

# Sunday Edition Poughkeepsie Journal

FOUNDED IN 1785 NEW YORK STATE'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER

SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2006

www.poughkeepsiejournal.com

\$1.50

## It's time to talk about, ahem, gas

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Bill Downs is the master of what he calls "The Last Taboo." This is where eclectic perspectives on what polite society refers to as "passing gas" assume almost scholarly proportions. For example:

■ Beans are popularly referred to as musical fruit because they contain complex sugars that are too unwieldy to pass easily through the small intestine walls, thus falling prey to bacteria that process them in often audible aerosols of carbon dioxide and methane.

■ 19th century French entertainer Joseph "Le Petomane" Pujol toured Europe many times by learning to direct his emissions into eerie imitations of musical instruments, animals and popular tunes.

■ The average person passes gas 14 times a day, enough to theoretically fill up a half-liter bottle.

■ Believing the deliberate withholding of flatus to be unhealthy, Roman Emperor Claudius legalized the breaking of wind at banquets.

"The phenomena of flatulence, throughout history," Downs notes, "has been more prevalent in the most affluent parts of cultures, the ones with the most access to pies, cakes, sauces, gravies."

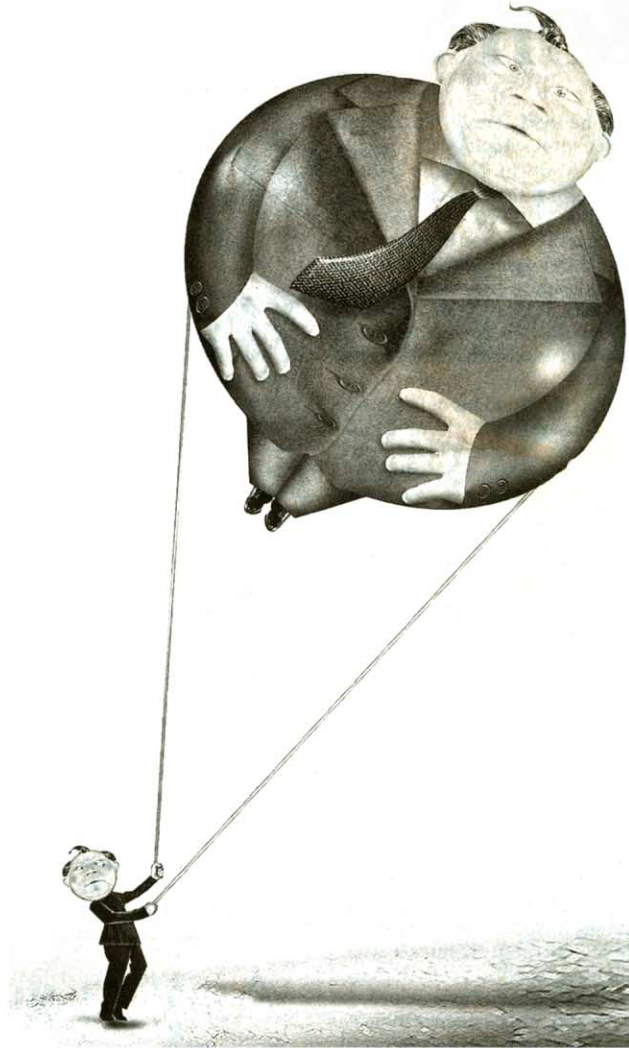
### Oh, the things we eat

But in the 21st century when industrial agriculture and junk-food empires ensure a more egalitarian access to culinary decadence once reserved for upper castes, the rise of obesity — especially in the West — represents just the most visible side effects of self-indulgence.

"We've gone to a place in our culture of caricaturing a problem we need to be taking a lot more seriously," said Downs, a nutritional biologist and author of peer-reviewed articles for medical journal, from his home near Philadelphia.

"Never in the history of our species have we become so addicted to fatty, calorie-rich, nutrient-depleted, refined processed foods," he said.

Downs said chronic flatulence can not only reflect a digestive disorder, but also a compromised immune system because "80 percent of the lymphatic tissue is in the (gastrointestinal tract)." Com-



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**Richard Hendry**  
nutritional specialist

plicating matters further is food harvested in mineral-starved soil, or exposed to herbicides and pesticides.

The remedy — fresh, organically grown vegetables — is easier said than done. So what course of action should you take to gird yourself?

There is charcoal-lined underwear to absorb malodorous emissions, Downs said, but he can't attest to its effectiveness.

Richard Hendry, a nutritional specialist at Wild Oats Community Market in Melbourne, Fla., said we should ease up on alcohol and drink more water.

"Also remember," he said, "we tend to get sick during the winter, and when we're sick, we take antibiotics. Antibiotics kill all bacteria, even the good bacteria

### Dining tips

What can you do to prevent excessive flatulence? Before you belly up to the table, you might want to tie a string around your finger to remind yourself of these useful tips for preventing flatulence:

- Chew each piece of food 10 to 14 times. Smaller pieces aid digestion.
- Water assists digestion, but alcohol is dehydrating. So moderate your alcohol intake.
- If you feel indigestion coming on, the acids in raw pineapple, lemon wedges, apple cider or vinegar are good remedies.
- Take digestive enzymes before a meal.

that help our digestion."

"Mastication ... is a key component in the conveyor belt," Hendry said. "You need to chew your food anywhere from 10 to 14 times, because the smaller the pieces, the easier it is to digest. It's by far your best chance of avoiding an explosive social situation."

If you feel a little indigestion coming on, Hendry suggests eating raw pineapple, or squeezing lemon wedges into a small cup of water to drink, thanks to the therapeutic power of the acids. Apple cider and vinegar also are useful tools.

"They'll break that rock right up," he said.

Remember the catchy ad that everybody mimics, Beano? "Take this and there'll Beano gas?" Beano really works, said Colleen Creamer, manager of Nature's Market in Melbourne. And so do other things, like chewable ginger candy or tea, peppermint, papaya and fennel.

"What you need are full-range digestive enzymes if you're going to have a great big meal. And not just Tums," she said. "Tums just neutralizes stomach acids. It doesn't really address the problem, which is that you're not getting enough digestive enzymes."