



## Helping people live with death

### The student guide to coping with the inevitable

Last Sunday I found myself once again skimming the wedding announcement pages looking for anyone I might know. It occurred to me that this is one of the true marks of adulthood.



JOHN SCROGGS  
Columnist

While I continued flipping through the paper, I pondered this new revelation, suddenly stopping on the obituary page. Something truly remarkable occurred to me at this point. In the past few months, I've known more people that have died than have been married. A very close friend of mine passed away in December, another friend had a brother who recently died, one of my great-uncles just died, and last week the mother of one of my friends passed away after a long battle with cancer.

Since I have only recently begun emerging from that "teenage immortality" stage, I was quite shocked to realize how close to death I am and how involved I have been with it. And, of course, since most college students have more important things to worry about, I decided to worry enough for everyone. We are all entering into an age in which we will be confronted more frequently with the deaths of those around us. The little boy scout in me started chanting "Be Prepared," so here is your chance to learn what I, as the employee of a funeral home, know about the rituals of death.

Funeral services always differ according to the individual's personal beliefs and religion. Learn to respect these differences. Catholics usually have a rosary the evening before the funeral and then have a mass for the actual service. Jews have traditionally been known to have the funeral as soon as possible, usually within the day. Some Protestant religions close the casket at the beginning of the service and do not re-open it at the graveside service. This means that if you want to see the body one last time, you had better do it sooner than later. Some individuals prefer cremation without ever having a final viewing. The main point to realize is that every funeral service is different. Don't expect any one particular thing to happen. I know that one of the most interesting services I have witnessed was an oriental funeral in which everyone wore white, their color of mourning.

Speaking of which, black, the traditional color of mourning for western cultures, is slowly fading out. Within the last decade or so, people have started wearing blues, reds and purples. As long as the outfit is tasteful, it isn't necessary that it be black. This will save many from rushing out the day before a funeral and buying that perfect black dress or black suit. Another thing to consider at the time of someone's death is

what to send to the services. Tradition dictates flowers, but people have begun to break from tradition and send live plants. The reasoning behind this is that cut flowers fade and die within a week. This display sometimes draws more attention to the loss. Potted plants, on the other hand, are fresh and vibrant and seem to celebrate life. Some critics of the new trend say that an overflow of plants to a household that is void of a green thumb can cause quite a few problems. If after a funeral the bereaved feels overcome with plants that they don't know how to care for, they should give them away. There are numerous retirement homes and hospitals that are more than happy to receive plants as gifts.

When dealing with the bereaved, many people get nervous and don't know exactly how to act or what to say. For some people, this can be a very touchy subject. In my experience, I've found it most useful to be as clear and specific as possible when speaking to mourners. The trite, "If there's anything I can do, just call me," leaves something to be desired. Remember, no one is going to say, "Oh, I'm lonely and need to cry. Let's do lunch next week." Be specific when you offer help and then be prepared to follow through with your offer. Remember, what the mourners may need most is to stay busy. Offer to take them to a movie, out to dinner or just out for a walk. Always give them plenty of time to talk about what's on their minds, but don't force them to discuss the recent death.

Food is another biggie during the time surrounding a death. Everyone and their dog brings the family some sort of covered dish. If you do this, remember to mark your bowl, tray or pot with your name to make it easier on the family in returning your stuff. Also, take into consideration that for the first three or four days, many people will have the same idea you have had. Don't over-supply the mourners with so much food that it runs the risk of spoiling. Wait a week or even a month before you send food.

Also, consider this one last thing. Some grief counselors estimate that it takes on average nine years for someone to completely go through the grief cycle. NINE years. That's quite a while. The times that support is most needed is during special events like birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. Make sure you check up on mourners during these times. Offer them your condolences on these days and offer to sit and talk with them about the situation.

The death of someone close to you can be one of the most traumatic and stressful events in your life. Dealing with the tiny details of what to do just adds to the stress. Hopefully this little preview will help you deal just a bit better with such an awful, yet inevitable situation. It's just a thought.

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The Battalion



100 years at Texas A&M

## Marijuana: legalize it

### Society can benefit from its use

The time has come to legalize the use of marijuana in the United States because unlike other illegal drugs, marijuana has many societal benefits.

The medical community already has established that marijuana helps in the treatment of glaucoma - an eye disease that can lead to blindness. Marijuana can provide relief for those cancer victims who are suffering from the side effects of radiation treatment. Marijuana has also been used to treat nausea and multiple sclerosis.

Enforcing the illegality of a rather minor drug also costs taxpayers money because it requires more police time, ties up the court system and contributes to the over-crowding of prisons. The U.S. government's war on drugs could focus resources on those illegal substances which are truly enemies to society.

When compared to the dangers of abusing prescription drugs such as valium or powerful and unsafe drugs such as heroine, crack or LSD, keeping marijuana illegal seems silly because these substances have the potential to kill immediately.

Marijuana is no more physically addictive than alcohol or tobacco. Any user is not in immediate danger unless they drive or operate heavy machinery. Of course, there are appropriate concerns about the recreational use of the drug. Like alcohol, marijuana impairs judgment and like tobacco, the drug can cause heart dis-

ease and lung cancer.

We are not advocating that U.S. society become a mirror of Cheech and Chong movies in which the main characters live in a drug-induced fog by smoking marijuana.

Legalizing marijuana does not have to be an open invitation for everyone to get "stoned." A prerequisite to legalizing the drug would have to be proper education.

As our government and other organizations such as Mothers Against

Drunk Driving already educate the public on the dangers of legal drugs such as alcohol and nicotine, the same effort to educate should be pursued for potential users of marijuana. Moderation and responsible use of the drug would have to be encouraged. "Don't drink or smoke and drive."

Still, there are concerns which lawmakers and the populace should be aware of if legalization is pursued. Police officers are concerned about more citizens driving under the influence of marijuana as well as alcohol, and drug counselors have rightly pointed out that drug addiction can be psychological as well as physical. Again, proper education is the key.

Despite these concerns, legalizing marijuana has positive benefits in medicine, the drug war and efficient use of tax revenues. It is time to explore all the benefits of marijuana as a legal drug.



## With Mail Call, we should listen more and complain less

It is just like an elementary school argument on a college level: "My daddy can beat up your daddy!" "Well, my mommy can beat up your mommy." Every day it's "My party's better than yours!" "No it's not. Your party sucks." Sometimes they say, "The Corps is great!" "What! The Corps should be disbanded." Other times it's "My God's better than yours." "No he's not, mine's better!" "Oh yea, I don't believe in God, but if I did, she would be better than both of yours." And who can forget, "Multiculturalism should be made more visible." "Yuck, I've had it up to here with multiculturalism." You might be wondering what I'm talking about. Well, it's Mail Call in The Battalion and now it is my turn. It's my column, I can say what I want to.



MIKE MORRIS  
Guest Columnist

Let's talk about the Democrats vs. the Republicans

It's two months after inauguration, and the dust hasn't settled yet. Democrats are still acting like the savior has come while Republicans are swearing the end of the world is near, and the saga is being played out every day in Mail Call. I voted for Clinton, and I say neither happened. The Republicans are screaming about all the broken promises. It is true that Clinton has done more turnarounds in his first 100 days than any president in recent history, but then I say what president hasn't broken promises before? The only way I'll believe Bush didn't break any promises is if he says he was misquoted: "Read my lips, KNOW new taxes." The Republicans are slamming Clinton's economic policy while the head of the federal reserve, a Republican appointee, is saying it is a good plan. The Republicans whined about the "liberal" media calling it a "lynch mob." Well I've got three words for you: Lena Guerrero, Democrat.

On the other hand, the interest, unemployment and inflation rates have dropped under the last two Republican presidents while the Democratic Con-

gress raised their salaries and ran for their seats one more time because they had one more kid to put through college. I say we vote like Richard Pryor did in "Brewster's Millions": "None of the above."

And then there's the Corps vs. the Non-Regs.

The Aggie Corps of Cadets is the backbone of what A&M was and is, but with 39,000-plus non-regs compared to roughly 2,000 cadets, non-regs are going to play a big part in the future of A&M. Both groups are made up of Aggies and should get along, but for some reason, these groups are at each others' throats. When allegations of sexual harassment started circulating, there were calls from some non-regs to disband the Corps. When sexual assault charges were filed by one Corps member against another Corps member, people said, "Forget disbanding. Get a rope!" The Corps is not the only guilty party though. When two different fraternities had problems, there were calls to not only kick the frats out, but some cadets were mumbling about kicking all of the non-regs out. I say we should all get along. Things could be worse; we could be at t.u. where the frats drink themselves to death and the ROTC mem-

bers pronounce the "s" in Corps.

And who can forget religion vs. religion.

Two of America's most basic freedoms, freedom of speech and religion, have become the biggest name calling free-for-all I've ever seen on this campus. I've seen less mudslinging at a mud wrestling match. All this friction revolves around one thing - morals. Who's is right? Nobody and everybody. In one sense, nobody is right because everyone else thinks they're right. The way I see it, no religion is wrong. When you look past the rituals and superficial beliefs, every religion is basically the same. How could any faith be wrong that condemns murder and stealing and stresses being kind to your fellow man?

Finally there is the great Multiculturalism vs. Americanism debate.

Interest in multiculturalism is growing fast at A&M. With the recent racial incidents, the large numbers of international students and the growing numbers of minorities in Texas, this is not surprising. What is also rising is the disinterest in multiculturalism. Many Aggies wonder why we need multicultural awareness at Texas A&M. I say, "We're quite aware of

the redneck element. Give somebody else a turn in the spotlight." Some Aggies complain, "Why aren't people happy just being Americans?" They don't understand why others call themselves Mexican-Americans or African-Americans. They don't understand why it is necessary to celebrate Juneteenth or Cinco de Mayo. I have one word for them-Thanksgiving. The only difference between any group of Americans is the size of the body of water they crossed if they crossed one at all, when they crossed it, and whether they came by freedom of choice or they came in chains. America is truly the melting pot and all the ethnic groups add the necessary spices, so kick back, open a beer and enjoy the stew.

Mail Call is a place to express your opinions and should not be used for name calling and mudslinging. Save that for the politicians on the campaign. Next time you read something you don't like and you feel the urge to start name calling, take a nap, have some milk and cookies and sit quietly until the urge goes away.

Morris is a senior biology major.