

End of summer leaves some things left unsaid



Barbara Gastel

Summer term is about to end, and so (some readers may note with relief) is this weekly column.

I note this column's passing with mixed relief and regret. Expecting a light workload this summer, I embarked on several projects such as this one — and found myself at least as busy as during the school year. I admit I'm relieved to have some summer left without weekly deadlines.

But I also regret that this column is ending. Writing the column has been educational and fun. And I haven't yet addressed all the topics I've had in mind.

Columns Not Written

So what have you missed, dear readers of this column? Mercifully, I've spared you my (mostly happy) reflections on pushing age 40. I've also refrained from spending a column complaining that readers who like a column tell the author but those who dislike it write to the editor.

In the spirit of the summer, I've kept most of my columns light. But, with autumn approaching, I'll mention some more serious items that I considered addressing.

I thought several times of writing a column about my college friend Garry, who lived through the fire door. Garry and I both liked to write, and we often commented on drafts of each other's papers.

Garry even took seriously my comments on his writing. One night, upset that a professor had criticized his latest essay, Garry started talking loudly in his sleep. "It was a good paper," I heard him declaim through the fire door. "I know it! Barb told me so!"

I would have liked to show Garry some of this summer's columns. But Garry died a few years ago. Aware of his personal history, I think I know the cause. I'm sorry my initial (and not-so-initial) naivete about his lifestyle kept me from understanding him better — and I'm sorer yet about the intolerance with which people like Garry still must contend.

I also thought of writing columns on various other themes. One theme: how the current emphasis on "family values" tends to exclude those of us whose daily lives, though constructive, are (by choice or chance) not very family-focused.

Raising a family can be great, but so can devoting attention and resources to young people in other ways. Attitudes and policies should, I believe, increase their support of the latter contributions.

How about, for example, letting faculty members without dependents carry a needy student or two on their group health insurance?

With autumn approaching, I also thought of writing about the prospect of a new school year. But the ideas were running too soporily sentimental. And since this week's column marks an end rather than a beginning, looking back seems more suitable.

Looking Back

Looking back, I realize I've gained much from writing this column. I've explored — and, I hope, developed some skill at — a form of writing relatively new to me. I've also learned about a 1990s newsroom and become acquainted with its computers.

As also hoped, the prospect each week of a column to write made me more observant and thoughtful. And preparing the column let me happily transform some frustrations into humor.

A further benefit (from my standpoint, at least) has been the chance to work with the Batt staff. Until last year, the Batt newsroom adjoined my office, and I often conversed informally with the staff. Then the newsroom moved downstairs, and interaction almost ceased.

Spending some time in the newsroom this summer let me reestablish acquaintance. I appreciate the help the staff has given me, and I've enjoyed the staff's good humor and good cheer. I've also welcomed the chance to teach in a way I especially value: by helping students work through problems as they arise.

I hope the staff will continue to call on me. And I'll remember the lessons this summer taught about literally meeting students more than halfway.

Thank You

Writing this column has also, as hoped, been tremendous fun. In fact, it's been the next best thing (well, not quite; I'm not getting that old) to a summer romance. Leaving this fling, I'm exhausted, exhilarated, and wistful. And I muse about eventual possibilities.

Meanwhile, I hope readers have enjoyed my columns and found them thought-provoking. I thank the Batt for its hospitality, and I thank various colleagues and others for kind words about my writing.

Enjoy the break before fall term, and have a wonderful school year. A&M is a special community indeed, and I'm glad that this column has made me more a part of it.

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

Editor bids farewell, offers thanks



Todd Stone

So this is good-bye.

As I finish my term as editor of The Battalion, I am stunned by the progress our staff has made.

We started June 1 as a green, very green, group — 25 new staff members and a few Batt veterans. And quite frankly, I did little to

make our jobs easier.

My philosophy has been that journalism is journalism, whether it's The New York Times or a newspaper with a circulation of five. And, journalists are journalists, whether one is a Pulitzer Prize winner or a cub reporter on a first assignment.

Experience is irrelevant — anyone practicing journalism should hold themselves to the highest professional and ethical standards, and I demanded this from ourselves from day one.

Unfortunately, the staff can only work part-time because they are students too, and they have to handle tests and papers just like everyone else.

So for the new troops, this was indeed trial by fire, and they exceeded my expectations by demonstrating a relentless pursuit to improve.

A few examples:
• Opinion editor Mack Harrison and his staff took on the load of publishing an opinion page for each issue instead

of just three a week. They performed well despite being short-handed.

• Reporter Juli Phillips worked for three weeks to get to the bottom of rumors of murder and cover-up at Blocker Building.

With the thoughtfulness and concern for the truth of a seasoned pro, Juli worked with sources who were afraid to come forward and refused to be discouraged when others were uncooperative.

Thankfully, the rumors were unfounded. But the paranoia that Juli encountered around campus shows that A&M needs to develop an environment of openness.

• Photographer Darrin Hill provided more photos by himself than some past Batt photo staffs put together. One week he took 12 photos. That's a lot of work when considering the time it takes to shoot and develop a photo.

• News editors Heidi Sauer and Meredith Harrison trained a group of eager but green copy editors while learning the Batt computer system at the same time.

• Associate professor Dr. Barbara Gastel took time out of her busy schedule (she teaches in two different colleges) to provide witty columns throughout the summer.

• Sports editor Doug Foster and his staff (Michael Plummer and Don Norwood) provided better A&M sports reporting than any other media in town.

• City editor Gary Carroll applied to be news editor only to be told, "Congratulations you are the new city editor for the summer and fall" — not what he

had in mind, but Gary and the city desk's performance has been exemplary.

Also, I owe thanks to Battalion advisor Bob Wegener and the journalism faculty for advice and encouragement.

Still, we have not reached our potential. The city staff is just now establishing its beats because it takes time to develop a rapport with sources.

We also are not immuned from blunders such as a vague headline, wrong information in an article or creative grammar. But, we are learning.

Despite our best efforts, we cannot avoid criticism, and that's the way it should be. Our responsibility is to the A&M community, and we rely on feedback from our readers to tell us how we are doing.

Well, judging by the letters on the opinion page, many readers are making sure we put forth our best effort.

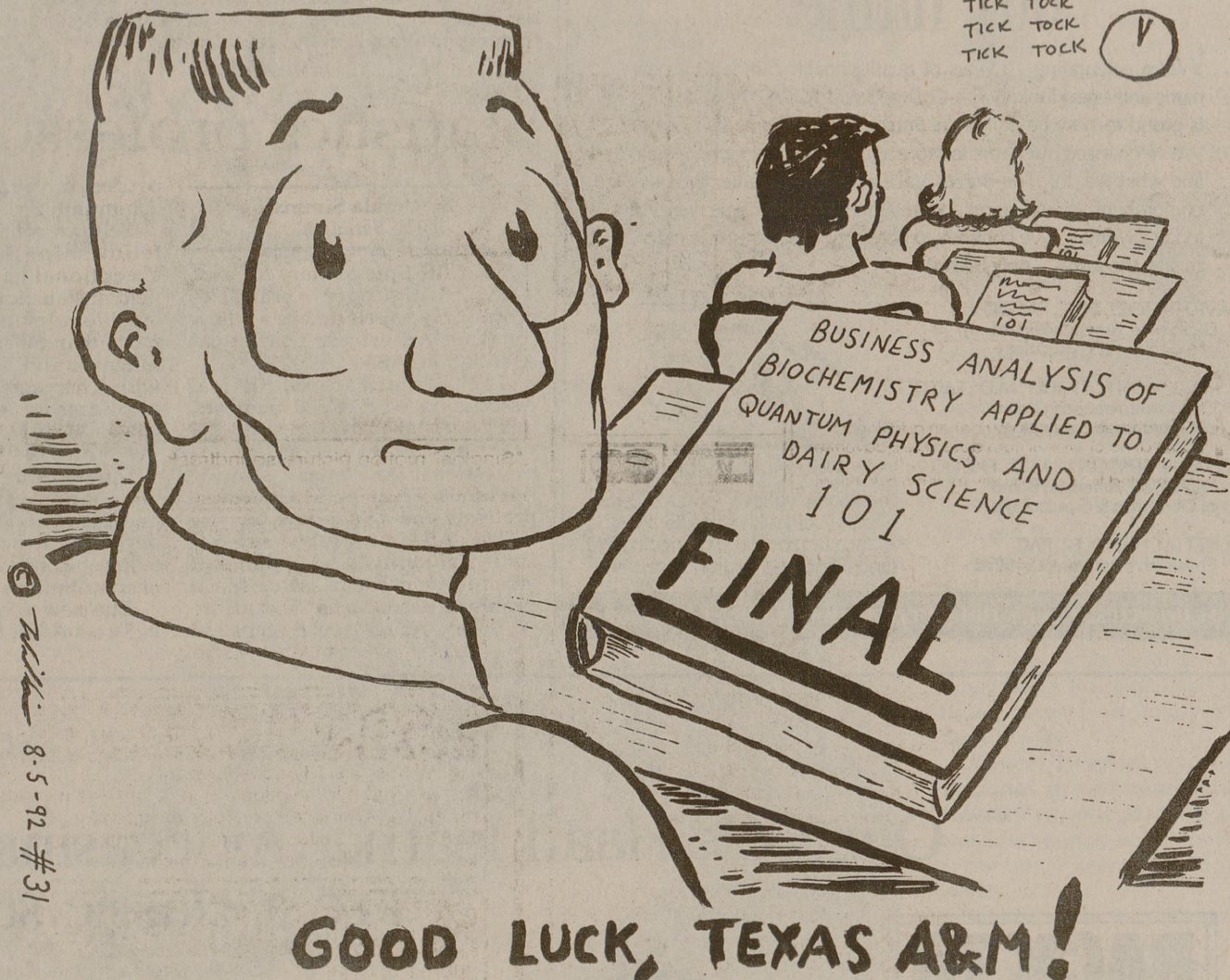
We always appreciate the public's participation with the opinion page. The letters and guest columns make this section a diverse forum for new perspectives and ideas.

But now, it is time for me to step aside as fall editor Atlantis Tillman takes over. The Battalion should only improve under her guidance.

I will stay with The Battalion this fall and work on the city desk as a reporter. I'm looking forward to meeting many of our readers as I cover stories.

And once again, thank you Battalion staff for your hard work. You made this summer very special for me.

Stone is a graduate student of business and editor of The Battalion.



GOOD LUCK, TEXAS A&M!

Let the (Republican) Games begin!

Four more days until the Olympics end, with a brief pre-empting hiatus before the Republican convention convenes upon the screens of our TV sets. Then our favorite summer reruns will be overrun with the drama, the tragedy, the joy, the sorrow, the thrill of victory and possibly, the agony of defeat of the Republican National Convention — that would be August 17 for those of you who want to set your VCRs.

And the convention promises to be a real treat, what with a million commercial-filled hours of speeches and roll-calls when the majority of Americans already know how it's going to end. Hate to spoil it for you kids, but guess what? Bush wins the nomination — or didn't you follow the primaries last spring? Watching the convention is rather like watching a mini-series backwards, after the hype and hoopla of the primaries, we get to watch Bush accept the nomination. Big surprise! Like the Republicans will pull anything exciting out of the bag and nominate, say, Ted Kennedy. No mystery. No drama. No intrigue.

And what Bush needs right now is a little bit of drama. According to the polls of my comrades in the liberal media, not many Americans really want to watch a million hours of President Bush and his band of merry men (and women). What Bush needs right now is a little bit of mass appeal. What Bush needs right now is a little bit of Olympic spirit. In order to spark the mass appeal that

has proven so successful for the Olympic broadcast, the Republican National Convention owes it to their poster children (Bush and Quayle) to give them Olympic coverage — to boldly go where no convention has gone before and seek out those non-politics-watching TV-viewers. That's what the Olympics did for sports. You didn't actually think NBC started doing those Olympic videos for fun, did you? They did that and the dramatic interludes about the athletes in order to entice non-traditional sports watchers, such as women, into the viewing audience.

Now imagine what would happen if the Republicans did that for the convention? Imagine the pageantry! The glory! The splendor! The fun, if we got to see the convention delegates in the traditional attire of their home states sprinting up to the platform torches in hand! Here in their native uniforms of Brooks Brothers suits and Laura Ashley maternity wear is the delegation from Connecticut. Following in their native attire of bare feet and unwashed underwear comes the Oklahoma team.

Imagine how neat it would be if, instead of losing more market shares and Nielsen households to Fox's fare of "Bev-Hills 8675309" and "Primrose Place," the Republicans took a tip from the Olympics and sponsored videos by major rock and country performers featuring personal moments of the "Bush and Quayles." George and Barbara playing golf to "Wonderful Tonight" by Eric Clapton? It could happen.

And what if the commentators of the convention adopted the limited vocabularies of the Olympic sportscasters?

"Wow! Bush really nailed that speech! He just stuck it! It was tight! I mean TIGHT!"

"Did you see the way Quayle ripped that photo-opportunity! He is just on fire tonight! That was a 10! A definite 10!"

Wouldn't it be great if, as with the Olympics, the convention featured little dramatic bubbles about the conventioners, and the crushing obstacles they overcame to get to the convention?

"They came from all corners of the country, from small midwestern farmhouses tucked in fields of golden grain, from shimmering skyscrapers planted like steel trees in the concrete jungles of our giant metropolises. They came to the convention! The convention! It seemed no more than a dream for Euline Walker Thornton Wilder Quackenbush of Chastewick, Rhode Island. Through vigorous months of electioneering, she made it to the primaries, struggling violently with the reigning champion, the incumbent from her district, but little Euline, shining and triumphant, overcame these odds, garnering a record 52,000 votes, to attend the Republican National Convention!"

Of course, the high point of the convention, comparable to the culmination of the Summer Olympic Games, could only be better if President Bush, like his Olympic counterparts, refused to accept the nomination unless he could wear his Air Jordans on the podium. . . . And what a deft stroke of foreshadowing that would be for the big November match up of the Republican Dream Team versus the Democratic Wonder Twins!

Sure beats reruns of 90264321! I can hardly wait. You heard it here first.

Feducia is a senior English and history major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Mail Call

Could it be . . . Narrow-minded SATAN?!?!?

Monday, Aug. 3, I was browsing through The Battalion (a publication I seldom if ever read) and came across one of the most opinionated and unprofessional columns I have ever read: "Found: The Ultimate Sorority Babe."

I am a junior biochemistry major, and am about to apply to medical school. I am not "breaking" my parents by attending college because I am on complete scholarship including a Presidential Endowed and University Scholar. Believe it or not, Mr. LoBaido, I am in a sorority.

I do not carry a Dooney purse, nor drive a BMW. I live in a house in the countryside outside of a small town named Lufkin — not a "cardboard box behind Bennigan's." I don't bronze my skin in a tanning bed, and I've never seen "90210." I've never altered the color of my hair, and I wear very little makeup. I don't sleep in until 11:00 either — in fact I'm up before 7 a.m. because I'm working 20 hours a week, taking a physics course, and studying my ass off for the MCAT. Furthermore, I am a Christian, and I resent the comment you made about Jesus. Finally, my days don't consist of random "sex with some fraternity dude and/or stray dog!"

I think you need to reevaluate your immature and narrow-minded views, not to mention polish your writing style. It is because of people like you and columns like yours that I and many others give The Batt so little credit.

Wendy Goodwin '94

Have an opinion? Express it!

The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers. All letters are welcome. 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.

The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee a letter will appear. Letters may be brought to The Battalion at 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or faxed to 845-2647.

Don Avirett Graduate Student



Stacy Feducia