

SALVATION IS AT HAND

After writing about fighting cancer and dishonorable disagreements, I hesitate to give this column such a well-worn, if sensational, title, but I bet it will make most of my friends (and some of my family read on just to find out if I am indeed a Holy Roller, a Christian scientist, or just a simple fundamentalist.

Most theologians, and all charlatans, understand the universal appeal of universal salvation... but I am aiming much lower, starting with this confession: I hate to write... really just can't stand it. I love making people read... so -- I'm stuck -- I have to write to get people to read. Okay? It's probably confusing, but that's how it works for me.

Anyway, I hate to write so much that I need a lot of inspiration just to get started. If nothing comes to mind, I usually end up in a tug of war with my editor: she proposes a topic, and I write about something else. I get behind in my deadline, she yells at me. So, I start the column off with a dig at her. Or the ACLU. Anything. Just so long as it's a start.

But verily I say, for those like me, salvation is at hand... not universal, just for those who hurt while writing.

The salvation I'm talking about concerns a book called The Visual Display of Quantitative Information. Killer title, huh? Ranks right up there with my favorite article title, Three Centuries of House Prices in Amsterdam. Remember that column? My second favorite? Commuting, Ricardian Rent and Housing Appreciation in Cities with Dispersed Employment and Mixed Land-Use.

In spite of what you might think about my taste in articles, my taste in books (this book, anyway) is seconded by no less a hip magazine for today's techno-cognoscenti than WIRED. You doubt it? Go to: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.09/ppt2.html>, where this guy is mentioned on the cover of the magazine. His article was titled Power Point is Evil. The subtitle? Power Corrupts. Power Point Corrupts Absolutely.

God, Evil, Power, Corruption. Lotsa of my recent themes floating around here, all thanks to the author, Edward Tufte, who's the professor emeritus of political science, computer science and statistics, and graphic design at Yale (please, no more comments about me almost flunking out of UH). It's the greatest article ever written, and I'd reproduce it here to prove it (but my editor, and Tufte's lawyers, would think me lazy, and sue the publisher, which would make headlines, and use up a lot more column inches.

So let me inch over to the salvation part... I am going to be saved because He (Professor Tufte) is going to relieve me from having to write articles and columns any more. How? By teaching me how to make my statistics interesting. Instead of me meandering around Christians and scientists, this column will be full of sharp tables, and bright charts, etc. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, and put words in Tufte's mouth, 'We will fight dullness and boredom on the beaches, on the landing grounds, in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight them in the hills; we shall never give up.'

To benchmark my learning curve, to say nothing of my salvation, I reproduce below the "Before" table... before I get into Tufte's book. If we're successful, teacher & pupil, my subsequent columns will be almost wordless, almost all numbers, lines, colors and symbols... So watch this space, and see (not read) what happens...

SEPTEMBER	CURRENT MONTH	PREVIOUS MONTH	YEAR PREVIOUS	PERCENT CHANGE
	OAHU RESALES	1,122	1,071	786
OAHU AVG RESALE PRICE	\$260,290	\$265,463	\$243,356	+7.0%
OAHU AVG TIME ON MARKET	26	29	27	-3.7%
OAHU NEW HOME SALES	261	185	232	+12.5%
OAHU NEW RES. PERMITS	123	263	233	-47.2%
OAHU S.F. MONTHLY RENT	\$1,792	\$1,782	\$1,749	+2.5%
INDEX (1972=100)	277.5	277.8	253.7	+9.4%