

Opinion

Life is never the same after the death of a loved one

We pushed open the glass doors and stepped into the geriatric wing of the hospital. An overpowering medicinal smell combined with the stench of urine and baby powder swept up and hit me in the face.

I turned my head slowly to catch the gaze of my younger brother. He was grinning sheepishly, fighting back tears forming in his eyes. (It was the kind of half-grin that almost always surfaces in tight situations saying: "THIS IS BAD AND I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO AND I'M EMBARRASSED THAT I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO.")

Looking into his eyes, a blurred reflection of my own fear jumped out at me.

My parents were walking quickly, but my brother and I were more hesitant. I vaguely remember how appropriately the stark white hospital walls matched my frozen feeling.

I walked through the corridors as if I had been encased in an ice shell. I was hypnotized — noticing nothing, but absorbing everything.

Most of the doors we passed were open

wide enough to catch a glimpse of many sick, moaning people. A sick emptiness grew deeper inside of me with each passing door and with the thought that my grandfather may also look like this — or worse.

Memories of holidays past started filling my mind.

Our family always went to Dallas on each Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving to visit my dad's parents. My grandfather singled me out as special because I was the only girl in the family.

During Thanksgiving it was customary for my grandfather to pull out the old riding lawn mower and give us rides up and down the curvy (then mountainous) hills of the backyard. I was always given the privilege of riding first and longest.

At our family's Easter egg hunts, he would "accidentally" kick the prize egg in my direction despite rants and raves from my older brother.

My favorite part of any visit was at night. While all the older relatives would drink coffee, talk or play bridge, my grandfather would continue to spoil me by telling me wonderful, magical stories. He built a dream world that I hung on to for a long time.

I felt a tug on my mind as my little brother grabbed my hand. I snapped back and

found myself facing room 712. It was time to go in.

I slithered through the crack in the door behind my parents. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the machines keeping my grandfather alive and the tubes and needles holding him together.

My eyes drifted past him for an instant. I was not ready to look. Instead, I looked to my father for support.

But I found more pain.

I saw the pain in my father's eyes as he laid them on his dad. I was in awe. The impact of it made my heart pound dizzily in my ears. I had never before pictured my father as being weak, and now, all color drained from his face, I was seeing him stripped of every last strand of musterable strength.

I felt very old and suddenly pressured to be the one to produce a magical story with a happy ending.

Thoughts from a couple of days before pushed into my mind to remind me why I was here. My grandparents had made a special trip to come to my high school graduation.

When they arrived, an aroma of Christmas spice and Easter candy filled the

air. Hugs and sloppy kisses (the kind only grandparents know how to give) were exchanged. At my graduation, we all acted embarrassed when my grandfather placed a hankie on his bald spot to "keep the draft off."

The next morning of their visit, my grandfather got up at his usual 6 a.m. and proceeded to sing quite loudly. Next, he jogged through the house pulling on our toes and throwing wet washclothes in our faces to wake us up. At the time, I was seething and wishing him dead.

He left for his morning walk, and soon after, we received the phone call. My grandfather had been found lying in the street with a pool of blood forming around his head.

After hours of surgery, doctors revealed that 95 percent of his arteries were blocked, and he had possibly had a stroke. The pressure of the blood trying to get through to his brain could've caused him to fall. The doctors quickly added that they had no way of knowing for sure what had happened to cause the fall.

The holiday smell faded and the stench of hospital medicine returned. The seriousness of the injury didn't hit me until I turned from my father and focused on my grandfather.

I was not at all prepared for what I saw. His head was shaved and two thick, crusted scars covered each side. His complexion was a sickly green, and through every part of his anatomy imaginable. So close to death, his body nothing more than a miniature shell, some sagging skin stretched around it.

My image of him shattered instantly. He was no longer an all-wise, all-powerful wizard who could make my dreams come true.

He started to make sounds, but I wanted to move closer, but my feet would open up and sink into the ground, rendering me helpless as the skeleton before me.

I would have spoken, but my tongue swollen up to fill my mouth, making it impossible even to swallow. Someone punched through my chest, stole my breath and bruised my soul.

I knew that when I left that room, I would never be the same. I could not live in a pure fantasy world made up of rainbows, butterflies and happy endings.

Life had peeled off its mask and shown me bare cruelty.

I turned abruptly and left the room.

Janet Goode is a senior journalism major and a guest columnist for The Battalion.

I lived for sandwiches of ham and cheese

Und between dives, we will have sandwiches of ham and cheese, said the guide at the bow of the boat.

These would probably be the best "sandwiches of ham and cheese" I would ever put in my mouth.

As my two girlfriends and I cruised down the coast of Mexico just south of Puerto Vallarta, the little motorboat carrying us, three other passengers and our German-born guide wove in and out among the rocks and coral reefs. On the rocky shoreline, the iguanas basked in the sunshine observing us, a not-too-familiar sight in this deserted part of Mexico.

When we looked deep into the water, we could see the fish and plants featured in the brochure we had picked up in the hotel.

Once again the guide, Hertmus, repeated the bit about sandwiches of ham and cheese as if they were the highlight of the trip.

I had never been snorkeling before that day, and after diving, found it terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. Our first dive had been at the bases of Los Arcos (the arches) just off the coast of Puerto Vallarta. Hertmus had said the rocks would be teeming with colorful fish and crustaceans, but to stay close to the boat. Of course I had visions of huge Mexican squid inking me to death and then sucking all my skin off, but I was brave and soon discovered the beauty and vastness of the life in just that small portion of the deep.

I put on the rented fins, mask and snorkel and wangled myself over the side of the boat. The apparatus attached to my face initially made me feel claustrophobic, but I got over it.

The water was clear and the fish swam up to me so close I could touch them. Down below I could see what appeared to be long thin tubular fish. Baracudas, I thought. Thank goodness I was only six inches below the water, because if I had been lower I would have sucked up that much more water through my snorkel while I tried desperately to jettison myself back onto the boat.

I was relieved and embarrassed to learn they were only harmless needle fish.

We moved on to other diving delights, and I collected coral, shells and remnants of what I was sure were ancient shipwrecks.

It had been a long time since breakfast and my diving partners and I agreed it was time for the sandwiches of ham and cheese. Luckily, Hertmus announced that we would take one more dive in a little cove and then pull around to the beach about 500 yards up the shoreline.

What I didn't understand was that this was an optional dive, and the people who chose to snorkel would be swimming the 500 yards to the beach.

Well, I flapped around and spied an eel in the rocks below and because I considered myself an expert at this point, I hollered at some guy with whom I had shared all my interesting sights during the day.

I looked around under the water and

didn't see him coming. That was strange because previously he had been everywhere at once, eager to see everyone's find. I poked my head out of the water and he was nowhere to be found. Not only that, I had drifted away from the boat, I thought.

"Bag the eel," I thought, "I need to find the boat."

I swam a little way out of the cove and neither the boat nor any of the other snorkelers were anywhere in sight.

Panic set in.

My first thought was that the guide had assumed I was aboard and took off for the beach. I still couldn't see the beach but I knew in which general direction it was. I knew also that I didn't want to swim all that way. I wasn't sure if I could; the margaritas we had consumed the previous three nights in a row had greatly decreased my athletic abilities.

As I searched desperately for a break in the jagged terrain of the shore so I could walk, terror struck me as I realized I was alone in the ocean and would have to swim the distance to the beach.

I started to paddle up the rocky shore, and one by one my fears multiplied.

The rocky bottom where I had seen the eel suddenly sloped off into blackness. I decided to hold my head out of the water so that if something were to try to eat me, I wouldn't be able to see it coming. Instead, I was greeted by smiling iguanas that were suddenly closer than I had remembered as I was about to be dashed onto the rocks. I had let myself come too dangerously close to the shore in that turbulent water. I began sucking up water because of the angle I had my snorkel; I should have been using it only when my head was submerged in the water.

I pulled the snorkel out of my mouth and choked for air. The more I coughed, the more the ocean sloshed into my mouth.

I flailed helplessly and knew I should calm myself but I couldn't. The current was already dragging me under.

I was scared.

I could feel myself rapidly losing energy and I hadn't had a full breath in several minutes.

A feeling of sorrow replaced the panic, a feeling like I had never felt before.

I knew there was nothing I could do.

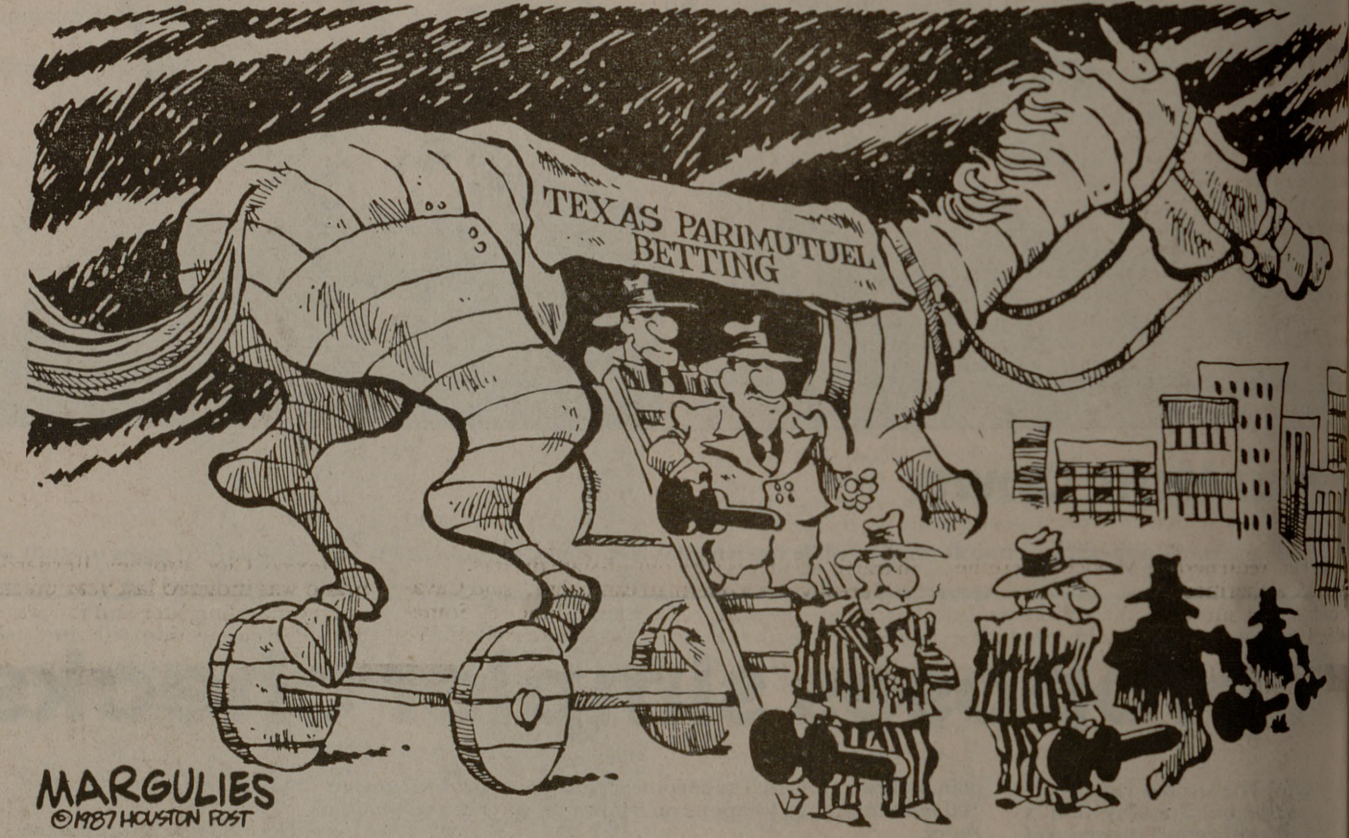
Somewhere in my confusion, something grabbed me by the neck and pulled me out of the water. This seemed only a continuation of my nightmare.

Minutes later I opened my eyes to see Hertmus kneeling over me, his face and blond curls shading the sun from my face as I lay on the bottom of the boat.

I choked but I could breathe. My voice was hoarse as I spoke and relief flooded my body, but ironically only one thing came to mind.

"Can I have my sandwich of ham and cheese now?"

Shannon Boyesen is a senior journalism major and a guest columnist for The Battalion.



The shape of things to come: male pregnancy

I was wandering aimlessly through the cable recently and came upon a program where a female doctor was talking about something quite extraordinary.

Male pregnancy.

You read it correctly. The doctor said that

medical science is close to reaching the point to make it possible for a male to have a baby.

The doctor also explained how that could be done.

She was technical, but if I understood her correctly, the following is what male pregnancy would involve:

- Patient would have to be sliced open, beginning somewhere near his bellybutton.
- A fertilized egg would then be implanted somewhere in his abdomen where there is a good supply of blood. I think the doctor mentioned the intestines.
- For several months, the patient would have to take female hormones.



Lewis Grizzard

• At the end of the gestation period, the mother (take that anyway you want to) would have to have his belly opened again and out would come baby.

Naturally, I have some qualms about all this. First of all, a male having a baby wouldn't simply fool Mother Nature, it would be a direct slap in the face. Something like that might cause catastrophic changes in the weather.

Further, there are considerations such as what the baby would call the individual who bore it. Mommy or Daddy, or perhaps a combination of the two, Maddy.

Then there is the part, which the doctor explained, about how uncomfortable pregnancy would be to a male.

1. You have to have your belly sliced open twice.
2. Taking female hormones would cause enlargement of the male breasts.
3. There are no such things as maternity dresses for men.

So what male in his right mind would agree to go through with such a thing?

The doctor answered that, too:

"I would think this would be a major

breakthrough for gay couples and transvestites who would like to have a baby is what she said, and I am thankful my grandparents and John Wayne didn't live long enough to hear her say such a thing.

I took a poll, asking other men what their thought of all this:

Said Bruno D. of Newark: "Guys have kids? Get outta here or I'll break your neck, prevert!"

Said Arnold S. of Cedar Rapids: "Can imagine having morning sickness on top of a hangover?"

Commented Michael (Billy) R. of San Francisco: "I can't wait to tell my boyfriend about this."

Said Ronald R. of Washington D.C.: "Just as soon leave all that business with the stork."

After watching the report on male pregnancy, I became quite ill and developed a splitting headache.

I called my doctor.

"Take two Midol," he advised, "and call me in the morning."

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