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Just stop and smell the bluebonnets Small town hospitality puts worries into perspective

ROBERT VASQUEZ

Columnist



Graduation looms around the corner. I stare endlessly into the computer screen at my resume, an X-ray of my professional life, twisted and contrived to convince some poor sucker that I'm the best person for the job. I leaf through the want ads, trying to avoid the clerical section, sure that I will be forced to tap that market eventually. Until then, I'll keep looking elsewhere. Always avoid the inevitable. Never put off for tomorrow what you can put off forever. And to think, I've been looking forward to this point in my life for the past, oh, century or so.

I was telling my friend, Jason, about how my sky was falling when he said, "Oh, before I forget, I'm inviting some friends to my parents' home in Breckenridge for Easter weekend. Do you think you can make it?"

I looked at him for a second. Was he joking? Had he heard a word I'd said? "Time! Time! I need more time to get everything done," was what I was saying. And he was asking me if I wanted to leave town for three days (72 hours - 4,320 minutes) to sit around and do nothing.

"OK," I said. "That sounds like fun." The road to Breckenridge, Texas is a lot like "War and Peace," only longer. And with more twists and curves and hills and bumps. Instead of gas stations and fast food restaurants, we passed sprawling fields dotted with cattle grazing in the distance. Everywhere we turned, we saw rolling hills littered with bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush. The backdrop was a vivid, deep green that spread out in all directions until it reached the horizon, where the brilliant blue of the sky began. White clouds drifted above, casting an

occasional shadow on the fields below. And suddenly, I realized that I wasn't thinking about all the things I needed to do. Like the cattle wandering across the open plains on either side, I was unaware of deadlines and requirements and all the snares of ambition. Ignorance is bliss.

The sign outside of Breckenridge welcomes visitors, and announces the grand population that recently exceeded 6,000. An old oil town that boomed and went bust with the rise and fall of the price of crude, Breckenridge, to many, is simply a collection of buildings on a highway. But this was our destination, and home to the family who welcomed us there.

As we drove up the long rock driveway, family and friends waved from the fields in the distance, walking toward the house to greet the guests.

Dinner was fish and shrimp and a corn salad that reminded me of something I loved when I was a child. I don't normally enjoy seafood, but this fish was delicious. I had three servings. And then cherry cobbler. It tasted like nothing from McPart's, Jack in the Crack, or Taco Belch. It was wonderful.

Easter Morning we went to a quaint brick

church that was probably smaller than any I'd ever seen. And nicer, too. The organist was a little old lady who smiled when she saw that Jason was home and would be able to sing in the choir.

"Nice to meet you, Robert," she said.

"Can you sing?"

"Not really," I said. "It's been a long time."

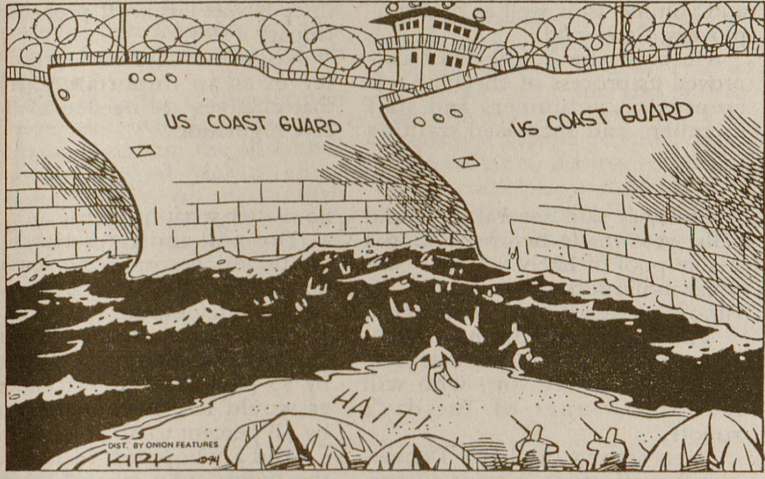
"You'll be great," she said, handing me a hymnal.

Staring down at the congregation as we sang "Aleluiah, King of Glory" I tried to retrace the steps that had led me to sing in a choir to people in a church in a town I'd never heard of only weeks earlier. They weren't my friends kneeling to pray. It wasn't my church where we worshiped. It wasn't even my religion. Yet the smiles and yawns and occasional tears reminded me of the services I'd attended on Easter's past.

I turned to look at the rest of the choir. There were children and adults and elderly people. They all sang to the best of their ability. Some reached the notes, some couldn't. But they all tried happily. And I sang with them.

On the ride home, my mind raced with thought. We would be home soon. Back to the deadlines and requirements and all the snares of ambition. But it was the events of the weekend that filled my mind. I was thinking of the simple things I had lost in my race toward success. And my only thought of the future was the hope that one day I could be as happy as I had been that weekend.

Robert Vasquez is a senior journalism major



EDITORIAL

Choosing justice Nomination shouldn't be political

There is only one issue President Clinton needs to keep in mind when choosing a new justice for the Supreme Court: qualifications.

Since Justice Harry Blackmun announced his retirement last Wednesday, there has been much talk about who will be successor. Many people are saying President Clinton needs to make the court look more like America by appointing a minority member, possibly the first Hispanic, to the high court. Others have said that retiring Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell would be a good choice because Mitchell would face little or no opposition during the confirmation process.

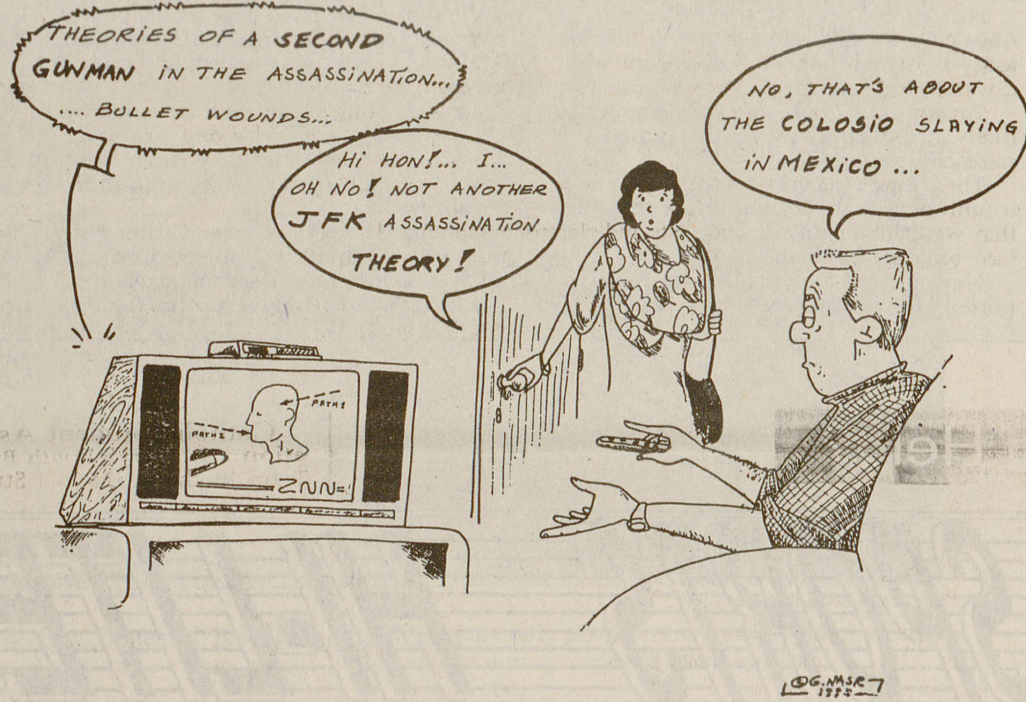
Politics should have nothing to do with the president's choice for a lifelong member of the Supreme Court. The founders of this nation created the court to be an independent and nonpolitical branch of government that would interpret the Constitution. However, it is a sad truth that no governmental entity stands free from politics.

Although presidents try to choose justices who share their basic political ideology, nominations do not have to become a part of political game playing. Clinton has

been given the responsibility to choose a replacement for the most liberal member of the court. In light of Clinton's own beliefs, it would be foolish not to expect a like-minded justice to be appointed, but it is not too much to expect that the future justice will be qualified, not just convenient.

Since it is a lifelong appointment and justices are accountable to no one other than the American people, the president should rely on more than the appearance of the appointment. The replacement's integrity, intelligence and experience as a jurist are just some of the qualities that really count. After all, the public opinion of the president's appointee will not last nearly as long as that justice's decisions and their effect on this nation's interpretation of justice.

Whether the appointee is red, yellow, black, white, green, man or woman should be of secondary concern. It is Congress, not the Supreme Court, that was designed to be the representative branch of the government. The less political the appointments to the court remain, the more Americans can count on the Supreme Court to do the job for which it was created.



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Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors.

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class, and phone number.

We reserve the right to edit letters and guest columns for length, style, and accuracy.

Contact the opinion editor for information on submitting guest columns.

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Mom and Pop stores quickly, sadly fading from reality

Americans today are trading the romance of Mom and Pop businesses for the continuity and conveniences of franchised and chain ventures. Family-owned businesses are becoming a thing of the past. Many college students claim to want to start their own businesses. But own what? A grocery store? A small dress shop? A gas station?

The basic needs of our society are already being met - by huge corporations, conglomerates and franchising networks. They do market research to determine where people would be most likely to buy their auto parts, greeting cards, hamburgers and 100 percent cotton sweaters. Small businesses have trouble competing, and when they do become successful, they are approached by investors who encourage them to expand, get rich and open hundreds of shops across the country.

Remember those commercials featuring Mr. Whipple, the friendly corner grocer who became slightly disturbed when people squeezed the toilet paper? Grocery stores now have department managers, assistant managers, night managers and general man-

MELISSA MEGLIOLA

Columnist



agers, none of whom guard the paper products. Finding a grocery store that is willing to deliver to your great-grandmother who can't get to the store no longer involves simply calling Mr. Jones and asking for a favor. Gas stations where the owner or his goofy nephew checks your tires and oil and cleans your windshield have become a part of 1950's nostalgia. Tom's candy stands and moon pies are next to impossible to find.

Today, rather than going to the town square where we know the clerks at the drug, shoe and furniture stores personally, we head out to the mall whenever we need anything. Malls across the country are clones of one another - each with a couple of anchor department stores, a food court and

the national chains that infiltrate every such center. They vary in size from the modest small town center to the obnoxious new Mall of America that could engulf a small state. Some feature ice skating rinks, others have fancy marble floors and valet parking. But ultimately, they are difficult to differentiate. Once inside, it is virtually impossible to determine which city or state you are in.

In north Dallas, on Beltline Road, the number of restaurants on a roughly two mile stretch is truly amazing. At one intersection I counted eleven restaurants. You can get Chinese, Mexican, Italian, seafood or even Chicago-style pizza. The restaurants are large, fairly well decorated, have decent food and service and can be found throughout the southwest. The waitstaff is usually made up of high school and college students who view their positions as temporary employment at best. Sixty-year-old professional waiters, the ones who know what you want without having to take your order, seem like fossils at the few restaurants across the country where they remain.

One bakery in the western suburbs of Chicago personifies the Mom and Pop busi-

ness. I worked at Ben's Bistro and Bakery for three summers. Ben, the owner, baker and chef, would greet his customers and call them by name.

Today, rather than going to the town square where we know the clerks at the drug, shoe and furniture stores personally, we head out to the mall whenever we need anything.

His wife, Mary, and I would take orders, discuss local politics and the weather with the diners. Ben, who was once the head chef at a major Chicago hotel, then prepared their salads, pasta and vegetables exactly to taste. He knew that the guys from the insurance company didn't like garlic and to always put extra fresh jalapeños in my mother's fritatta. The back table in the restaurant was never set. When Jason and Tommy,

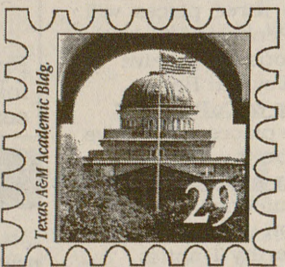
Ben's sons, came in for the afternoon, they sat in the back and colored or played with their Nintendo Gameboy. When business was slow, Ben and I sat there and read Newsweek or the daily paper.

Many of Ben's customers ate lunch at the bakery four or five days a week. They would ask about how I was doing in calculus and would invite me to sit with them and eat whenever I had the time. Ben encouraged such behavior. He never let me leave until he had made me a full lunch. He gave me advice on college and hosted a graduation party for my younger sister. And he never would reveal his secret chicken salad recipe.

Although the neon signs of chain restaurants, shops and services are easy to find and are alluring with their promises of consistency and convenience, they can't compare with family businesses built on pride and hard work. When shopping or going out to eat, we need to remember to search out small Mom and Pop stands. If we don't, they'll soon be gone.

Melissa Megliola is a senior industrial engineering major

Mail Call



Guest column shows reader error of ways

First, I would like to congratulate Will Haraway on his biting guest column. His reference to the editorial writer as "Beavis" was a literary stroke of genius. But if I may be so bold as to make a suggestion to the man who hands out Pulitzer Prizes, perhaps "doodoo head" and "booger brain" might have been equally effective.

I would also like to take this time to thank Haraway for not blaming us, the ig-

norant, misled readers of The Battalion. His wisdom has set me free. Many readers may have questioned the direct quote, "I can say whatever the hell I want," thinking that as a person's position and power increase, so must the temperance of his or her tongue.

The readers may have imagined a homeless person and President Clinton each saying those words - and the repercussions. Fools! All of them fools! They are uninformed. The Corps does not live by the same rules as everyone else. On behalf of society, I would like to offer my sincere apology and beg forgiveness.

My faith in the Corps has been af-

firmed. Like the Corps members who supported Trent Ashby, I supported a non-reg and am therefore not an Aggie.

What was I thinking? The next Will Haraway may have been in the list of cadets I passed over. I would not be able to live with myself if I did not place his kind of leadership in office again.

Martin Leifker
Class of '95

Crime victim finds bad guy to be idiotic

"Got a little story for you Ags..." Something glorious happened to me just the other day: the bad guy was an idiot for a change.

My bicycle was stolen from my off-campus apartment complex on Wednesday of spring break, March 16. This bicycle was my only transportation and of

priceless sentimental value, as I built it myself out of old parts. It was the very center of my being, Ags.

I reported it stolen to College Station police Department, not really expecting to ever see it again. I firmly believed it was not an Aggie who took it. There is that Aggie Code of Honor thing, I thought. So, I fully expected it to be halfway to, like, Alaska, in the hands of some off-campus spuzz.

Tuesday, April 5, I went to the library and guess what. Parked illegally on the concourse, right there in front of my face, was my bicycle. The schmo who took it did not even try to conceal the fact that my bike had two different shifters, unmistakable rust spots and a flat-tread tire on the rear.

Would you not suspect that a bicycle you stole in College Station might belong to a student who might have to go to the library? Not only did he park it directly in front of my place of employment (I have worked in the library since 1988), he put a shiny new lock on the

thing - final evidence of its new change of "ownership."

Looks like he messed up. I would like to thank the little criminal for making it so easy for me to recover my bicycle. I am surprised I did not find it sooner.

Whoever he is, I hope he realizes he makes a really rotten thief and gives it up. If you see me riding around on my customized - and now completely registered with PTTS and marked by an engraver from the UPD - rusted out Murray Eagle River Bike, remember this, Ags: sometimes justice strikes back.

Thanks to the UPD and to the College Station police department for their understanding and help. Let me take this opportunity to encourage everyone to get their bikes registered with PTTS, engraved with an ID and have your bike's serial number written down somewhere.

Of course, this does not protect me from the guy smashing it now...

Julia Stavenhagen
Class of '93