

Opinion

Juvenile eyes can't discern elderly's vulnerability

Not so long ago, I alternated evenings, sitting on the porches of my grandmothers' homes and listening to their stories about my elderly relatives. It seemed to me that they really never could have experienced youth.



Cathie Anderson

Surely, I thought, the complicated web of lines in their faces and wisps of gray in their hair always must have been there. I tried to imagine them as children, as the mischief-makers who seemed to fill the ranks of my acquaintance. But the only visions I could conjure up were shrunken versions of their bent and fragile frames.

I never thought of what it was like to be old, to grow old or to feel old, at least not in that way. Old to me at nine or 10

meant reaching the grand age of, perhaps, 30.

Now, however, having reached the near-grand age of 22, my brain has grasped what my juvenile eyes saw before — the assorted bottles of potions and pills put above my reach, the time it took my senior mates to move about while I skipped along ahead of them or the tall glass of water, in which Granny's teeth floated nightly.

Why, only yesterday did it come to me that sitting on those porches, Momma Little and I or Granny and I represented the two most vulnerable stages in human life — childhood and old age. At these times people are easy targets of abuse, neglect or exploitation and are least capable of walking away.

Unfortunately, abuse of the elderly seems to take a back seat to child abuse. Both are atrocious crimes, and the two shouldn't be ranked in order of importance.

Seniors are adults, but they are as sus-

ceptible as children, proven just this week in Pleasant Grove where Albert Peterek Sr., a 72-year-old man confined to his bed, was left by his son without food or water for five days.

Peterek's 36-year-old son, Albert Jr., took \$100 in grocery money and left him Sept. 3. The elder Peterek was not discovered until late Monday when neighbors knocked on his bedroom window and found him, begging for food.

Although Peterek is now in fair condition, officials said he was dehydrated and had a number of infected sores on his legs when he was admitted to the hospital.

A felony warrant for injury to an elderly person was issued Tuesday and a \$5,000 bond set for the younger Peterek, who remains at-large.

Peterek said his son had been fixing his meals and paying bills.

He said he lived off a \$617-a-month Social Security check. His son had been cashing the checks because Peterek

couldn't leave the house without assistance and couldn't write his name because of partial paralysis from strokes.

Peterek said he did not expect to see his son again but said he didn't know if he wanted the police to arrest him.

According to a report issued by Texas Attorney General Jim Mattox, "the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on Aging found that more than 1.1 million Americans over the age of 65 are victims of abuse every year and the Texas Department of Health estimates a minimum of 110,000 older Texans are abused annually."

Abusers come into frequent contact with the elderly and are in a position to exert physical, psychological or financial control. Adult children are not the only candidates for such abuse. Attendants at nursing homes and other types of caretakers also may abuse the elderly.

Four out of five cases of elder abuse are not reported. This means there are over 500,000 cases of elder abuse yearly.

According to the report, the fastest-growing segment of the population is age 85 or older, thus the number of people at risk is increasing steadily.

The report says that types of abuse could include any of the following:

- Verbal-emotional. This is the most

difficult to document and can be subtle or blatant. It consists of insults, threats or other humiliating acts.

- Exploitation. An elderly person's resources are used for personal monetary gain.

- Active neglect. This consists of withholding food, medicine or medical care.

- Physical neglect, in short, means failure to provide the basics necessary to health, life and dignity.

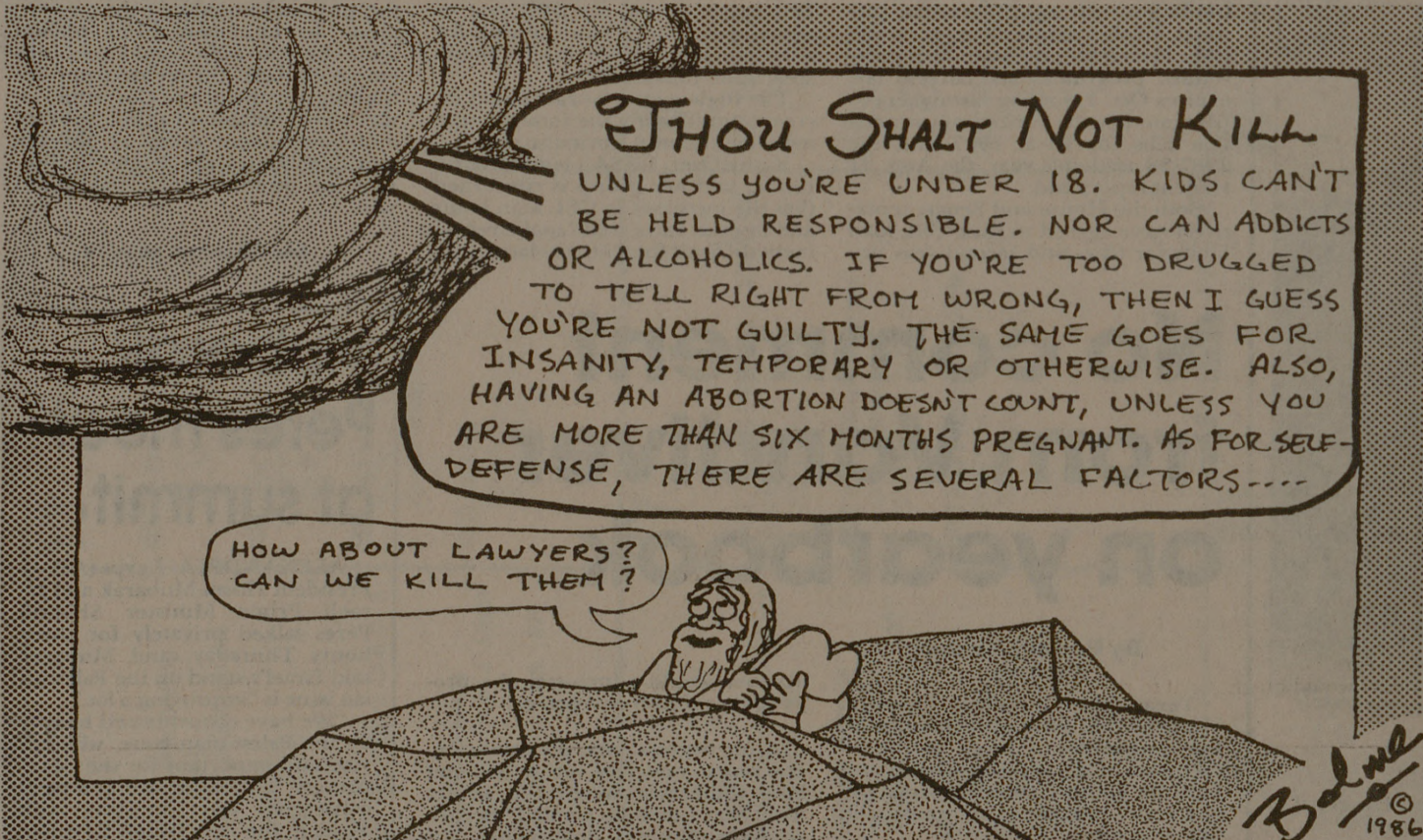
- Physical abuse. An elderly person is burned, bruised or hurt in any way.

- Sexual abuse. Indicators are sexual contact to the genital area or fear of being with a caretaker.

Texas law requires anyone who knows of elder abuse to report the matter to the Texas Department of Health Services, and anyone who does so is immune from civil or criminal liability, long as they acted in good faith without malice.

Many lessons can be learned from the story of Albert Peterek Sr. One is that such problems will not disappear without funding for programs to help seniors or an understanding of their vulnerability.

After all, you can't discern about the elderly through juvenile eyes.



'Other shoe' drops on Safeway workers

At the bottom of the *New York Times* (Aug. 19, page D4), was a three-paragraph item that tells you more about the values of our times than most of the stuff printed on page one. It said that Safeway had laid off one-quarter of its headquarters staff. For 300 people, the other shoe had dropped.



Richard Cohen

The first shoe hit with a celebrated thud — a sure 10 on the Richter scale for greed. Safeway, the nation's largest supermarket chain, announced it was taking itself private — cannibalizing itself for the profit of its officers, shareholders, bankers, lawyers, lenders. Even the printers got \$3 million for preparing various documents by which the rich get richer. Take a look:

The investment banking firm that bought Safeway got \$60 million in fees and an annual consulting fee of at least \$500,000 for 10 years. The banks that arranged the financing got \$48 million in fees. (Interest on the loans is extra.) The banking house of Morgan Stanley & Co. will get \$10 million for managing the takeover while, in a refutation of the Vince Lombardi maxim that winning is the only thing, the manager of the losing bid, Drexel Burnham Lambert, will get at least \$15 million.

Lawyers and accountants will receive \$10 million and even the Haft family of Washington (Dart Drugs, Crown Books), which lost its attempt to take over the company, walked away with a cool \$80 million in profit. We should not forget the stockholders, who also made a killing when the Hafts bid up Safeway stock. Everyone made out like bandits — everyone, that is, but Safeway employees. What did they get? Well, right off, 300 of them got the gate.

Almost certainly, more Safeway workers will be fired and, almost certainly, Safeway will have to sell off some of its divisions. The reason for that is that the company is being "restructured," which is Wall Street lingo for looted. Someone has to pay all those fees, repay the loans and service the debt. The company put its assets into hock.

Back to the *New York Times*. When the Hafts announced in July they were gunning for Safeway, the story made the front page of the business section. Other newspapers accorded it similar

treatment. After all, here were numbing numbers — billions and billions. Wall Street circled Safeway vultures over a lame animal. The boys (and girls) of the 1980s, the investment bankers, did their thing. It seemed to matter that they were destroying, not building; eliminating, not creating them; stripping a company not expanding one — practicing a reverse capitalism in which nothing made but money for a fortunate few.

It's somewhat unfair to pick on *Times* which is, after all, one of more conscientious newspapers. Alas, when it comes to the glorification of takeover specialists, the three-paragraph item was typical. Only rarely do deals that precede them. And more rarely is someone quoted questioning the morality of the ripping off a company at the expense of the people who work for it. Even Smith might say, "For shame."

It would be one thing if Safeway were down on its luck and employees had to be fired. And it would be another if Safeway tried to produce something new, develop a new product, and failed. But that is not what happened. Instead, a company built partly on energy and toil of its workers around and devoured itself, rewarding everyone but the workers who built it.

When I complain about the looting of Safeway, I am told by those whose business is business that this is the way things work — as if takeovers followed natural law of some kind, something God intended. I am told we enjoy benefits of capitalism, which is fine enough, and that such takeovers produce a wonderful efficiency, which sometimes also true enough. But who so efficient about throwing people into the street?

An economic system is man-made, not divinely given; and what man makes, he can improve. As it is now, the press and the government extol corporate wreckers — cheer a system where something good for everyone is looted for the benefit of a few where favored employees (corporate officers) make a fortune at the expense of others.

At Safeway, 300 people are out of work and more will follow. Unlike Americans, Safeway workers don't know about the other shoe. It dropped on them.

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The man from R.E.A.C.T.

As I was walking past Zachry Engineering Center last evening, a man with a briefcase shinned down a rope and abruptly landed beside me. He tugged the rope twice and it disappeared into a second floor window.

Amit Mukerjee
Guest Columnist

"Howdy," I said. "Spelunking practice?"

"Going home for the day," he said. Then sensing that something was not quite right, he added, "Haven't you heard of Operation Sunset?"

That reminded me of my war days, when we would crawl through jungles smothered in leeches, waiting for the enemy to shoot us. However, this guy had a tattoo on his left hand, which clearly means (to anyone with the slightest tinge of grey in his brain) that he was not the type to let any enemy shoot him. He would shoot first. So I asked him if Operation Sunset was the newest, hottest cave climbing club, just in case I was not with it.

He looked hurt, and explained to me that he was the leader of an underground movement in Zachry with the object of getting out of closed buildings. It was called Rapid Evacuation After Closing Time (R.E.A.C.T.). Their motto was "always equipped." You may be cer-

tain that I did not question him further about the nature of his equipment. We quickly parted company, with me looking back to see if he opened his briefcase.

I tried the doors of Zachry. Indeed, all the doors were locked, except the one by the fountain. There I found, resplendent in uniform, another man who looked like the type who doesn't let enemies shoot him. He was busy trying to control a long line of people who were signing a sheet of paper.

Now, I have this problem that whenever I see long lines I see visions of free trips to Florida. This is perhaps because when I was four years old, my distant uncle won third prize in a contest for which the first prize was a vacation in Florida. In fact, last week during registration, I kept asking everybody inside the Pavilion about Florida, but no one really seemed to know.

In any case, I joined the end of the line and imagined myself under palm trees on the beach. Before I could make any progress toward the bikini-clad beauty lounging near the concession stand, a group of youths in camouflage dress emerged from the dark caverns of Zachry and shattered my trip. Emitting bloodcurdling Oriental noises, they pushed us aside and charged through the doors. The uniformed honcho took

off in hot pursuit, leaving us leaderless, like passengers in Pan Am jets. Without the beloved shepherd our line withered away and everyone went home disappointed about Florida.

This morning near Zachry I again bumped into the man from R.E.A.C.T. "Hello," he said. "I heard you witnessed our double-pincer attack yesterday. If you want to join us, be at the Xisper Downs when eight bells toll."

If I was shocked sockless at the depth and penetration of his counteroffensive operations, I knew better than to say so. I was mumbling about other pressing engagements that would keep me interminably occupied at precisely eight bells, when I noticed that he had disappeared. He was crawling up the wall like a roach.

"I thought you specialized in coming out of buildings?" I shouted.

"Remember, this is Operation Daybreak," he said while pulling himself in through a skylight.

Spelunking habits die hard.

Amit Mukerjee is an assistant professor of computer science.

EDITOR'S NOTE: All Zachry doors except the one near the fountain will remain closed from 5 p.m. to 7:30 a.m. every day until a set of locks for which a key has been lost can be replaced.

Mail Call

Obligated to respond

EDITOR:

I feel somewhat obliged to respond to Marco Roberts' column printed in *The Battalion* Sept. 10. I must say that I was somewhat flattered by him dedicating his entire column to me, however he raised too many issues to deal with in one sitting.

I would like to address one issue. That is the reason I mentioned the name of the student who died of AIDS last spring. It was not my intention in any way to cause the family of the student any embarrassment, but rather to make a point. That is that the casualties of the immoral lifestyle that Roberts so jealously defends are real people with real names and not just statistics written down at the health center. His case is just one. I am sure there will be more.

What Roberts does not know is that the aforementioned individual and I went to high school together. We graduated in the same class and came to

Texas A&M together. I knew him well.

When I heard of his death, I was very grieved. As I thought of many memories of him, one thing stood out in my mind — that his life was characterized by a general unhappiness which caused him constantly to try new fads and new lifestyles for fulfillment.

This trend led him into homosexuality. My brother visited him in the hospital shortly before his death and told me that even then, he had not found happiness. So much for the gay lifestyle.

His death was a very personal loss to me, and if I caused the family any embarrassment, I would apologize for that. I would also apologize, though, for Roberts, because after all, it was not my philosophy of life that killed this individual, it was his.

Mike Foadre

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. Each letter must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion

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