

Take time out to be thankful, remember those honored at Silver Taps

Silver Taps is one of the best traditions at Texas A&M. To take time to honor those fellow students who have passed away is something that is unique to us Aggies. Sometimes in our quest to be unique we forget the purpose of this tradition. It's easy to forget the people we're trying to remember. It can quickly become just a walk over to the Academic Building on a Tuesday night. When we stop to remember the individuals, their goals and aspirations and say a prayer for their family and friends, we truly honor their memory.

Like the 33-year-old man who was honored a few weeks ago. Maybe he was coming back to school after a long break from high school. Maybe he was trying to get a better life for his family or trying to start a new career. Maybe his wife was working two jobs to help get him through college. Maybe he missed playing with his kids because he was too busy with college and he was

Mathew Ninan
Guest Columnist

looking forward to returning to normal hours soon, but there's no more playground.

How about the freshman who was killed in an auto accident earlier this year. Maybe he was finally on his own, ready to take the world by storm. Maybe he was one of the many national merit scholars we have here. Maybe his parents were proud their son had made it to college and was maturing into an adult. Think of the dreams he might have had. He was just starting to get his feet wet in the oceans of life, but there are no more playgrounds.

Remember the senior who was within months of graduation. Starting

to see the light at the end of the academic tunnel. Maybe he had a good job lined up, marriage plans in the works and enthusiasm for what lays ahead, but there are no more playgrounds.

The student who was pursuing an advanced degree. Maybe she was the first member of her family to make it to college much less get a post graduate degree. Can you see her parents "bragging" about their daughter. The smile that comes across their faces when they think about her. Just imagine the sparkle in her eyes as she thinks of the future, but there are no more playgrounds.

The freshman who was killed recently when she was driving back to A&M. Maybe she decided to take a break from studies and go home that weekend. She was only seven miles from campus when she had the fatal accident. Only seven miles away from

maybe meeting with a study group for an upcoming test. Seven miles away from going to a dinner engagement, committee meeting, a night on the town. Maybe she had projects due the following week, a speech to give, a date finally with that cute guy in her history class. But plans got changed, ambitions are lost and dreams ended, for there are no more playgrounds.

The days of innocence are gone. Sandboxes and swings, hopscotch and jumprope, chasing grasshoppers and catching fireflies. Their all just memories now of more carefree days. Our grass-covered playgrounds have been replaced by the cold concrete of the real world. A world of deadlines, responsibilities and obligations.

Let us take time out from our busy lives and remember. Let us remember the families of those students. Just as their flames were beginning to glow

brightly they were snuffed out. Let us remember their dreams and their ambitions for they are very much their own.

As Thanksgiving draws near, let us remember those carefree days. Let us be thankful that we are the ones who are remembering at Silver Taps. Let us be thankful for having our family and friends. For the privilege of living in a great country, attending a great school and having so many of the things we take for granted.

So, as the turkey is being carved, as the smell of pumpkin pie fills the house, take time to remember the playgrounds of our younger days, the blessings of our present day and the hopes we have for future days.

Pass the cranberry sauce.
Mathew Ninan is a senior mechanical engineering major and a guest columnist for The Battalion.

A Texas mandate on workers compensation

A particularly flavorful agglomeration of citizens greeted state lawmakers, returning for a third time to try to straighten out the workers comp mess.

About 300 bikers wearing sleeveless leather jackets, tattoos that said "Born to Loose" and Nazi earrings came to protest the new helmet law; anti-death penalty activists demonstrated on behalf of Clarence Brandley, the citizen on Death Row who is apparently innocent; and a bunch of high school rodeo champions wandered about looking improbably wholesome.

Elizabeth Iglesias, an environmental

activist, took up lobbying tactics inspired by Bo Pilgrim, the chicken magnate, and went about handing out payee-blank checks to lawmakers — except hers were for 1 cent, instead of \$10,000. She wants the state to do something about toxic chemicals.

Meantime, there's apparently a done deal on workers comp, and as you might expect, the workers will get the short end. The push in the Legislature is just to get it done — it was supposed to have been the Numero Uno item during the regular session, and they flubbed then. It was the only item dur-

ing the special session this summer and they flubbed again. Now they're all sick of the subject, they're facing major embarrassment if they whiff three times, and none of the problems that made reform urgent in the first place have gotten any better in the meantime. So the only focus now is on producing something, anything; no one wants to hear from anyone who isn't helping "move the ball forward."

The pure parliamentary power of Bill Hobby was on display as he sent the two Senate bills — one he had written and one by Sens. Kent Caperton and Carl Parker, to committee. Guess which bill is going to come out of the committee Hobby picked to handle them? Hobby, who God knows deserves credit for moving this ball forward, has written a bill that is, at last, politically feasible. Caperton and Parker have written a good bill that can't pass.

The trouble with having the Lite Guv, presiding officer of the Senate, pushing his won bill is that it leaves no chance for the maximum legislative outcome — the compromise between what should be done and what can be done. There's a famous legislative phrase, "I have no pride of arthurship" (arthurs, in the Texas Lege, are guys who write things, like bills and books), but of course all "arthurs" take pride in what they've written.

The saddest thing about this whole long, sorry debate about workers comp

is that no one ever proposed the obvious solution, which is a get-serious, state-supported OSHA. A whole package industrial-safety measure, long overdue and much needed in this state, could have taken care of the compensation insurance problems, along with being right and just.

You see, we wouldn't be having all these problems with comp insurance going sky high if we didn't have so many injured workers in this state. The Hobby bill has no provisions for drug or substance abuse programs in the workplace; no safety training programs; no legislative intent section that specifically says the purpose is to protect workers' health and safety; no criminal sanctions for employers who knowingly fire, suspend or discriminate against a worker for reporting unsafe conditions; does not mandate that signs be hung from prominent places to advise workers of their rights and what number to call under the whistleblower provisions; has relatively weak penalties for unsafe workplaces; and phases in over a three-year period, rather than taking effect immediately.

The cynical and immoral practice many large companies have of using temporary workers, hired either through "Kelly Girl" companies of just a crew of illegals and winos picked up for the purpose, and using them to do incredibly dirty and dangerous tasks is not addressed at all. True, illegals who speak no English and derelicts who have no credibility are far less likely to complain about being made to wade around in toxic chemicals than are full-time employees who know what the stuff is. On the other hand, temporary employees are even more likely to get hurt doing dangerous jobs, since they aren't familiar with the equipment and can't tell if it's working properly.

Kent Caperton appears to be about

to go down in flames on workers comp not exactly his career on a high note but let us pause to salute a man who has never been anything but a credit to the state. Several legislators have announced their retirements recently and some are worth mourning. Sen. Bob McFarland of Arlington, often described by colleagues as "awfully good — for a Republican" has been an awfully good senator, Republican as all, and will be missed. But Caperton was special from the beginning. He was practically a child-legislator, or at least he seemed that way, straight up from Bryan in 1980, the 30-year-old kid who finally beat Bill Moore, the Bull of the Brazos, one of the last legendary, important, amoral old pols who made the Legislature infamous.

Moore once defended a bill he was carrying by explaining that he would make a whole lot of money on it — a little bit. Caperton, the clean-cut, young lawyer who had been student president at Texas A&M, took over Moore in one of the great underdog campaigns ever waged. For that public service alone, Caperton's name should be legend, but he also turned out to be a remarkably able and astute legislator.

Although he and Hobby are no crossways on workers comp, he became Hobby's pet and a committee chairman, always using his power wisely. He has been a consistent campaigner for more open government, for any bill that gets the process out of the back rooms and into the sunshine where everyone can see. He has also worked hard for higher education, for reforms in criminal justice and for judicial reform. He is quitting because he needs to go home some money so he can send his kids to school — plus he'd like some time to see his kids. But perhaps he'll be back sometime down the road — maybe he'll get that lucky twice.

A supercomputer meets its match

The human race is now in the debt of the Soviet chessmaster Gary Kasparov.

In case you might have missed the news, it was Gary Kasparov, the world chess champion, who went up against a chess-playing computer named "Deep Thought" and flogged the machine with relative ease.

It took the human two-and-one-half hours to win the first match. It took him only two hours to win the second.

And "Deep Thought," mind you, was no ordinary computer. It was, in fact, the World Computer Chess Champion.

What if the match had come out the other way? What if a computer had taken on a human in the complicated game of chess and had beaten him?

Wouldn't this have been a horrible blow to our self-esteem? If we couldn't beat a computer at chess, at what else might this thing with wires be superior to?

Look at what computers have already proved they can do better than human beings.

They must be better at flying airplanes, because computers do most of the heavy work flying most new commercial jets.

Computers add, subtract, and divide faster and more accurately than do humans. Computers do most of the production work at newspapers today. Humans used to do that.

But Gary Kasparov's victory over "Deep Thought" proves we can still dominate computers in some areas, and that should offer some peace of mind to all of us.

I don't want to awake on morning and find out I'm working for a computer, instead of the other way around.

An editorial writer for the Daily News in New York obviously has this same thought and was appreciative of

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the Kasparov victory. The writer listed a number of things a computer still can't do.

My favorite was "purr." Cats can purr and I've known women who could do something very similar, and who wants to pet a computer or hold one in his arms in front of a fireplace?

I was moved to make my own list of abilities computers don't have. The effort brought me much satisfaction.

- A computer can't:
 - Fry a chicken like my mother did, crispy brown on the outside, tender on the inside.
 - Teach a small boy how to throw a curve ball.
 - Make a friend.
 - Fix a flat tire.
 - Deliver my newspaper to my front yard at the crack of dawn, 365 days a year without a single miss.
 - Pat me on the back and say, "Great putt, partner," when I make an occasional birdie to win a \$2 Nassau.
 - Call a square dance.
 - Get up and get me a beer when Southern Cal is threatening to score late in the game against Notre Dame.
 - Sing "Angels Flying Too Close to the Ground," like Willie Nelson.
 - Drive a truckload of goods from Spokane, Wash., to Nashville, Tenn.
 - Win a tobacco-spitting contest.
 - Write a funny novel, like Dan Jenkins.
 - Cry.
 - Paint a masterpiece.
 - Bake a cake.
 - Have a baby.
 - Save an earthquake victim.
 - Hooray for our side!

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Mail Call

Bonfire comments unfounded

EDITOR:

In response to Reverend Sellars' comments about bonfire, I feel that many of his statements are unfounded.

First of all, I did not know that college was only for academics or book learning as he implies. I thought college not only included academics but also extracurricular activities to expand and enhance one's learning experiences and opportunities. Bonfire is one of those activities. The friends I have made and good times I have experienced during the past four years at cut and stack are infinitely better and more beneficial to me than some courses I have taken at this University.

Reverend Sellars also points out that students' grades suffer while working on bonfire. Do others' grades not suffer while attending football and baseball games, student organization meetings, and jobs, all of which are extracurricular activities? Most people working on bonfire have a devotion to both their school work and bonfire. A case in point is a former Aston Hall crew chief I know. He devoted much time, energy and effort to building bonfire last fall while making a 4.0 carrying 16 hours in aerospace engineering. I could name many others, including myself, who maintain above-average grades while working on bonfire.

Next, Reverend Sellars states that the wood for bonfire could be better used elsewhere, perhaps in constructing homes for the homeless. Although this idea has its merits, many of the Aggies I know would not devote their weekends

to building these homes. The homeless would also have little or no financial means to pay for their house payments, property taxes, utilities and other costs of owning a home.

Safety at bonfire depends, in part, on how smart or ignorant one chooses to be. Every person who works on bonfire knows the inherent risks of getting hurt while working on it. That is why one signs a waiver at cutting class. During cut and stack, the redpots and yellowpots repeatedly stress safety. Certainly bonfire is no more dangerous to us than football is to its players.

Over the years, more people have died in car accidents going to and from home for the weekend than have people for bonfire. Yet we hear no cry to do away with football or visits home for the weekend. So, please Rev. Sellars, explain why those who do get hurt continue to work on bonfire, often times the same or next day after sustaining an injury?

Finally, not all area churches may be supportive of your statement. A local church billboard found on Texas Avenue and other places in the community, includes yell practice and bonfire in its message. Ags who sacrifice their academics, resources, and safety for tradition, BUILD THE HELL OUTTA BONFIRE!!

Carrie Sundstrom '90

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.