

OPINION

Wednesday, July 14, 1993

Sometimes you just want to sing Don't let others tell you to keep your feelings inside

The urge to kill overcame me one day as I walked to class and was forced to listen to some maniacal student who apparently was having a much better day than I. He chose to let everyone within a 5-mile radius know about it by whistling at the top of his lungs.



ROBERT VASQUEZ
Columnist

It wasn't just his whistling, though. There was something profoundly excruciating about this man as he gave a very poor rendition of the theme song from The Andy Griffith Show, spittle flying frantically from his mouth, all the while managing an obnoxious grin. This man wasn't just whistling "Dixie."

Though he was walking about 20 feet in front of me, I felt as if he were aiming his voice directly at my ears, his broken stream of bad breath specifically at my face.

Of course I knew that he was simply enjoying his right to free expression, a right guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States of America. A right conceived and preserved by the forefathers who founded and loved this great and mighty land. But this man was really hacking me off.

So I guess I should understand why some people don't like my singing. I've never considered myself a great singer but, lately, more than a few people have told me, well, to shut up. Everyone's a critic.

I'd be singing at work, or at play, or in the shower, and someone would turn around and request the silent treatment from me. But not in so many words. It went more like this:

"Robert. I wish you would stop singing. It's not that I don't like the songs you sing. It's just that I hate your voice. You can't carry a tune. It's nothing personal. I still love you. It's just that your singing sounds like fingernails on chalkboard to me. You understand, don't you? Could you pass the soap, please?"

Subtlety is not a common trait among my friends. And, their good intentions aside, I found their comments nearly as annoying as they found my singing.

It's not like I'm imitating Julie Andrews. I don't run along mountainsides screeching at the top of my well-developed lungs about female deer and needles pulling thread. I simply whisper some song that happens to be

lingering in my head ... and is begging to be freed ... yes freed, released into the atmosphere where the hills of Switzerland can rejoice with the song that fills my soul. But I digress.

I'm no Star Search wannabe. I just sing. My friends say they'd prefer that I smoke twelve cigarettes at once and blow the clouds of carcinogens into their faces, leaving a charcoal gray film and ashes in their lungs. "Just don't sing," they say. "Please, Robert, just don't sing."

Singing in public is no different from smoking, some friends say. "It's inconsiderate and violates other people's space. The people who can sing are already singing — and they're getting paid for it."

Other friends who have the same affliction as I have — *singingus en publicus* — say there is nothing wrong with us. "Singing is the mark of a happy person," said one friend (who asked to remain anonymous). "It shows that the person is feeling good. And to ask that person to stop singing is downright rude."

"You wouldn't ask a person to stop laughing, would you? I think the people who don't sing and who ask others not to sing are just unhappy people."

"Maybe the people who sing are the ones who are unhappy and they're just trying to cover it up," another friend answered.

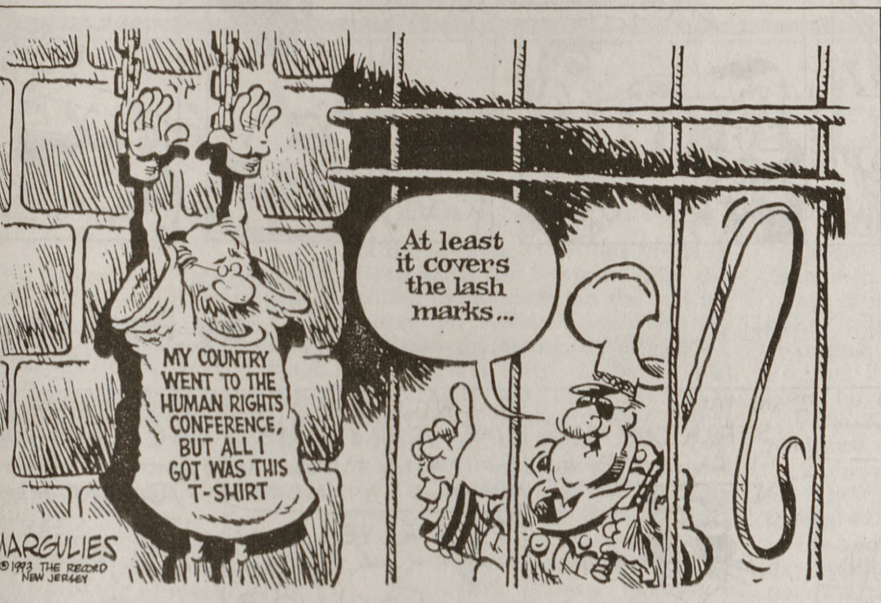
After being told a number of times to kindly shut up, I asked my friend what I should do. I never knew that my singing offended so many people and I figured that maybe I should indeed stop singing to appease these would-be silencers.

"Sing louder," he advised. "There's no reason for you to stop singing just because they don't want to hear it. A very wise and thin woman once said, 'Sing a song ... Don't worry that it's not good enough for anyone else to hear. Just sing a song.' And that's what you should do."

He's right. If people have the courage to sing in public, then they should be allowed to do so. They're not jeopardizing anyone's health. They may cause an upset stomach or two, but nothing serious.

So, the next time you see me in the hallway, or in class, or taking a shower, and you hear me singing, don't ask me to stop. I may return the sentiment and tell YOU to keep it to yourself.

Vasquez is a senior journalism major



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EDITORIAL

Drug war casualties Mandatory minimums unjust

One weapon currently being used in the government's "war on drugs" seems to be producing nothing but collateral damage.

This weapon, mandatory minimum sentencing for drug-related crimes, is a part of the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984. It was intended to create rational, uniform sentences and stop what politicians saw as leniency in sentencing by liberal judges.

Its effect has been to fill federal prisons with non-violent first-time offenders serving harsh prison sentences with no possibility of parole.

In fact, the federal prison population has more than tripled since 1981, mostly due to federal drug charges and their attendant minimum sentences.

Consequently, perpetrators of violent crimes unrelated to drugs are being squeezed out of the prison system, receiving shorter sentences and earlier parole.

More murderers and rapists end up on the streets; more small-time drug offenders clog up the justice and prison systems.

Many judges hate the mandatory minimum sentences, which eliminate judicial discretion and allow "accessories" to be given the same prison

terms as actual perpetrators for even the most tenuous connections to drug crimes.

In one such instance, a married father of two in California picked up a hitchhiking teenager he knew who flagged him down for a ride to a restaurant.

When they arrived, the teenager got out and a stranger hopped in to grab a bag of crack left on the front seat.

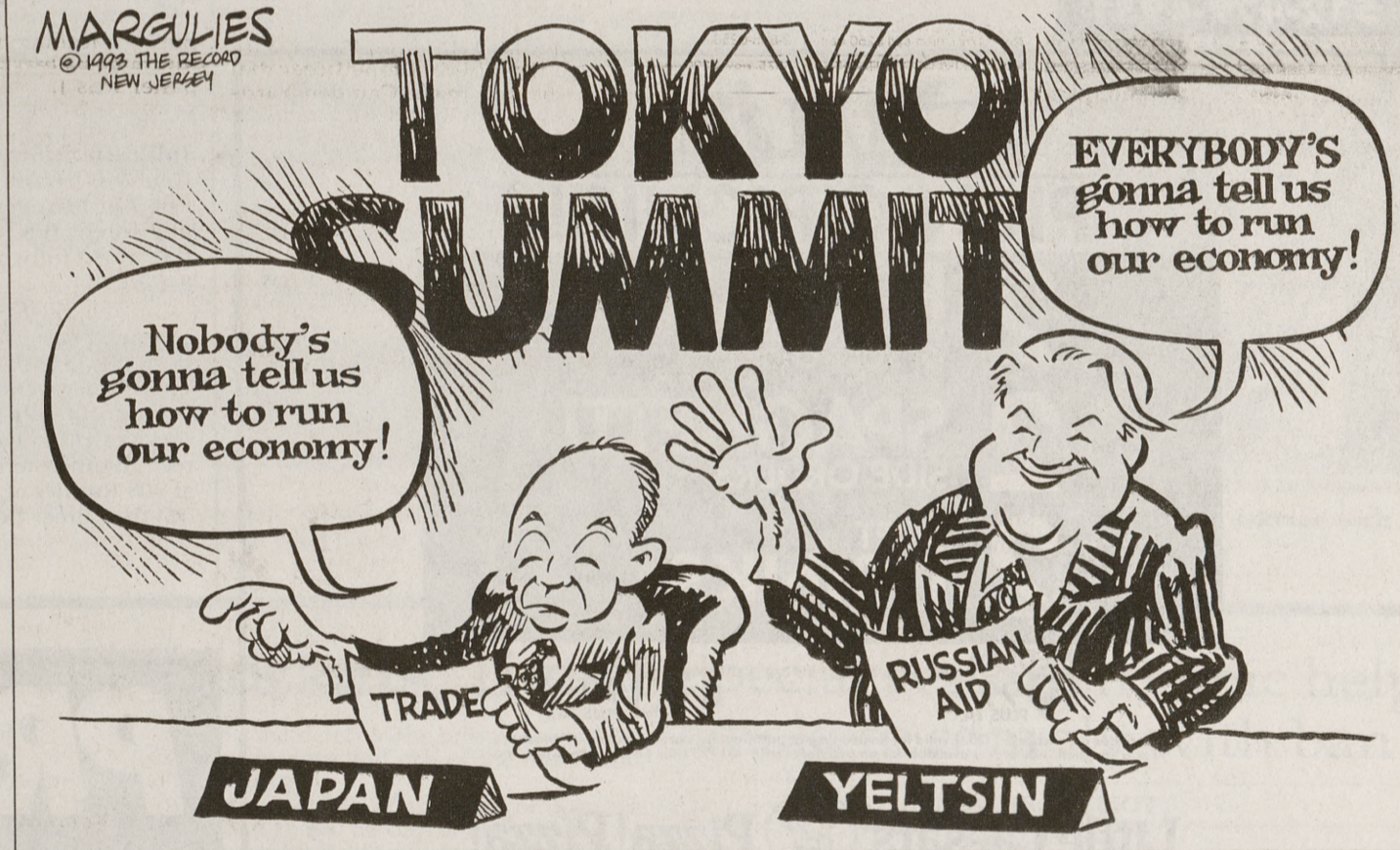
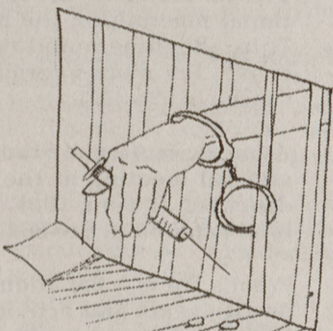
The driver, who had been on his way to a birthday party, was arrested and sentenced to a mandatory 10 years without parole for his "part" in the crime.

The judge in the case called the sentence a miscarriage of justice, but could do nothing as the mandatory minimum could not be overridden.

The mandatory minimum law was intended to ensure that drug kingpins spent more time in prison.

Instead, it has sent small-time offenders off to prisons to be converted into hardened criminals and to displace robbers, murderers and rapists who are usually eligible for the parole denied to mandatory minimum convicts.

Mandatory minimums must end; sentencing should be left to judges. In waging our war on drugs, let's not let all citizens get caught in the free-fire zone.



Soda splash and bladder breathers: anatomy of a road trip

Just what is a vacation supposed to be anyway? Webster's considers it freedom from regular duties, but if you really think about it, vacations are anything but free and at least twice the effort of academics or a regular job.



FRANK STANFORD
Columnist

We've all done it. Even making plans for a week-end road-trip can be an unbelievable task, especially if the trip involves more than one person.

First, the driver usually sets a preliminary itinerary and establishes a rough time of departure. The passenger(s) are given an opportunity to throw some clothes together, pick up their wallets, turn in a paper, or find their wallets.

With luck, two or three hours after the proposed departure time, the show gets on the road. By the time gas, chips, beer, soda, and cigarettes are purchased and actual travel begins, vehicular speed must be recalculated to 94.2 mph

in order to reach the destination on schedule. No problem.

After the state trooper drives off, and the sweat drips off your chin onto the tickets in your hand (inspection stickers are always expired), intense furor steadily subsides — with a few choice expletives — into a beaten-helpless state of "law abidance." You distinctly remember saying, "see you around dinnertime" on the phone just a few hours ago and now you must rationalize that you really meant dinnertime in Tokyo.

Once under way, the passengers rally around the driver and confirm the officer's anal retentive personality complex; all but the one girl in the car who is very silent. She foresaw and repeatedly forewarned. She knew. Girls always know. Why is that? The remainder of the trip is usually eventless aside from the occasional bladder breather or soda splashing.

Sodas splash constantly all over the world, but none are more disconcerting than the automotive variety. The driver gets a little cocky while steering and sipping simultaneously and places the soda carefully between his or her legs in such a manner as to prevent spillage. I'm not quite sure of the physics involved, whether the motion of the car, gravity, or the squirming of the driver

is responsible, but the soda, without exception, will spill backwards directly into the individual's crotch and continue its trek rearward.

For the driver, all possibilities of a pleasant voyage are destroyed at this moment. Because of the lives involved, the car will only swerve a lane or two, followed by spilt Cheetos, more cussing and a frantic, futile attempt to flick already absorbed soda off an already saturated, sticky lap.

The bladder breather is distinguished from the conventional pit stop in that there is no restroom. Invariably some idiot in the car (quite possibly you) with a bladder the size of a Hacky-Sack, who insisted he or she had no need for the facilities at the last gas station but now emphatically states, "I really need to go ... I mean NOW."

Finding a private, secluded bush alongside a major interstate on a week-end is an impossibility, forcing the car to the shoulder for the ol' "we're just checking for cargo shifting" charade for passing motorists. Generally, an open car door will do for privacy, but females who ordinarily might scream at an apartment spider will venture like a commando across waist-high thistles in a swampy, stagnant, arachnid-infested drainage ditch and clamber over a

rusty, tetanus-teeming barbed-wire fence in shorts and sandals to find that perfect potty amongst the rattlesnakes. Always honk at these people.

In spite of the wet upholstery, doughnut crumbs (you know, those little white ones which have now turned to paste in the seat), orange Cheetos dust covering your fingers and the fact that your damp jeans are now glued to sensitive leg hairs, the post bladder breather bliss will emotionally carry most motorists on to their destination.

The above scenario — having occurred to me more than once, and probably to most of you — prompted me to sell my car and proclaim, "Never again!" Struck by brilliance, I purchased a large touring motorcycle to eliminate all traveling headaches.

All automobile headaches that is. First, no passengers. It's difficult to find travelers with death-wishes. No doughnuts or soda, unless you can puree the two and suck it through a 27-inch flexi-straw while driving 75. No seat spillage (no soda). No bladder-breatheers (no soda) and no tickets. Cops apparently assume you're an eventual road pizza, and a citation would only prolong your fate. Sounds great, doesn't it? Freedom, and all that stuff? After six hours on a bike, your butt

goes numb, you're as drenched as if you showered in soda, peeing isn't necessary because you're medically dehydrated, and all those bastards in air-conditioned cars are trying to kill you. I even unintentionally power-swallowed an insect once. Finally, the damn thing will break down in Caldwell at a barbecue stand, forcing you to hitchhike to College Station dressed like a biker thug. It is still there.

After living on a boat for two years, I can tell you marine travel is no picnic either ...

Stanford is a graduate philosophy student

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