

attention!!

Howdy! There, I said it. Another time-honored Aggie tradition has captured me —and I've only been here since September. Why is this such a major accomplishment? Last fall I transferred from a school to which I shall refer euphemistically as "That Other Major State University" (or TOMSU), out of respect to our more sensitive readers. If you do not know which university I am, talking about, you need read no further. For the other 98 percent of you, I would like to give you a glimpse of what life is like as a student at TOMSU. This will not, however, be an exercise in unrestrained Bevo-bashing; I will attempt to be as tasteful as possible.

Let me establish some background first. TOMSU is located in the capital city of a large south central state (let us call the city "Austin"). Way back in the dark ages of the mid-1970s, I was informed by my father that we would be moving to Austin. At the time, I was living in New York (a fair-sized northeastern state), and had just gotten out of junior high. Enter significant trauma. I was in no mood to make the move, knowing for a fact (as all Yankees know) that Austin, along with the entire state (by now you will have guessed that I am speaking of Texas), was smack-dab in the middle of the desert.

My oldest brother was already living in Austin, having been stationed there by the U.S. Air Force. Several months before we moved, my brother sent us all some gifts which would be useful in the future. I don't remember what my other sibs received, but I do remember what he gave me. It was a T-shirt, bright orange in color. On the front was the picture of a charging cow, and beneath the cow was the word "TEXAS." On the back was the same cow charging away, and the word "TEXAS" was reversed. In my innocence I started wearing the shirt, thinking that it merely promoted the state. Such matters as college football meant little to me at the time.

That quickly changed once I got settled down in Austin. Austin, it seems, is extremely partisan toward TOMSU. The year I moved there, TOMSU's football team (the L-----s) had a very good season, and I was caught up in the excitement. Little by little, though, I began to pick up on references to a mysterious entity known as the "Aggie." It seemed a silly name at

the time. In my freshman year, my high school got a new principal. The comment was made in one class that the new fellow "used to be an Aggie." My teacher, with a snort of contempt, said "Once an Aggie, always an Aggie," and we all laughed knowingly. Never mind that the statement is said with pride here; in Austin, it's intended as an insult.

Then there were the Aggie Joke books, available in bookstores and gift shops. These were mainly rewritings of the ethnic jokes which were so popular (and so tasteless) back east. It wasn't until about two years ago that I realized that the joke books were being published right here in College Station. I wonder what would happen if all of the teasp supporters realized they were being used by the Aggies, that Aggies were profiting from the teasp's prejudices.

When I graduated from high school, it seemed natural and logical that I should attend TOMSU for my higher education, citing such career-oriented reasons as "inexpensive" and "can live with parents." I must also confess to no small loyalty to TOMSU, having been immersed in its propaganda for so many years.

So much for the background (i.e. How I Got There). Now I wish to embark on a comparison of my experiences at TOMSU and at TAMU.

My biggest beef (sorry about that) about TOMSU was the fact that to the University, I was just a ten-digit number in the computer. In my first semester I took a chemistry class which had well over 500 students. This Official Anonymity had its effects on the entire student body. Out of the 48,000 students and 15,000 faculty/staff, there weren't many that I could consider to be on the level of Acquaintance, much less Friend. One certainly wouldn't call out a greeting to some stranger as he passed on the sidewalk or in the hall.

TAMU has a major difference in this regard. While TAMU also has a problem with Official Anonymity (a consequence of size), there is an attempt to counter this through the use of Traditions, the "Howdy" tradition being one of the most visible. Being generally friendly by nature, I was often bothered by the fact that I was usually ignored when I said "hi" as I passed someone. At TAMU, the responses range from a mumbled "hi" to a confident "howdy" (from a cadet) — but I DO get a response.

TOMSU is surrounded by central Austin, so there is little breathing room. Finding decent living quarters near campus can be quite an adventure. Nearly all of the apartments within walking distance have gone condo, so one usually has to go farther away to find a place to rent. In my last semester at TOMSU, I lived with a roommate in an apartment about two miles from campus. The apartment was what I would call substandard, but we had to pay \$480 per month for the two-bedroom place (about par for Austin). The reason they could charge so much was that they were near one of the shuttle bus routes. The shuttle buses were available to all students (no pass necessary); the cost of maintenance was spread out over the entire student body by being included in the sinister "General Fee" at tuition time.

At TAMU I also live off campus, pleasantly surprised at the relatively low rental rates. I have not yet, however, gotten used to the shuttle bus fee of \$46 per semester.

Parking is an adventure, too. Student parking permits at TOMSU are a lot cheaper than they are here, but there's a catch: Parking permits are issued in a 7 to 1 ratio over actual parking spaces.

One issue which bothers me may be totally trivial to you: That of textbooks buybacks. At TAMU (here I include independent bookstores) they have a totally arbitrary method of buying texts at the end of the semester. Basically (this is my impression) they stack all of your books into a pile; if the stack is such-and-such height, they offer you \$20 for the stack. If you can produce another four inches, they'll give you \$25. They take absolutely no account of what the book is actually worth. The college bookstores in Austin consider each book separately, using the wholesale value of the book as a basis for the buyback price. The local method of buybacks must be bothering a lot of other people, too, considering the number of students who try to sell their books via dorm bulletin boards.

Then there's football. Good grief, there's football. Particularly, there's the annual war between TAMU and TOMSU. The following statement may be a disturbing revelation, so get ready: TAMU takes the game a lot more seriously than TOMSU does. In the ten years that I spent in Austin, I observed that the town (and the

university) got more excited about the game against Oklahoma than it did about the TAMU game. I always saw the TAMU game as an important one, but I don't think I ever saw it as THE GAME.

It's different here. I was somewhat overwhelmed at the amount of time and energy spent in preparation for the game. Here it really is THE GAME. From the first day of the fall semester, attention is focused upon such issues as Bonfire, Bonfire Buddies, Bonfire t-shirts, etc. It's almost as if preparation for THE GAME is the very purpose of the Aggies' existence. As another example, I compare the "Texas Fight" song and the "Aggie War Hymn." Line two of "Texas Fight" says "... goodbye to A&M..." and that's the only reference to TAMU. The War Hymn, however — good grief! The entire song is aimed at the teaspis.

I know what you're wondering (come on, admit it!) — how on earth did a loyal teasp suddenly decide to turn traitor and come to TAMU? All politics aside, I did it for academic reasons. It is rather complicated, but in the interest of saving space, I will put it all in one sentence and let you sort it out. It's like this: Meteorology is my major but TOMSU didn't have a meteorology department per se but rather had what they called the atmospheric science group which was a subset of the Engineering Science degree plan which is really meaningless but the atmospheric science group was under the control of the Civil Engineering Department which is totally ridiculous since meteorology has absolutely nothing to do with civil engineering but you can find it in the Engineering Course Catalog or at least you used to be able to find it there but you can't any more because the university did such a

good job of hiding the meteorology program inside the engineering school that nobody knew it was there and therefore nobody enrolled in that degree plan so the number of students in the program eventually dwindled to one and that was me and since I was the only one left I decided that I didn't have much future there so I transferred to TAMU since I heard that they have a top-notch meteorology program and after I dropped out of TOMSU they closed down the undergraduate meteorology program and that's the truth. Whew!

I guess I can be considered an Aggie now. My friends in Austin think I am, anyway. I even have a maroon "Gig 'em Aggies" t-shirt. I wore the shirt when I went home for Thanksgiving, and I even went so far as to root for the Aggies when I watched THE GAME with my family. My folks think that I am just going through a phase, but I don't know... Even though I spent four years at TOMSU, my degree will be from TAMU; I can live with that. I still have a lot of teasp friends; my girlfriend is one of Them, too. That brings up an interesting issue: If we get married, how should our kids be brought up? Maybe we should just send them to the University of Iowa, or Florida State, or some other neutral college.

The Traditions have made this place special to me, as have all of the fantastic friends I have made here in the past six months (especially through the Christian group that I am involved with). It has all come together to convince me that Aggies really are "Rough! Tough! Real Stuff!" And that's saying a lot, considering my past life as a teasp. "Once an Aggie, always an Aggie." Hmmm...

Tim Thornton is a senior meteorology major.

Editor's Note: This attention!! page will be used each week as a forum for you, our readers. We encourage you to submit any original work that would be suitable for publication in At Ease.

Pictures should be black and white shots that are unique either in content, angle or technique. Columns, essays or poems should be no longer than 500 words, and should relate to an unusual experience, a new perspective on a common experience, or just about anything else you want to share with our readers. Please don't send us your gripes, complaints, or sermons on heavy-duty issues — send those to the Battalion's Opinion Page.

Don't forget to put your name and phone number on anything you send us. Then just drop it off at the Battalion, Room 216 of the Reed McDonald Building. Be sure to specify that it is for At Ease.