just won't work.

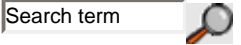
Men normally don't possess enough backbone to do what Annette Zender does. Maybe it's male alpha dog biology superimposed into human life. But guys often will shut up if someone in authority tells them to shut up. Just watch a football team sometimes.

Women are a different issue.

I've known women for a long time — several of them starting with Mom — and I can't remember one who would respond favorably to being told to shut up. Not only will they not shut up, they'll make you sorry you ever had the idea. Oh, buster, will you ever be sorry.

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So, just from a functionality point of view, it's a waste of time.

Plus, the last thing you'd want is to throw her in jail, which the local judge insisted he'd do.

Remember the judge trying to prove Santa Claus was a nutjob in "Miracle on 34th Street"? That's the doomed legal dynamic at work. Hizzoner is way overmatched.

And, if he tosses Zender in the calaboose, it only gets worse. That invites Alan Dershowitz or Jesse Jackson to show up for the debate. Or even worse: Oprah.

Besides, I hate to lecture a judge, but ordering people to shut up hasn't worked for 200 years in this country. National mouthiness is sanctified by our Constitution, and we're addicted to telling off people who think they have power over us. It's a genetic thing.

Just ask Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and Rosa Parks. They all have one thing in common with Annette Zender. They wouldn't shut up, either.

AS I SEE IT

09/02/06

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