

News Roundup

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In Chapel Hill, the start of the John Edwards trial is big news. The *News and Observer* covers the beginning of jury selection [here](#), and has an interesting story on Edwards' increasingly isolated existence [here](#). The only story that may be making a bigger splash is Jessie Smith's contest, *It's a Crime What I Did to My NC Crimes*, which offers a free copy of the new edition to the person who provides the most appalling photographic evidence of heinous abuse of the previous edition. Waive your right against self-incrimination and enter the contest [here](#). It ends today, so don't dither. And you need to do better than this, which looks to me to be among the most promising contenders (though I am not a judge):



In other news:

1. The *New York Times* reports [here](#) that “[a]ccording to statistics compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 72 officers were killed [nationwide] by perpetrators in 2011, a 25 percent increase from the previous year and a 75 percent increase from 2008.” Most of the deaths occurred in small towns, not big cities. Some believe that an increasing emphasis on community policing and frequent officer/citizen interaction may be responsible for the trend.
2. Connecticut is repealing its death penalty. The *New York Times* notes [here](#) that the repeal bill has passed the legislature, on a vote that mostly followed party lines, and is sure to be signed by the governor. Only Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, among New England states, retain the death penalty, though overall 33 states have it. As the *Times* observes, the Connecticut debate a “horrific crime[]: a 2007 home invasion . . . in which Jennifer Hawke-Petit and her daughters . . . were held hostage and murdered, two of the three raped, and their house set afire by two habitual criminals who are now on death row. Ms. Hawke-Petit’s husband, Dr. William A. Petit Jr., who was badly beaten but escaped, has since been an ardent advocate for keeping the death penalty.” The repeal is prospective only, so the two defendants sentenced to death in the Petit case will remain on death row.

3. Staying with the *New York Times* theme, check out [this article](#) about the cottage industry of prison consulting. Apparently, quite a few ex-cons are now making a business of offering advice on how to handle prison life. One long-time consultant says that the business is exploding, but as the *Times* reveals, when consultants “brag[] about an extensive criminal record to attract customers[, t]hat can make it tough for potential clients to choose: How much incarceration time is enough? What kind of experience is right for the job — maximum security, solitary confinement, a knife fight?” Good grief.
4. I noted last week that we’ve experienced some technical difficulties with our email subscription function. We think that we may have it sorted out. If you’re still experiencing problems, please let me know.
5. Finally, remember [the American Idol contestant](#) who sang the song *Pants on the Ground* to protest “sagging”? Well, [a judge who feels the same way](#) about low-riding pants recently sentenced a litigant to three days in jail for contempt for “show[ing] [his] butt in court.” Asked whether his actions were unusual, the judge replied that normally he goes for five days.