

## Walk another path in someone else's shoes



Barbara Gastel

Rarely do I have business in the Blocker Building, but recently I did. When I finished, I ambled along the easiest path toward my office in Reed McDonald. Suddenly some polite but frustrated honking roused me from my daydream. I realized I was walking down the middle of the roadway — just like the oblivious-seeming pedestrians who always exasperate me.

This summer, I've chanced to venture on various paths I had viewed as mainly others'. I've been learning a lot, and I recommend the experience.

### Other side of the coin

Some of my encounters have related to the media.

A number of weeks ago, I received a letter from China. It was from someone with whom I had worked there.

"Are you OK?" Lao Xia anxiously wrote. "Since I learned from TV news that there were some riots due to racial discrimination, I have been worrying very much about you."

Likewise, after receiving a card from me, another Chinese colleague wrote expressing relief that I was all right. She had been worrying about me, she said, since reading in the newspaper about killings in a restaurant in Texas.

I, like many people, tend to picture countries as fraught with danger if I hear news reports of violence there. The two letters have helped drive home what a fallacy that can be.

Two other letters—from colleagues in the United States—also drove home something relating to the media that I knew but had not quite assimilated.

In teaching others about dealing with the media, I emphasize that we tend to be overly critical of coverage of our own work. Just how true this can be I learned earlier this summer.

The learning experience involved an article in the magazine of a university that previously employed me. The article contained a passage describing some of my work.

On reading the passage, I bristled at what I viewed as several major mistakes. I brooded about a word that I thought conveyed a very wrong impression. I imagined the scathing letter I would send the author.

In the next few days, I received copies of the article from two colleagues, both of whom know my work and are careful readers. "It's wonderful to see a friend reap well deserved praise!" wrote one. "I think the above has a nice ring to it, don't you?" wrote the other.

On rereading the passage, I still found it less than exemplary, but I agreed that it captured the gist of my work and present-

ed the work favorably. I also realized that I had a new anecdote to use in my teaching.

### Reversals of fortune

Other tables also have turned this summer.

A number of summers during my schooling, I did internships for offices, labs, or publications. This summer, for the first time, I had an intern working with me.

As a summer intern, I considered mainly what I was giving and getting, and I wished that some of my internships had been more consistently stimulating. I far from realized the thought and effort that supplying a student intern with rewarding, productive activities can take. I've developed new understanding now that I'm on the other side.

Being on a new side in other interactions also has been revealing. As a doctor, teacher, writer, and editor, I'm used to being the professional. And I've often reflected on professionalism.

But I've been reflecting much harder now that, as a potential owner of a home, I'm dealing with professionals in outside fields such as real estate, construction, and financing. Now in the role of consumer, I realize more than ever that being a good professional entails much more than knowledge and technical skill.

### A prescription

For at least one group of professionals, a program exists to provide experience on the other side. In this program, medical residents spend time in the hospital as "patients." By doing so, they develop new perspective — and, it is hoped, greater sensitivity and consideration.

More chances should, I believe, exist to develop understanding and tolerance by reversing roles. In fact, I propose designating one day each year as Switch-o Change-o Day. People would be encouraged to spend part of the day in someone else's role.

On such a day, professors might again experience what it's like to sit through hours of lecture. Students might see how much work it can take to plan a class or correct a batch of papers. People who gripe about the media might experience the challenges of reporting.

Of course, Switch-o Change-o Day would likely be long in coming. And some of the most enlightening exchanges might prove infeasible (and illegal).

So meanwhile, I propose Switch-o Change-o Minute. Sometime today or this weekend, mentally put yourself in the place of someone else — ideally, someone whose behavior you find frustrating. Spend a few moments imagining yourself in the other person's shoes. The result might be a whole lot fewer blisters.

Gastel is an associate professor of journalism and of humanities in medicine.

## Football — No pain, no gain?



William Harrison

It's coming. As sure as there is summer sweat, cut grass, bloody uniforms, and muddy cleats. It's almost fall, and football is back again.

Anyone on the sidelines who has ever put on pads and played the game of football feels a great urgency to get football into their system even after their playing days are over.

Yet, what could make a person quit if he had the talent, opportunity and desire to play the game?

I decided to play football at Austin College after graduating from a high school that won its first game and lost its last nine. I decided that there must be something past that senseless season of humiliation, so I decided to go to college where I had a shot at playing ball and redeeming myself.

Working out during the spring and summer, I put on 15 pounds after torturing myself through weight-lifting and sprinting with a rope strapped from my back, dragging a tire behind me (I'd done this in high school, and read a Herschel Walker fitness book where he described how this activity could make me become just like him).

Then I hit college football three-days two weeks before classes started up, and I discovered what pain really was.

But I stuck it out; eventually slated at third-string noseguard (noseguard, actually — I cheered from the bench). I wasn't expecting much from a team that had a 3-4-3 record the previous year — that's right, three ties.

The coaches were something special there, motivational and interpersonally

constructive in forming a team that would win the conference championship and go to the NAIA division II playoffs.

When classes started, I hung out with a group of friends outside of football, including Chris, a pre-med student from Dallas.

Chris is black.

Chris lived down the hall from me, and on Fridays and Saturdays our group would drive fifteen minutes in search of beer to Denison because Sherman, the town where Austin College is located, is dry.

So we would drive around to local fraternity parties, to the dorms or an apartment and play 3-man, chandeliers, quarters (or speed quarters), up and down the river, or anything involving drinking heavily. After all, there just wasn't that much to do in Sherman, a town an hour north of Dallas and an hour south of Lake Texoma.

Whenever someone suffered an alcohol infraction, the offender had to wolf one of Chris' Schlitz Malt Liquor Bulls inside of a minute, and there was a lot of racial kidding with Chris' alcohol preference as well as other things.

Some of the comments got rough; people made blunt generalizations and uttered repeated racial epithets to jibe him. He glared at them and always responded with a shrewd, cutting retort.

This didn't seem to wear on Chris. He was smart, quick-witted and very popular around campus. He was about 5'11" and 210 pounds of muscle. One time we got into a wrestling match, and Chris, who was on his high school wrestling and football teams and worked out as heavily as I did, thoroughly beat me. He was tough, cool-headed and could take care of himself.

Then, one night after the boys had gone bingeing while I did homework, Chris came in, eyes glazed with alcohol, and we started talking as people only seem to do when early morning and

booze are mixed together.

I'd always wondered why Chris didn't play football, and I found out why that night.

Chris told me his mother sent him to a high school away from his neighborhood where he lived with his mother and sisters. The neighborhood kids showed him contempt for becoming 'white.'

When he came up to Austin College he decided that he would not play football. He wanted people to view him as a student, not an athlete, but people came up to him all the time and assumed that he played football — because he was big and black.

He said that one time a white girl that we both knew came up to him, asked him what position he played, and became disinterested in Chris upon finding that he wasn't on the team. He told me that he wanted to play, but disliked the stereotype it would bring him.

I couldn't understand it, and told him that if he really wanted to do something, he should do it and not let people hold something over his head. He could have contributed on that team, and the team could have contributed to him.

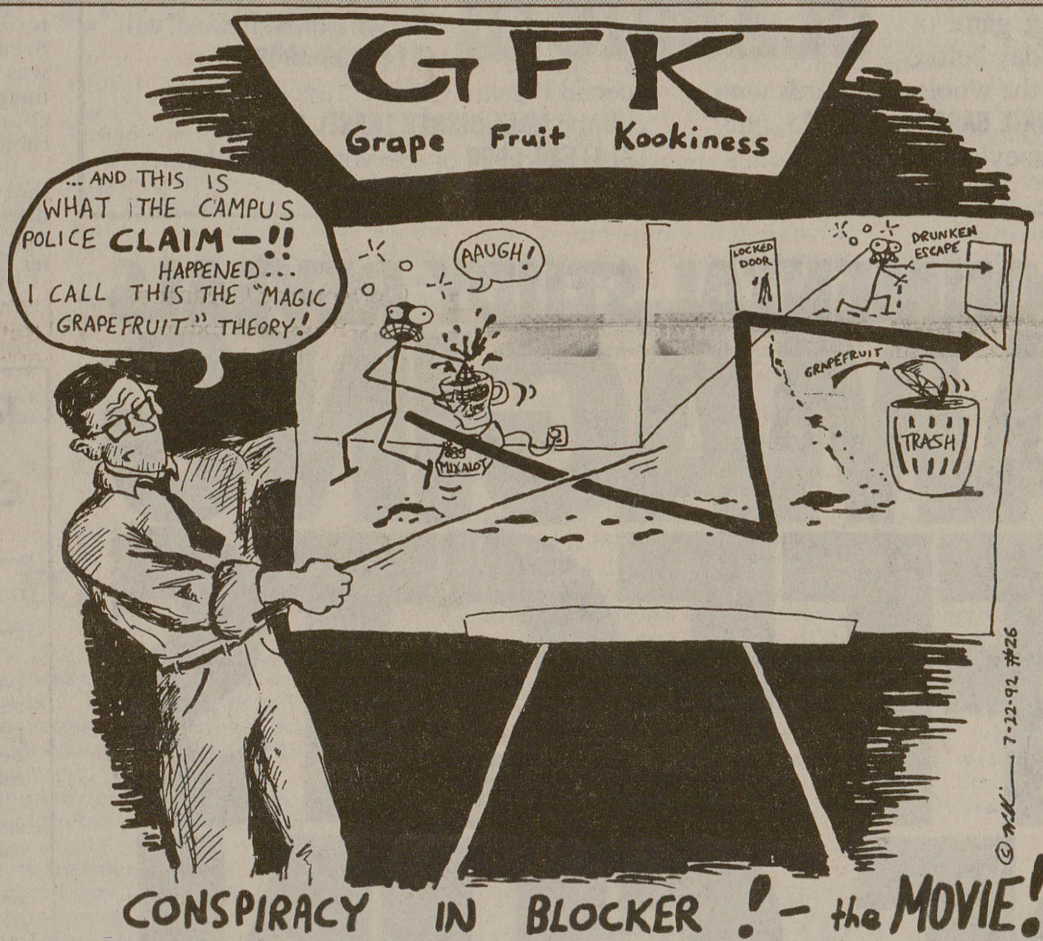
But I guess he had already gotten whatever he could out of the game I was working so hard to succeed in.

When I gave up football after dropping 20 pounds of weight and 50 pounds of strength due to an inner ear injury and flu complications, I left Austin College for Texas A&M with what I'd come for — participation on a winning team.

Chris and I have since lost touch, and I assume he's graduated already.

I hope that he lived his college life to the fullest, leaving successful and content, somehow avoiding the games people play.

Harrison is a senior journalism major and political cartoonist for The Battalion.



## 'Ladies and gentlemen' the basis of inequality

### GUEST COLUMN

Ken Fontenot

I'd like to discuss a problem I've noticed — that is, feminism of convenience. Now, first of all, I am a humanist, not a feminist. I think the very name feminism shows a prejudice. Although many feminists will tell you they believe in equality for both men and women, I haven't heard many who criticize discrimination against men, such as that which is blatantly practiced by auto insurance companies. (Can you imagine statistical discrimination based on race?)

What disturbs me, however, is that I seem to be more of a feminist than many of the women I know. They seem to support equality for women only when it is convenient for them. If someone were to make a stereotypical remark about women in their presence, they would surely criticize that person, and rightfully so. However, they are not inclined to give up their perceived advantages of living in a sexist society.

One such advantage — and this may seem frivolous at first, but I don't really think it is — is the role of gentlemen and ladies. These women expect men to be gentlemen. They want doors opened for them. They want chairs pulled out for them. And damn it, they want flowers. I don't have any problem with treating people special. I just think it should be reciprocal and not gender-based. If someone is walking with me or close behind me, of course, I hold the door open — re-

gardless of the person's gender. It's a matter of common courtesy. But to expect me to open a door for a woman simply because I am a man is patently sexist.

"What's the big deal?" you ask. I'll tell you. I do not think it is a good idea to teach little Billy that he should open doors for Susie because he's a boy. And it's certainly not a good idea to teach Susie that Billy should open the door for her because she's a girl. This certainly affects the way Billy and Susie see their places in the world. Alone, it probably wouldn't have much effect. But, if you combine all the other unequal ways we define their roles, it becomes very important indeed. In fact, I'll bet you that Billy likely turns out more assertive, and Susie likely turns out more submissive. And if by some accident Susie turns out assertive after all, I'll wager that Billy will likely call her a bitch.

Farfetched? Think of all the ways we define gender roles in society, and then tell me they don't add up. Of course, they do. But people have a tendency to fight inequality only when it is disadvantageous to them. If you believe in equality, then you should fight for it wherever it does not exist, regardless of whether you receive any personal benefit. If you don't believe in equality, then you should not complain when you don't receive it.

There is a time for idealism and a time for pragmatism. When we're talking about equality, I still believe in idealism.

Fontenot is a senior English major.

## Sex not a game in age of AIDS

I wonder why, as often as AIDS is discussed, it is still out of control in 1992? Could it be because sex is considered a game that requires you to "use your imagination?" When are people going to wise up and start taking responsibility? I understand that some circumstances are beyond our control, but the woman from Houston got what she asked for. If you play with fire and get burned, you have no one to blame but yourself.

The responsibility lies on us to educate ourselves and our children. Why is Congress responsible to save people (like Magic and most faggots) from their sins? I think the government should develop some kind of an education program, but spend money it doesn't even have. If more Americans had common sense, this probably would be a minor problem.

Michael Snyder '95

## Election year indifference

Rhetoric, dogma, Drama 101 gesticulation, pretty-boy haircuts, canned response, blah blah blah, et cetera. These are the trademarks of modern day politics, the monotonous grind which turns our T.V. sets and newspapers into sledge

hammers which pound our weary minds into apathy.

Now I'm supposed to believe that if Bill Clinton wins, we'll have racial harmony, full employment, no more wars, a cooperative Congress which responds to the people, an effective national health care plan, a repaired national infrastructure, fewer homeless people and less welfare, among other things. My cat will build a space shuttle and establish a colony on Mars before all this happens.

Even though I will vote this fall, I cannot deny my immense indifference to this year's race. Four years from now when the lame incumbents are in office, our environment is more polluted, and our tax rate is higher, you will understand what I mean. To be certain, Harry Truman and Andrew Jackson were not perfect, but at least they knew it didn't take an Ivy League education to have a plan.

Brooke Small '94

## 'Femi-Nazi' not accurate label

I am more than a little confused by the letter of Mr. Gary M. Gaither, which appeared in The Battalion on July 22, 1992, in which he described a "Femi-Nazi" as a person "bent on the destruction of the traditional family." Is it possible that Mr. Gaither does not know that the Nazis were strong defenders of the traditional family, opposed abortion and wanted

women to stay home and have as many children as possible?

It was, after all, an early Fascist, Heinrich von Treitschke, who wrote, "The normal woman first obtains an insight into justice and government through men's eyes, just as the normal man has no appetite for petty questions of household management."

It would seem that Mr. Gaither's values are much closer to those of the Nazis than are those of the pro-choice "radicals" that he labels "Femi-Nazi." Is it possible that Mr. Gaither knows this, but uses the term "Femi-Nazi" because, to quote him, he "is well educated in the use of the media" and prefers to appeal to a "slogan-depth perception"? If so, I can only echo his own question, "Will mainstream America fall for the lies?"

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### Have an opinion? Express it!

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Letters must be signed and must include classification, address and daytime phone number for verification purposes. They should be 250 words or less. Anonymous letters will not be published.

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