

# Biker mama crashes into reality

## Motorcycling class turns into endurance test of self-confidence, willpower

This weekend I was transformed from a staid nerd to a wild and carefree motorcycle mama. After riding on the back of a motorcycle for 10 minutes with a friend about two weeks ago, I decided the future held me driving a road hog. The only problem with this grand plan was that I have a hard time keeping my balance while walking on flat, smooth concrete, so the mental picture of me on a motorcycle was somewhat hard to focus. Nevertheless, I gamely signed up for a weekend-long course to learn how to live my dream.

Saturday morning I drove to the worst part of San Antonio, up to a decrepit row of buildings, past a liquor store with the windows barred and a "nightclub" with bullet holes in the walls. Last in this confidence-building sequence was a small room with one door and a temporary sign placed on the ground outside that read, "Motorcycle Training."

I walked into the room and — thankfultly — seven other very normal people were sitting around the sparsely furnished room. We spent the first part of the morning in this classroom, then we went to the road course.

The instructor quickly and subtly showed me in the direction of the oldest, most scratched-up motorcycle on the lot. In one short hour I learned to successfully walk my bike in neutral across the parking lot without killing the engine. I could tell already that I was not destined to be a valetictorian of this class.

The rest of the day was remarkably uneventful, except for one tiny spin-out

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Columnist



and loss of control in our last exercise of the day. I merely revved the engine too high while popping the clutch. The motorcycle overreacted, in my opinion. What exacerbated the problem was that I am used to riding a bicycle and so my first instinct is to throw my feet down to stop all movement. This idea doesn't work well on a motorcycle, and I am not sure when my big toe will be its original color again.

After I arrived on day two my self-doubt was reinforced when my instructor saw me and immediately yelled to his partner, "Hey, I owe you lunch. She DID come back!" The worst part is that they were serious. They really had bet on whether I would brave the second day of hell ... I mean instruction. My confidence plummeted, but I resolved to tough it out. From that point on the class and instructors "adopted" me. They teased me, supported my painful endeavors and told Aggie jokes until I couldn't help but laugh.

By the end of the day, I was feeling sunburned and sweaty, but also very confident in my ability to pass the skill test. Big mistake. BIG mistake.

I passed the first test, accelerating

around a curve very well, though I was 0.3 seconds too slow. Then came the "quick-braking" test. The first time I attempted it I stopped very quickly, but I began braking before I was supposed to, so they told me to try again. I devised a clever plan to stare at the ground so when I drove over the white line I would know to begin braking.

I accelerated and shifted into second, then began staring intently at the ground. As soon as I saw the line I completely panicked. I slammed my foot into the rear brake and grabbed the front brake simultaneously. I sure stopped quickly, but the instructors told me it didn't count if I used my body on the concrete to stop myself.

Luckily, I was no worse for the wear, though my new boots were looking decidedly broken-in. In the end, I did well enough on the other tests that they allowed me to count the first go on the quick-stop test and just took points off for starting to brake early. By the skin of my teeth, I passed the test and now am considered a relatively able motorcycle driver by the state of Texas, though my expertise is certainly still questionable.

I learned a great deal, and the experience was definitely worth it — whether I end up buying motorcycle or not. I also know that the people in my class were very relieved that I would be riding in a city far away from them. Too bad for ya'll, I guess.

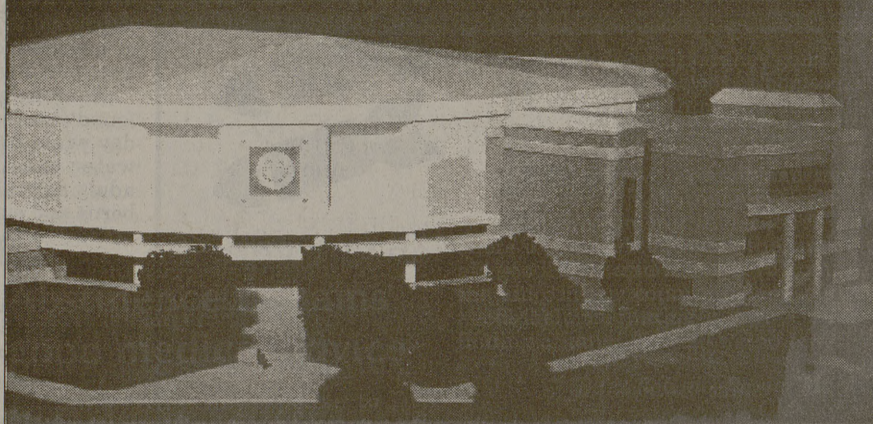
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## EDITORIAL



## A SPECIAL EVENT

### Center will provide long-needed facility

It took long enough, but finally something is being done about Texas A&M's lack of adequate space for indoor athletics, conventions, entertainment and ceremonies. Friday, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board finally gave its approval for a \$33.4 million special events center.

This center will provide more than just another basketball court. By being able to accommodate 10,500 to 12,500 people for the events held in the facility, Aggieland may be able to properly receive actual "special" events. Most schools which the University's athletic teams compete against have this kind of center. Now it is A&M's turn to enjoy a new home court.

What is so unfortunate is how long it took the coordinating board to make this decision. Texas A&M is continually expanding, pulling in more and more of the state's student population. Its campus facilities need concurrent renovation and expansion, like library improvements, new residence halls, MSC additions and this special events center.

How many Aggie students have been turned away from the Muster

ceremonies in G. Rollie White Coliseum for the last two years?

Why should students get only six tickets for graduation guests, after spending years working to get there?

Why should basketball fans have to be stuffed in a building no longer suitable for modern sporting events?

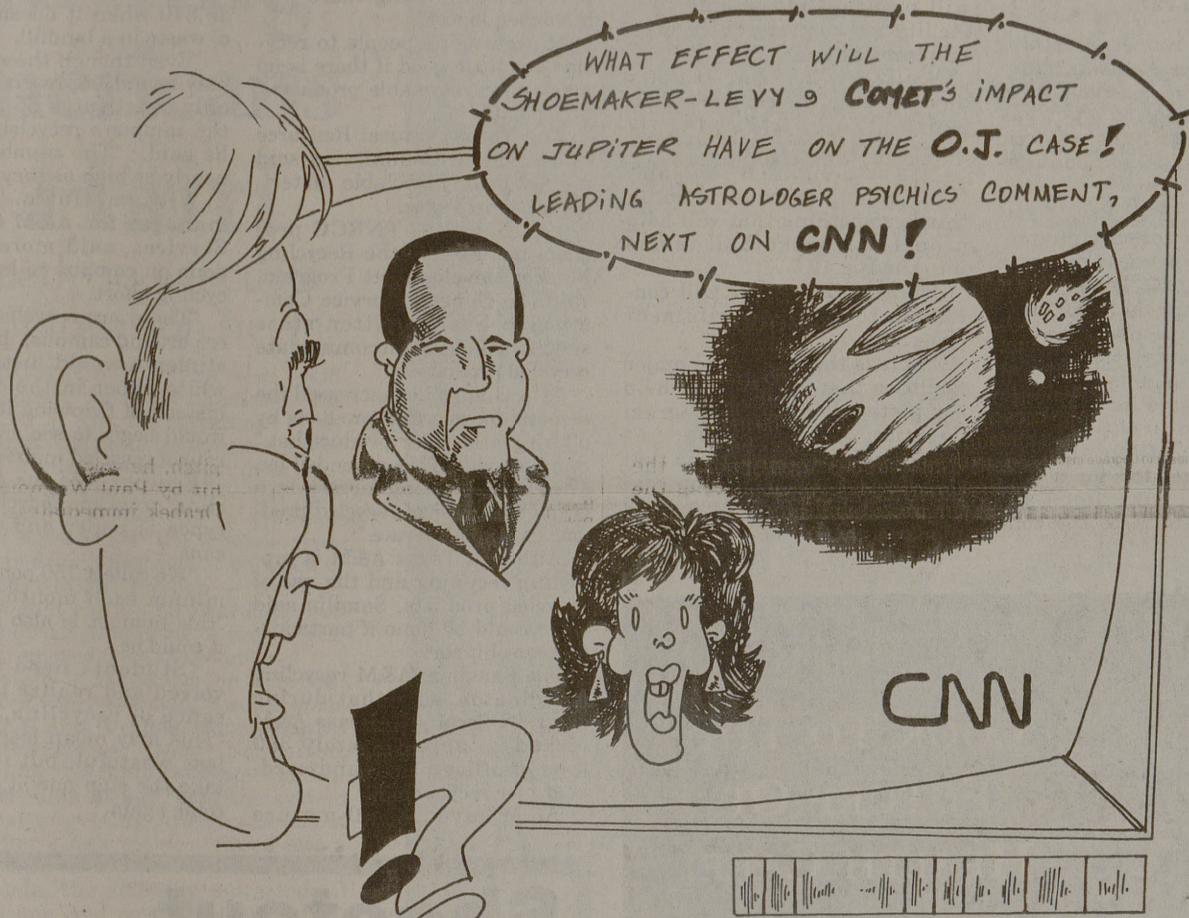
Why should bands, concerts and other cultural events be consistently turned away because Aggieland had no coliseum that could support them?

Besides being the second-largest university in Texas, a nationally prominent sports institution and top research school, what more should we have done to impress the coordinating board of our needs?

Most current students will have graduated by the time the center opens. But, for the sake of future Aggies and alumni activities, the entire A&M community can look forward to watching and participating in events the center will house.

Aggies should remember, the next time they vote for state officials, that many bureaucrats and appointees ignored this issue as long as they could.

Maybe the Aggies can return the "favor" at the polls.



## Social work supports 'community'

### Local welfare programs care for people who can't care for themselves

The job was meant to last three days, a temporary thing. I was filling in for a receptionist/secretary in my county's Social Services department. Apparently something weird in the air conditioning was making her sick (another story entirely), but after three days she still wasn't well and had to be relocated to a different office in the building. They kept me on for another week, then another ... and I ended up working there for nearly six weeks.

Though the bulk of my job was answering phones and typing memos, I also authorized payments, worked fairly closely with professionals who provide care for developmentally disabled people and became acquainted with the social workers. Since both of my roommates are considering careers in social work, I thought I ought to take good notes and I asked numerous questions. These social workers became friends with the clients and their families.

The Developmentally Disabled Unit works with mentally- and physically-handicapped clients, many of whom have severe health problems that require round-the-clock care. While some have parents who can take care of them, the clients who are not so fortunate live in foster homes.

Those with vocational skills hold down jobs in the community, but their wages can't pay for full-time foster care. Some even have been abandoned. No one will provide for them except the government. Their medical costs sometimes run as high as \$75,000 per year. Average people can't afford to pay these expenses. Without federal, state and county funds, many of these patients would be destitute or dead.

At first, I was rather taken aback by the exorbitant costs of caring for the disabled. It seemed a heavy burden for the county to bear. I must admit that I wondered if it was worth all the money, yet this question remained: who else could pay?

Working at the Social Services office opened my eyes. I was impressed by the smaller community they formed within our county, a collection of parents and children, foster-care providers, social workers and others who cared for some citizens who could not care for themselves.

One poignant phone call came from a mother who has cared for her 40-year-old mentally-disabled son his entire life. Apparently, every other weekend she and her husband get away and leave their son in a foster home, which had been closed for the summer. She was panicking.

"I need those four days a month," she told me, "Can you

ERIN HILL

Columnist



please help me find someone else to help us?"

This woman's selflessness was touching. All she wanted was four days to herself. The rest of the time she willingly gave to her son.

Did she ask to spend her life caring for a son who could not enjoy all of the dreams she held for him? Of course not, but she performed her duty with courage.

This woman is not the only one who gives so much. She is one part of a community which forms part of the larger one to which I belong. I also have some responsibility to help care for the disadvantaged.

With all the talk of welfare reform, it is easy to get caught up in the hysteria of cutting back social services. People fear fraud at every turn and believe that wise government spending is an impossibility.

I saw firsthand both the need and the wise implementation of government funds. That money is not always wasted, as some might think.

The difference between one county office and the entire federal government is certain. Bureaucracies always work better on a smaller scale.

But, ideally, these successes could work on the national level; our nation could start forming self-sufficient communities that provide for one another. We don't need new communities, just better ones.

Margaret Atwood said, "The United States has promoted individualism so much that the responsibilities of giving to a community have been trampled by rampant individualism."

Could she be right? Are we so caught up with ourselves that we neglect or resent having to help other people in our community? I think so.

I did not leave the job with the attitude that unlimited welfare is a good idea. I still can't answer the question of how much is too much when it comes to government spending. But for six weeks I was witness to something pretty terrific. A small community that worked together with the monetary support of the government to help care for people. That's all. It probably can't work everywhere, but we could try.

And with more community support and caring, individuals could be less reliant on the government.

Erin Hill is a senior English major

## Abstinence remains good medical advice

I am writing in response to Dr. Richard Shafer's July 12 letter concerning Dr. Kenneth Dirks of student health services and his birth control recommendation. At last check, abstinence was the only 100-percent effective means of birth control or transmission of sexually transmitted disease. His advice is not paternalistic or moralistic, but rather good medical advice. It sounds as if Dr. Shafer may have a more political agenda.

Ed Marcinkiewicz  
Class of '85  
Athletic Department

## Find cure, not blame, for national AIDS crisis

I am writing in response to Susie Carter's July 13 letter. I'm sure Carter has acquired a wonderful and meaningful education. Microbiology is a very fascinating subject. She is probably working on a brilliant and promising career. However, it is a shame that she has allowed her personal prejudices to blind her to what she should really be focusing on — finding a cure for a disease that is killing people and dividing our nation.

As a scientist, she knows as well as I do that AIDS claims many lives each year. She should very well know that not everyone with AIDS is homosexual or engages and practices homosexual activities. In fact, the knowledge she possesses can, with other scientists, help save lives.

I know that homosexuals have managed to enter our universities and our military forces. For those that have managed to enter the military, I pray that God protect them and watch over them as they help protect and watch over the freedom we so much enjoy. For those that have entered the universities, I pray that they will be able to assist society and contribute to society's

needs with the education they gain.

As a Catholic, I know that homosexuality is wrong and I think that many individuals (regardless of race, religion, beliefs, etc.) feel the same way. However, as humans, we are not and never will be the final judge and jury.

With that in mind, I return the quote to Carter's: "Now is the time for all good men and women to come to the aid of their country." Our country needs help in finding a cure — not in finding a fault.

Buzz Refugio, former Marine  
Class of '95

## Flag deserves respect, needs special attention

When I was driving by the Administration Building at around 8:45 a.m. on July 10, I saw something that at first I could not believe. Upon closer inspection I realized that the American flag had been hoisted up the flagpole upside-down. As soon as I reached a telephone, I informed the University Police Department and they quickly dispatched someone to correct their mistake. I would hope and assume the people who put up the flags had no intention of the American flag being upside-down and inadvertently signaling that the United States was in a state of distress. However, I am extremely disappointed with the UPD because of their carelessness.

I later discovered that the task of taking down the flags in front of that building and the Academic building would be turned over to a group of students as of July 12 so that the flags do not remain up and unlighted after dusk. The UPD will continue to raise the flags in the mornings.

My comment to all involved is that we as Americans should pay special attention to detail when dealing with our country's flag to ensure that the type of disrespect that occurred does not happen again.

John Pickett  
Class of '94

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