

Opinion

Christmas brings with it good, bad and ugly

I, Paula Vogrin, as a new *Battalion* columnist, do solemnly swear I will be entertaining, interesting and amusing. I swear I will not write any government commentaries, political criticisms or guidelines for United States national policy. Lastly, I will fight for truth, justice and an "I love Texas A&M" column from Karl Pallmeyer.



Paula Vogrin

In comparison to the last task listed, the rest should be a breeze.

Since the holidays are almost upon us, I decided to begin my stint as a columnist with some observations about the Christmas season.

Some things I dislike:

- The way shopping malls put up Christmas decorations at Thanksgiving. Who wants to deck the halls before December?
- The Salvation Army. Those guys

really know how to make you feel like pond scum. They stand outside the malls and grocery stores ringing their bells at you when you walk by. You try to act like your pockets are empty, but when you're walking into a mall or grocery store, it's obvious you have money. So, if you're like me, you feel guilty for having money, sheepishly donate a dollar, and go on your way.

- Flocked Christmas trees. Nothing looks more out-of-place in a 72-degree living room than a snow-covered Christmas tree. But I suppose America should be thankful. At least those pastel-colored Christmas trees so popular during the 1970s have disappeared.

- Theme-decorated Christmas trees. I've always thought Christmas trees should be a kind of family statement. My family's Christmas tree represents the entire history of the family. There are ornaments my sisters and I made in kindergarten and grade school, ornaments we bought on trips to various places around the United States and ornaments my parents had before they were married. A tree decorated entirely with red bows, gold balls and white

lights just doesn't mean the same thing as my family's tree.

- Shopping-mall and department-store Santas. It may have been neat to sit on Santa's lap when you were a little kid, but take a look at the Santas today. Very seldom do you find a rotund, red-nosed, jolly old man. Instead, look for a young, beady-eyed, deviant who wanted a cush Christmas job. I wouldn't sit on those laps for anything.

- Flashing lights of every color and size decorating the outside of people's houses. I know some of these people have good intentions, but come on. There is a family living in my neighborhood in Dallas with a Christmas display you would not believe. To begin with, an illuminated, life-size, plastic nativity scene complete with Jesus, Mary and Joseph graces their porch. Above the scene, not quite on the roof of the house, is a star made of a string of red lights. The lights flash out of sync, so the star is never completely lit. The house is decorated with eight or 10 strings of different-colored, flashing lights — not the kind that twinkle, but the kind that flash on and off at once.

When I say different colors, I mean each string is a different color. They have several trees in their front yard garnished with the same diverse selection of flashing lights. But only the lower two or three branches are decorated. The grand finale to this extravaganza is a loudspeaker on the roof which booms out Christmas carols. The final result is something akin to a circus. I always expect a bunch of clowns to come running out the front door and start juggling on the lawn.

On that note, it's time for some things I like about Christmas:

- Family gatherings. Families, whether spread out over the country or living under the same roof, experience a special closeness at Christmas. There's less squabbling and more camaraderie within families and it seems easier to get along with everyone.

- The holiday spirit. Everywhere you go, people seem friendlier, kinder and more concerned about other human beings.

- Real Christmas trees. They might be a fire hazard and a mess to clean up, but real trees make the whole house smell like Christmas.

- Snow. Christmas in Hawaii or the Bahamas might be nice, but to me, white Christmas is still the ideal Christmas. Waking up on Christmas morning and looking out my window to find a blanket of snow over everything is one of my fondest Christmas memories.

- Christmas carols. Most people can honestly say there isn't a Christmas carol they don't like. Unlike Top 40, these songs are perpetual favorites and never go out of fashion.

- Christmas dinner. On Christmas day, houses are filled with the smell of turkey, goose or ham, potatoes, stuffing, cranberries and all the dishes you ate just a month ago at Thanksgiving. Usually, these dishes are as good as better the second time around.

- Midnight Mass. Since I'm Catholic, I attend every year. Lots of other churches offer midnight services, and you ever get the chance to go, don't pass it up. Afterwards, you'll feel like you've made a difference that dates back 2,000 years ago, a little boy was born in a manger.

Paula Vogrin is a senior journalism major and a columnist for *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Aggie turned jerk

EDITOR:

As an off-campus Aggie late for class a few days ago, I opted to park in a visitor lot. After driving through the crowded lot for about 15 minutes, I spied an empty space.

Seeing no other cars near me, I put on my turn signal to claim my oasis in the parking-lot "desert." Suddenly, a fellow Aggie sped around the corner and stole the spot I had so clearly claimed just an instant before. After expressing my displeasure to my fellow Aggie, it took me 10 more minutes to park my car, making me hopelessly late for class.

If the fellow Aggie who so maliciously misappropriated my parking space is reading this article, I hope he remembers the wise words of Joe Bob who said, "It's not good bull to take another Aggie's parking space."

Thomas Burton '89

Common-sense solution?

EDITOR:

I read a couple of interesting articles in *The Battalion* Dec. 10 about sex education for teens. It appears some of our more noble experts in the field got together and concocted a new "strategy" for stemming our nationwide epidemic of teen-age pregnancies (Oops, did I say "epidemic?" I'm sorry, apparently there is no epidemic, we are just a "different society"). Their solution? Relax, Mom and Dad — Big Daddy's got lots of money to buy all kinds of good toys for your kids to keep them from making a mistake.

I certainly don't claim to be an expert on the sexual problems of American teenagers, but I do claim to be fairly long on common sense. Therefore, I dare to make a bold move and suggest the following solution to the problem of teenage pregnancies in America: abstinence. It's cheap, requires no government intervention, lets children be children, prevents guilt and anxiety and makes sex in marriage a whole lot more fulfilling and exciting. But then again, it would require parents to intervene in the personal affairs of their children.

Oh well — it was just an idea.

Mark Garrett '84

Call him a politician

EDITOR:

Q: What would you call a politician who blames his opponent for problems with the economy that weren't his fault, breaks campaign promises and uses a seven-year-old photo for his campaign posters?

- a. dishonest
- b. conniving
- c. Bill Clements
- d. all of the above

Be sure to study this question carefully, because it will be on a quiz every day for the next four years.

Robert Dowdy

Come clean

EDITOR:

On Sept. 10, I was stopped for speeding on Anderson Road while driving a black Ford Escort EXP.

There was a car behind me — a yellow Monte Carlo. I got that car's ticket. The officer said I was going 46 mph; however, I was traveling nowhere near that speed and I believe he clocked the Monte Carlo.

I've been to municipal court, where the judge didn't even listen to me, and now I've got an appeal for Dec. 17.

I really need to talk to the driver of the Monte Carlo. Don't worry, you'll be in no jeopardy, but I think you owe me a little help. Please call me at 784-3063.

Douglas McCord

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 classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion

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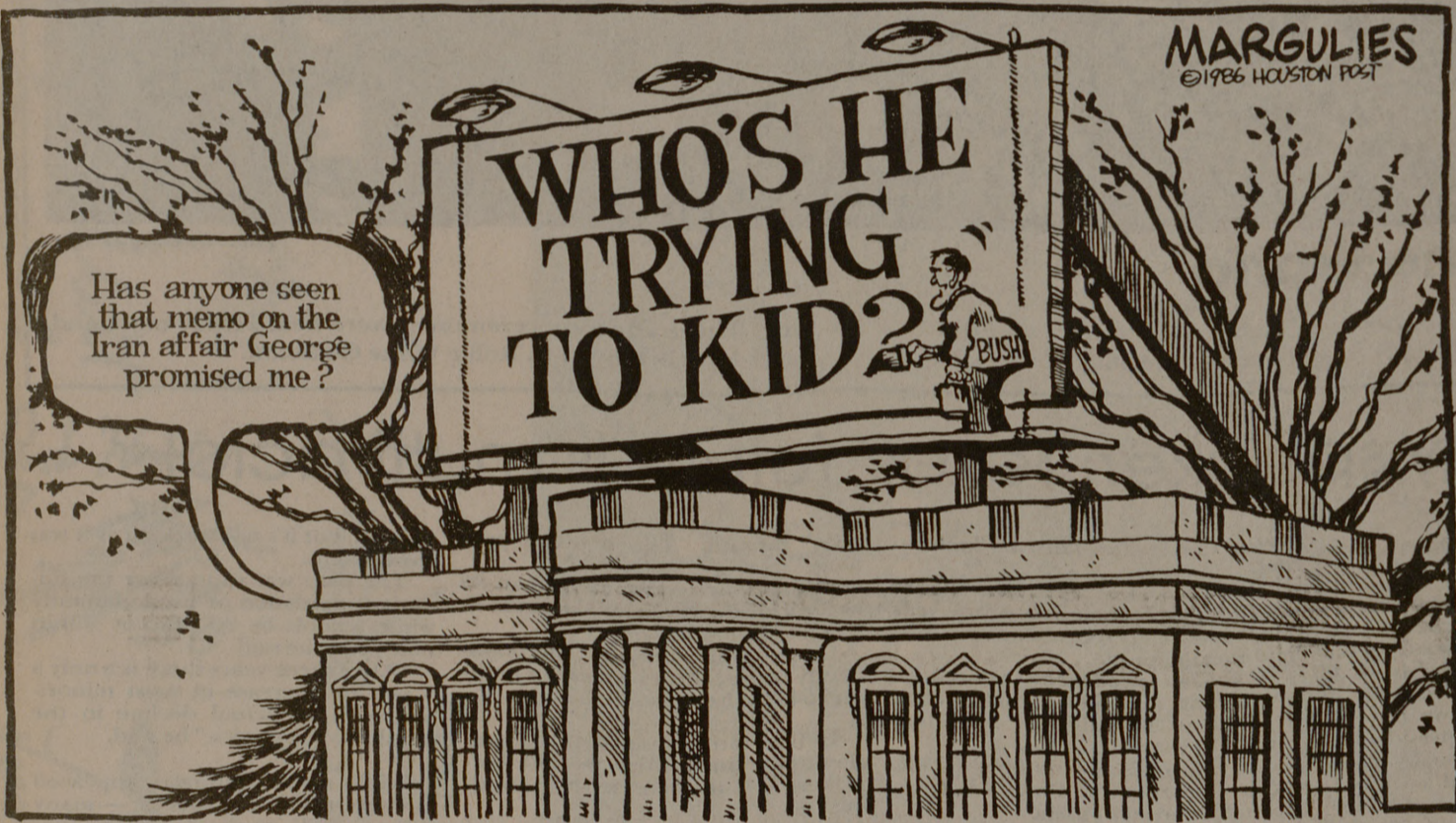
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Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent those of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

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Lazy news media and Congress deserve blame for Iran scandal

In his interview with *Time Magazine* about the current scandal involving diversion of cash from Iranian arms sales to the Nicaraguan contras, the president put his finger on something: "The whole thing boils down to a great irresponsibility on the part of the press." The president is right.



Richard Cohen

But not in the way he means. Enough information is now known about the imbroglio to make Americans wonder about the sanity of those who chastise the press for bringing on this crisis. In fact, given what we know, you, dear reader, are entitled to fault us for being asleep on the job.

You may ask: Why did the mythological guard dog called the American press not know, until the story broke in Lebanon, that American arms were being shipped to Iran? And why did we also know nothing about the funding of the Contras which entailed the cost of hundreds — everyone from the Sultan of Brunei to American right-wingers with deep-pockets and fertile imaginations?

Consider this: Ship after ship arrived in Iran. Planes took off from Israel. Numerous Americans were in on the secret. Arms dealers in the United States, Iran and Israel were involved. So, too, were Swiss bankers. Israeli and U.S. officials knew and talked to one another. The National Security Agency, which monitors most of the world's telephone calls, must have known, too. People in the White House not only knew, they

supervised the program. Where was the press? Asleep, that's where.

Take the element of Israeli complicity: Twice, in the months before the entire arms operation was revealed, high Israeli officials were asked here in Washington about rumored Israeli shipments of arms to Iran. At breakfasts for reporters, columnists and bureau chiefs, the then-Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres and his defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, were asked to comment on those reports. They coolly characterized them as lies, although neither they nor anyone else could explain why those reports persisted. The reason they did, we now know, is because they were true. Simple denials from Israeli officials seemed more than enough to turn off all inquiry. As with Saudi Arabian complicity — also denied — the clues were there for all to see and the press needed only to connect the dots.

Or take the secret and possibly illegal funding of the Contras: At a time when the United States had suspended lethal aid, the Contras were mysteriously in possession of both arms and the means to get them. Airplanes ferried supplies to Honduras. Pilots were on the payroll. Arms were being bought and ways invented to get them to the Contras. Who was paying for all this? Where was the money coming from? We now know. But at the time, no one seemed to doubt that some Americans — presumably very rich people — were by themselves funding a war. If true, it may have been the first time in history.

What's true for the press is doubly true for Congress. It seemed terminally naive. Its suspicions never were aroused. It, too, seemed not to wonder where the Contra funds were coming from. It, too, did not pause to consider

whether its own legislation was being violated or, at least contravened. It sat smug and beguiled as administration officials briefed it on its latest version of the truth, never suspecting for a moment that it was being snookered. Even when Eugene Hasenfus went down in Nicaragua in October, there were few in Congress who expected what Hasenfus himself admitted — that he was, in some way, part of the United States government operation. The snores from Congress drowned out this declaration of truth.

In retrospect, the sorry record of the press and Congress is startling. President Reagan, after all, is a known commodity. His anti-communism is not some dark secret that he keeps in the closet, but a resplendent article of his ideological faith. His language gave away his intentions. His characterization of the Contras as "Freedom Fighters" and his likening them to our founding fathers bespoke a man who would not, if he could, let their cause go down the drain. Just as Richard Nixon's entire career foreshadowed the paranoia and abuse of power that came to be called Watergate, Reagan's career pointed to self-defined historical mandate to roll back communism — no matter what.

In an opinion-editorial article in the *Washington Post* this week, White House communications director Patrick Buchanan referred critically to the "artillery of an adversary press" — a reference to a phrase once used by James Reston in a book title. Buchanan has a point. The White House is under siege and well it should be. But as for the vaunted artillery of the press, it took its time getting to this fight. For too long our guns were spiked and our gunners asleep.

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