

'Just bein' neighborly' often poses a challenge

Sometimes you simply can't all get along

Everybody has trouble with neighbors every now and then, regardless of how the term is used in a given situation. Webster's defines the word "neighbor" in several different ways and allows us to consider almost anything or any person to be one.

So, what does it take to be a neighbor? And, of what importance is their business to others? Not much really.

Most of us learned the concept of "neighbor" when we were tricycling around our neighborhood playing with the neighbor's kids. "Don't leave the neighborhood!" was on every mother's lips as the next Mario Andretti sped off down the sidewalk. Luckily for me, my mother thought the boundaries of "our neighborhood" were clearly understood and had no idea of their obscurity.

When you're speeding along on a bad-ass trike with an enormous football helmet bouncing around on your head, neighboring neighborhoods and neighboring city precincts can count as neighbors also. Well... technically anyway, and it WAS a good excuse even though it could be used only once.

The other manner in which children learn about neighbors is through that timeless television tragedy, "Mr. Rogers' ridiculous Neighborhood." Mr. Rogers taught many of us - in that utterly condescending tone of his - that neighborhoods are

always a good thing and everyone gets along so-o-o well.

Although his TV neighborhood might mimic a few residential areas of the 1950's - and that's debatable - it fails to accurately represent most small communities. I've often thought Mr. Rogers should have "real life" segments on the show called "Mr. Rogers' Ghetto," "Mr. Rogers Becomes Insolvent Keeping up with the Joneses Next Door" or at least "Mr. Rogers Tries to Retrieve all his Borrowed Tools and has to Deal with a Lawsuit." Some of these episodes might frighten a few children, but it would help them cope with reality when the time comes.

Although the very word "neighbor" connotes a warm, happy or at least cordial relationship, it's certainly not always the case. Oftentimes our government will officially refer to Mexico as our "neighbor to the south" when it wants us to think positively about some new bill or law that will most likely exploit this "neighbor."

Even though Haiti has been described as our "Caribbean neighbor" by politicians with specific

agendas, how many of them would actually welcome Haitians into their residential neighborhoods?

How many of you can't stand one of your suitmates or "hall mates" that gets you written up all the time? What about those "wall-pounder" neighbors at your apartment complex? What if you freshmen in the Corps had to live next door to a pishhead your whole life? Six foot fences would be built, you'd never be able to borrow that cool table saw, and even your wives and kids probably wouldn't get along. And for what good reasons?

When I lived in a dorm - for four years - I had to put up with what many of you are familiar already: rules, rules, rules and neighbors who are into following them. Even in the Corps, when your buddy is the RA, there's always some jerk ready to get you busted. Booze, girls, water balloon launchers, pistols, pet birds, my cat, electric kitchen appliances - it was always something. When I finally moved to an apartment I thought those troubles were over.

Wrong. My roommate and I practically had to float around in ballet slippers to keep the 45-year-old, 300-pound, Cajun ex-bouncer living below us from sticking his fist through the floor. When

"Thibodeaux the Terrible" eventually graduated with his Ph.D., (only in America) the new neighbor girls were only slightly better. Although they were much less threatening, they got ticked over my running an outboard engine on the fire escape. Go figure.

Because of these experiences, I decided to rent a house with some other students several years later. In a quiet little neighborhood. With families. And tricycles.

Since my roommates and I built a rather large carport in our front yard, a couple of the neighbors got peeved and are trying to make us tear it down - \$500 later. Maybe they don't like a yard crammed with four cars, two boats and a motorcycle. Maybe they're biased because our house looks like a seedy, low budget nightclub-opium den with a million beer bottles stacked in the front window.

Lawyers may be involved soon. If we win, I'll never tell another lawyer joke. If we lose, I'll run an outboard engine in the bathtub until they reconsider. Neighbors.

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Haiti has been described as our "Caribbean neighbor," but I wonder how many politicians would welcome Haitians into their neighborhoods.



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EDITORIAL

HEALTHY CANDIDATES

Illness should not become campaign issue

Poor health should not become a negative focal point of a candidate's credentials or become an advantage for an opponent during an election campaign. However, the public has the right to know if candidates are healthy enough to perform the duties of the office for which they are running.

This health issue has been a conflict surrounding the lieutenant governor's race between incumbent Bob Bullock and challenger Tex Lezar.

Lezar has turned Bullock's recent heart bypass surgery into a campaign issue. Out of anger against Lezar and need for rest to recover, Bullock has canceled all public appearances, until the election including a debate scheduled for Oct. 17 with Lezar.

Lezar claims that "if [Bullock] is physically unable to debate, then he must be physically unable to do any campaigning or to perform the job of lieutenant governor."

Lezar is jumping to conclusions and making invalid assumptions. Who is he to say that Bullock would be a poor lieutenant governor, even if he has a heart condition? It's just like saying that people with colds, a

symptom of AIDS, can automatically be diagnosed as HIV positive. This is blowing things out of proportion and generalizing - exactly what Lezar has done with Bullock's heart condition.

Furthermore, by making Bullock's health an issue, Lezar is neglecting the issues that are relevant to his campaign. His overreaction to Bullock's health gives the impression that he does not have important issues on his political platform.

Campaigns should center around real issues - education, taxes and crime. Lezar seems only out to get attention. He is being insensitive and completely inappropriate.

On the other hand, Bullock should have been more open to the public about his condition. Maybe he thought his condition would hurt his chances of re-election.

This only makes the public more skeptical and suspicious about his entire campaign.

The bottom line is that a candidate's health should not become a strength for the opposing side, but at the same time should not be hidden from the public. The health of a candidate is important yet should not be a deciding factor in an election.

Schools should stick to schooling

Southlake administrators overstep bounds by punishing off-campus drinking

Underage drinking is a problem that hits close to home on the Texas A&M campus. Hundreds, even thousands, of underage freshmen and sophomores revel at clubs, bars and parties every weekend, consuming liquor. They buy with fake I.D.s or have others buy for them.

While collegiate under-age drinkers are minors, they are also legal adults, and therefore responsible for their own actions. If caught, they must pay the fines and perhaps do community service, all without the knowledge of parents and peers, if they so choose. Law enforcement officers, not parents, are the punishers.

Most high school students are not yet legal adults, and many of them also choose to drink. For them, the question of who is responsible for punishing the offender becomes more vague.

The proper authority would presumably belong to the teens' parents. They are the people who have been responsible for the children all of their lives. That responsibility includes making it clear that illegal consumption of alcohol will not be tolerated.

What happens, however, if the school steps in and takes over this responsibility? Students at Carroll High School in Southlake recently found out.

The Dallas Morning News reported that at least two dozen Carroll students were suspended from extra-curricular activities after being caught attending non-school sponsored parties, held off campus, where alcohol was present. Students who attended one of the parties, but did not drink alcohol, received a one-week suspension.

In other words, those students who resisted peer pressure and chose not to drink any alcohol were suspended for a week. The students who actually consumed were suspended for up to three months.

None of the suspended students were allowed to participate in the Homecoming festivities this past weekend.

To make things more interesting, approximately 20 of the students are members of the school's football program, and at least seven are first-string varsity football players. Others are cheerleaders and band members. That must have been quite a Homecoming.

The school's principal, Linda Smiles, cites the students' leadership responsibilities as the reason for their suspension. "Our leaders do represent us both on and off

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campus... and one of the things that goes with being a leader is that they will not consume alcohol, neither will they be where alcohol is served," Smiles said.

If students who don't drink at parties are to be punished, then what should stop students who don't drink at wedding receptions, family reunions, church functions, restaurants and any other place that alcohol is served from getting their just reward?

Students involved in extra-curricular activities may indeed represent their school off campus, but it seems ridiculous to have school officials monitor their behavior when they are not on school grounds.

A comparable action might be if A&M officials were to suspend any student leader who gets an MIP off campus while attending football games and other activities. That off-campus MIP is something for the student and the police to worry about, and no one else.

One has to wonder where the regulation will stop. Do Carroll High officials intend to start punishing students who shoplift off school grounds? How about students who smoke or have sex? How does the school propose to regulate all of these actions committed off campus? Will there be video cameras in the homes to give students detention for not eating their veggies?

Parents probably don't approve of these behaviors any more than they approve of underage drinking, but school officials haven't made it their prerogative to punish

students for anything else yet. It may not be difficult in the future, however, to suspend students for other illegal conduct now that there is a precedent.

Carroll's head football coach, Bob Ledbetter, says about the players: "We ask them not to do anything that would embarrass this program, their coaches, their parents or this school." He said, "Suspension probably doesn't help [a student] because it takes him out of our program. Sometimes they just make the wrong choices."

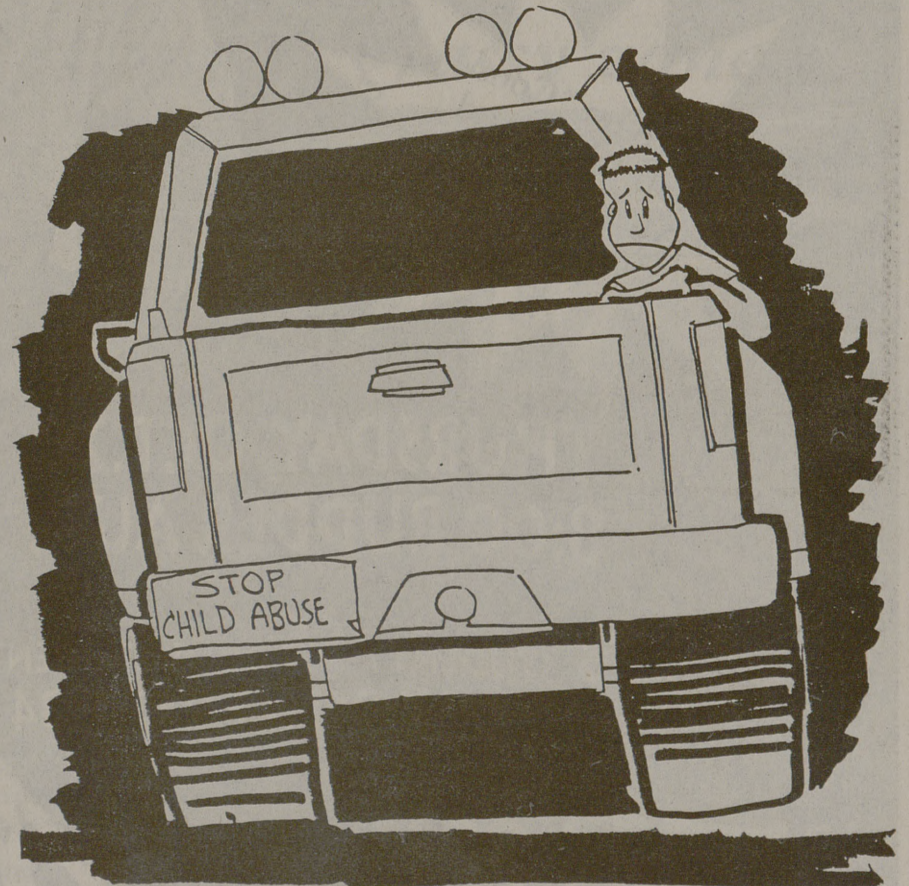
Taking students out of athletics or band or cheerleading isn't going to teach them not to drink alcohol. Suspension doesn't provide students with an incentive to stop drinking because once they're out of the activities, they have nothing to lose by going to more parties.

The question is not whether underage drinkers should be punished. The need for punishment is a given because their actions are illegal.

The people who should administer the punishment, however, are the parents, not the school administration. Carroll High School's administrators overstepped their duties by trying to act as regulators of off-campus behavior.

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