



Top Stories



Australian Parliament apologises to the Stolen Generations

Billy West, voice of Ren and Stimpy, Futurama, on the rough start that shaped his life

From the hands of an alcoholic abusive father to battling drugs to creating Ren and Stimpy, Philip Fry, and some of the most memorable characters on television, Billy West has come a long way in life. In an unflinchingly candid interview, David Shankbone and West discuss his journey.



Featured story

'Top Model' winner Jaslene Gonzalez on her career and being a Latina role model

Wikinews talks with America's Next Top Model's first Puerto Rican winner, Jaslene Gonzalez, about her childhood, what makes her a strong individual, and what television show her abuela would want her to go on.



Wikipedia Current Events

Former Major League Baseball pitcher Roger Clemens testifies to the United States House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform regarding performance enhancing drugs.

- The Iraqi Parliament adopts an accord on the budget, detainees and federalism, setting provincial elections for late 2008.
- The Swedish government rejects the Nord Stream underwater natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany.
- Hezbollah commander Imad Mugnyiah is killed by a bomb attack in Damascus, Syria.
- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issues a formal apology to the Indigenous Stolen Generation on behalf of the Parliament of Australia.
- Ch K-Run's Park Me In First, a.k.a. Uno wins Best in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, the first beagle to win the show.

•An explosion in Vancouver, British Columbia destroys two restaurants. Police confirmed explosion was the result of arson, the fire was set inside the taco restaurant and an accelerant set off the explosion.

Astronauts replace ISS nitrogen tank in spacewalk

Two astronauts have performed a spacewalk, or EVA, to replace a depleted nitrogen tank in the Integrated Truss Structure of the

International Space Station. The Space Station's Nitrogen Tank Assembly (NTA), was successfully replaced with a new one, launched aboard Space Shuttle Atlantis, which is currently visiting the station, on mission STS-122. The old tank will be returned to Earth aboard the Shuttle. The NTA forms part of the Space Station's cooling system.

The spacewalk was successful, and the primary task of changing the tank was completed ahead of schedule, allowing the astronauts to perform several secondary tasks, which included the installation of thermal covers on the newly installed Columbus module, and inspection of micrometeoroid shields on the Destiny module.

American astronaut Rex Walheim and German astronaut Hans Schlegel, both of the STS-122 crew, left the ISS Quest airlock at 14:27 GMT, and re-entered it at 21:12, after six hours and 45 minutes of extra-vehicular activity. This is the 103rd spacewalk to be made as part of the International Space Station programme, and the second of three planned for the STS-122 mission.

Meanwhile, NASA have announced that the STS-122 mission has been extended by one day. Landing is now scheduled for next Wednesday, at 13:59 GMT. The extension will give the astronauts extra time to finish activating the Columbus module, a process which has been delayed due to computer

problems aboard the module.

Wikinews interviews U.S. Libertarian presidential candidate Bob Jackson

Wikinews held an exclusive interview with Bob Jackson, one of the candidates for the Libertarian Party nomination for the 2008 U.S. presidential election.

Jackson, an engineer, believes that he can win the Libertarian nomination and, though it is unlikely, the White House as well.

He believes that the strength of America is based on the maximum freedom of citizens who are responsible for their actions. "This", he says, "is guaranteed by the Constitution and made possible by the rule of law and limited government."

He has plans for Iraq and the economy, as well as "correcting a dysfunctional government, a real energy policy and a better national defense."

Interview

WN: Why do you want to run for president?

Mr. Jackson: During the past 40 years it has become abundantly clear that both the Democrats and Republicans covet expanded government without regard to fiscal responsibility and personal liberty as guaranteed by the Constitution. The vicious attacks among them show that their only objective is to gain personal power and their only difference is over which part of the government should grow the fastest. Tragically we no longer have an effective two party system. The Libertarian party is the only alternate party to bring balance and responsibility back to the government.

I believe that the strength of this country is based on the maximum

freedom of the citizens who are responsible for their actions. This is guaranteed by the constitution and made possible by the rule of law and limited government. The government must be returned to the people and to the authority granted in the constitution. I truly believe that, with the help of the people, I have the background and ability to guide a transition to return the federal government back to the Constitution. My plan is being developed and described in the web page www.bobjackson.org.

WN: If elected, how would you handle Iraq?

Mr. Jackson: The United States should declare victory in Northern Iraq and let the Kurds control their fledgling democracy. We should stabilize the Shi areas of Iraq into areas that they can control so that the United States would have another friendly ally. This would also be a victory. We should help the rest of Iraq areas to gain their control and if that is not done in a reasonable time we should let them decide their own future without our help. The United States should remain strong in this world and help freedom flourish wherever possible. We have a committed enemy that wants to destroy the United States by "a death of a thousand cuts". The United States can prevail against this aggression through better leadership.

WN: How would you handle the economy?

Mr. Jackson: I would concentrate on getting federal spending balanced within a reduced budget. This would allow America to bring the two most powerful forces for economic success, free enterprise and the profit motive, forward to build a better and ever improving economy. The more personal

freedoms we can reinstall in America the faster we will grow. The smaller the government involvement in business the better business will produce. I would propose to redefine the tax system as it is a barrier to personal and economic growth. With a smaller government a tax system like the "Fair Tax" would be great for expanded economic success.

WN: Do you think that you have a good shot at getting the Libertarian nomination? If so, do you think it's possible that you could be in the White House this time next year?

Mr. Jackson: I do believe that I have an excellent chance to gain the Libertarian nomination because my experience is best for governance at the federal level. It is possible but not probable for victory at this time. However, If the electorate finds non leader Senators from a dysfunctional government are only a choice between the lesser of two evils, and they understand the Libertarian alternative, I can be elected.

WN: There are thousands reading this right now. What could you say to convince them to give you their vote?

Mr. Jackson: I believe that the strength of this country is based on the maximum freedom of the citizens who are responsible for their actions. This is guaranteed by the constitution and made possible by the rule of law and limited government. The government must be returned to the people and to the authority granted in the constitution. I truly believe that, with the help of the people, I have the background and ability to the president and guide a transition to return the federal government back to the Constitution. I am an Eagle scout. That means

that I am trustworthy, Loyal, Honest, Prepared, trained and I help others at all times. I am responsible for my actions and I take full advantage of my personal freedoms. That is – I have always been a Libertarian.

I am an engineer – weigh all the facts and make the best solution that works. 100% vrs 51%. I have better broad based business, citizen and community credentials than any other candidate. I have unequalled energy and drive. Check my web page bobjackson.org Particularly review my plans for correcting a dysfunctional government, a real energy policy and a better national defense.

Malaysian Prime Minister dissolves Parliament, makes way for elections

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today announced the dissolution of the Parliament of Malaysia. Badawi, also known informally as Pak Lah, has been expected for some time to call for parliamentary elections.

Only yesterday, the Prime Minister had responded to journalists that he would do "no such thing" today.

In a response to the announcement, Parliamentary Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang expressed his regrets on the time of calling elections, as it, in his words, "showed insensitivity and disrespect to the Chinese New Year celebrations".

Another opposition figure, Lim Guan Eng of the Democratic Action Party (DAP), made a statement condemning what he called the misuse and abuse of the media "where only negative news about the DAP and the opposition are published, whereas positive news is ignored". He cited as an

example a video clip that was apparently being shown before the evening news, which in his words linked the DAP with street violence.

The five year term of parliament would have come to its regular end on May 16, 2009, more than a year from now. By law the election of the new parliament must be held at the latest 60 days after the preceding one is dissolved.

The actual date on which the polls are to be held is to be announced tomorrow.

'Top Model' winner Jaslene Gonzalez on her career and being a Latina role model

Jaslene Gonzalez is not your typical model. She rose to fame after winning Cycle 8 of America's Next Top Model, and since then, has been aggressively tapping into the fashion industry. As a result of her Latin background, Gonzalez has been successful at marketing herself both in the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking worlds. However, Gonzalez is much much more – a fighter, a humanitarian, and a good Latin granddaughter.

Born in Chicago to a Latina mother, and a Puerto Rican-born father, Gonzalez had, in many ways, a typical U.S. Latino experience – her tight knit family, grandparents, and spirituality played an intrinsic part in her upbringing.

"I went to an all-girl Catholic school and grew up with tons of family.....My family was very close knit and supportive. They were involved in my life everyday. So there was so much joy in every little occasion.....Every Sunday we would go to my grandmother's house where we [the family] would

hang out together....We enjoyed being around each other and being together," states Gonzalez.

Her grandfather was the director of a local dance group, Viva La Gente, which Gonzalez credits with impacting her life positively.

"I was a dancer for 12 years and life revolved around dancing. I was a very active girl, and was always involved with my grandfather's dance studio. The whole family was. My aunts, my cousins – everyone took part in performances and were involved in the group...That's how we spent our summers, and we looked forward to being outside, dancing salsa, hip hop, merengue," states Gonzalez. Through her involvement in the dance studio, Gonzalez's horizon was broadened significantly, and her humanitarian streak began to deepen.

"We were always constantly traveling. We traveled to Mexico to poor villages where we gave performances to give back to the community," said Gonzalez.

Ironically, ANTM gave her the opportunity to overcome her own difficulties and to further help those in need. "I went in there, without knowing that I was in an abusive relationship. They were the ones that brought that up to me...they felt I was emotionally destroyed, they wanted me to get support," commented Gonzalez. While the ANTM staff was supportive, she also credits her life long dream for helping her get out of the abusive relationship.

"Having a dream and having a goal in life, is the most important thing I did in my life. Because of that I manoeuvred my way to that dream. I knew I was better than that, I wanted to be happier,"

stated Gonzalez.

Soon after winning ANTM, Gonzalez became a spokesperson for Liz Claiborne and the National Domestic Violence Hotline, and began traveling the country reaching out to women.

"We had several meetings, and they asked me to be a spokesperson. I was so happy and blessed to help women, to have that title. It's something I want to do, besides modelling....I enjoy sharing my personal experiences because I can educate them, but I can also save someone's life. It's something precious, it's a gift," stated Gonzalez.

Abuse is not the only obstacle Jaslene has had to face. Growing up Latina had its own set of difficulties. "Being a minority is a challenge no matter what," states Gonzalez.

However, Gonzalez also states that being a Latina has many positive aspects in regards to her profession. "As a Latina, you have the advantage of being a Latina. Not only do you have this corporate job, but you can relate to many groups as a person."

When asked if the fashion industry forces Latina models to change certain aspects about themselves, she remarks that focuses on always staying true to herself. "Modeling is a difficult job because of what you go through. 80% of the time it's a no...When I go in, I go in like me, I don't have to change anything. Any time I get a chance to show who I am, I do. I am a Spanish girl, trying to pursue my dreams. I try to be the best I can be," remarked Gonzalez.

It is that same confidence and will to succeed that she seems to

appreciate in other woman. "I find women beautiful. I find a girl with no makeup, not worrying about her style and appearance, I find that sexy. I find confidence beautiful...Its so simple. It's being natural and confident," said Gonzalez.

As a role model, she has two key pieces advice that she offers women: nurture your mind with positive thoughts, and identify and foster the principles in life you value.

It is not surprising to see why Gonzalez's family is proud of her. "My family is so funny. They are so happy. I've never seen them so full of life. My mom acts like she won. My grandmother screams 'mi flaca' every time she sees me. They are so proud. Especially my grandparents. I was practically raised by them. To see them see you so happy and successful, there couldn't be a better feeling," said Gonzalez.

She adds that her grandparents would be extremely happy if she appeared on Cristina, the Spanish-language talk show whose host is referred to as "the Spanish Oprah Winfrey."

In the coming years, Gonzalez plans to continue on the path she is on. She wants to continue gracing the magazine covers, as well as dedicating herself to helping young teens develop self growth and esteem. "Every time I wake up, God gives me the opportunity to be a better me...Life gets better as it goes by."

This is the third in a series of articles with America's Next Top Model contestants.

Huckabee shifts campaign to Wisconsin

Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee moves his campaign to Wisconsin today after being defeated by John McCain in the Washington, Maryland and Virginia primaries last night.

Tonight, Huckabee will attend a rally in Pewaukee. Tomorrow he will be making stops in Madison, La Crosse, Wausau and Green Bay.

As of this writing, he has 217 delegates compared to front runner John McCain, who has 827, more than tripling Huckabee.

The Wisconsin primary, for both Democrats and Republicans, is on February 19.

German court upholds surveillance of Scientology

A German court has upheld a ruling from a lower court, sanctioning the monitoring of the Church of Scientology by Germany's intelligence services.

The North Rhine-Westphalia Higher Administrative Court in Münster ruled that there is enough information present to continue to allow Germany's intelligence agencies to monitor Scientology activities, asserting that the organization and its members have ambitions contrary to Germany's democratic order. The agency which monitors Scientology in Germany is called the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and has had the Church of Scientology under surveillance in Germany since 1997.

"There are concrete indications that Scientology's activities are to implement Scientology's program in Germany and to expand more and more Scientology's principles

in government, economy and society." —North Rhine-Westphalia Higher Administrative Court

The ruling stated: "There are concrete indications that Scientology's activities are to implement Scientology's program in Germany and to expand more and more Scientology's principles in government, economy and society". The court did not rule on whether or not the organization should be considered a religion, saying that was irrelevant to the ruling. The German government considers Scientology a business, and not a religion.

The court cited "numerous indications" that "central constitutional values such as the dignity of mankind and the right to equal treatment would be suspended or restricted," in a Scientology society. The statement released along with the court's decision also said that "In particular, there is the suspicion that in a scientological society only Scientologists would enjoy civil rights".

During the court proceedings the German court heard testimony concerning anti-democratic statements made by L. Ron Hubbard, the American founder of Scientology who died in 1986. The court did not find any evidence that the organization had distanced itself from Hubbard's statements. Certain statements made by Hubbard detail how to harass ex-members and critics of Scientology. Scientologists presented other writings by Hubbard, and asserted that he was a peaceful person and was being quoted out of context.

Other evidence considered by the court included "The Way to Happiness" brochures, part of the

organization's campaign to disseminate Scientology principles worldwide. The project is called "Operation Planetary Calm". A brochure was sent to the office of German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, whose office monitors Scientology and other groups deemed a threat to Germany's constitution.

When the Church of Scientology opened new headquarters in Berlin in January, opponents of Scientology protested outside the building and accused the organization of brainwashing its members. In December, Germany's top security officials stated that they believe Scientology is in violation of the German constitution, and requested state officials to investigate whether they have sufficient information to ban the organization in Germany.

"Despite over 10 years of intrusive investigation and harassment of Scientologists, not one shred of evidence has been uncovered to justify this politically motivated investigation." —Karin Pouw, Scientology spokeswoman

Scientology spokeswoman Sabine Weber said that the organization will appeal the ruling. Karin Pouw, public affairs director for the Church of Scientology International told the Associated Press: "Despite over 10 years of intrusive investigation and harassment of Scientologists, not one shred of evidence has been uncovered to justify this politically motivated investigation". A statement released by the Church of Scientology in Germany said: "The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution should finally end this farce and turn its attention to real enemies of the Constitution and real danger

so as to do what it is there for: to protect the German constitution and the basic rights of the people".

The Church of Scientology took German authorities to court in March 2003, seeking to stop further surveillance of their organization. In a November 2004 ruling, a court in Cologne upheld the legality of the German government's surveillance of the Church of Scientology.

The United States Department of State has criticized Germany for its surveillance of Scientology in its annual Human Rights Report.

Writers Guild of America ends strike

Hollywood writers have voted to end a three-month strike that crippled film and television production.

Yesterday, Patric Verrone, president of the Writers Guild of America West, said they will end the 100-day strike. "The membership has voted. Writers can go back to work," Verrone said.

Nearly 3800 members of the guild, both the east and west coast unions cast their ballots in New York City and Los Angeles, with more than 92 percent voting to end the strike. The writers will be back to work today and new episodes of television series should come as early as four to six weeks.

The strike occurred over the streaming of television, movies and other creative work over the Internet and how writers should be paid for that content. Under a tentative agreement, the writers would get a maximum flat fee of \$1,200 per program in the first two years, then two percent of a

distributor's gross revenue in the third year.

The strike ended after entertainment company heads including, Leslie Moonves, the CEO of CBS, Peter Chernin, the president of News Corporation and Robert A. Iger, the CEO of The Walt Disney Company and union officials such as Verrone and executive director David Young worked out a deal.

Moonves said the deal was a fair one to according to the Associated Press. When speaking to the entertainment publication *Variety*, he said, "I think there was some miscommunication early on. It was important that we started speaking eye to eye. Ultimately, getting the percentage of streaming revenue was important to (WGA), and I understand it."

The end to the strike means Hollywood's annual celebration, the Academy Awards, can go ahead as scheduled, February 24. The threat of picketing writers had reduced the Golden Globes last month to a news conference. Sid Ganis, the president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the executive producer of this year's 80th Academy Awards, Gil Cates, will hold a news conference today to reveal their plans for the award show since there will not a be picket line in front of the Kodak Theatre where the award show will be held.

The strike stopped production of dozens of television shows and slowed production on movies. One Los Angeles economist says it cost the local economy at least \$3 billion. However, the city of Los Angeles believed losses to only be around \$380 million.

Billy West, voice of Ren and Stimpy, Futurama, on the rough start that shaped his life

Ren and Stimpy. Bugs Bunny. Philip J. Fry and Professor Hubert Farnsworth on *Futurama*. Sparx. Bi-Polar Bear. Pop Eye. Woody Woodpecker. You may not think you have ever heard Billy West, but chances are on a television program, a movie, a commercial, or as Howard Stern's voice guru in the 1990's, you have heard him. West's talent for creating personalities by twisting his voice has made him one of a handful of voice actors—Hank Azaria and the late Mel Blanc come to mind—who have achieved celebrity for their talent. Indeed, West is one of the few voice actors who can impersonate Blanc in his prime, including characterizations of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd and other characters from Warner Bros. cartoons.

What is the fulcrum in Mr. West's life that led him to realize a talent to shape personalities with his voice, and how did the discovery of that gift shape him? David Shankbone found that like many great comedians, West faced more sour early in life than he did sweet. The sour came from a physically and emotionally abusive alcoholic father ("I could tell you the kind of night I was going to have from the sound of the key in the door or the way the car pulled up."), to his own problems with drug and alcohol use ("There is a point that you can reach in your life where you don't want to live, but you haven't made the decision to die.").

If sin, suffering and redemption feel like the stages of an endless cycle of American existence, West's own redemption from his brutalized childhood is what helped shape his gift. He performed little

bits to cheer up his cowed mother, ravaged by the fact she could not stop her husband's abuse of young West. "I was the whipping boy and she would just be reduced to tears a lot of times, and I would come in and say stuff, and I would put out little bits just to pull her out of it."

But West has also enjoyed the sweet. His career blossomed as his talent for creating entire histories behind fictional characters and creatures simply by exploring nuance in his voice landed him at the top of his craft. You may never again be able to forget that behind the voice of your favorite character, there is often an extraordinary life.

Below is David Shankbone's interview with renowned voice actor Billy West, who for the first time publicly talks about the horrors he faced in his childhood; his misguided search for answers in anger, drugs and alcohol; and the peace he has achieved as one of America's most recognizable voice actors.

The use of celebrities for voiceover

David Shankbone: You're known for speaking about the use of famous actors to do voice-over. What is your central problem with their use?

Billy West: My problem is that if they were judged by the same standards we were, that we have to try and get work with, they would be pretty piss poor as voice performers.

DS: What standards are those?

BW: The standards are that you have a really special voice that you can go around and do that voice and make a living that people just instantly love it. Nobody is just instantly in love with the usual suspects. Voices that we see in the cartoon movies now.

DS: Like Robin Williams?

BW: No, he's different, he understands character. I mean he understands characterization and voice changes. And so does Mike Myers and so does Eddie Murphy.

DS: Jerry Seinfeld as well in Bee Movie?

BW: No, that's not it because he's doing a character that looks exactly like him and sounds exactly like him. I mean, Will Smith does characters that are drawn to look like him and sound like him. I wish I had that luxury. Nobody draws a character that looks like me and sounds like me for me to just step in and be the perfect person for the role. You know what I mean?

DS: What's the solution? Not to do characters around stars?

BW: The thing is, I don't have an issue with the fact that these movies are being made. If I could audition for them and I didn't get them, I still wouldn't have an issue with them. But this is the thing: they audition us for these movies and then they play it for the A-list people, for these celebrities, so they can strip my talents' abilities and kind of toss them over to the celebrity just to make it look better than it would be. And I'm not a teacher. Not a paid teacher. I don't like that stuff.

"They audition us for these movies and then they play it for the A-list people, for these celebrities, so they can strip my talents' abilities and kind of toss them over to the celebrity just to make it look better than it would be."

—West on laying down cartoon characters in auditions, only to have a celebrity end up doing the voice with the quirks West's voice introduced.

DS: They'll have you come in, or

someone of your caliber come in, and actually shape the voice around the character and then they'll present it to the celebrity as the template?

BW: Yeah, and sometimes you'll actually hear stuff that you actually thought of during the audition, because you have to really be on your toes.

DS: Are you paid for that?

BW: Not really. Only a couple gigs did I ever get paid to scratch a movie for a celebrity that was going to do it. The stuff that goes on at auditions is despicable.

DS: Are there legal remedies that you could pursue for that?

BW: No. I gotta prove it. I used to bring a tape recorder around with me, but still, it's like trying to fight city hall. It is what it is. But that's my real issue with it is that this is an Area 51 for experienced voice-over people who do create characters and not just do who and what they are. It takes away from the creative process.

DS: There was a similar issue involved with Crispin Glover. They had taken a likeness of one of his earlier roles. I think it was Robert Zemeckis Then they tried to pass it off later as him and he sued them for doing that. Are you familiar with that situation?

BW: It only means anything to me if he won.

DS: He did.

BW: Oh, he did! That's very similar. But the thing is, if you could prove that. You can't prove that somebody deliberately took the stuff and tossed it off to some person that's acting. But it's a dirty business and I won't do it anymore. I never really quite got what it's all about. It's to show up and to sound exactly like the character and to read it, yet you're

doing it the way that you would do it. It's not good business as far as I'm concerned. It's not my part of town.

DS: Has your speaking out on this issue hurt you in any way?

BW: In what way?

DS: In your career?

BW: No.

DS: There's no reaction against it from the studios or from the?

BW: No they don't give a shit which voice-over person is in the alleyways beating the piss out of the other one to get a gig. I mean, they don't care. They really don't.

Iconic characters and choosing projects

DS: You discussed in an interview issues about the weight of the character's legacies, such as Pop-Eye or Bugs Bunny. You had said that every time they do one of these they say, 'this time it's going to be different. We're putting the teeth back in those characters. Nobody is going to tell us what we can't write and what we can write.' And you said they always blow it. How do they blow it?

BW: They pander. Slowly they take away the aspects of what made those characters who and what they were. In other words, cartoons contained sometimes gratuitous violence with the squash and stretch animation. Sometimes it was gratuitous. But that was only an aspect of the cartoon. When you start stripping away those things that made it a full dimension character, you're going to have Xeroxes of it in every way including creativity. The worst mistake Warner Brothers ever did was make all these characters friends, because then you took away the dynamic. Elmer wanted to kill Bugs Bunny. There

was no question in anybody's mind. Sylvester wanted to kill Tweetie. There was no question in anyone's mind, unless you wanted to say, "He just wanted to eat him. He didn't want to kill him." Go figure that out. There was danger involved, and some life truths involved. When you're telling the truth, you're really dealing with comedy. If you don't have the truth on your side, then comedy can't spring from it, unless you have some weird hydroponic garden that doesn't need any of the standard things that it takes to grow something.

DS: How do you choose a project, or does the project choose you?

BW: It works both ways. I get offers for stuff. If it looks like a good offer, I'll take it. I'm not a snob. I love working, and every now and then somebody will say, "Why did you do that?" You know what? It's none of your business. All I owe you is a good performance.

DS: Where do you think voice acting is going? It doesn't seem like it's ever an art that's going to lose its place, but do you see it diminishing? Is it on a downturn? Is it on an upturn? Is it idling?

BW: What they're doing slowly is they're going to have to turn the celebrities and actors into cartoons, slowly but surely, because it's the look that people are seduced by. It's almost as if they like watching animation more than they do live action because of all the farms of kids being fostered to love computer-generated images. If you don't do this, if you don't start turning all of the celebrities into cartoons, we'll lose our star system. It's better to have their likenesses with their voices rather than trying to act out something that sprung from someone's imagination that

needed a concerted effort to give it a voice, a look. These characters are actors, they look like themselves, but they're doing it with cartoon and computer processing. This is where it's going.

DS: With computer animated voices?

BW: No, no, no. The stars will never go away. Let's start there. If they have to become cartoons they will, because it's a trend in the industry that these kinds of movies make more money than the regular ones do, for the most part. And they have no use for people that can create any kind of a character that's shaped to whatever you want. That's not useful in this case.

Discovering his talent

DS: Do you remember a time in your life when you started recognizing your talent for being able to shape your voice into memorable characters?

BW: I never really noticed. It was just so natural to me. What I used to do was hide it because no one would say anything. When somebody's mind got blown around you, they just resented you or would find a reason to not like you. What happened was, I grew up thinking that everybody could do it, but that they were just too cool to do it.

DS: You had a talent that seemed very trite to you, but very few other people could do it and you didn't recognize that?

BW: Yeah. I didn't even think that it was something that was gifted upon me. I mean I never thought of it like that. I thought everybody was exactly the same. And then I would hear that nobody was doing the kinds of thing that I did and I began to feel weird and I retreated for various reasons. If I showed up

at a softball game I started calling the plays like an old-time sportscaster. You would think people would like that. But it would be met with, 'Who do you think you are?'

DS: You would feel a compulsion to do the plays in a voice?

BW: Yes. And I definitely wanted to get approval. Every kid wants that. But I would do those things because I heard the radio and I would listen to what people actually had to say. I just had my own approach to everything. Every little town weirdo like me grows up to come to the Mecca of weirdos, which is Hollywood.

DS: I'm not a voice actor, but there's times I'll hear a person say a phrase. I covered the Iranian president speaking at Colombia for Wikinews and I watched these dueling ideologues who were normal citizens. One of them was this large black woman with a bible yelling at this secular Jewish guy. I recorded these voices. She had one of those voices that I just couldn't get out of my head. She just kept going, "You're evil. You're going to burn in Hell." I found myself saying it aloud over and over and over again because her voice and what she said made such an impression on me that I wanted to imitate it. There was such a history behind that voice. She probably could have just said, "Buy Tide detergent," and I would still be saying it over and over and over again.

BW: Sure. That's what I mean about some people having naturally quirky voices. You've heard people in your life, like you meet a girl, a full-grown woman, who goes [in high pitched squeal], "I wanted to ask you." And you go, "Drop the act. Is this a put-on?" And I go, "Shit, you should be doing cartoons!"

"It was a horror chamber where I grew up"

DS: Is how you developed your talent when you were younger based upon imitating others? You would hear things that would leave impressions on you and you would want to imitate them? But why would you want to imitate them?
 BW: Because I had no role models. My dad was a certifiable psycho and he made my life a living hell and it was a horror chamber where I grew up and when I grew up. The guy used to beat the daylight out of me left and right, for any random reason. He was a raving alchie. I grew up with him making fun of me. I was forced to retreat into a world where I couldn't get hurt or beat up or anything like that.

"[My father] used to beat the daylight out of me left and right, for any random reason. He was a raving alchie. I grew up with him making fun of me. I was forced to retreat into a world where I couldn't get hurt or beat up or anything like that."

—Billy West on beginning to do voices

DS: It was escapism ...?

BW: Well yeah. You gotta understand, it was like I was a little kid. I'm not a magical being. My dad tried to kill me about fifteen times.

DS: So when you would escape into those voices, you felt a sense of safety?

BW: Yes. 'Cause I was surrounded by things that wouldn't be a threat to me.

DS: And things that you could control through your own voice.

BW: Yes.

DS: Whereas you couldn't control

what an alcoholic authority figure was going to do.

BW: I was like an alien; I was an observation unit, trying to study the human condition, not consciously, but because I had to. I could tell you the kind of night I was going to have from the sound of the key in the door or the way the car pulled up. I was hyper vigilant. So all I was, was this unit from space that had nothing but data gathering and sensory equipment.

DS: What was your dad's reaction to your doing voices?

BW: It didn't register on the radar because, number one, I wasn't really doing it in the time I spent with him. The other thing was that he was a frustrated talent. He could sit down at the piano and just start playing it, having no lessons or training. He could do dialogs and he could do voices. He was very funny, you know, among his friends and all that. He was also a musician, a drummer. And I became a musician except I wasn't a drummer, I was a guitar player. The thing is, he could never make it pay. All he had was a string of jobs. Driving a beer truck then driving a soda pop truck then driving an ice cream truck. You know what I mean? Like a Ralph Kramden kind of thing.

DS: Where was your mom during all this?

BW: She was trying to make a household and trying to keep the place as sane as she possibly could.

West moves to Boston after his parents divorce

DS: It doesn't sound like she was very successful.

BW: She had to leave him. She came into the sixth grade one day. I saw my mother at school and I was mortified like any other kid

would be. She talked to the teacher and they went out in the hall. My mom came and I went with her to the airport. It was like going on a trip. We got out of Detroit, Michigan and we were on a plane to Boston. Me and my two brothers. One was a baby and the other one was like, gosh, he had to be seven or six because I was about eleven. This was back in 1963.

DS: When did you come to a realization that your voice was something that you wanted to turn into a career?

"I'd go out and kick the shit out of some little cat or something, just like you know, smack it... In a weird way, in a weird permutation of the whole situation, to me that was supposed to be love. Cause why would your parent hit you, hurt you? Why? It never makes sense to a kid. And they all used to say, 'It's because I care about you.' But I got over that stuff and what I did was start to hurt myself."—West on abusing animals to deal with his own abuse

BW: It never was a realization. I started playing trumpet in grade school when I was ten years old and I liked the idea of going on stage and playing. And I was in a couple of plays in school and I really liked that world. I felt totally at home with it cause you had to be ready for anything and you had to be vigilant and you had to be on your toes, which actors need as skill and survival tools. So it was the perfect place for me to be. It's not like I was a hollow, empty vessel. I had plenty of things percolating inside and all that, but I needed to be where I to be where I felt good and I never fit in with other kids. I only had, like, two friends, maybe one, who was, "You like that comic book too?"

You know, that kind of stuff. Getting called faygot by any random goon.

DS: Did you say fay or faggot?

BW: No, it's faggot, but they would pronounce it fay-got, you know, in Boston. Faygot. What are you, faygot? What are you, queer?

DS: Do you think that's had any lasting effect on you?

BW: Well, I can now get crazy without being angry or raging because I know how to do it. Everything you do has to come from something real. You have to tap into something. Otherwise, there's nothing to grab hold of if you're a watcher or a listener or whatever. There's nothing for you there. It's no fun for the audience.

DS: They say that all great comedians typically have extraordinary tragedy in their lives, and they develop their humor as a response to it.

BW: Yes, but I developed mine a lot of the times to comfort my mom. Because she saw the way I was being treated. Not so much my brothers, but I was the whipping boy and she would just be reduced to tears a lot of times, and I would come in and say stuff, and I would put out little bits just to pull her out of it.

DS: Even though you were hurting, it would hurt you to see her hurting over you.

BW: Yes. And you know, I could take a beating. I finally learned how to just galvanize myself where you just totally like disassociate and your body can sit there and get smacked around and punched or whatever and your mind is a million miles away.

DS: What made you the whipping boy?

BW: Well my dad was very very

angry. He was abused as a child and he lived in a matriarchal situation with his mother and her sister and then her mother and there were all these big German I don't know, like real staunch [people], angry and punishment-inclined. He liked to dish out punishment

DS: What would make you the one that he would unleash that upon as opposed to your brothers?

BW: Because I could do little things that he seemed to be threatened by.

DS: Like what?

BW: I could draw. He was an artist. I could pick up a pen and start drawing immediately. He was a musician, a drummer. Then, I learned to play guitar when I was ten years old. He didn't sit right with any of these things. Plus, he was very jealous of me because my mother loved me more than him.

DS: An oedipal issue?

BW: Well, yeah, but it happened from Day One. He resented eventually the fact that I was born 'cause I took away his mommy.

DS: What is your relationship with your brothers like? Did they see this going on? Did they feel bad for you?

BW: Only my other brother. He's dead now. He bore witness to an awful lot of stuff and he, himself, was the brunt of an awful lot of stuff that I teased him and bothered him, 'cause it trickled down.

[How West dealt with his father's abuse](#)

DS: You said your father was a victim of abuse himself and that pattern often repeats. How did you stop that pattern? Was it through your voice work?

BW: No, not really. I had a mean streak. But I'm such a dyed-in-the-wool animal lover. I've always had pets. I would be so filled with anger and rage that on my way to school, it was literally a "kick at the cat" as they used to say. You're angry and you don't know where to direct it. You'll kick a wall that has wet paint on it. That'll teach them. And hurt yourself doing it. I'd go out and kick the shit out of some little cat or something, just like you know, smack it. You know, go over and go to pet it, then whack it because that's all I knew. In a weird way, in a weird permutation of the whole situation, to me that was supposed to be love. Cause why would your parent hit you, hurt you? Why? It never makes sense to a kid. And they all used to say, "It's because I care about you." But I got over that stuff and what I did was start to hurt myself.

DS: How so?

BW: I started drinking and doing drugs when I was about 21. I was playing in a band and it was all part of the picture, you know. It could be rosy for you. You couldn't survive anywhere else, but in a band you were like golden. I used to punch walls, cause ruckuses and get into fights wherever I went. You know, throw things at people.

[Rehabilitation and sobriety](#)

DS: How did you stop the fights and the drugs?

BW: I had to go to rehab. I had a job in radio. I stopped playing music. I tried to do some standup comedy, but I don't have the discipline for it. I used to just go out there and not care if I died or lived or whatever. You know, I'd just say stuff. I was always searching. I just couldn't go up there and do twelve minutes and pretend like I'd just thought of it,

you know, for three years.

DS: Are you still sober?

BW: Oh yeah. I've been sober for 22 years. But I had to go into rehab. I had a series of car accidents. I almost got killed one night but I just walked away from it chuckling, smashed.

"I got away with this kind of behavior and it was awful because I was terrorizing people. Not during the day. At night. And stories. There would always be stories and then it would make the papers."—West on his wilder days.

DS: Were you at a point where you didn't necessarily want to die, but you just didn't care if you lived?

BW: That's pretty much it, yeah. You put your finger on it. There is a point that you can reach in your life where you don't want to live but you haven't made the decision to die.

DS: Whatever happens happens.

BW: Yeah. You let the wind blow you around. I have a zillion stories. I should write a book. These are stories that you think, 'No, that couldn't be true. That couldn't possibly be true.' I was in radio around the same time too. I went back to playing music in the early eighties after a hiatus. I started playing again with a couple of people and I was also working radio but I was in a constant blackout. And people said I was good on the radio. I don't know what I did or said. I just used to come in there and turn the place upside down. I was too good to fire. But they didn't know what to do with me, you know. I'd come in in the middle of a night—

DS: And that would almost egg you on?

BW: No, no. It wasn't that. They wouldn't just grab me and throw me up against a wall and say, "Listen, you little fuck, you're going to rehab." I got away with this kind of behavior and it was awful because I was terrorizing people. Not during the day. At night. And stories. There would always be stories and then it would make the papers. You know, that kind of stuff. I finally cracked up a car and I was in for non-payment of rent and the judge says, 'I don't care about this non-payment of rent thing, but you're doing a week in Charles Street Jail for this DWI that you never answered for.' This was before the advent of computers. Now, they press a button and it spits out everything. But back then, you could screw up in one town and then go to another town and do exactly the same thing and they could never put them together because everything was on paper.

DS: Now it's all electronic.

BW: But I wasn't proud of that. That was the lowest point of my life. But I've been sober for longer than I was a user. Twenty-two years.

Is West glad he experienced addiction?

DS: Are you in some way glad that you went through the drug and alcohol abuse?

BW: I could ask you the same thing and I don't mean to pull a "Donald Rumsfeld," interviewing myself. But I could ask you the same thing. Are you glad? Because if you are where you are and it seems okay, then you had to have gone through those things for you to be the total sum of your experiences which led you to the very spot and the very phone you're talking on. You know what I mean? And so it's almost like no matter what you did, if you finally

get yourself together and you mean well and things are going okay, it's like, 'Well, it had to be that way.' The universe obviously had to teach me something.

DS: Do you believe in a higher power?

BW: Yes I do. I don't know what it is. I just think its some higher form of energy and some sort of being, but I can't embody it in my mind. But I know I have a one to one, kind of a spiritual connection to whatever that is. See I was raised, I had Catholicism shoved down my throat. I was an altar boy. I knew the mass in Latin.

DS: Me too.

BW: Really?

DS: I didn't know the mass in Latin, but I was an altar boy and I had Catholicism shoved down my face, but I'm 33, so Vatican II had happened.

BW: Yeah, and then you get "Father PreCum" trying to give you a massage and shit like that.

DS: The priest at my church got a nun pregnant and my mother, who was the president of the PTA at my Catholic grade school, helped deliver the baby and keep the whole thing hidden.

BW: Really?

DS: Yeah. And he's still the priest.

BW: I think it's probably a guy masquerading as a nun, if you're talking about priests.

West on his career

DS: Where do you see yourself now in your career?

BW: Exactly where I want to be. You know, I feel bad for kids who want to be voice-overs. They will always be needed. I always encourage them. They're always going to need what you offer. And you can make a living if you're

really good. But there's only so far you can go now. Before, the sky was the limit. There wasn't these rigged fights standing in your way. 'Cause right now, it's like a rigged fight. You can still audition and get great satisfaction on the job as a voiceover. And that's all I ever really wanted to be.

Ren Hoek from Ren and Stimpy. But I did aspire to do animations that required voice work. And I've done some of it and then this trend set in. And believe me we don't get the kind of money those people get for doing voices. It's rather odd to me. At some point I realized many years ago—I was a teenager in the sixties, protesting with the long hair, running around with the hippies—I realized when I looked at all the guys we were supposed to hate so much and resent, I kind of analyzed what complacency was, and they seemed complacent to me. They reached a point in their lives where they felt good about themselves and just cause a bunch of kids come along that were popping drugs and accusing you of this and that and being the man and everything, you think your feelings states are never going to change. And I used to say they're complacent. But the thing is that everybody that's born pretty much has to reach that point where they're looking down the barrel of their own complacency. You gotta like do a little gear shifting.

DS: At what point was that for you?

BW: When I stopped drinking, of course. But I couldn't play music in the way I wanted to play it anymore. I would have been like a parody of myself. So that didn't seem truthful to me. Trying to do comedy seemed truthful to me, but then, like I told you before, I didn't have the discipline to do

stand-up. That term wasn't popular much before the seventies. Then you started hearing these stand-up comics. When I was a kid and when I was a teenager, doing comedy meant you were interrupting somebody's dinner in a restaurant. There was no comedy clubs per se. But the turning point—it's called survival. It's like being a cockroach. You evolve or die. When I was kid I thought everybody was like me and all these people I hang with are going to be running the country and I couldn't have been more wrong.

West on politics

DS: Well they are. It's just things have changed.

BW: I'm way older than a lot of these guys by the way, that are out there. But to me they look like old men with bad breath and dandruff.

DS: Who are you talking about?

BW: Republicans.

DS: Yeah.

BW: You know, the guys that are running things. They don't look like people that came from my generation at all. I'm as old as Karl Rove, or any of those idiots and it's like, 'Where did you come from?' It's still the same old geezers that hide behind religion and family values, and then they're messing with guys in men's rooms and scandal prone because that's sort of what the party is famous for. I hated those guys and I didn't grow up to be one. But then I watch all these people from my generation just suddenly morph into that and I'm still in a state of shock. Where did these Donna Reeds and these little Breck girls, St. Pauli girls that are filled with Republican ideology come from? It's like they're young. What is this, you know.

DS: It's confusing because you look like somebody like Dick Cheney, who has this lesbian daughter, who's in a gay marriage and now has a baby with her partner, and you just don't know how the situation exists. It's hard to comprehend. That Mary Cheney exists in the Republican party, and that she seems to be fine with that existence and even works for it.

BW: I know, it's almost like it shouldn't be possible, yet it is. And these guys are thumping their chests about it. I don't go for that. It's like saying you don't approve of who and what your daughter is by birth. I'll never understand that. And, again, Cheney is only like six or seven years older than me. You know what I mean? Like where the f did this shit come from?

Billy West on modern American society

DS: Has the Iraq War affected you much as a person?

BW: Yeah, totally. I watched the whole Vietnam thing go down and it's the exact same thing. You think we would learn, but we don't because the proof of that is there's Holocaust deniers to something that happened a couple years before I was born, that there was extermination. Now there's people that aren't sure whether that happened or not, no matter how many shoes are piled up and down in Washington, D.C..

DS: Teach the controversy. Make it appear there are two sides to every fact.

BW: Yeah, but there ain't two sides to science. And when you start banning science and real knowledge, then you're in George Orwell land. The pretense of it all really bothers me. I hate sitting there, talking to a guy that's looking me right in the eye, and he's lying to me. I hate when

adults play pretend. I hate it more than anything. The only time I want to play pretend is when I can play like a child and not make it into an ideology. I know I go way off the subject, but I have a lot to say and a lot of people say, as far as the animation and the celebrities and all that, you know, I'm not so outspoken. Maybe not everybody talks about it, but what am I going to do? It's the truth.

DS: Do you think we live in a fear-based society now?

BW: It's no secret to anybody, unless you fell off a potato truck somewhere. Back-street America.

DS: What is the reasoning behind questions like, 'Aren't you afraid of saying such-and-such thing?'

BW: Because the person is usually fear-driven himself and totally understands the consequences of telling the truth. You don't get rewarded for it, let's put it that way.

DS: Are you optimistic?

BW: I'm optimistic about my own life and things changing for the better. I don't pin my existence on the industry. I really don't. Some people, without their fame, they would just roll up into a ball and bounce away and I'm like a reluctant famer, if you know what I mean. Celebrity means nothing to me. The word means nothing to me. I don't know if I said this. I probably already did because I've been talking so long. But if you fart the national anthem you can be a celebrity. It's bloodless. It's artless. It's Godless. But, fuck, that's what people want. And the idea that the word celebrity and the word diva has been watered down into any girl with a belly button now and some gold chain around her neck can be a diva. It doesn't matter why they call the great talents divas, you know

women in the theater. It's a pass-fail society. It's like, in my opinion, the guy that can fart the national anthem and is famous is totally equal to someone else who actually has talent and worked their ass off and became famous for having a gift. But it can be debated. It's like you're saying there's good art and bad art. Then there's like, well define art. It's endless. It's infinite.

DS: And you think that they are equal?

BW: No, of course not.

DS: You're saying in today's culture they are equal?

BW: Both can be famous. That's not the kind of fame that I would want and the other kind of fame is a certain flavor of misery too because there's a trade-off that you lose your personal life. I spent enough time in the fantasy world. I don't watch reality shows. These are the kind of people I couldn't wait to get away from in high school and I'm going to chronicle their stupid adventures, you know? I don't live there. I don't watch television.

DS: I don't have cable, so I know how you feel.

BW: Yeah, but even if I had cable, satellite, everything, I don't watch television. I surround myself with things that edify me, not because it's there. I'm an information freak. I'm a news freak. But it's got to be truthful news and that's why I'll go to the BBC News on the Internet. There's less pressure with the truth teller over there.

DS: It's amazing when you hear the BBC interview British politicians. We find it shocking that they'll say things like "Aren't you essentially lying when you say that?"

BW: But that was the Fourth

Estate. That was the idea that you owe your readers. You've been entrusted to deliver news to them and even if it's an editorial or an interview, the idea is to get as much true information so people can decide for themselves. I don't care if the interviewer's biased. If I get enough information, I have a chance to be biased or not.

[edit]

Billy West on telling it like it is

DS: Are your voices an attempt to understand reality?

BW: Well yeah. All I was presented with was life as it was deconstructing and disintegrating. And I had to pick up whatever pieces I had off the floor and try to put it together in a way that made sense to me. I don't know if I'm making myself all that clear.

"I really love what I do and I don't want people to think I'm sitting here angry all the time. I'm absolutely happy and I like what my life has become. But I still will start feeling weird if somebody asks me a question and I can't tell the truth about it. I'm just telling it like it is."

—Billy West

DS: No you are.

BW: Yeah, I'm telling you stuff that I never said to anybody.

DS: Well it's good.

BW: You're like the Barbara Walters of your generation. And I'm not going to protect an image I don't really have. Nobody wants to hear what I really think about politics. I totally understand it. It's like, every night is opening night if you're a performer. Okay that's done. Now what? I mean if everyone had to answer that standard in their job. "Now what are you going to do?" Because I

don't get told what to do. I audition for everything because if you want to work you've got to audition. Some people call me out of the blue and say, 'We just want you,' which is very nice and I worked really hard for that status. But I still audition for everything. There's a show coming up called Rahan and there's a 26 episode commitment on that. I'll be starting that soon. I can't tell you much about it because I've only read the auditions, the lines I was supposed to do. And the other thing is Futurama is going to keep me busy for awhile even though all the voice-over work is done. There's lots of projects that are related to it. And I'm still doing the M&Ms. I really love what I do and I don't want people to think I'm sitting here angry all the time. I'm absolutely happy and I like what my life has become. But I still will start feeling weird if somebody asks me a question and I can't tell the truth about it. I'm just telling it like it is.

DS: That's perfect. I will send you a link to the interview when it is published.

BW: That would be fine. I'd appreciate it. There's so much wrong on Wikipedia, like that I got booted off the Stern show. I feel a lot of dehumanized lie dispensers get a hold of these things and just make it so. Believe me, there's this very small but very active group of posters that want to keep dancing in the pet cemetery with animal corpses.

DS: It doesn't say anything negative about the Stern show. It just mentions the characters that you did and that you were on there. And the only thing it says is that "Billy has since claimed that he left the Stern show because WXRK management refused to give him a sufficient pay raise."

BW: Yeah. That's the real reason. That's cool. They finally got that in there. For a while there it was like, He was going to be Invader Zim, but he didn't make the cut. He wasn't Invader Zim and somebody else was. That's so stupid to me. Rick Horowitz was a friend of mine. He was better at it than I was. That's a fact of life. Instead of printing what I didn't do. I mean, there should be a link to the list of voice credits, if you can find one. You know a complete one.

DS: There's a link to your official web site on there. And there's also a link to Voicechasers database and a link to Internet Movie database and a link to an interview with you on CNBC.

BW: Oh. The Donny Deutsch interview. That was weird too. I mean I really love Donny Deutsch, but he kept asking, 'What it's like making all of this money?' Because that's what the show is. It's about finance or something. I mean, I know the guy. I actually used to work for him because he had Deutsch Advertising, when I was doing commercials. But he had to keep the money thing going because that's the channel basically. His show was about that and I was embarrassed. I mean, now that you've got millions because we know that you're working. I'm in the same boat you are Donny. As far as your house goes, you want what's yours and what touches yours to avoid encroachment. And it's never enough because fate keeps throwing stuff at you and nobody knows what it's like to pay a seven figure tax, in quarters over a year. You wind up about the same except that you have more stuff than most people.

Barack Obama and John McCain sweep Potomac states' primaries

Barack Obama, the junior senator from Illinois and 2008 US presidential candidate has swept all three of today's Democratic contests in the "Potomac primaries" consisting of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. and the bordering states of Virginia and Maryland.

Obama led in the Virginia polls 67 percent, while in the District of Columbia, he lead 76 percent over opponent, New York senator Hillary Clinton's 24 percent. This sweep gives him a slight lead over Clinton in the delegate count. Meanwhile, the Clinton campaign lost an aide today, as campaign aide Mike Henry resigned making light of a small staffing crisis within the campaign as Clinton just replaced her campaign manager Patty Solis Doyle with Maggie Williams. Doyle remains with the campaign as a senior advisor.

Meanwhile, John McCain, the senator from Arizona and 2008 US presidential candidate has swept all three of today's Republican contests in the Potomac primaries. McCain obtained a slim margin of victory over opponent, former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee in Virginia and had a lead over Huckabee by nine points in the District.

George Bush meets with Mali president Amadou Touré

George W. Bush, president of the United States met with the Malian President Amadou Touré yesterday. Mr. Bush said that he "was touched by the [Malian] President's concern about the life of the average citizen in Mali," and that he is "proud to be standing side-by-side with you [Amadou

Touré]."

Mr. Bush started the press conference after the meeting by saying that one of the reasons he wants to work with Mali is "because they've agreed to fight corruption, and support the education and health of its citizens." He added that he believes Mali is "a country that's committed to the rights of its people," and that the United States is "proud to be standing side-by-side with you. [the Malian President]." Mr. Bush also thanked Touré "for his hard work in helping his citizens deal with HIV/AIDS."

Mr. Bush said that in the meeting they spent "a fair amount of time talking about the dangers of radicals and extremists associated with groups like al Qaeda." He said that they also discussed the "need for close cooperation to protect the innocent people from those who murder the innocent in order to achieve their dark political vision."

Mr. Touré said in the press conference after the meeting that he "would like to convey to the President of the United States the sympathies and solidarity of the people of Mali because of the destruction caused by the tornados in some of the southern states of the United States." He continued by saying that "the [US] President had some initiatives not only for Mali, but also for Africa, which we [the Malian government] believe are historical initiatives."

Danish police arrest three in cartoonist murder plot

In the early hours of Tuesday, Denmark's Politiets Efterretningstjeneste (PET) (Danish Security Intelligence Service), arrested three people for their connection to an alleged plot to murder one of the cartoonists

from the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy.

On September 30, 2005, Jyllands-Posten a Danish newspaper, published twelve cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad. The paper solicited the cartoons for an article that explored "self-censorship" with regards to criticism of Islam. One of the cartoonists that responded was Kurt Westergaard, who contributed an image of Muhammed with a turban that looks like a bomb.

PET says that Westergaard was the target of an alleged plot to murder him. At 4:30 a.m. CET (UTC+1), in a pre-dawn raid, they arrested three men in Aarhus, Denmark. The men, two Tunisians and one Danish citizen of Moroccan origin, are suspected of planning to kill Westergaard.

PET commissioner Jakob Scharf said, "The purpose of the clampdown was to prevent a terror-related homicide. The clampdown occurred after a long period of surveillance."

The Danish citizen has been released. It is thought that this means that the evidence against him is not very strong. However, the 40-year-old man "will continue to be of interest for the PET" says Scharf.

The two other men, said to be 25 and 36 years of age, and who by all accounts were in Denmark legally, face deportation back to Tunisia. They are due to remain in custody until a judge can review their case on Thursday. "I have no idea about what is going to happen next. The ball is in the court of PET, and they are they ones who need to start talking and explain the meaning of all this. I have no idea what the next step is," said

the public defender assigned to the Tunisians.

The government and the PET has yet to present their case in court. As a result, it is unknown what evidence there is of a plot. Also, it is unknown if the men were under orders from groups outside of Denmark, as has been speculated by media.

However, Scharf says that the pre-emptive police action "was to prevent a planned killing of one of the cartoonists behind the Muhammed-drawings." The primary objective was not to jail or deport anyone, but to prevent a murder.

The Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh-Rasmussen, commented: "Unfortunately, this case shows, that in Denmark, too, there are groups of extremists, who do not recognize and respect the founding principles upon which the Danish people's government is built."

Meanwhile, the editors-in-chief at the three biggest newspapers in Denmark have seen the alleged plot as a threat to their freedom of speech. These papers are Jyllands-Posten, Politiken og Berlingske Tidende. To reassert their rights they all plan to republish the controversial Muhammad drawings on Wednesday.

"We must in Danish media send a clear and unambiguous message to all, that might get the same insane thoughts, as those who would attack Kurt Westergaard," says Berlingske Tidende chief-editor Lisbeth Knudsen.

Westergaard, who is 73 years old, has been under police protection since he received death-threats shortly after the original

publication of the cartoons. "I fear for my life, when the police tell me there are certain people who are working with concrete plans to kill me," he says.

Australian Parliament apologises to the Stolen Generations

A motion has been passed in the Parliament of Australia to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generations. Thousands of people converged on Canberra, the capital city, to witness the event. Many Indigenous people set up camp on the lawns outside Old Parliament House at the site of the Tent Embassy which has been on the site since Australia Day 1972.

The front doors of Parliament House opened at 7:30 a.m. with many people queuing from before 7 a.m. to gain a place inside. With the House of Representatives public gallery packed, about a thousand people watched a live telecast of the event on screens that had been set up for the event in the Great Hall. A special area was set up at the front of the Hall for members of the Stolen Generation. Thousands of others watched outside Parliament House, gathering on the lawns of Federation Square. Some members of the crowds wore t-shirts with the word "Thanks" on the front. Many more people watched at venues across the country.

Crowd building in the Great Hall.

All living past Prime Ministers, with the exception of John Howard, were in the chamber to witness the apology.

The Prime Minister's speech was received warmly by the crowds and received a long standing ovation at its conclusion. During

the Opposition Leader's speech, a majority of the audience in the Great Hall and Federation Square turned their backs.

There are more images in the photo gallery.

The Apology

The motion was presented to the house as the first item of business at 9 a.m. on the second day of the new Parliament. It was read by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, and said (in part):

"For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry,

To the mothers and fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great

country."

After the formal apology, Rudd gave a speech in which he referred to specific members of the Stolen Generation, and also addressed some common arguments against the apology.

He told the story of Nanna Nungala Fejo, an Aboriginal woman born in the late 1920's. "She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek. She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night. She loved the dancing," Mr Rudd said. "But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone. They brought a truck, two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip. The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away ... Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection."

Mr Rudd criticised the former government for refusing to apologise. "These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology. Instead, from the nation's parliament there has been a stony, stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade," he said.

Responses

Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson spoke in Parliament after Kevin Rudd. He reiterated the apology made by Rudd. "We formally offer an apology to those Aboriginal

people forcibly removed from their families through the first seven decades of the twentieth century," he said.

Nelson had a different take on the issue of inter-generational responsibility. "Our generation does not own these actions, nor should it feel guilt for what was done in many, but not all cases, with the best of intentions," he said. "But in saying we are sorry - and deeply so - we remind ourselves that each generation lives in ignorance of the long term consequences of its decisions and actions. Even when motivated by inherent humanity and decency to reach out to the dispossessed in extreme adversity, our actions can have unintended outcomes."

Nelson spoke against compensation to children forcibly removed from their parents. "There is no compensation fund, nor should there be. How can any sum of money replace a life deprived of knowing your family?"

In the Great Hall the crowd grew uncomfortable during the Opposition Leader's speech and the majority of the audience stood and turned their backs to the screens on which he was being broadcast. As the speech progressed a slow clapping began which drowned out Dr. Nelson's speech.

The crowds in Federation Square, the gardens outside Parliament House, also turned their back on the Opposition Leader.

One of the first to stand and turn his back in the Great Hall was Chris Osborne, representing the State Executive of the United Services Union of N.S.W. Mr. Osborne told a Wikinews reporter that his son had Aboriginal

heritage and his sister-in-law was a member of the Stolen Generations. Regarding Dr Nelson's speech he said that the Opposition Leader "had not learnt and understood the fundamental issues" and said that he had presented a "begrudging apology".

A member of the Stolen Generations interviewed by Wikinews said that she had personally resolved the issues in her life and had made a success of it, but was pleased that the Nation had made the apology. She said that she did not turn her back on the Opposition Leader as she believed that it was better to listen to what people said and then take from it what was useful. Another Indigenous person said that he felt that people would leave the event with a spirit of hope and optimism. Of Dr. Nelson's speech he said that the Opposition Leader: "...had us for a nano-second and then he lost us. He lost the spirit."

Live telecast

The audience at Redfern Community Centre in Sydney applaud at the conclusion of Kevin Rudd's speech

Thousands of people gathered throughout the country to watch a telecast of the apology.

In Sydney, 1,000 people gathered the Redfern Community Centre in Redfern, an inner city suburb that is a focal point for Sydney's aboriginal community. The event was organised by the City of Sydney and number of Indigenous organisations.

An aboriginal smoking ceremony was performed before the telecast, and attendees were welcomed to the land by a member of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council.

As the live telecast began it started to rain. This didn't deter the participants, who sheltered under ponchos and umbrellas. Rudd's apology was met by cheers and applause. The crowd booted at the mention of former Prime Minister John Howard.

The sound of the live telecast was turned down after Rudd's speech, so that the Lord Mayor of the City of Sydney, Clover Moore could speak. She acknowledged the traditional owners of the land and declared her support for the apology, but also said that it was a first step only and that there was much work to be done on the way to reconciliation. "For the first time, we have acknowledged the history of this country, and the privilege to live in this country," she said. "But we have to ask ourselves: what's the cost of that privilege? Who paid the price?"

"In our hearts we know the costs, whether in child-abuse, in petrol sniffing in remote communities, and drugs, and alcohol in the city districts."

Today in History

1876 – Electrical engineer Elisha Gray and inventor Alexander Graham Bell each filed a patent for the telephone, starting a controversy on who invented the telecommunications device first.
1949 – Asbestos miners began a labour strike around Asbestos, Quebec, Canada, considered one of the causes of the Quiet Revolution.

1989 – A fatwa was issued for the execution of Salman Rushdie for authoring *The Satanic Verses*, a novel Islamic fundamentalists considered blasphemous.

1989 – The first of at least twenty-four Medium Earth Orbit satellites in the satellite constellation of the

Global Positioning System was launched into orbit.

2005 – Former Prime Minister of Lebanon Rafik Hariri was assassinated when explosives were detonated as his motorcade drove past the St. George Hotel in Beirut, sparking the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon. February 14 is Valentine's Day, Feast of St. Brigid of Kildare in Eastern Christianit

Quote of the Day

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. ~ Paul of Tarsus

Word of the Day

osculation n

1. The action of kissing.
2. A kiss.

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