Post Office Botch

AIDSphobic mail carrier fired

October 1, 1995

Tim Snodgrass, the 10-year veteran of the U.S. Postal Service who refused to deliver mail to a home for people with AIDS, turned in his mailbag and change-of-address forms at the end of July. Charleston, West Virginia, Postmaster Richard Esslinger fired him after an all-day AIDS education session with a cardiologist flown in from Louisville failed to change Sodgrass' mind. The postman's paranoia involved a chain of events even Melrose Place fans would find absurd: First, he feared he would cut his finger on this particular mailbox and then touch the box or envelopes, all of which he considered "contaminated" with saliva of the HIV positive stamp-licking married couple living in the house. "This guy does not reflect the views of the U.S. Postal Service or the citizens of Charleston," Esslinger said. In fact, the community rallied to support the couple, Fred and Pat Grounds, and several mail carriers volunteered to deliver their mail.

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