

It's OK not to want children

Couples who have kids take on unenviable responsibilities

Dear Mom and Dad:

I hate you because you won't buy me the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.

— Jeffrey

JULIA STAVENHAGEN

Columnist



This is an actual letter written in a kindergarten class from a disgruntled child whom I know. Mary and Joel, Jeffrey's parents, had him with every intention of raising him to be a thoughtful, productive and selfless member of American society. "This letter is a good start," they say sarcastically. They hope he will grow up to carry their family name through the generations and bring meaning to the sacrifices they've made. Good luck.

People in America love children. The society is obsessed with them. The fashion industry has placed grown women in "baby-doll" dresses. "The Lion King" drew more adults into its audience than children. Doubtless, the children were renting "Terminator 2" while their parents went to view Disney's version of childhood innocence. Every other commercial features The Happy Couple with The New Baby. Children's toys litter every vista in America. Birth control and abortion are such hot issues because most Americans refuse to believe that someone actually might not want children.

Reality check. The world's population of 5.6 billion is set to double in 40 years, according to the Population Institute in Washington, D.C. Although most of this growth will occur in poorer countries, the damage per capita to the environment is greater in America. "A child born in the U.S. today will consume 10 million more gallons of water and use five times more energy than a child born in the developing world," says the Institute. Doubtless, each child will have to have a Disney-licensed Lion King float for his 10 million gallons of water and will not use his five times more energy unless it goes through a Nintendo or a big screen color TV.

Many parents have children so that someone will take care of them when they get old. Scientific studies, as well as informal polling of people around me, have shown that kids take money from their parents until the event of their death, and even after, if the will is in order. The kids then spend that money to put the parents in a nursing home. Can you see your mom or dad living in your house in 20 years?

Another concern raised by people with children is the issue of immortality — carrying on the family name. There are other ways to leave your mark on the world besides adding another mouth for it to feed. Perhaps one of the most selfless is to defy the "natural" urge to have children and leave that much more space on the planet for the existence of a tree or natural landmark that will outlast us all. In place of a child, I would like a redwood spared from the expansion of a trailer park, or 10 million gallons of water to continue coursing through the majestic Grand Canyon instead of into a urinal in Colorado. I would much rather my family name be connected to an operating water treatment plant than a child struggling to find a place in the wilderness to get away.

The choice to be childless is not one of selfishness or oversight. People think that couples who don't have children just want to vacation all the time and spend all their money on themselves. This myth is unsubstantiated. What is really selfish is having a child whom you and the environment cannot afford to support. A child neglected or stuffed into overcrowded schools — or prisons — is a miserable thing.

A support group called Childless by Choice and another group called the ChildFree Network have been started nationwide in an attempt to defeat the negative stereotypes that childless couples must overcome. Census figures from 1992 estimate 13 percent of married couples chose not to have children. I hope this figure will increase.

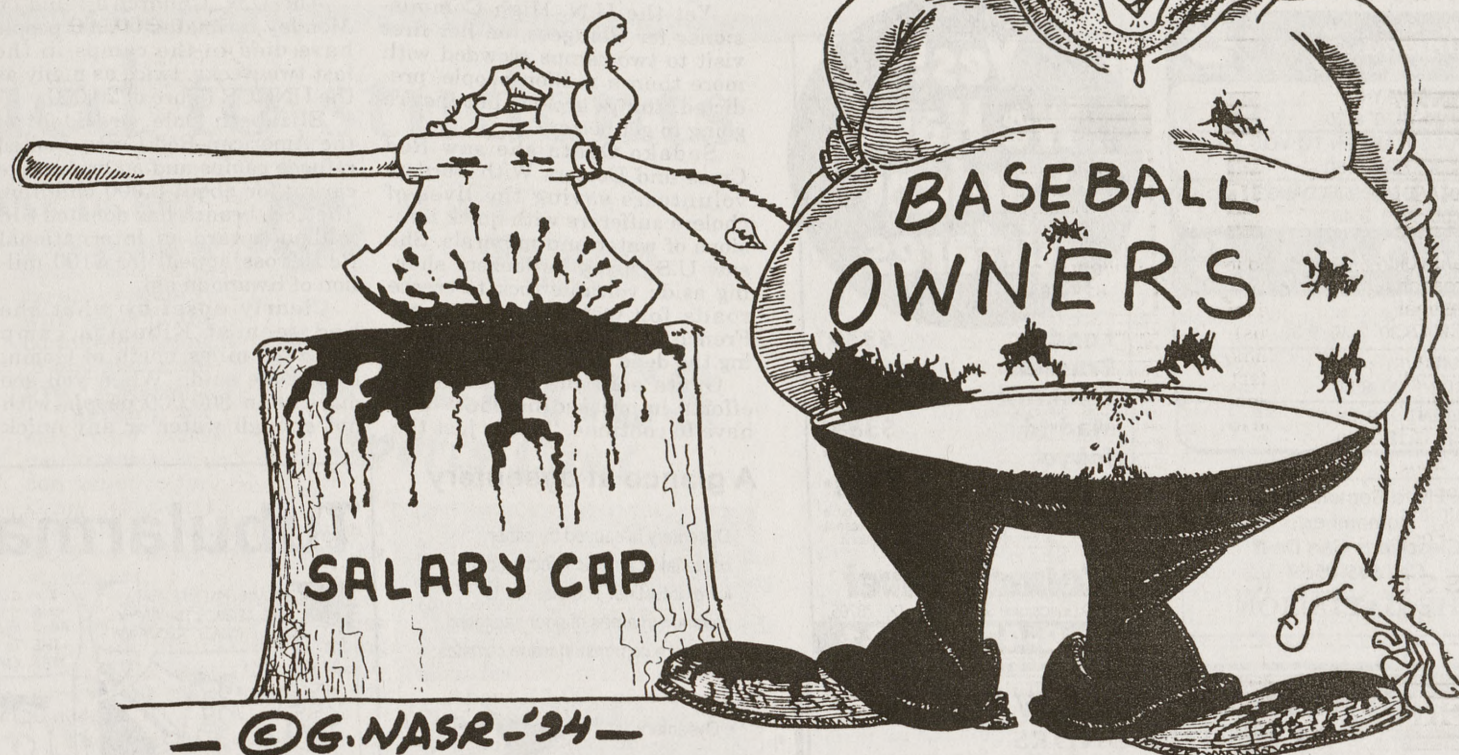
It isn't that I dislike children. My best friend chose to have a child whom I adore. I fear for him, though. What will the world be like in another generation, when he is my age? Every day in my world someone's child is shot, burned, abused or abducted. This happens too often to justify having a child in whom I would invest thousands of dollars and 20 years of time. In fact, it's because I love children that I probably will not have any. To subject another human to the horrors of this world is more than I could bear.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Sloan:

I deeply regret to inform you that your son John was killed in a gang-related shooting downtown ...

This is an excerpt from a real letter. Also a reason to pay attention to the children we have, rather than make more we cannot manage.

Julia Stavenhagen is a graduate anthropology student



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EDITORIAL

STRIKE, NO BALLGAME

Players, owners sacrifice sport's spirit

The deadline for the eighth baseball players strike in 22 years has been set for August 12. Fans throughout the country fear the possible consequences of the arbitrators' petulance.

The looming walkout is like a drive-by shooting. The club owners are driving the car and the players are pulling the trigger, but the bystander getting hit by the bullets is the game of baseball. Those who love the game are the unfortunate witnesses who have to helplessly stand by and watch the crime. The wounds are a scourge on the game of baseball and the scars show that the players and owners ignore the true meaning of the game.

Instead, they focus on an aspect that should not be so important — money. The main issues they are trying to resolve are a proposed salary cap, which the players will not accept nor negotiate, and salary arbitration, which the owners want eliminated.

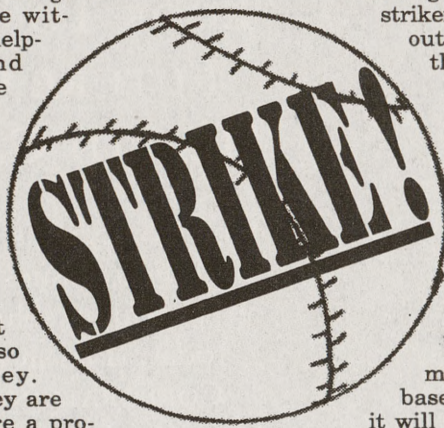
If the two parties in this dispute cannot work out their differences, the greatest season in a generation will be destroyed. Players such as Ken Griffey, Jeff Bagwell, Frank Thomas and Chuck

Knoblauch will miss out on once-in-a-career chances of breaking longstanding records. Fans will miss the opportunity to cheer on these highly talented players. Everyone loses out.

The fans need to remind players and owners of the real spirit of baseball by taking action. Fans should boycott games until the disputes are settled. Pay no attention to the strike at all and encourage media blackouts of strikers if the players walk out. The bottom line is that the players' and owners' fighting, ignores those who really pay for everything.

It is the fans who pay for the tickets and merchandise that generates the money for those multi-million dollar contracts. It is the fans who make the business of baseball profitable. And, it will be the fans who will ultimately lose if there's a strike.

The players and owners are fighting like children in a sandbox over who gets to play with the shovel. Both sides have legitimate complaints over issues that need to be resolved, but are unrealistic about the game. They do not know the true purpose of professional baseball — fostering the spirit of competition.



Experience inspires words of wisdom

As graduation looms, senior writes guide for making choices in college

I have been on the Texas A&M roller coaster since the fall of 1989 and it's been one hell of a ride. It might have been smoother had I done what I was told, and put on my seat belt and not stood up while the car was moving ...

CHRIS S. COBB

Columnist



Now that my graduation is approaching and the roller coaster will soon coast to a stop, I thought it was time to pass on some expert wisdom that I have collected while going to A&M.

I know there are many incoming students here with their parents for freshman conferences. During this time, one of the things the new students must do is choose the classes they will take in the fall. I have provided a guide to help in this difficult decision-making process. Also included are tips on making an even more difficult decision — picking a major.

There really isn't that much pressure. Sure, it may affect the rest of your life, but for now, you have four years — or five, or six — before you have to enter the real world. You can decide what to do with the rest of your life two weeks before you graduate, like me. Now that you know I am an expert in the field, here is *The Chris S. Cobb Guide to Choosing Classes and Majors or How to Graduate in only Five-and-a-Half Years*.

Part I — Choosing Classes. As a general rule, never pick classes that end with -istry, -ology, -ics, -ture, or -ing. In most of these, the students have to spend most of their time memorizing factual information. Once you have written this information on tests, be sure to forget it. Some other class is demanding that brain cell space.

Pick classes where there are no facts. An example is English. There are mainly two kinds of professors in this department. The first has their interpretation of the book, poem, etc. and no one else's matters. For this type, it is best to write what the professor wants to read. So, reword what they say in class and turn that in. They'll think you're a genius.

The other kind doesn't really like the work they are teaching, but they had to learn it in college and feel that in order to round out the students' life — or make it hell — they should teach it. This kind of professor is much more fun. When turning in papers for these classes, write the most outlandish interpretation you and your beer can think of. (*The subject of beer is covered in Part III of the guide. — ed.*)

Even if the professor does not agree with what you have to say, you are sure to do well just by being creative. "What the hell," they'll say, "it could've been worse. He could've said the same old stuff like, 'Hamlet was about a Danish prince.' No, Chris said it was about a drug deal gone bad. A+."

When in doubt, get drunk when writing your papers, no matter what kind of professor you have. You'll certainly have much more fun that way. (*Save the beer stuff for Part III, Chris. — ed.*) Oops, sorry.

In summary, don't pick any class where you'll actually have to learn stuff. Pick a class like philosophy — you can argue that the course and professor don't actually exist and then not have to go to class. "What the hell," the professor will say, "at least they're thinking philosophically. I think I exist. Don't I?"

Part II — Now that you know how to choose your classes, it is time to pick your major. This may seem like we are doing this backwards by picking a major second, but we're not. In fact, many college students do this, but if they don't, most change their major four or five times, anyway. This is equivalent to the '70s excuse, "I have to find myself." In choosing a major, students have to find themselves. Most find themselves in a major they don't like, so they look for another major that sounds like it might be fun and will not take too much work.

For example, look in the catalog for Underwater Basket Weaving. The first year concentrates on swimming, scuba and which swimsuit looks best on you. The second year is arts and crafts, like making ashtrays out of twigs. The third combines the first two. The fourth year gets tricky — the focus is skipping class while making the instructor think you really were there. Actually, the goal of the last year Underwater Basket Weaving is the same for all majors. Now that you know how to pick a major, you're all set for your college career.

Part III — Now for the most important thing ... BEER! (*Sorry, Chris, you're out of space. — ed.*)

Chris S. Cobb is a graduating senior English major



MAIL CALL

PC' movement goes too far

OK, now I know that this political correctness movement has gone way too far. When somebody can take exception to a cartoon that is intended for children to enjoy, I know this whole world has gone out of whack. Of course, I am referring to the July 26 article concerning "The Lion King," a movie produced by that evil company Walt Disney. The next thing you know, they'll start saying that cartoon characters should be clothed because "naked" cartoon characters promote nudity. Or that cartoon animals shouldn't be illustrated beating each other over the head because it promotes cruelty to animals.

Now that I've let off some steam, please allow me to be a bit more rational. If we are going to be a country that prides itself for upholding the right to free speech, then we should not be judgmental of a cartoon intended for entertainment. I realize that the argument will be made that such stereotypes as a subservient lioness (hint: that is the way it is in nature) will corrupt our children's way of thinking but, come on — the real problem here is that people are becoming too

sensitive to what we watch and see and insensitive to what is really happening around them. I believe the fact that when a problem in Rwanda gets placed on the back of the newspaper while a whining article about a children's movie gets placed on the front page proves my point indeed.

What we don't need around here is a politically correct producer who is concerned with what people are going to think about their production. If this were the case in the past then blacks might still be repressed and women might still be expected to stay at home and raise the family. Our media, for better or worse is the method by which this country has grown to become as powerful as it has. The media makes people aware of what is going on in the world, it gives them a release from the stresses of life and it makes us aware of where we came from and where we are headed.

So, to all the politically conscious people out there, I say this: stop whining about how you might perceive a movie or a t-shirt or a professor's lecture and start concentrating on how you can make this world a better place for your children. You can start by taking them to watch "The Lion King" and letting them just enjoy a well-produced movie. The fact of the matter is that they are probably too young or, hopefully, too naive to extrapolate such a horrible meaning from the movie as your politically correct (socially ignorant) minds are.

Nick Flynn, Class of '92 Graduate Student

Late night engineers wonder: Who fired that shot?

I would like to further enlighten the gentle Battalion readers about what is on the minds of mechanical engineers at Texas A&M besides the tasty "humpmunch" meal mentioned previously in the July 26 Mail Call.

From another weary researcher, here is the question I wish you to ponder: What the hell is that loud burping-farting noise that can be heard late night around the Petroleum Engineering Building and Harvey R. Bright Building? Is someone performing gastrointestinal experiments with microphones? Is the campus belching?

Even though this letter is in the spirit of former Battalion columnist Stacy Feducia, I really do want an answer!

Monte Williams, Class of '90 Graduate Student
Accompanied by two signatories

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