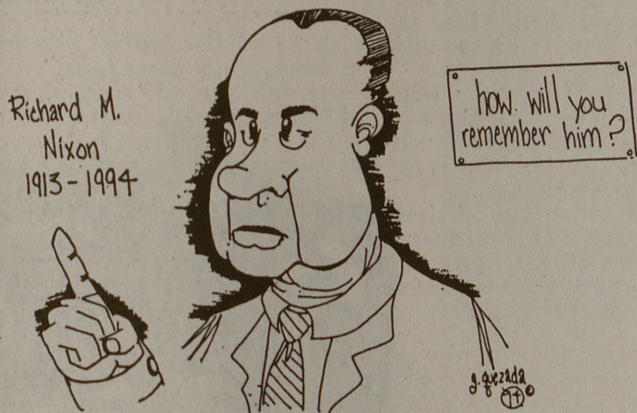


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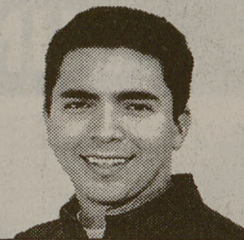
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One more column, nine more days ... Winding down, selling out as final deadline approaches

One column left. After all this time, it's hard to believe I have only one column and two weeks left at A&M. There remain only nine days of school. It seems like, only yesterday, there were 10 days left. Sigh. But isn't that the way things go? The sands of time are sifting through my fingers, shifting beneath my feet. And I find it a little unsettling.

ROBERT VASQUEZ



Columnist

At the risk of sounding sophomoric, I must tell you that I know everything. 'Cause I've been here longer than you. That's how I was told I was supposed to write when I first started this column nearly three years ago.

"You're supposed to persuade the readers to believe your opinion," I was told. "You must make them side with you on topics and subjects that pertain to them. Convince them that you know everything."

This is college, not obedience school. All my life I had been told what was right and wrong. I didn't need that. I can think for myself; so can most college students. Suddenly I was supposed to turn around and tell people how to think. I couldn't do it. I wouldn't.

So I chose instead to write the columns that I would want to read. Instead of writing about what I'd done right, I wrote about things I'd done wrong. (This approach not only made me sound less pious, it doubled the experiences from which I could draw.) One friend refers to my column as "Robert's Weekly Confession."

erals. Or conservatives. Or both. But when people actually call in and say that they liked what they read, that it somehow made them stop and think ... well, it makes it all suddenly worth the trouble.

There are so many fears and questions people have when they leave home for college. I know I was overwhelmed by the immensity of the campus, the complexity of the registration process, and the insanity of parking. Though the problems were very real for me, I was certain I was the only one who found them intimidating. No one else seemed to talk about them. Why was I the only one who seemed to notice the obstacles standing between me and a degree?

Well, that's when I discovered my special purpose. To complain. To gripe and moan about all the little things that made this journey seem interminable. A number of people have told me, "Robert, you can't leave. You have to stay and write your columns forever." While the sentiment is flattering, the thought terrifies me.

As much as I've grown to love this place, it's time to move on. And, while I've enjoyed our little chats, I know this conversation is drawing to a close. So some friends and I decided to collect our favorite columns, the ones we

thought best recorded our cries for help and put them in a little pile called a book. We figured, since misery loves company, some people might be interested in keeping some of the stories they once read to remind them of the agony they survived. The topics of the columns range from credit cards to Desert Storm, from date rape to Dr. Seuss.

The book we have produced is called, "Voices from A&M: A Survivors' Guide to Love, Life and the Pursuit of Sanity." And it's available in paperback. (We couldn't afford a hardback cover.)

Stacy Feducia, Toni Garrard Clay and I have put more than 40 of the best columns we can find into this book. Some parts of it are borrowed. Some are original. Most are plagiarized. And it all can be yours. For ten bucks. We figure, since we won't be making any money after college, we may as well start panhandling now. I'm not forcing you. I'm begging you. Buy this book. Please.

Seriously, if you're interested, send your name, mailing address and \$10 to:

Windows of the World
 P. O. Box 2925
 College Station TX 77841-2925

For you perceptive cynics out there who think this is an outright advertisement for VOICES FROM A&M, I want you to know you couldn't be more wrong. So put your suspicions to rest and ACT NOW!!! (No purchase necessary. Prices may vary. Offer void where prohibited.)

Robert Vasquez is a senior journalism major

EDITORIAL

The ugly truth Facing Rwanda's turmoil

At the heart of Joseph Conrad's "Dark Continent," a horrific scene silently plays on. Ignored or conveniently unnoticed by the national media and the United Nations, the civil war in Rwanda has claimed up to 100,000 lives and displaced more than two million people within two weeks.

While the United Nations — the world's "peacekeeping force" — attempts to deal with Serbian aggression in Bosnia, the multi-national body has only informally discussed the slaughter in Rwanda. The U.N.'s only action was to order the reduction of its forces from 2,500 to 270.

Private aid agencies, however, said last Thursday they could not carry out humanitarian missions in the ravaged countryside because of the lack of U.N. protection.

News of this tragedy has also been relegated to back-page or late-night coverage by the American media. The events in Rwanda are horrible and disturbing, but we must ask why the West has chosen to deny their severity.

Is it because of America's and the U.N.'s preoccupation with the Bosnian situation? (Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Friday the United States must take decisive action to save America's reputation — not the lives of civilians

in Gorazde or Sarajevo.) Or is it that neither institution has anything to gain from addressing the African conflict?

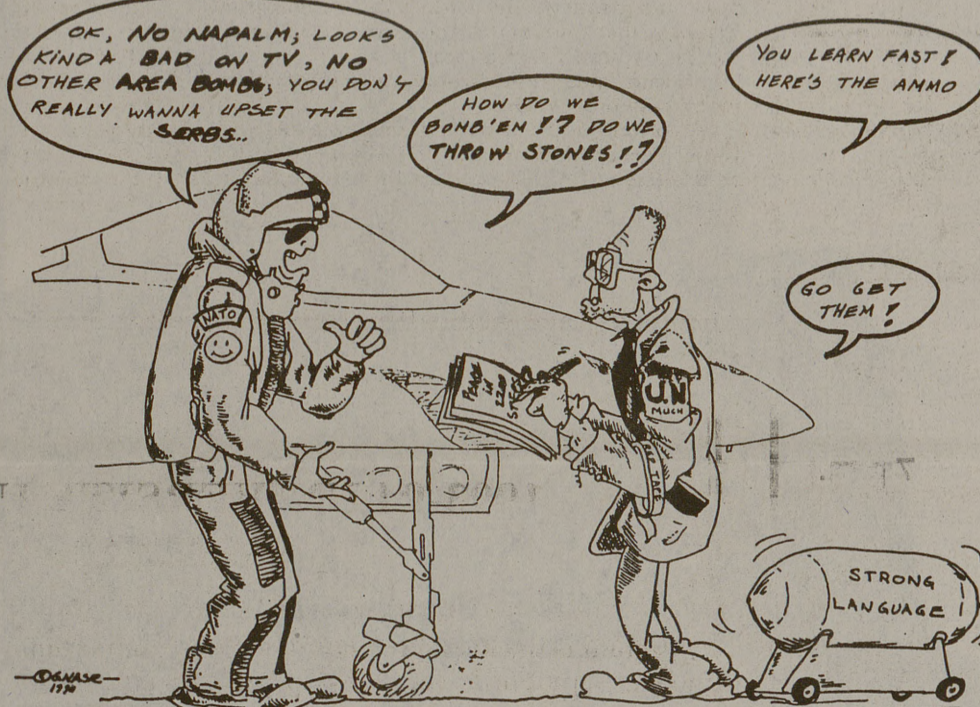
The United States has only limited diplomatic and economic ties with the besieged East Central African country, and the U.N. has already demonstrated its callous attitude toward Rwanda.

The American media also has limited access to Rwanda. With no sure safe havens, only a few journalists will cover such a dangerous situation.

Also the slaughter in Rwanda is not something we care to dwell on. We can believe dozens or even hundreds of deaths. But the extermination of 100,000 people in two weeks? Such numbers are almost impossible to grasp.

With no economic or political interests in the region, why should the U.N. or America act? Because Rwandan civilians are innocent victims of a vicious conflict, and because the United Nations should treat all situations equally, not according to how politically or economically advantageous involvement may be.

To do otherwise would be to deny the epic suffering in Rwanda, and reinforce our aversion to the "ugly" truth.



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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. Address letters to:
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Shared mourning teaches lessons of unconditional love

I'll never forget October 27, 1993. It was a hot, muggy Wednesday, and I should have been in class. But I wasn't. I was in Port Arthur, Texas, at my grandmother's funeral.

It was a day of sadness, a day of tears, a day of awakening. I learned a lot that day — a lot about death and a lot about life.

The drive to the church was strange. My dad, his wife, my sister, and I drove along as if nothing had happened. We talked about school; we talked about the weather; we talked about politics; we never uttered a word about my grandmother.

I remember thinking how odd this was and how we should all be ashamed of ourselves. Driving along in the car, I remember digging a hole in the back of my dad's head with my eyes.

"This is all his fault," I thought. He had put my grandmother in a nursing home a year earlier, and her health and sanity left her shortly after. She quickly deteriorated into nothingness.

JENNIFER SMITH

City Editor



My 14-year-old sister and I did our best to keep conversation with my grandmother when we visited her at the nursing home, but she spoke of nonsensical things. Our visits ended almost as quickly as they began.

We both blamed my dad for not taking care of her. We both blamed him for a lot of things. My dad divorced my mother 10 years ago, and neither of us has really forgiven him for it.

But one positive result of my parents' divorce was the relationship I gained with my sister. Though there were fights and struggles, we couldn't be closer.

We fought while she was growing up,

but through it all I knew she, more than anyone, was the one person in the world to whom I was tied. The bonds of our relationship are so important to me. I feel like the same blood that runs through her veins runs through mine.

My parents' divorce left me in a peculiar position with my sister, because I took on much of the responsibility of raising her. I was never asked to do this; I just did. As a result, I became something of a second mother to her. In return for my love and caring, she gives me the joy of just being there.

I'll never forget the day after she was born when I held her in my arms for the first time. It was so powerful. I had never experienced such instant love for anyone or anything.

My sister and I grew up similarly. We both saw my dad every once in a while, but obviously after the divorce it was not the same. There is just no substitute for a dad living at home. Weekend visits and phone calls could never compare.

As a result of the loss and the absence of a father, my sister and I clung to each

other. Our relationship is stronger than any other sibling relationship I have ever seen, and there is nothing I am prouder of than that.

But there were times when I wondered if she truly knew how much she meant to me. I found out last October.

I'll never forget the day after she was born when I held her in my arms for the first time. I had never experienced such instant love for anyone or anything.

As we walked into the church, my sister began crying instantly. I am much more reserved, and I think I went into a trance-like state.

Even when we sat down on the front row less than 10 feet away from my grandmother's open coffin, I still would-

n't let myself cry.

Ten minutes into the ceremony, I still would not cry. Then suddenly as I looked at my grandmother's hair and face and realized I would never see her again, a dam burst. I began to sob uncontrollably.

Everyone else was crying, too, and I blended in well with the crowd. But I felt isolated. I didn't want my dad to come near me, didn't want him to look at me, didn't want him to see me cry. I was alone in a sea of darkness.

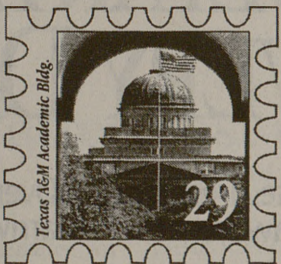
Suddenly a light appeared. From out of the darkness, my sister reached over and grabbed my hand. Her smaller hand held mine, and all at once I knew what life was all about. I knew what unconditional love was, and I felt so lucky to have it.

That one small gesture from her summed up all life is for me.

I learned a lot about myself that day, a lot about life and a lot about death. And most importantly, I learned about love.

Jennifer Smith is a senior journalism major

Mail Call



Homosexuality just part of today's world

• Even though we're in the midst of finals preparation and have no spare time, I feel moved to respond to Eric Peddicord's intuitive observation that it is uncool for gays to participate in the United Way Kiss-Off due to their obvious evil intent to corrupt the universe as we know it. I realize we're all very busy right now, but perhaps you've noticed it's 1994 — men kiss men, women kiss women, and in some parts even the

sheep are involved. Now whether this is due to a genetic snafu, insurmountable sin, or just the overwhelming desire to be bashed by every intolerant Bible-thumper and ignorant redneck, the world may never know.

So even though I'm certain that the world in general and Aggieland in particular benefits greatly from the moral compass that keeps us on the straight and narrow, allow me to take a little discourse through Theology 101.

God says love thy neighbor (now here comes the tricky part) — like it or not, some of your neighbors are gay.

That means you have to (help me out here) deal with it. When you show contempt for people (any people), you do nothing to elevate your cause. Peddicord solves this entire problem by saying he chooses to ignore sin and stick to what's right. Perhaps he could practice what he preaches and ignore this, too.

If you don't like it, look the other way. Let me tell you how I deal with it. I'm not gay and I'm way too concerned with getting through school and on with life to worry about those who are.

Tony Ludovico
Class of '94

• This letter is in reference to Eric Peddicord's letter to Mail Call in which he compared homosexuals kissing in public to a KKK rally, claiming both are "proud of their wickedness and [wanting] the whole world to 'greet, envy, deceit, malice, violence, hatred, racism, and lust ... [all] manifestations

of the dark side of human nature known as sin."

Homosexuality is inherent to certain individuals, just as heterosexuality is inherent to other individuals. As sexuality is a God-given quality intrinsic to all of God's creatures, the specifics of each individual's sexuality is God-given, through his infinite wisdom and between only each individual and God. None of the sins listed are inborn characteristics, because by definition a sin cannot be an inborn characteristic. Greed, envy and lust are all normal feelings for humans to experience. Malice and hatred are two more bad feelings which are not only sins, but lead to unhappiness, ulcers and heart attacks in the meantime. Deceit and violence are behaviors whose actions are specifically committed with the intention to hurt other people. Racism is learned hatred, born of fear and ignorance.

I am not personally an advocator of public displays of affection, but as the United Way Kiss-Off was based on

people kissing in public to raise money for charity, I don't see why anyone would object to homosexual couples kissing. Heterosexual couples are permitted by our society to express their affection and sexuality in public without offending anyone, and here at A&M we have several traditions which not only tolerate but encourage public displays of affection without undue criticisms, religious admonishments or risk of bodily harm.

As Aggies, we should be above hurting each other with words or actions by accepting even the parts of our neighbor we can't understand. And some parts of our neighbors' lives are simply none of our business. And if our neighbor chooses to express some aspect of that private relationship in public, we should not stand in judgment, especially when others are allowed to freely express similar aspects of themselves.

Allison Rowland
Class of '96