

You never know what you'll get

Accentuate positive perspective of life's difficulties, experiences

Pessimism is easy. Counting your blessings is what is hard. If this weren't true, then we'd have Thanksgiving 364 days out of the year and save all our gloom up for one day in late November.

MICHAEL LANDAUER
Columnist

I'm glad we have so many days to deal with our problems, but maybe we should start making more days to think of how good we have it, too.

After all, no one knows when something will come along to make everything else seem trivial.

A friend recently called me and asked if he could stop by. Just from the sound of his voice I knew what he was coming over to talk about: his older brother who had AIDS had died.

He had been fighting for his life for over a year. His doctors told him that he would be dead by his birthday, but he turned 28 several months ago. They had given him another six months, but he couldn't wait. Although too weak to open envelopes on some days, he got a burst of energy, and had someone drive him to a park near where he grew up. It was there that he had played with my friend as a child and it was there that his battle with AIDS ended.

He shot himself. We both sat there shaking our heads. How do we react to a disease that takes every ounce of strength away from people, reduces them to nothing and still expects them to prefer life to death? There was nothing to say.

Soon we started talking about how much worse it could have been. This is hard to imagine at first, but it really could have been worse. My friend had the chance to tell his brother how much he loved him several times in the past year. His brother knew he loved him when he gave him an extra-long hug to say goodbye on his last night alive.

If his brother had died in some random act of violence, then my friend wouldn't have had these opportunities. He may never have found out his brother was homosexual. He may have never confronted the whole new set of feelings he encountered as he disagreed with his brother's lifestyle. But he never questioned his love for his brother.

Times have been hard for my friend, but it has made him a better person. His brother ended a long, painful experience, not just for himself, but for all those who loved him. And for that, my friend can be thankful.

In the movie "Forrest Gump," Mrs. Gump teaches her son that "life is like a box of chocolates - you never know what you're gonna get." My friend's box of chocolates is not easy to swallow right now, but that hasn't stopped him from looking for the good in his situation. He said it's easier to look at how good he has it, and he's probably right. Maybe we should adopt this policy with our everyday problems.

Everyone has their trials in life. Baseball players think they have been genuinely wronged by their clubs' owners. Rwandans wonder where they will get their next meal. Teenage girls worry that they'll look fat in their new formal dress. These problems, both big and small in the grand scheme of things, always seem huge in one person's life. Although it may not be the worst thing that is going on in the world, it may be the biggest problem in our own world.

Comparing our problems to others' difficulties is a waste of time.

No one should ever say, "Well, I just got kicked out of school, my parents are getting a divorce, my dad lost his job and my heroine addiction is only getting worse, but I shouldn't get upset since I'm not starving in Rwanda."

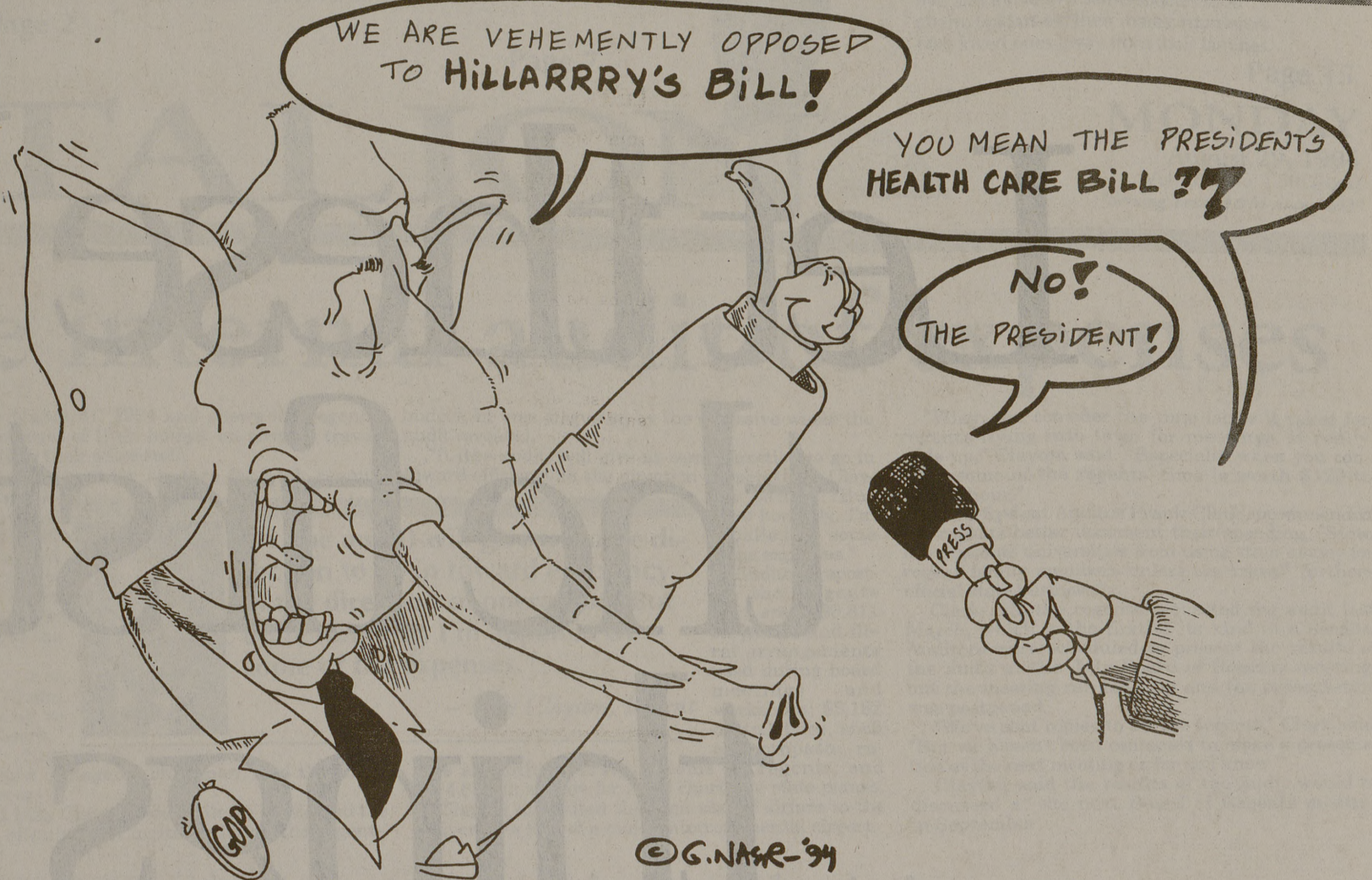
We don't have to be fanatical when putting things into perspective. We shouldn't block out emotions because we feel like our situation does not merit having feelings.

When bad things happen to us, we don't have to pretend that a bad situation is a good one. Unless we're masochists we're still going to feel the pain in our lives.

Still, when it all seems to be crashing in, try to find the good in a situation. Even in the worst catastrophes, people become strong enough to see things in a way that makes any problem bearable.

We all have crosses to bear. And although his is a bigger burden right now, I know my friend wouldn't trade his for any other.

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EDITORIAL

FRESHMAN CHALLENGE

'Responsibility' brings up many questions

Freshmen hitting the college books for the first time this fall will probably discover they have many questions about life here in Aggieland. The biggest ones usually concern that most frightening concept: responsibility.

Taking care of every little thing in college life can be a daunting prospect, and Texas A&M is not an easy place to figure out.

Students should know three places to go:
The Pavilion - you can take care of fee payments, registration problems, ID cards and eating lunch while you're there.
Heaton Hall - issues your transcript, works with transferring your credit hours from other colleges and eventually processes your degree application.
Your academic adviser's office - this individual can almost always find out what happened to get you into some mess and what it will take to get you out of it.

The important thing to remember is that nobody is going to trek over to these offices for you, and there won't be someone reminding you to take care of the endless "little things."

Those little things plague everyone. The easiest way to manage them all is by following the advice from freshman orientation and making a list of places and people you need to see.

It takes a while to remember that your credit card bill payment won't mail itself, and your parents might call missing persons if you take off for the weekend and don't tell anyone where you're going.

Everyone here has gone through the same process of adjustment. That doesn't make them sympathetic, but it might help relieve some embarrassment when you have to cancel a date because your car got towed out of a reserved lot.

Just don't forget - if you don't take care of it, no one will.

Class of '98

Texas A&M should take pride in its hospitality

Before leaving the A&M campus after five weeks of study on an NEH grant, I would like to express my appreciation for the kindness I have encountered from staff and students here. From professors to food service to dorm service to library to swimming pool, everyone has been courteous and willing to help. It is pleasant to be greeted with "Howdy" by passing students. I find the same note of hospitality even in the posted notices about rules to be observed. There is a positive spirit about the school you should be proud of. Perhaps civility is a more important thing to learn than, say, civil engineering.

As for The Battalion, it was a helpful window onto the local and national scene for someone who had little time for anything but study.

Keep up the good spirit.
Rev. Laurence Kriegshausler, English teacher
St. Louis, MO

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Education remains best prevention

Teaching children about sex now will help them make safe choices

Lately I've been reading in The Battalion the different opinions on abortion. It seems nobody wants to talk about the best pregnancy prevention method: knowledge. I mean sex education.

KIMBERLY NEVILLE

Guest Columnist

This topic raises a variety of intense opinions. Everyone knows that if you come out and openly discuss sex, children will rush out and experiment wildly. Naturally, it is better to keep silent about it, and just wait until your 13-year-old daughter is four months pregnant, or your 17-year-old son is the father of three children.

So when is the RIGHT time? 15? 13? 12? Seven? Do kids need to know the facts when they pass into the realm of puberty? Is the time right when they first ask, "Why are boys and girls different?" You can't answer them with a blunt "boys have penises and girls have vaginas," without raising HUNDREDS of curious questions. Do you leave it up to the school, church or cable television to teach your children the facts of life?

Many parents feel awkward talking to their children about sex. They don't want to realize their sweet, innocent babies are growing up and need to know enough information to make sexual decisions maturely.

Children are incredibly uncomfortable when they have the infamous birds and bees talk with their parents. I know people who believe firmly that the stork dropped them down the chimney. It's either accept that as truth, or admit that their parents have ... sex. Just ask some of your friends about their parent's sex life. You'll usually hear, "Gross! I would rather drink an entire cup of used dip than picture my parents in bed!"

Ridiculous as it sounds, parents do have sex. Just take a look at A&M's population of 40,000 students for proof. The stork could not have been delivering ALL those Aggies.

Because both generations are so timid, where else can a curious child go? A possible source might be school. There is often a token "sex education week" taught in high school health or biology classes. If the students can hear their teacher over everyone's embarrassed giggling, they'll only hear the pure scientific facts. In science, sex is just a means of reproduction. If you want to know about birth control,

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you have to ask a specific question about it. This lack of information is based on the incredible reasoning that if kids know about contraceptives, they'll go out and test their newfound knowledge at the first available time! Anyway, who wants to risk the incredulous stares of her classmates as she asks, "What is the correct way to put on a condom?"

You could go to your church minister or priest, but one problem is many churches' belief that premarital sex is a sin. Some church officials would be understanding and try to give good information, while others will shove Biblical quotes so far down a person's throat they'll be scared to have sex at all.

Maybe cable television is the answer. Here they will see people having sex after one drink and an exchange of their first names. Violent sex is also shown, where, to put the woman 'in the mood,' the man beats her up. Sex on television has no emotion or lasting feeling, just a meaningful act cheapened to increase the viewer's pulse. And it works. Sex sells. But, is this how children should learn about sex?

I've raised a lot of questions, but I cannot find an answer. Children need to have answers to their sexual questions as soon as they're asked. This time varies widely from child to child, but they all need to know the truth.

Every child WILL learn about sex. It might be on the playground at school while "Brandon" recites what his parents told him yesterday. Or it could happen while they flip through the TV channels late at night. Parents have to be ready and confident enough to answer the difficult questions when their innocent children ask that dreaded question - Where did I come from?

Kimberly Neville is a junior English major



MAIL CALL

Marijuana laws illustrate lack of American freedom

Americans give much lip service to the notion of liberty and freedom, but what is freedom? In its most fundamental sense freedom is the ability to engage in any action which does not harm another person or endanger their property: Jefferson's "pursuit of happiness." Based on this definition the question as to whether the U.S. is a country of freedom is a resounding and unequivocal no.

Few examples better exemplify this point than America's marijuana laws. The U.S. has by far the highest per capita incarceration rate of developed nations (far greater than even South Africa's). Around 30 percent of these inmates are behind bars for consensual crimes, in other words, crimes for which there were no victims. In America the average time served for murder is eight years and eight months. Compare this fact with the case of Mark Young. Young, although he had no other relat-

ed priors, was recently sentenced for life in prison without parole for brokering the sale of 700 pounds of marijuana. Unfortunately, his case is not unique. One out of six inmates in crowded federal prisons are serving sentences for marijuana charges and currently the number of people effectively condemned to die in prison due to marijuana is in the hundreds. Whether a person buys, sells, or smokes marijuana - all voluntary transactions - would, in a land that is truly free, be of no concern to that nation's government. How sad that our nation chooses to persecute marijuana users in a harsher fashion than violent criminals who have actually harmed or interfered with another person's private property.

The use of marijuana is a personal choice. How can one reconcile the idea that modern democracies require citizens capable of making extremely complex economic and political decisions necessary for responsible voting, yet these same citizens are not capable of deciding whether or not they wish to consume a piece of bio-mass. Hundreds of thousands of people have died fighting this country's wars, presumably partly due to the fact they thought they were fighting for freedom. Based on the fact that this country punishes individuals more harshly for non-violent lifestyle choices than for armed robbery and murder, it would appear those individuals died in vain.

Jason F. Carr
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