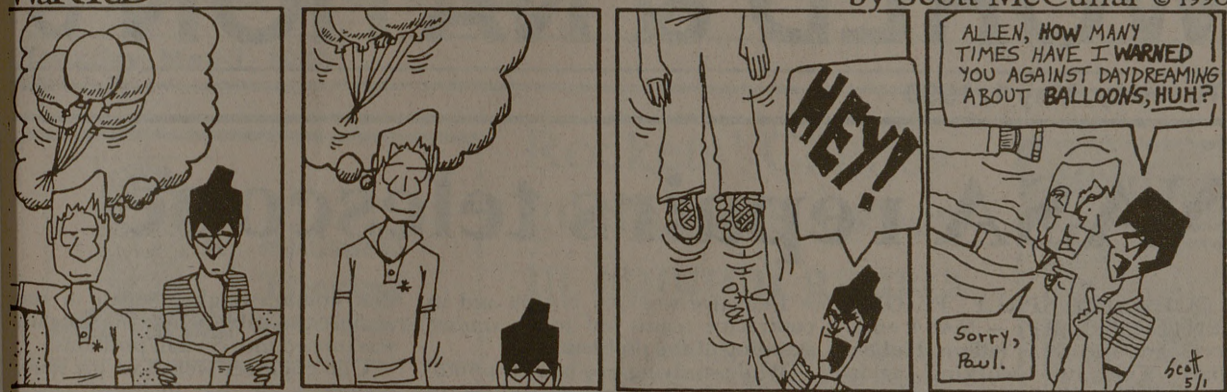
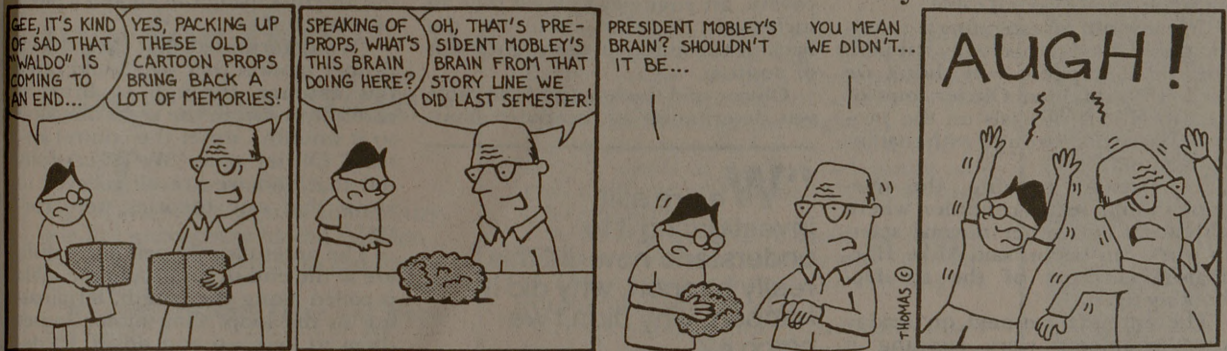


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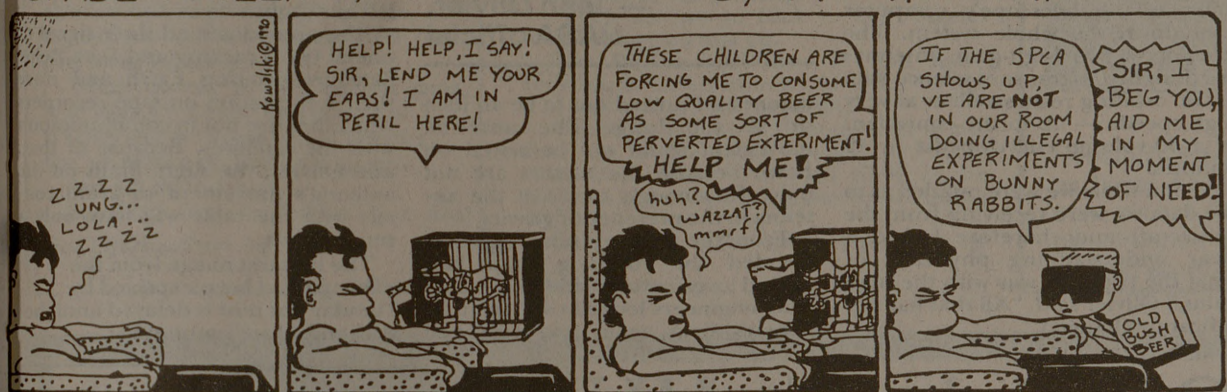
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Man faces possible life sentence if convicted

Publicity slows jury selection in Treaty Oak poisoning case

AUSTIN (AP) — Jury selection began Monday in the trial of a man who faces a life prison sentence if convicted of poisoning a famous, centuries-old oak tree. Paul Stedman Cullen, 46, is accused of pouring the herbicide Velpar around the base of the historic Treaty Oak, where, according to folklore, Stephen F. Austin signed a treaty with the Indians in the 1820s. Stephen F. Austin is generally regarded as the Father of Texas. The poisoning was discovered last Memorial Day. Half of the 60-foot tree is dead as a result, despite \$100,000 in donations and herculean efforts to save it, officials have said. Attorneys expected the process of choosing 12 jurors from 65 candidates to be difficult because of extensive publicity surrounding the case. The attack on the tree shocked city residents and touched people around the world. Many sent get-well cards to the tree or stopped to write messages and leave tokens of good will. Workers have severed the most severely affected roots and have injected sugar water in hopes of thinning the poison. Cullen, of Elroy, is charged with felony criminal mis-

chief and could be sentenced to life in prison if convicted because he has a prior prison burglary conviction. He was denied bail and has been in jail awaiting trial for more than 10 months. None of the attorneys on either side of the case would comment on the proceedings Monday, although defense attorneys objected in court to limits State District Judge Bob Perkins put on their case. Perkins granted prosecution motions requiring defense attorneys to clear certain information with him before allowing it in the trial, including possible criminal records of state witnesses and evidence of Cullen's good character. "It seems to cast a cloud on anything the defense tries to do, and if that happens, I don't see how we can get a fair trial at all," said Richard Jenkins of Dallas, one of Cullen's attorneys. Attorneys said they expect the trial to last about two weeks. Cullen also could face up to 15 years in prison for federal charges of possession of a firearm by a felon and making a false statement to a firearms dealer. The charges stem from a .22-caliber rifle police say they found in his truck when he was arrested.

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