

Opinion

Confessions of a politically deviant sorority girl

I discovered a few weeks ago that I am a political deviant.

Tracy Staton
Guest Columnist

It happened one day at lunch

house. I was sitting at the dining room table, unaware that by the end of the meal I would be labeled "normal" by my sorority sisters.

Susan started it all. She said, "Did you know that George Bush is so-and-so's godfather?" I guess she never learned that name-dropping and talking politics are taboo.

Of course, someone said, "Isn't he running for president?"

Since I'm a college journalist, and therefore required to keep abreast of current events, everyone at the table looked at me.

"Yes," I said through gritted teeth.

"I hope he gets it," Susan said. "Me too," Kelly chimed in. "He's been a good vice president."

Unable to control myself any longer, I groaned.

Eight pairs of eyes looked at me.

"You don't like him?"

"No, to tell you the truth," I said. "I knew I had to face the wrath of the second-hand Republicans sometime."

"He's the most honest politician around right now," Amber huffed.

Everyone agreed. Except me.

"Well, Tracy, who do you want to be president?" someone asked.

I hesitated for a moment, then plunged into Greek no-man's land. "No Republican, that's for sure."

"NO REPUBLICAN??"

Their response echoed through the hallowed halls of the sorority house. I cringed, but refused to yield to political peer pressure.

"Are you a Democrat?" Susan whispered.

"No, but I'm not a Republican," I whispered back.

After a few moments of stunned silence, everyone resumed eating. I thought I was safe. I was wrong.

"Who else is running?" Kelly asked.

"There's Richard Gephardt. He's a congressman from Missouri. And the governor of Arizona, Bruce Babbitt, is running," I began.

"Isn't there anyone we'd know?" Susan asked.

"Jesse Jackson."

"UGH," they chorused.

"Paul Simon."

"Paul SIMON is running for PRESIDENT?"

"Not the Paul Simon from Simon and Garfunkel," I laughed. "He's a senator from Illinois. He always wears a bow tie."

"Oh, he's the one who looks like the guy from 'Revenge of the Nerds,'" someone said. "I saw him on television the other day."

"That guy? He's such a geek," Susan said. "I don't think anyone who looks like that should be president. I mean, really."

I restrained a sarcastic comment by gulping my iced tea, then checked my watch.

"Gosh, it's 12:15 already," I said. "I've got to go to work."

As I escaped from the dining room, I heard someone say, "She never should have changed her major to journalism. If she would have stayed in business she'd be Republican like we are. They really THINK about that stuff in journalism."

Since that luncheon fiasco, I have judiciously avoided talking politics with any of my sorority sisters. "No comment," I loftily say when anyone approaches me with questions about the campaign. They're waiting for me to slip, though — I can tell.

I almost got caught two days ago. I was reading an article about George

McGovern in "Rolling Stone." In fact, it was a mistake. I had to mark the page that began an article about Bonds could flip to it when someone walks by. Since I'm pretty paranoid anyway, I spent so much time flipping back and forth between the two interviews that it took me 30 minutes to read one page.

I know that someday I'll be able to publicly acknowledge my divergence from the Gospel According to Conservatism — again. I just need time to recover from the emotional shock I experienced the last time.

It's a hard-knock life for a political thinker — especially a Greek political thinker. But I've been an aspiring deviant for a long time. I'm not going to abandon my quest now.

Tracy Staton is a senior journalism major, photo editor and staff writer at The Battalion, and an aspiring political deviant.

History shortchanged Landon, labeling him 'quintessential loser'

Alf Landon, who died recently at the remarkable age of 100, got a bad rap from history. For about half of his life he was remembered primarily for his epic loss to Franklin



Donald Kaul

Roosevelt in 1936; in the '40s and '50s and even into the '60s, he was kind of a national joke, the quintessential loser.

The Kansas Republican was better than that, a lot better. Both before and after his defeat he was a progressive moderate who was on the common sense, far-seeing side of almost every issue. When he was governor of Kansas he saved the banks during the Depression, declaring a moratorium on farm foreclosures, and he gave state support to local relief plans without running up a huge deficit. Before that he had campaigned against the Ku Klux Klan in Kansas, when the Klan was still quite powerful, and before that he supported Teddy Roosevelt's "Bull Moose" breakaway from the Republican Party in 1912.

He was an internationalist who, in his role of elder statesman of the Republican Party, supported aid to Britain prior to World War II and anti-communist aid to Greece and Turkey after it. He was in favor of the Marshall Plan and the United States' participation in Europe's Common Market.

There is hardly a question that he would have made a fine president; one so superior to recent models, in fact, as to make a joke of the comparison.

Still, he has a good deal to answer for in his life, this amiable, gentle man, for his candidacy inspired one of the most pernicious devices known to mankind, one that threatens our system of governance — the political opinion poll.

Before Landon what polls existed were casual affairs, generally conducted by publications that would ask their readers to send in cards supporting their preferred candidates. The most famous of these was the reader survey conducted by a well-thought-of magazine of the time, the Literary Digest. It had had a pretty good track record over the years.

Well, in 1936 it asked its readers whom they liked for president, and a clear majority of those responding answered "Alf Landon." A Landon victory was predicted; this in a year when Franklin Roosevelt was largely regarded as the country's savior.

Landon himself later said that news

of the poll results had given him his only glimmer of hope in the campaign. "For an hour or so that night," he said, "I could see myself in the White House."

The cruel reality was that Landon carried only two states — Maine and Vermont — losing the election 28 million votes to 17 million and, incidentally, crushing the old political truism "As Maine goes, so goes the nation."

He retired from active politics after that, returning to an oil business in Topeka, Kan., but the damage was done. A few exceptionally bright young men, led by George Gallup, realized that their was a market out there for public opinion polls, ones conducted along more or less scientific lines that could make accurate predictions of political behavior. They began to chip away at the market.

There was no harm in it at first. They would conduct polls to find out what people were thinking about politics and other things, then publish the results. Sometimes they were proved right, sometimes wrong. As they got better at it, though, it occurred to some that it was only a small step from finding out what people were thinking to being able to give people what they wanted. This was modern political advertising born.

What it has produced is a generation of politicians who live almost entirely by polls. They test-market messages the way Procter and Gamble test-markets a new brand of soap. If the message finds favor, they stick with it; if not, they change it. They test-market their hair styles, their clothes, their manners; I haven't heard of it yet but I wouldn't be surprised if they test-marketed their wives and children. As a matter of fact, I'd be surprised if they didn't.

So, in a sense, we have Alf Landon to thank for the blow dry candidate, a brand of politics, ironically, from which he could not have been further removed. It wasn't his fault. He was simply the agent of inspiration.

His personal campaigning style was said to be awkward and halting, but he never lost his sense of humor about himself. During his '36 campaign he appeared in Maine and was complimented on the warm response he received.

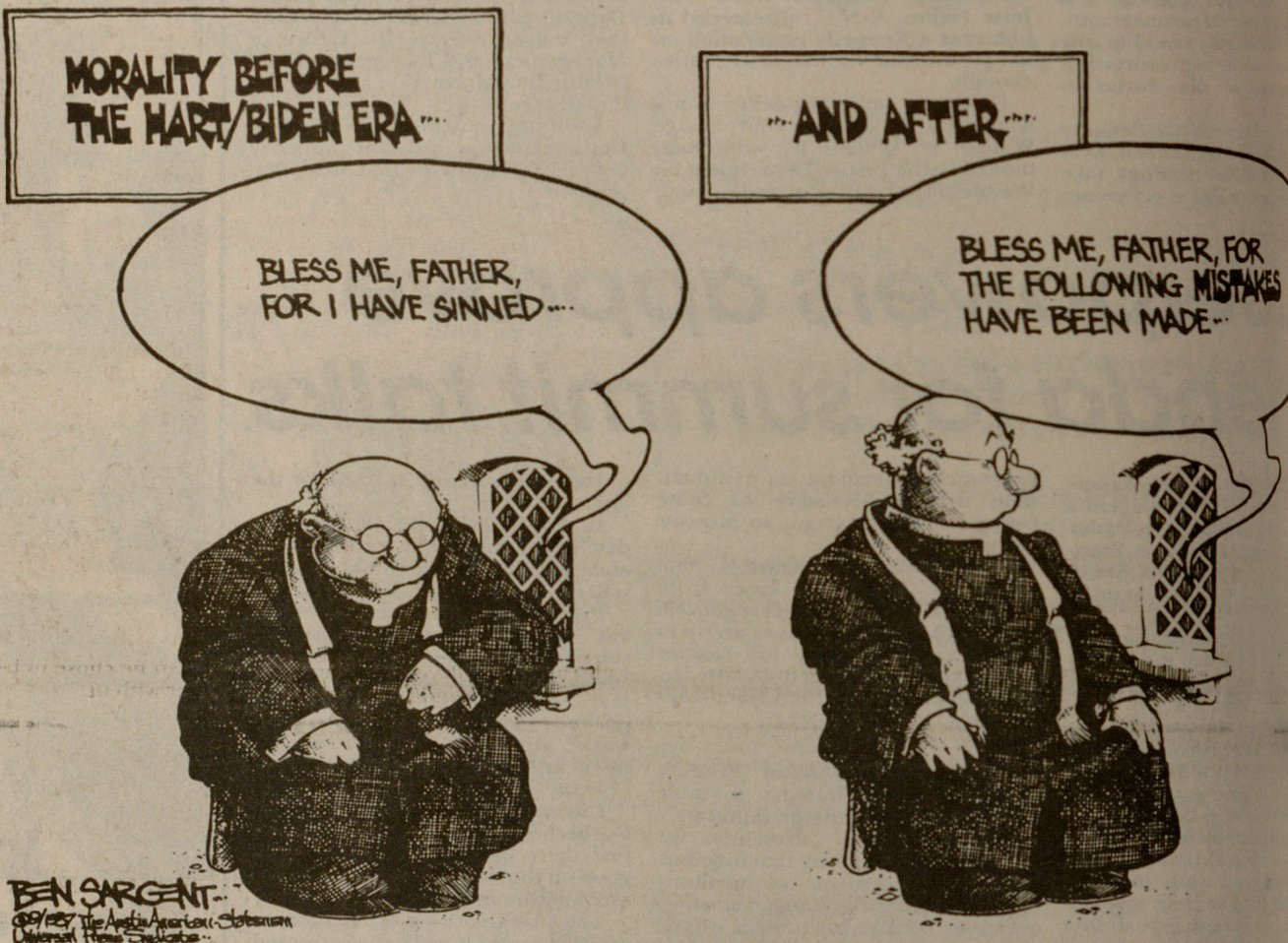
"It may have been warm for Maine," he said, "but it was damn cold for Kansas."

Last month, days before his 100th birthday, Landon was visited by President Reagan. It was a little sad.

The old gentleman, hard of hearing, seemed confused and at times lapsed into non-sense.

Landon was fine, though.

Copyright 1987, Tribune Media Services, Inc.



BEN SARGENT
© 1987 The American Jobsman
National News Services

Mail Call

Two cents' worth
EDITOR:

I have been here as a transfer student since January '87 and have been reading *The Battalion* ever since. The one thing that I really like to read is Mail Call. I really get a laugh at all the complaining from writers who call each other names and refer to their moral character, mental capacity, etc. I am sure everyone remembers the pro-choice vs. anti-abortion debate and the cry because the Students Against Apartheid has only 15 members.

I believe everyone should have a choice to do with his body as he sees fit, as long as it does not violate my free choice. I am sure the Students Against Apartheid feel the oppressed in South Africa should determine their fate, so they're pro-choice. The anti-abortion people are pro-choice; they want what the unborn infant would choose.

The problem is that the infant is not recognized by the government as being an individual and therefore has no rights. So now if this is the premise, that an individual does not have any rights until they are recognized by the government as having rights, as we have set in our own country, then how can we protest the government in South Africa? It doesn't recognize the blacks as individuals having any rights, so no human rights are being violated. This is in accordance with our own policy. Let us get our country within the guidelines that we want to set for other countries.

Yes, I am against abortion. Now you can get an abortion as easily as buying a candy bar at the corner store, and we complain about other countries' stances on human rights and morality. My question is, where is the concern for our own people? People die from living in poverty, yet we send millions overseas to feed the hungry.

I'm waiting for students to address the problems that effect the student body. Since the school was not allowed by law to raise the tuition fees, it added a computer access

fee. This is called circumvention. What about the parking? A&M sells as many permits as possible, knowing there is a way that all of them will find a place. I am waiting for the sidewalk use fee; it's the only thing left. What about the rising cost of college and the decline in financial aid? Several weeks back there was an article on doing away with public education. If the writer hasn't noticed, he is attending a public institution. And I'm sure the writer wanted to do away with the standing army and issue everyone a gun is a member of the reserves, in line with the "reserve only" concept.

Now that I put my two cents' worth in, I hope I don't get this urge again. I do have classes to pass.
R. Smith '90

Set a good example for the kids
EDITOR:

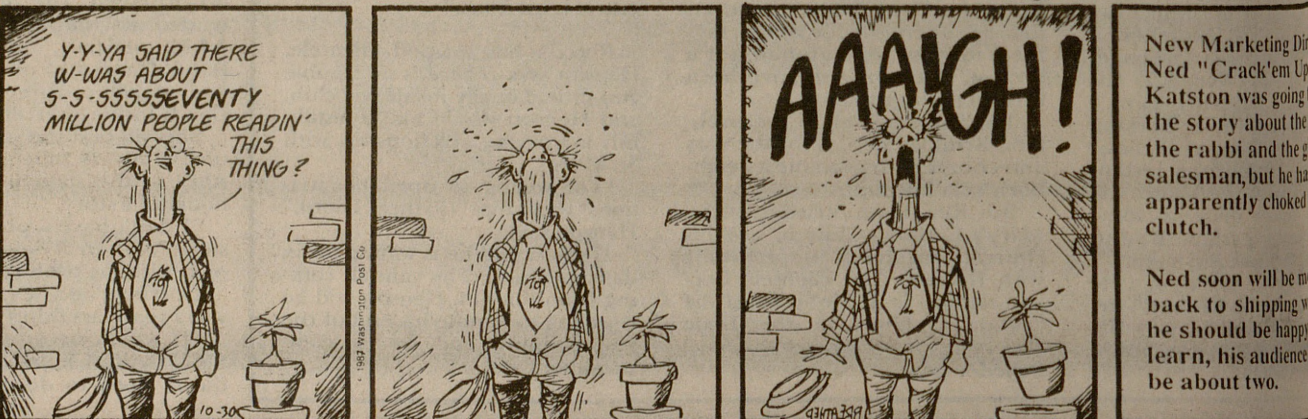
There are many children who spend time hanging around campus, and until last week I viewed them as more than small nuisances invading my sidewalk space with their skateboards. Until last week, a friend and I were talking in the Theater Complex when a small group of boys began "spying" on us. They began to make several references in fluent street language. It seems, Ags, that they pick some of them up from us.

It's sad that before these kids can understand sex, it has become cheap. I never realized remarks made casually as I walk across campus were heard, and certainly never considered the fact that they were taken as important. It's something to think about.
Lea Scott '89

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.

BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



The Battalion
(USPS 045 360)
Member of
Texas Press Association
Southwest Journalism Conference

The Battalion Editorial Board
Sondra Pickard, Editor
John Jarvis, Managing Editor
Sue Krenek, Opinion Page Editor
Rodney Rather, City Editor
Robbyn Lister, News Editor
Lloyd Brumfield, Sports Editor
Tracy Staton, Photo Editor

Editorial Policy
The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station. Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents. The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism. The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request. Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-4111. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.

New Marketing Director Ned "Crack'em Up" Katston was going to tell the story about the rabbi and the salesman, but he has apparently choked his clutch. Ned soon will be back to shipping when he should be happy to learn, his audience will be about two.