

# Opinion

## Monogamy is the best medicine

A young man came into *The Battalion* newsroom last week to express his concern over a problem at Texas A&M. "John" said he and his partner had just tested negative for the AIDS virus, but he still was worried because few, if any, of the homosexuals he knew had submitted to testing. It takes a lot of courage to admit your homosexuality to someone at a school not known for its tolerance. It takes even more courage for that same person to then criticize the gay community for its irresponsibility.

But John didn't come forward because he wanted to be praised. He came forward because he felt that his story might persuade somebody to seek testing — that he might save somebody's life.

It was also this sense of decency that moved him to warn of the threat to the heterosexual community at A&M. John said he knew of homosexuals in the Corps, in fraternities, in sororities and in University politics. Most homosexuals at A&M are unrecognizable because they don't fit the limp-wristed stereotype, he said. John also said many of these same people were "dangerous" because they date the opposite sex as a "cover" or because they are confused about their sexuality.

Certainly John was not trying to start a new wave of homophobia at A&M. He was just trying to warn "straight people" at A&M that they also are at risk.

But, unfortunately, as more heterosexuals become infected with the AIDS virus, the gay community will be blamed. Responsible people like John will be forgotten while irresponsible ones like Jimmie Glenn Etheridge will be held up as the standard in the gay community. Etheridge is believed to have infected as many as 54 teen-age boys in six states and Mexico with the virus.

If homosexuals are to try and avoid a new wave of homophobia, then they, as individuals, should consent to testing.

If people in general are to lead a normal life, then they had better make sure of the partners they're sleeping with. To put it another way, monogamy is the best medicine.

— The Battalion Editorial Board

## An ad could make a difference

Ready or not, our local media and the community supporting it should put aside their hesitations and encourage open advertisement of birth control, especially that of condoms, which also have proven the best method of preventing a disease that's out of control.



Sondra Pickard

Condom commercials have been offered and are available — they have been for some time. But like too many other wary television stations, ours has chosen to turn down a prime opportunity that could make a difference. The station's corporate policy forbids the airing of such commercials, and its directors don't "feel ready" to handle them. Their reason: a fear that the explicit nature of the material won't be readily accepted in the Bryan-College Station community.

"The commercials definitely would raise some eyebrows," said KBTX-TV sales manager Todd

Carroll. "It's a pretty conservative town, and I'm sure there would be objections from many community leaders."

It's unfortunate, but Carroll is probably right. From a sales manager's point of view, airing an advertisement advocating the use of something even remotely related to sex in this town could mean financial disaster. Local businesses and community leaders are what keep the station ticking. They are what keep all the media ticking. To offend an advertiser could mean to lose an advertiser. To lose an advertiser means to lose a buck. The station feels it will suffer financially because of the backward attitudes of its viewers.

KBTX is not alone. Although they aren't held ultimately responsible for them, stations everywhere are turning down public service advertisements advocating condom use in order to pacify a potentially skittish audience. Now is not the time for audiences to be skittish, and now is not the time for the media to look away. Unwanted pregnancies coupled with a deadly disease should tell us that now is the time to spread the word — effective

birth control can save you a lot of trouble. Condoms, in particular, save your life.

Carroll himself said he can't think of anything more horrid than unwanted pregnancies or contracting AIDS because of a lack of knowledge. Airing the ads, he said, might force the issue of birth control on those parents who are hesitant to discuss it with their children. The issue should be forcefully emphasized, not hushed.

The age-old argument that talking openly about sex will only encourage sex might have some validity, but doesn't hold up in all situations. Sooner or later, whether while children, young adults or grown-ups, people are going to talk about and experience "the act," or without television. But more information is needed, especially now. With the message should come the alternatives and the warnings.

If it doesn't come from parents, it must come from somewhere else. Too often it's left out completely, and an unwanted child is born. In the case of AIDS, the innocent

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## Putting on the dog

Catfish, the black lab, trotted over to me in tears, his tail between his legs. "What's the matter?" I asked.



Lewis Grizzard

"You don't love me," he sobbed.

"Of course, I love you," I said. "You're my best friend, and you're always glad to see me when I come home, and you don't care where I've been nor what I've been doing. Three wives were never like that. Why don't you think I love you?"

"Because," Catfish answered. "I don't have an air-conditioned doghouse."

So that's it, I thought. Catfish has been reading the paper again and found out Jim and Tammy Bakker had an air-conditioned house for their dog before it was auctioned off.

"Catfish," I said, patting him on his head, "just because I haven't provided you with an air-conditioned doghouse, it doesn't mean I don't love you."

"It's just that we don't have the kind of money the Bakkers have been making at PTL. I'd like to provide you with an air-conditioned doghouse, even with a pool outside for when your friends come over, but it's just not practical."

"And look at what else the Bakkers have that we don't, a houseboat, a \$500,000 condominium in Florida with \$22,000 worth of floor-to-ceiling windows, and a \$600,000 home in Palm Springs, Calif."

"I have to make money the old-fashioned way — honestly," I continued. "I can't go around

begging old people for their money like the Bakkers did."

Catfish seemed to understand. He paused for a quick scratch and then asked, "Why don't we go into the television ministry, so we can have all those things, too?"

"Because," I said, "I'm not a lowlife scoundrel who could sleep at night after using religion to bilk people out of their money. That, and I don't have a wife who looks like she just walked out of a wax museum."

"But I could help you," said Catfish. "You beg and I'll howl."

"You say, 'Either you people send me a couple of million for another couple of houseboats or you're all going to hell,' and then I'll start barking in tongues."

"I'll go, 'Baah-ruuuuu!' and you can interpret and tell the viewers I'm saying, 'Make it four million you bunch of heathen tightwads.'"

"I'm surprised at you, Catfish," I said. "We have a very good life without doing any of that. I've got a red truck, a VCR for my bedroom and a Jacuzzi."

"And look at you. You don't have an air-conditioned doghouse, but you have a nice carpet in the living room to sleep on, and I feed you from the table."

"And you're not satisfied? Greed," I said to my dog, "doesn't become you."

"You're right and I'm sorry," Catfish said. "By the way," he went on, "what do you think will happen to Jim and Tammy after the IRS gets through with them?"

"If they get what they deserve," I said, "they'll need the doghouse back for a place to live."

"Baah-ruuuuuu!" howled Catfish in total agreement.

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## Where have all the cabooses gone?

Lumbering railroad cars squeak, sway and clack in a metal-to-metal march. Motorists waiting at the railroad crossing follow each car past, moving their heads from side to side like toy dogs in the rear windows of East L.A. lowriders or tennis fans at a Wimbledon match. A captive audience of onlookers, the motorists wait for the sometimes friendly, sometimes mannequin-like figure seated in the window of the dusty red caboose that signals the end of the train.

Robert W. Rizzo  
Guest Columnist

But there is no weathered red caboose. There will be no leathery conductor resting high in the raised portion of the car, known as the cupola, or leaning out of the more modern side-by-side window. The caboose has been replaced by a no-nonsense black box on the end of the last car.

From behind, the box resembles the orange and white candy stripe caution markers guarding road construction areas. Its yellow flashing-light head warns approaching trains of impending danger. But the boxes don't wave or smile. Nor do they create visions of wandering souls content in solitude and the life of the rail. Instead, they monotonously click out brake pressure information in a digital language and dispatch it to the engine of the train where it is monitored by the engineer — like the attendant at a Gulf station might monitor a gas pump.

The elimination of the caboose does more than shorten trains, it dehumanizes railroading. In a business of metal and speed the caboose somehow remained friendly and demure.

Cabooses, cabin cars, conductor's

vans, brakeman's cabs, accommodation cars, train cars and way cars were the conductor's office — and sometimes home — on wheels. From the rear of the train the conductor was the considered captain by the railroad companies. But the men riding the rails on a daily basis did not always follow suit.

Russell Scott, a Southern Pacific conductor, said engineers and conductors often fought over who was the boss of the train.

"The conductor could make the engineer stop the train (using the emergency brake system) but he couldn't make 'em go," Scott said. On the other hand the engineer was unable to move his \$300,000 train until the conductor waved his \$2 lantern. The squabbling never changed anything and now the whole crew, which often means conductor and engineer, rides in the front of the train.

Scott doesn't waste time griping over the new arrangement but says it is less effective at times than a set of good eyes in back. Like the time Scott was riding in the engine of a train and a diesel truck trailer fell off.

"We got a call from a freight behind us saying they'd seen a piggyback (truck trailer) from our train laying off beside a curve," Scott said, "but I didn't get in much trouble because there wasn't any way I could've seen it."

Before computers took over the bookkeeping, every piece of freight was the conductor's responsibility from the time it was put on board to the time it was unloaded. He maintained the "consist," or list of freight, documenting every move of every item. Legend has it a conductor once noted on his consist that a vase was broken, then sent it on toward its destination. The next conductor to check the vase off his consist noted, "vase still broken."

The conductor and brakeman also

watched for overheated axle bearings, "hot box," as overheated bearings were known to trainmen, could cause a derail. In the event of a hotbox the conductor would release the emergency stop valve and a brakeman, regardless of weather would backtrack to warn approaching trains of the stopped train ahead.

These older cabooses sported a raised-roof in the center designed to improve the conductor's visibility. Seats were elevated against each wall and ladders built in the walls. But visibility was not the only thing increased. Six feet off the floor was dangerous.

The greatest danger was from an effect known as slack action. As the car or so of space existing between cars was reeled in or out during acceleration or deceleration it could generate a tremendous jerk. A 200-pound man could be thrown from the end of the caboose to the other, or a dozing cupola conductor tossed out head. The action produced a characteristic sound, sending trainmen grabbing for anything tied down. Conductors knew where it would happen on their routes it was second nature. Too bad they couldn't predict the fate of the caboose.

These modest railroad cars have reached the end of their utility. For generations of children will never see a caboose unless its in a museum or roadside park. Many people will even notice them missing. But one day they will look at the end of a train and notice there is no caboose. The next time they see a train, if they remember they will look for the caboose again. It won't be there. Only then will they realize there really are no more cabooses. No more cabooses.

Robert W. Rizzo is a photographer and a guest columnist for *The Battalion*.

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