

Opinion

What causes honest people to change into comet liars?

The country seems to be divided between those who have seen Halley's Comet and those who say they have. It isn't like 1910 when everyone did see it. This time if you blinked your eyes you could have easily missed it.



Art Buchwald

Yet, as Halley's Comet fades behind the sun, more and more Americans are pretending they sighted it. These citizens will tell you, "I saw Halley's Comet last night with my opera glasses."

There is no reason for you to doubt them until you remember it was so foggy last night that they had to shut down the airport.

Why do otherwise honest people, the pillars of our communities, many who wouldn't even pick up a discarded newspaper from a bus, lie about what they saw in the heavens?

The answer is that since Halley's Comet has been so hard to spot, status seekers are forced to resort to perjury in order to impress their friends.

If claiming you saw the comet when you didn't is just a way of keeping up

with the Joneses, then I say more power to the fibber. But what makes this practice so dastardly is that it does injustice to the people who actually have spotted it.

Those who stood outside all night in the freezing cold stabbing their fingers at the skies deserve a lot more respect than the ones who stayed in bed with their heads under the blankets looking at photos of Halley's in *People* magazine.

The reason I am incensed about all this is that I happened to see Halley's Comet the other night. I refused to mention it to anyone because it's the sighting and not the bragging that counts with me.

Then Novak came down the hall and claimed that he had seen it.

I have been suspicious of Novak's comet sightings ever since he announced in 1973 that he viewed Kohoutek and told everyone that it was on a crash course with earth.

The people in the office were quite impressed that Novak had seen Halley's Comet, but no one thought to find out if he was telling the truth.

"What did it look like?" I wanted to know.

He replied, "A dirty snowball."

He could easily have read that in

Penthouse magazine, so I asked him, "How long was it?"

"As long as the dirtiest snowball I've ever seen," Novak replied.

"That long?" I said. "Did you see the tail on it?"

I thought I had him. Novak said, "It was too dirty to see the tail. I was lucky to get a glimpse of its mouth."

I was leading him right into a trap. "And what did the mouth look like?"

"A big dirty snowball streaking across the sky."

"Did it fly past the moon?"

"Of course it flew past the moon. What kind of comet do you think it is?"

"Not so fast, Novak," I said. "I saw Halley's Comet last night and it was nowhere near the moon."

"Well, it was so dirty I couldn't tell what it was passing. All I know is the sky is falling."

"People have been lying about Halley's Comet for 2,225 years."

Novak was adamant. "I know what I saw. It was a snowball, and it whizzed right past the moon."

"Where was it going?"

"It was on a crash course with earth."

Art Buchwald is a columnist for the *Los Angeles Times Syndicate*.

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Media hype, sensationalism threaten credibility with public

Hype and sensationalism are words members of the news media are keenly familiar with. Webster's Dictionary defines sensationalism as the use of subject matter which relates to the senses.



Trent Leopold

Tuesday many of us saw the space shuttle Challenger explode, instantly killing the seven crew members aboard.

Following the incident, hype and sensationalism pervaded the news media.

Huge color photographs and large headlines consumed front pages. Newspapers used the shuttle explosion to sell newspapers on Wednesday. That's sensationalism.

But for many newspapers just sensationalistic coverage wasn't enough. Hype was included too. The event was publicized in a way which exceeded the limits of necessity. The explosion story needed to be told, but most papers filled their front sections with articles on everything from the explosion itself to the

reactions of Christa McAuliffe's high school class.

For example, one of the Houston papers filled the entire 16-page front section with the story and others related to it. The hype was evident even as the day's issue sat in the newsstand. Big red letters were printed over a full-color, half-page photograph of the event.

But the shuttle explosion is just the latest example of the ongoing hype and sensationalism in today's media. In recent months terrorists have relished the attention the news media has given them.

What it boils down to is that such "overreporting" can make a lot of money for publishers. However, news credibility can be destroyed at the same time.

It's the journalist's job to report events in a clear, correct and credible manner so the public can be informed enough to make intelligent decisions and form opinions conducive to a strong society.

Hype and sensationalism like we've experienced this past week is not a part of good journalism.

No rules govern such coverage, and as long as we are to enjoy freedom of the press, none will. But the news media must learn to control their desire to overcover "big news" before the entire industry loses credibility in the eyes of the public.

Trent Leopold is a senior journalism major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Letters must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

Not a liberating factor

EDITOR:
In the Battalion last Thursday there was a column regarding abortion explaining why a woman would have one. Believing life begins at conception, we believe abortion is murder.

However, our motivation for writing this letter was not to debate an unborn child's fate, but rather to voice our concern for women who have had or plan to have abortions. We noticed that throughout the article the author showed concern about women — their rights, their financial situations, etc.

If there is a true concern for women, perhaps we should examine the effects abortion has had on our female population.

It might appear that abortion is a reasonable alternative to an unplanned pregnancy or having a child with severe birth defects, especially since we are so concerned about women's rights.

In reading material written by members of Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA), a nationwide organization of women who have had abortions and later regretted it, we learned some darker aspects of this controversial subject.

For instance, some women who have abortions on their first pregnancy have to have hysterectomies because of perforated uteruses. They can never have another child. Infertility and sterility, as well as many other physical complications can result. Members of WEBA experienced some deep psychological problems because of their abortions.

In an article on abortion in 1978, the *Chicago Sun-Times* printed: "Desperate women made their way to appointments at Michigan Ave. abortion mills. Some are pregnant; some are not. It doesn't matter. Most of them will be sold abortions. For abortion profiteers there is money to be made and no time to waste."

In this half-billion-dollar-a-year industry, pregnant women have become prey to half-truths and fancy sales pitches. They many times do not really get to make an educated choice.

We believe widespread abortion is producing a generation of bitter, hurt and exploited women. It is not liberating women, but only entangling them in deeper problems.

Melissa Meyer
Christie Yeates

An unassailable point

EDITOR:
Your "MIND OVER MATERIALISM" editorial written by the "Battalion Editorial Board," whoever they are, makes one unassailable point. It's a good idea to help others. Amen.

How do you and I do it? A tough question. One thing we know for sure. If we're broke, we can't help someone else. So it's important that we make some money, honestly, by providing a product or service for which people voluntarily pay their hard earned money.

If we all "focus" on doing something useful for our fellow man — something that enriches his life — we'll enrich our own lives spiritually and materially.

In our society, today, we have too many "concerned groups" reminding us of ageless truisms and too few investing their blood, sweat and resources in the productions of worthwhile goods and services.

It is comforting to know that the majority of our youth embraces the idea of success and ignores the drivel of "social awareness" preaching.

Joe G. Bergstad

EDITOR'S NOTE: The members of the Battalion Editorial Board are listed in the staff box at the bottom of this page every day.

'Academics Anonymous'

EDITOR:
No doubt you've heard about the shadowy spy organization called Academics Anonymous. You know, the informal group of self-proclaimed student experts who have volunteered their services to evaluate the performance of professors. Quite a heated controversy happened last year, over the privileges vs. abuses of academic freedom in the classroom.

It's one thing, though, to read about something — and another to actually witness "Academics Anonymous" in operation. It isn't hard to peg the AIA moles — they're the people who ask really convoluted questions in class, when everyone else is pressed just to keep pace with the lecture, taking notes and trying to figure out what the teacher is talking about.

Usually even the professor is quite confused by the questions posed by the student "evaluator." It's nice for a change, though, to see a lecturer a little hot under the collar!

Those wacky questions don't do much, however, to help the learning atmosphere of the classroom. Most people don't realize that university professors have a quite busy schedule — lecturing, preparing tests, writing journal articles, conducting research, supervising graduate students and keeping up with the latest developments in their field are just a few of their duties.

To have an arrogant, antagonistic subversive in the class only adds to the stressful routine, reducing the quality of the information passed on during the limited time allotted to students in the class. I say the AIA should be better spent their time in pursuit of an education, rather than reducing the quality of education provided for themselves, and their classmates.

William H. Clark II

Seeing the light

EDITOR:
In response to Brian Sterling's letter (Jan. 29), I, like you Brian was entrapped by the "sweet melodiousness" of this New Age music. But this was not all, because soon afterwards, very strange things began to happen.

I began going to Dr. G's, changed my major to environmental design and even had an earring put in my ear. I even started to like Karl Palmer and AGREEING with what he had to say.

But the worst was yet to come, because I changed into a liberal DEMOCRAT, a fate worse than death in my household. I worked for the Mondale campaign and even VOTED for him.

Well this was just too much for my parents, so in true Southern Baptist tradition, my parents burned my New Age record collection and then kicked me out of the house. My mother even joined Tipper Gore's new campaign, MANA (Mothers Against New Age Music).

All I had left was my Walkman and a Twisted Sister tape. In desperation, I turned it on and then the voice of God and the multitude of angels spoke to me and said, "We're not going to take it, Hell no, We're not going to take it anymore."

This was when I saw the true light. I dusted off my old Motley Crue and Judas Priest albums and reveled in all their glory. Then I cancelled my subscription to the *New York Times* and placed an order for the *Hour of Prophecy*.

Thanks to you Brian, I have been able to bear my soul to the rest of the humanity and hopefully spread the word to other people so that they may also find the true and only light. God bless each and every one of you.

Ralph Kramer

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