

AIDS doesn't kill only strangers

Memories of Uncle Erwin illustrate heroism in midst of pain, tragedy

He was better than Santa Claus. He was excitement, odd presents, short visits and warm hugs. When my sisters and I were small, he would throw us in the air and tickle us. To this day my father ruefully remembers how he encouraged us to misbehave at an expensive restaurant. One Christmas he took us downtown in Houston to show us the lights at midnight. Uncle Erwin was also unmarried, a source of confusion for me in my ever paired-off world.

Erwin Preston Jr. grew up in Poteet, Texas, and spent his adult life in Mexico and New York City. He graduated from McMurry College in Abilene, and earned his master's of divinity from the Methodist church in 1971. He never was ordained, but he worked with and for churches all of his life. His belief in God and Christ sustained him through his darkest days. He taught English as a Second Language at Columbia University, and before he died he was working as a buyer for an art gallery in New York City. His talents were many and his capacity for giving was limitless.

When I was 11, my mom told me that Uncle Erwin was homosexual. I wasn't surprised, but I knew about AIDS and had been told that it was a "homosexual disease." Immediately, I sat down and wrote him a long letter telling him how much I loved him, accepted him and wanted him to be safe. The next time Erwin came to visit he took me to the Poteet Sonic and told me he would answer any questions I had. He was understanding and calmed my fears.

That was the last we spoke of his homosexuality for a long time. I never thought of him as "gay," he was just

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Columnist



Uncle Erwin. He was there to put his arms around me and tell me I was beautiful and loved during those awkward preteen years. I went to visit him in New York and he showed me Broadway, the Hard Rock Cafe, and took me out to Sardi's. He flew into town and gave me a blue-and-red book bag and gave my mom a paper jacket — the latest rage in fashion clothing. He was hip, cool and kind, my ultimate hero.

Old and young, homosexual and heterosexual, men and women, AIDS is claiming its victims every day. And some of those victims will be people you love.

We discovered Erwin had AIDS in 1986 when he went to the hospital for a case of pneumonia and tested positive.

My uncle suffered greatly over the next four years, but he did not allow his disease to control him. In 1987 he met his companion, David, who stayed by his side until his death. Erwin also worked

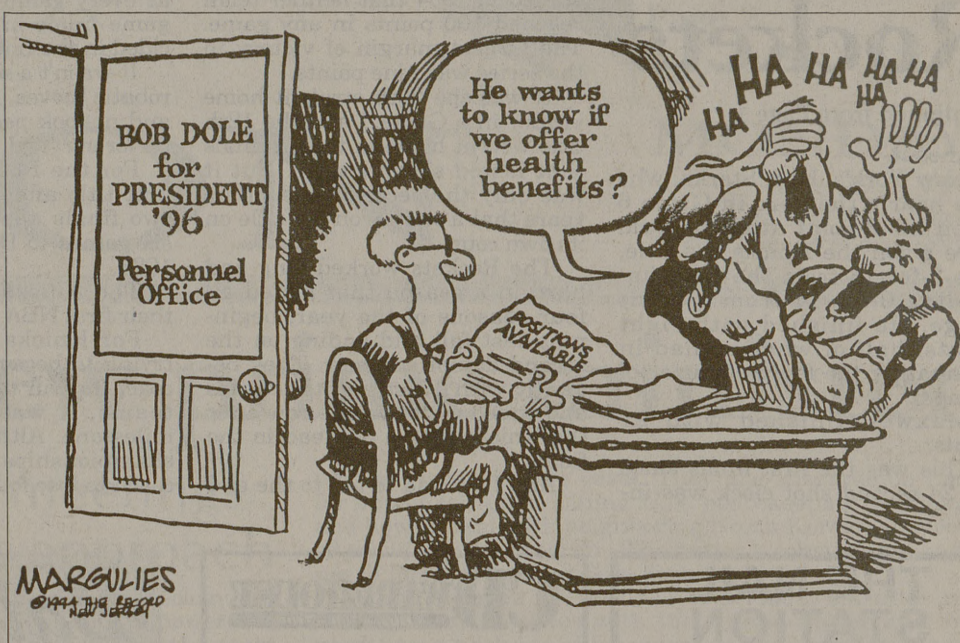
as long as possible, hating to be idle. David said the most incredible thing about him was how he never dwelled on the disease. AIDS-related pneumonia put Erwin in the hospital for the first time in 1988, and from then until his death he was in intense pain. Instead of allowing it to paralyze him, my uncle traveled and lived a full life up to the day he could not walk any more. He went into the hospital for the final time in July, 1990. He died on November 20, 1990 at the age of 46, surrounded by friends and family and at peace with himself. That weekend I flew to New York with my family, and we spent a weekend paying homage to a great man. We sang "Amazing Grace" at his funeral and asked David to scatter Erwin's ashes in three places: the Hudson River, over Mexico, and in Poteet.

My memories of Uncle Erwin extend far beyond the little heart-shaped frame that contains a photo of us in New York City. My uncle is more than a statistic adding to the list of good people ravaged by a disease that we now know does not discriminate. Old and young, homosexual and heterosexual, men and women, AIDS is claiming its victims every day. And some of those victims will be people you love.

For those like my Uncle Erwin who have died, for those currently suffering and for those future victims of this always-deadly disease, I urge everyone to support more AIDS research funding.

Whether you like it or not, and no matter who you are, AIDS will touch your life.

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EDITORIAL

SIMPSON ABOVE LAW

Police unfairly mold justice to fit 'celebrity'

Last Friday is a day everyone in America will long remember. O.J. Simpson, a national icon and prime suspect in a double homicide investigation, fled from the Los Angeles police like a common criminal on the run. While an entire country gawked in disbelief at the televised spectacle, a group of squad cars followed Simpson in an orderly fashion to his home. Over 300 spectators stood outside in the street and cheered the former football star.

Unfortunately, murders and getaways occur all too often in the United States, but the justice system does its best to ensure the perpetrators are handled according to precedent and the law. Simpson's case, however, is being treated like a celebrity wedding rather than a brutal slaying. Millions of dollars will be exchanged as tabloids and lawyers work to exploit this man and his family in a sickening public display; a display not unlike the Patti Hearst kidnapping and the Lindbergh baby tragedy.

It will be next to impossible for Simpson to receive a fair trial after such publicity and declarations of celebrity affection from the public. The death penalty would ordinarily be given in a case like this one, but even if Simpson is found guilty, his popularity and hero status

may prevent such justice from taking place. This bias is precisely what the American legal system is designed to prevent. No one should be above the law.

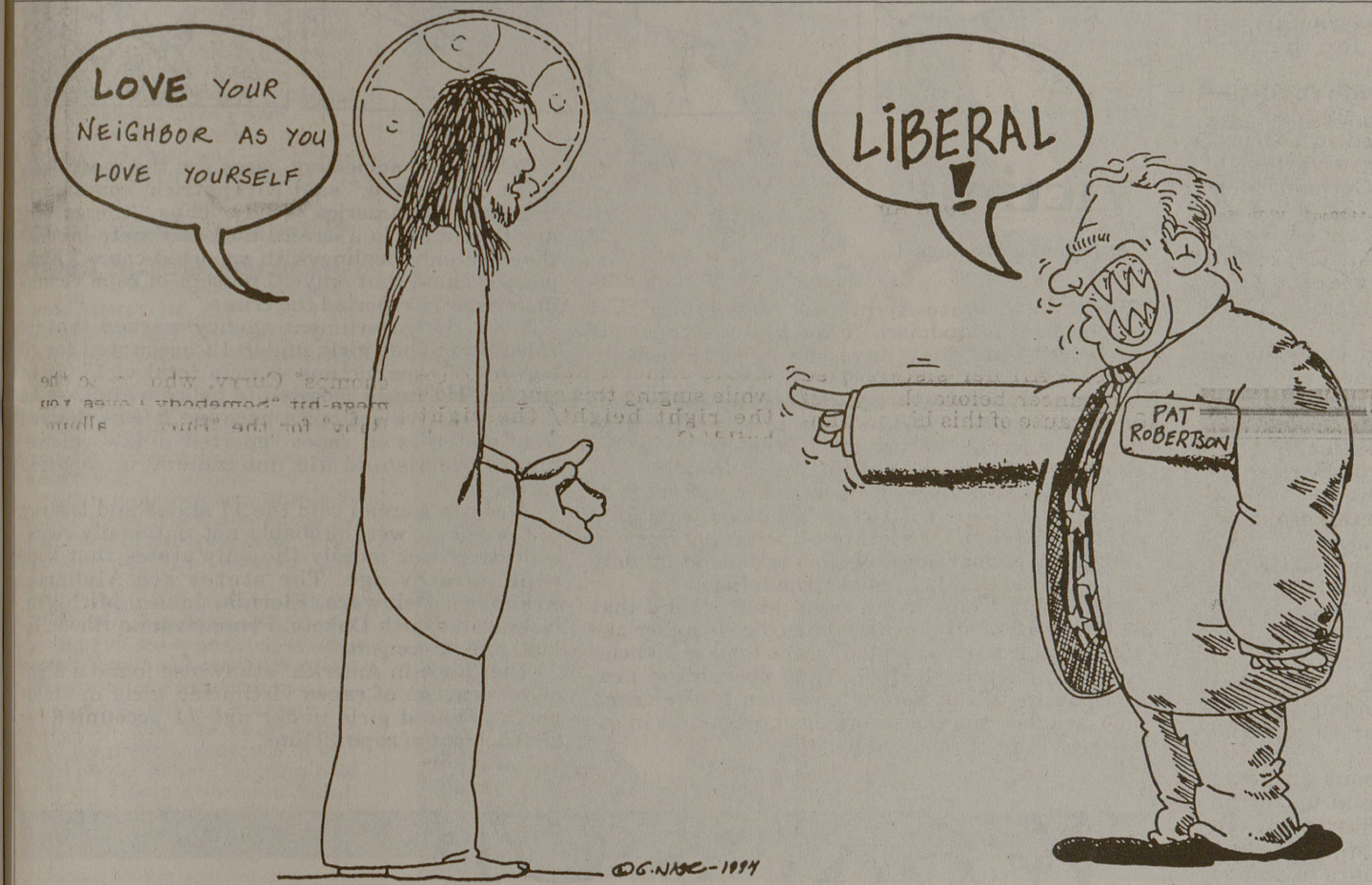
There has already been a terrible injustice done to the public in the special treatment of Simpson. Any non-celebrity would have been apprehended succinctly by the police for such a blatant getaway attempt. In addition, there will undoubtedly be unfair treatment of Simpson as well, because of the media sensationalism and paparazzi-hounding his children and family are likely to suffer as a result of the ensuing trial and verdict.

The cost of legal defense, will not only take all opportunities to devour every cent they can from Simpson's fortune, but will also use such a high-profile case to springboard the careers of everyone involved in the upcoming trial. Los Angeles district attorney Gil Garcetti is already becoming a high-profile figure. Defense lawyers will be on their way to great riches, regardless of the verdict.

The families of Simpson, his ex-wife and her friend Ronald Goldman all know how unfair life can be. It is sad and terrifying for the rest of us to see justice take the same route.



O.J. Simpson



GQ Brooks-bashing reveals ineptitude of fashionable music

"Some people approach every problem with an open mouth." — Adlai Stevenson

Integrity rarely stands a chance in the face of mediocrity's appeal. So it is that we are cursed with [Garth] Brooks and the artistic eunuchs stampeding after him in hopes of cashing in on his success.

If one was Garth Brooks, then's fighting words from GQ magazine's Country and Western guru, John Schulian. Here's more:

"[Brooks] is country music for people who hate country music. That's all Garth Brooks has ever made — his Oklahoma roots notwithstanding — and it is all he will ever make," Schulian cries.

"How else do you think he sells such an obscene amount of albums?"

So this is about money, fan appeal ... and Brooks' girth.

"Onstage, Brooks is equally lamentable, gloomphing ... with that Doughboy body of his ... The only thing I find the least bit appealing about Brooks is that he isn't pretty."

One can sympathize with Hunter S. Thompson, the infamous "Gonzo" journalist of Rolling Stone magazine, when he parted company with Rolling Stone. He blasted the publication for becoming "a

WILLIAM HARRISON

Guest Columnist



fashion magazine," a journal of no lasting relevance.

This column isn't a shot at defending Brooks. For those who care less about him or country music, Schulian's commentary is still

basely offensive tripe. He makes no mention of Brooks' lyrics, music or personality. Instead he leans on his imbedded first impressions that seem the best to trust, but which are the worst bases of criticism.

In GQ, the epitome of American fashion, Schulian follows true to Thompson's condemnation, and from the mentioned quotes and others, reveals the sorry state of the music industry and its "critics."

Schulian wonders why his personal country music deities — Waylon Jennings, Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard — have been shelved in favor of a younger generation. He offers no possible explanations; only bemoaning "the face of mediocrity's mass appeal."

Yet, it's a safe bet that back 40, 50 years — or in the Cretaceous period — when Haggard, Cash and Jennings hit the scene as rising country stars, some critic wrote similar condemnations of them.

Rolling Stone never gave a good review to any of Led Zeppelin's albums. Why? Too mainstream, then. Now they are legendary. Critics never appreciated the music of guitarist Eric Clapton until his body of work became too large to nit-pick.

But here's where Schulian gets the goat: "[Brooks] panders to an audience corrupted by childhoods spent listening to Rush and Foreigner, the very same bilge he grew up on himself."

Admittedly, what the article really accomplished was to goad the ire and pen of this Rush fan.

"Begin the day with a friendly voice, a companion unobtrusive ... — 'The Spirit of Radio'"

Twelve years ago, a disaffected kid at summer camp passed time with friends and a tape recorder in a canvas tent. Those lyrics meant more to him than the beginning of his favorite song by his new-found favorite band.

But as he learned later, they didn't mean much to others — to others he was "corrupted."

Rush didn't bite bats' heads off on stage, take a whiz on the Alamo, wear makeup, get drunk or overdose on vodka or cocaine. What kind of a rock group is that?

They just didn't have what it took to be idolized as a heavy metal band by rabid metalheads and critics. Except they kept touring, making music,

gaining a large following and, lo-and-behold, are still around after 24 years. It outlasted critics and more-favored "darling" groups, which appeal only to critics, tending to last about 24 months.

But what should Rush mean to Garth Brooks, arguably the most popular entertainer in the country? That it's the music first, and everything else second. In the cheap, sleazy world of modern music, a band or person can last and work on its own terms — and if anybody doesn't like it, tough.

The standard axiom for good music is that it must comfort the afflicted or afflict the comfortable. Critics, however, degrade themselves solely into affliction — unfortunately, not only unto themselves.

The Murphy's Law axiom, as applied to music, says 90 percent of everything is crap, and one man's mediocrity is another man's triple-platinum album.

As for Schulian, the Law should include 100 percent of his senseless article.

The only thing Schulian reveals is a showcase of himself as an idiot, smacking of envy and musical senility, since he can offer no real appraisal of Brooks' quality of music — only his own bias.

Instead of senselessly blasting someone else, Mr. Schulian — "heal thyself."

William Harrison is a journalism teacher's certification student



Christian message goes beyond 'social justice'

I read with great interest Julia Stavenhagen's opinion column (Christianity and Buddhism Offer Similar Message) in the June 14 Batt. It is not

often that spiritual matters are discussed so openly in a public forum, and as a Christian, the headlines always grab my eye. Also a great supporter of spiritual dialogue, I admire Stavenhagen's boldness in broaching philosophical and religious issues. Because of my faith in Christ, I believe that all truth is either found in him or is a mere reflection of his ultimate truth. So in this sense, I can agree with Stavenhagen that Buddhism and Christianity share some similarities. Too many of us who claim to be Christ's followers ignore his messages about compassion, forgiveness, and humility.

However, it is at this point where

we diverge. I would assert that Jesus's message here on earth was not primarily one of social justice. In fact, the rewards he promised to the poor in spirit, the meek and those who mourn were not to be realized until heaven. Jesus's message was simple: He and the Father are one (John 10:30). Even a casual flip through the gospels reveals that the controversy Jesus inspired was not from his messages of compassion and love, but from his miracles and claims of deity. By far the bulk of the gospels are devoted to Jesus's claims to be God's own son. The pharisees plotted Jesus's death not because he summed up the law and the prophets with the Golden Rule, but be-

cause in their eyes he had committed grave blasphemy. This man probably would not be concerned primarily with sensitivity training or civic responsibility. Even if one subscribes to the theory that Bible translators have altered many of Jesus's teachings, it must be admitted that his scandalous nature was about who he claimed to be, not about his philosophy.

This is the error I see us falling into too easily. In our effort to seek relationships and bridges, we can lose the very essence of the debate. We cannot accept that Jesus was simply a moral teacher, because on that count alone he would probably fall miserably short. He either lied about who he was

or he is the very son of God he claimed to be.

I do not doubt that some tenets of Buddhism are similar to Christianity, but to say that their messages are basically the same ignores the radical claims of Jesus.

Corey Walls Class of '92

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