

Opinion

Living the confused life of an unbalanced student

It's Saturday night, and I'm at my usual hangout. Reclining in my chair, I have a drink within reach and a bowl of munchies next to it. The lights in the room are dim. As my eyes scan the paraphernalia on the walls, my mind wanders, delving into the deepest reaches of a subject I'm trying to put into words. The means of expression evades me, so I continue to bask in the neon glow of... a computer terminal.



Tracy Staton

My Saturday night rendezvous isn't with a date — it's with a computer file. I'm attempting to distill the information I've gleaned about a campus event into an intelligent and coherent analysis of the situation. I'm a reporter. I work for the school newspaper. And I once was a normal college student.

Once upon a time, I had a social life and a wide circle of friends that extended beyond the newsroom. Having a party? I'd be there. Going out to eat? I'd tag along. Road trip? I'd say, "Let's go!"

Now my sorority sisters are shocked to see me at a mixer. They're even surprised when I'm in my room at the sorority house during daylight hours. The

housemother almost faints every time I appear at dinner. When I see friends on campus or (gasp!) at a party, the inevitable question always surfaces: "Where have you BEEN?"

Working, studying, whatever — although I'm faced with these question many times, I always stammer when answering. My absence from society is legitimate and involves no illegal activities, but my replies are apologetic. I feel guilty, even irresponsible for neglecting my social life for such a trivial reason.

Inner conflict ensues. A voice in one ear coos suavely, calling me to devily when I should be studying, but that irksome voice of responsibility squeaks just as insistently. Peace of mind is ever-elusive. If temptation prevails, Miss Responsibility throws a tantrum; having a good time is virtually impossible. But if I continue to study or work, the next day I inevitably receive a phone call from someone who feels duty-bound to describe the enormous amount of fun I missed.

This may be an extreme case, but many students experience an inner war of the worlds. The social world and the career world do battle for top billing on the priority list. What should win that war? Taken logically, the victor should be career. Most college students aren't independently wealthy, and a means of support is necessary after university life is exhausted.

No one can say that humans think logically all of the time, and college students sometimes feel like they're exempt from rules that govern the real world. So a choice between studying for a statistics test and going out with friends isn't clear-cut. Procrastination is a more enjoyable tactic than keeping up in class, especially when procrastination leads to socialization.

Until the night before a test. All the nights of choosing partying instead of studying are cursed as students rummage through the cupboard for coffee and No-Doz. In the early hours of the morning, usually about 3:38 a.m., stress overwhelms them with a wave of hair-pulling, wall-kicking and paper-shredding. And after the test is over and the caffeine wears off, the standard resolution is made: Keep up in class or suffer the consequences.

Which lasts for about two hours. Then Bubba or Buffy calls and forces a night of merriment on the unsuspecting student. Once broken, resolutions are difficult to uphold. The cycle continues. Procrastination and regret, procrastination and regret.

So a social life is the root of all evil, right? Nothing good can result from meeting people and making small talk and drinking a little. Certainly no career skills can be learned at parties.

But, as John Donne wrote, no man is

an island, and making good in the "real world" requires interaction with other people. To meet career goals, people need social skills as well as intelligence and know-how. An "egghead" or "book-worm" who can't converse with people who don't understand Newton's Laws of Motion faces career frustration, too.

Since social skills can only be learned through socializing, I have vowed many times to make myself go out more. And once I get started, stopping is a definite problem. Certain periods of my life have revolved around date parties and long lunches and fraternity mixers and other enjoyable pursuits. The social whirlwind has sucked me in, Miss Responsibility has deserted me and I've fought for air. Then an interesting project comes along at work, or a prof recommends more studying for a test than I had planned. Miss Responsibility reappears and nags until I seclude myself from society once again.

When I reassume the role of hermit, my job engrosses me completely. Time goes on, boredom sets in, and I become dissatisfied with the limited sphere of work. My heart longs to rejoin the ranks of the social butterflies, but I resist — for a while. Then I'll see a friend with whom I haven't talked since my last foray into the social world. He'll ask, "Why haven't you been around lately?" and I'll gulp and stammer and promise to go out that weekend.

The whole ugly pattern starts again. Balance is the catch word here. Some how there is a way to study successfully and have a satisfying social life. Moderate studying, moderate sleeping, moderate eating and moderate partying — sounds easy, doesn't it?

Ha! Finding the technique for attaining balance in life is a treasure hunt with no map. The prize is somewhere there, but reaching it is a real trick, probably written in hieroglyphics in a cave buried long ago by a sand storm. Or stashed in a safe on a ship that sailed off the coast of Africa.

I certainly haven't found the solution and I staunchly admire anyone who has achieved that balance. From the dedicated newspaper reporter to the dithered studier to the girl-who-can't-leave-a-party, my life is a study in extreme. Moderation is not one of my mottos.

So I continue to stare at the computer screen on Saturday nights, absorb my latest attempt to write a news story. And I'll wonder what I missed. Someday my focus will change, and my social life will become paramount again. Maybe next time, I'll be able to party moderately and sustain a balance in life. Maybe.

Tracy Staton is a senior journalism major, a staff writer and a columnist for The Battalion.

Mail Call

What's Aggie Joe up to today?

EDITOR:

I think it would interest many students at TAMU to know what their local congressman is up to these days.

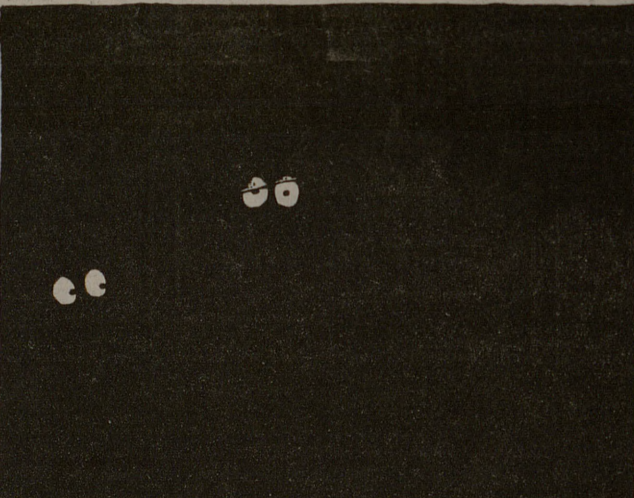
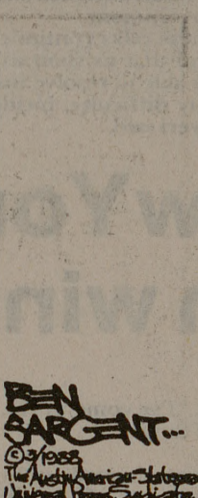
A senate bill, specifically S.858 — The Abandoned Shipwreck Act, was voted down in the senate recently but is coming up again next week. This bill seeks to protect and preserve underwater sites that hold priceless information about our past. Without this legislation these sites are doomed, and the past is lost to us forever.

Texas A&M University spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year supporting archaeological projects above and below sea level. Your congressman (I didn't vote for him), "Aggie Joe Barton," cast his "No" along with the rest of the Republicans, in essence casting a vote against TAMU research. Somehow, I don't think Mr. Barton had A&M's best interests at heart when he committed this error. His only possible excuse is ignorance — that he doesn't know where A&M's interests lie. Therefore, it is partially our own fault and we must try to correct the situation.

If Barton votes down A&M research in one particular area, what is to prevent him from doing it again when partisan lines decide the matter? This is a question any "good Ag" should ask her/himself, and while you're at it, give Congressman Barton a call at 846-1985 and tell him you'd like to see the Abandoned Shipwreck Act (or any other legislation that promotes A&M research) passed.

Christopher M. Monroe
Graduate Student

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.



We should treat Swaggart just like we treat everyone else

Jimmy Swaggart, the TV evangelist with a roving eye for lewd women, says he's going to return to preaching despite what his church elders say.



Mike Royko

And I don't blame him. Why should he be singled out for sterner punishment than is meted out to others in his line of work?

We've read of dozens of show-business people — rock stars, actors, actresses, comedians, movie producers and others — who have been busted for sniffing and smoking illegal herbs and spices. As quickly as they make bond, they are back on stage or screen earning their big bucks.

We've lost count of the number of star athletes who have done the same. They snort white powder, miss a game

or two, spend a few weeks in a rehab resort, and return to their teams as soon as their eyes become uncrossed.

The fans aren't offended. They sometimes welcome the wayward jocks with standing ovations.

So why shouldn't Swaggart be allowed to go back to work?

What's that you say? He's not a rock star or an athlete? He is a preacher, a man of the cloth, so he should be held to different standards?

Nonsense. Rock stars are in show biz. Professional athletes are in show biz. And Jimmy Swaggart, preacher though he be, is in show biz.

The rock stars are peddling music, the comedians peddle laughs, the athletes peddle violence and vicarious thrills.

Swaggart is peddling salvation, with a little bit of religious bigotry and intolerance thrown in.

Like the others, he's out there on the air waves hustling a buck. Millions of bucks, since he's been the biggest of the

show-biz preachers.

And he knows that being benched for a year of two, while some shrink asks him when he first developed a craving for dirty pictures, is going to cost him millions.

Why, even before he made his decision to return in May, he was hustling his faithful followers.

He sent out a mass mailing that included these poignant lines:

"For some time Frances and I have worked until the point of total exhaustion, and in the midst of this Satan was trying to destroy me with a terrible problem."

He didn't elaborate on what Satan made him do, but I assume it was his habit of putting on a jogging suit and taking hookers to a motel. That Satan, he gets such kinky ideas.

He went on: "Oh, the days and nights spent in prayer, the tears shed, the days of fasting."

Not to mention the dread that the motel keeper might not be fooled by the

sunglasses and recognize him.

"However, I think most you know that from the very moment this tragedy began, even though I had suffered humiliation and shame as possibly no human being on the face of the earth has ever suffered, I have done the right thing — and that is what I want to emphasize."

The right thing? Did he give the hooker a generous tip?

"When I stood before the whole world and repented, that was the right thing to do."

It was also the smartest thing to do. It made for great show biz. He blubbered. His kid blubbered. The audience blubbered. I haven't seen that much effective sobbing since actress Jane Wyman was in her weepy prime.

After blaming the devil for what he did, rather than his own horny tendencies, he said:

"I have sought direction from God as I have never sought it before and He has told me in the very depths of my be-

ing, 'Feed My Sheep.'"

Does that mean that Swaggart is going to do penance by working on a sheep farm?

No, he explains: "Now I need your help. I need your hand. I need your heart. I need your prayers."

And besides that, he needs more greenbacks. And at the end of the letter is the pitch. It's the part the faithful get out, stuff in an envelope, and it says:

"Yes, Brother Swaggart, you can count on my supports. Enclosed is a gift of \$-----."

So I say that Swaggart shouldn't be treated differently than any of the other show-biz fugures who have little flings. Let him make his bucks — you Lord didn't believe in free enterprise, he wouldn't have given us computerized mailing lists.

And, as Swaggart said, he has an urgent mission from God. He must feed those sheep.

Or did he say fleeces?
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The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

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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, 230 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. 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 77843-1111.

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