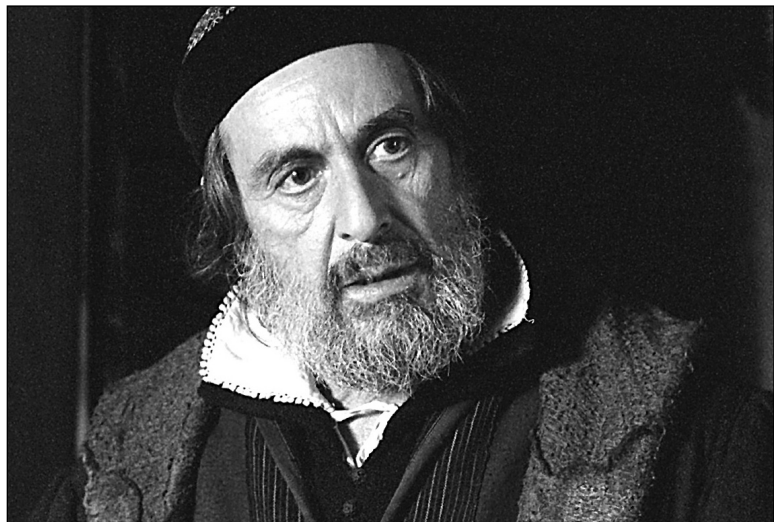


DAILY BRIEFING

A QUICK GUIDE TO TODAY'S SUN-TIMES

WEEKEND



The play's the thing

Shakespeare's controversial "Merchant of Venice" finally gets its due, thanks to a terrific performance by Al Pacino as Shylock. **ROGER EBERT'S REVIEW**



COLUMNISTS

NEIL STEINBERG

RUN, JUNIOR, RUN

Anyone who cares anything about Chicago can't help but be delighted to see Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. finally begin criticizing Mayor Daley and his corruption-riddled regime. **Page 22**



CATHLEEN FALSANI

God doesn't fit at Rolling Stone Magazine was short-sighted to reject ad for Bible. **Page 42**

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A ringer in Cicero politics? **Carol Marin, Page 51**

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Mr. Skin's book a must for buff buffs. **Page 54**

New insurance law also covers morning-after pill. **Ask the OB/GYN, Page 61**

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Field's parent facing big changes, including possible merger. **Page 65**

Morton's to open another Chicago steak house. **Page 65**

City-owned lots west of the United Center to see new housing. **Page 65**

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Picking this weekend's NFL games. **Pages 152-153**

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DEBRA PICKETT



e-mail:
dpickett@
suntimes.com

Listening trumps reporting on this Africa mission

In one of my first jobs out of college, I worked for a big executive. I didn't make a lot of money, but I did get a very nice office, and I got to make up my own title, which was "executive communication specialist" or something similarly ridiculous. The essence of the job was that I followed the big executive around, wrote down things he said, then assembled his collected utterances into speeches and articles.

On one of my first assignments, I accompanied him on a trip through Europe, where he was meeting with other big executives to find out about

how they ran their businesses. After a week of taking notes through all of these conversations, my boss decided that I, too, was ready to participate. He told me I could ask one question at each session.

I expended more mental energy on coming up with a single good, smart-sounding question than I had on my entire senior thesis.

Then, I tried to ask it. The question — technically, I think, a multipart query — rolled off my tongue in a torrent of qualifiers and subjective clauses and hemming and hawing, all rolled up in an East Coast accent with a nervous Valley Girl inflection.

The French executive at whom it was directed could only stare blankly. Not even at me. He just looked at all the other grown-up men in the room — all of whom spoke clear, perfect, board room English — asking them with a bemused and gently arched eyebrow, "What the hell am I supposed to do with her?"

Since my European humiliation, I have made a point of trying to listen more than I talk, to avoid both conversational grandstanding and evangelism.

On certain topics, though, I can't seem to help myself. Like the AIDS orphan crisis in Africa.

Preaching to the choir

"You know how it is when you get back," I remember saying to my friend Vic, as our lunch stretched into its second hour. "You can't stop talking about it, and everyone just looks at you like you're crazy."

He nodded vigorously — the kind of nod that other people would definitely take as crazy — and said, "I know exactly what you mean."

That was a year ago.

I was just back from east Africa, and Vic was just back from southern Africa. While there, we had each visited with kids orphaned by AIDS. And it was strange and frustrating to get back into our regular lives, talking with our regular friends, while the world was on fire.

We were tempted just to throw everything over and go stand on a street corner and shout at people until they got it: There's a generation of kids growing up over there without parents.

What can I do?

Instead, we holed up together over burgers and root beers, saying the same things over and over again, telling each other what we

already knew, both how bad it is and how fixable, how desperate, how urgent, but also how simple.

Since I first came back from traveling through Kenya and Tanzania last year, I've been thinking about going back there. Last time, I went to learn. This time, I keep telling myself, I'll go with something to offer.

But, the truth is, I don't have a lot to give. I don't know how to set up a public health initiative or an economically self-sustaining community or even a decent goat farm. I'm not a teacher or an engineer or a doctor.

Matchmaking idea

And, then, in one of our lunchtime conversations, Vic and I hit on the idea of a sort-of matchmaking service, a way to connect some of the highly skilled people we know with some of the incredibly impressive Africans we'd met who were doing great work but who could have used a hand or a sounding board or — to use the horrible business consultant expression — a coach.

Vic slid into the role of master networker, calling up the Small Business Administration and just about every other business organization he could think of, looking for people who might be willing to volunteer. I nominated myself to go back to Africa to get some more information about the kinds of coaching people could really use.

Our enthusiasm began to feed on itself. We hadn't actually done anything, but we were becoming convinced of our own brilliance.

Last-minute questions

Then, a few days before I was scheduled to leave on my self-appointed fact-finding mission, it occurred to me that I should be nervous, that, in fact, I had neither a plan nor a clue, nor really anything other than a round-trip ticket and a bundle of good intentions so overstuffed it would not fit securely beneath the seat in front of me.

That's when I started staying awake all night, thinking about the look on that French businessman's face.

As I write this, my stomach churns with anxiety. I'm thinking about how I'll ask my questions — "What can we do?" "What could you use?" — without sounding like either a complete jerk or a total fool.

By the time you read these words, I'll already be there, bumbling around in my big sun hat with my bottled water, trying not to be too much of a dork.

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WEATHER



Today: Cloudy and cold with snow arriving late in the day. Highs in the lower 20s, lows in the upper teens. **Saturday:** Cloudy with snow changing to flurries. Highs in the lower 20s, lows around 5. **Sunday:** Variably cloudy and cold. Highs in the lower 20s, lows in the lower teens. **Monday:** Mostly cloudy and windy with flurries. Highs in the lower 30s, lows in the mid-20s. **Tuesday:** Mostly cloudy with flurries.

◆ **Details on Page 80**

LOTTERIES

For tickets dated
Thursday, January 20, 2005

Illinois

Midday Pick 3—**119**
Midday Pick 4—**6459**
Evening Pick 3—**734**
Evening Pick 4—**8608**
Little Lotto—**01 02 04 09 33**
Lotto Grand prize: \$12.5 million
Mega Millions
Grand prize: \$10 million

Indiana

Midday Daily 3—**140**
Midday Daily 4—**6211**
Daily 3—**304** Daily 4—**6680**
Midday Lucky 5—**01 06 12 16 31**

Evening Lucky 5—**07 08 24 30 35**
Lotto grand prize: \$3.5 million

Michigan

Midday Daily 3—**424**
Midday Daily 4—**7678**
Evening Daily 3—**306**
Evening Daily 4—**6807**
Fantasy 5—**10 23 33 34 39**
WinFall jackpot: \$2.5 million

Wisconsin

Pick 3—**793** Pick 4—**6209**
Badger 5—**09 13 15 25 31**
Super Cash—**01 16 22 27 30 33**
Megabucks jackpot: \$1 million
Powerball Jackpot: \$26 million