

Homeless man provides new life perspectives

DREW DIENER COLUMNIST



Mike is a street person. He spends his days and nights wandering throughout his neighborhood, the North Beach section of San Francisco. Clad in the classic dungarees of a bum, Mike once wore the green of the United States Army during the Vietnam War. His camouflage hat has been replaced by a navy blue toboggan. Better to keep his head warm with. His combat boots have been replaced by canvas walking shoes. They still make those? Think about it...

Like other relics of the past, such as canvas walking shoes, Mike has been forgotten or rather erased from the consciousness of mainstream American society. Canvas walking shoes like the ones on Mike's feet turn up every now and again in places like thrift stores and garage sales. Homeless veterans like Mike turn up every now and again as well, scattered amongst scurried garbage and debris in places like urban San Francisco.

The fact that canvas has given way to leather is not a societal injustice. The fact that care and concern for our fellow man has given way to care and concern for ourselves is.

There is a fine line between looking out for and maintaining personal well being and engaging in all out selfish behavior. While it is fine to bathe ourselves and the one's we love in life's precious gifts, it is important for us to remember that some people in this world struggle each day to merely rinse themselves in life's most precious gift of all: life itself.

While everyone desires a positive cash flow, nice clothing and an automotive means of transportation, street people are satisfied with a hot meal in their cold and lonely stomachs, a couple of dollars in their worn and lonely pockets and a friend in their wretched and lonely lives.

When I met Mike last Friday night outside of a North Beach bar, I provided him and an old, lesion-covered woman with all three.

Mike was sitting on a step near the street when I walked outside the bar for some fresh air.

He looked pitiful: hands on his face, hunched over and down on his luck.

When was the last time he ever sat down and enjoyed a \$40 dinner, as I had hours before?

When was the last time he cruised around San Francisco in the back of a stretch limousine amongst friends without a care in the world, as I had hours before?

When was the last time he was able to walk in a bar, lay down a twenty dollar bill and buy a drink for himself and a couple of his friends, as I had minutes before?

When was the last time he was able to walk down the street without eliciting feelings of fear and drawing derogatory comments from on-lookers, as I have been able to do all my life?

My heart softened as I drew closer to this man. I thought about a book I was reading at the time about L.B.J. There was a passage in the book where the narrator describes a time that he and LBJ passed a homeless person as they were driving in to Johnson City. Holding his index finger and thumb about a third of an inch apart, LBJ said "Don't ever forget the difference between you and him or me and him is that much."

I initiated what was to be one of the most valuable conversations I have ever had, by digging into my worn yet full pockets and giving Mike a few bucks.

Instead of wandering back into the bar, where the warm air and cold beer was calling, I decided to stay outside and make a friend.

As we chatted, I learned a great deal, not only about Mike, not only about homeless people, not only about our society, but about myself as well.

Mike served our country in a war when I was but a flicker in the eyelashes of the two people that would one day bring me into this world and allow me to bathe in many of life's finest gifts.

Prior to this school year when I moved into a nearby duplex, I spent the last two years of my college life bitching about living in a climate controlled dorm room with another person.

Mike has spent the last eight or so years on the streets of San Francisco, finding temporary housing on occasion in what is I'm sure is not near as plush as my former Dunn Hall dorm room was.

After our conversation, my friend wandered back into reality and into the night and I wandered back out of reality and into the awaiting limousine.

Drew Diener is a junior English major

Resurrection Week ought to rise to the occasion

Christian faith had always been a large part of my life. From birth, I attended church practically every week. I have participated in at least as many youth groups, retreats, choirs and church services as the average Aggie.

I loved the camaraderie, spirituality and bonding that are all part of being active in Christianity.

However, it seems that I have always had problems with some beliefs of the Christian faith. One thought-provoking instance comes to mind.

A man who had lived next door to my stepfather for almost 30 years — a close friend and a wonderful person — died unexpectedly. The morning of the funeral, my stepister and I were speaking in the front yard of our house, and she said something that I will never forget.

"I am very sad this morning, and I don't know what to say to the family. I have never been to a funeral where I knew the person did not go to heaven."

It took me a moment to understand what she was speaking about.

Then I remembered that the man next door had been a devout Jew.

It was not a moment of blinding clarity, and I did not instantly real-



ELIZABETH PRESTON COLUMNIST

ize that Christianity was no longer a belief system I could support; but that was the moment when my doubts began to crystallize.

A belief system that teaches people that God has told them who is going to hell — and who isn't — sounds both incredibly sad and tragically exclusive.

How can any human being say with certainty, or even speculation, that another person has passed-on to a place of never-ending torture?

"We don't say who is going to hell — God tells us through the Bible," is the most common response to my query.

This does not seem quite right. First of all, God didn't write the Bible: man did. "Inspired by God" is a very different thing than "dictated to man by God, word for word and edited by Him to make sure there were no mistakes."

Secondly, belief in the Bible is a tautology. The reason people believe in the Bible is because the Bible tells them to. If the Christian God is a god who looks at a man who lived a honest, good life — worshipping in the temple

twice a week, faithful to his wife and a good father to his children — and condemns him to an eternity of suffering, then this is not a God that I want to worship.

In fairness, not all Christians think this way. But interestingly, almost every major religion of the world dictates that they are the True Religion.

This is the nature of religion. On one side, I'm sure there are millions of Christians who are saddened by this close-minded view as I am.

However, I'm equally sure there are millions — thousands of them here at Texas A&M — that support these exclusionary views.

And that is where I think the suffering lies. A world where lines are drawn with accepted people on one side and rejected people on the other is a sadly divided world.

Jesus said many things, but the main themes I learned from his teachings were about loving your neighbor and letting he who is without sin cast the first stone.

During Resurrection Week, stones fly all over this campus.

If you believe Christianity is The Truth, that's fine — maybe it is.

But people shouldn't go around convicting people they know nothing

about, and piously using their faith as an excuse to separate and raise themselves above the rest of the world.

This is being purely judgmental, an act the Bible clearly rejects.

Resurrection Week is used too often as an excuse to judge others:

• The popular T-shirts proclaiming who is invited to heaven and who is not.

• The surveys questioning students about their chances of getting into heaven.

• The dramatic resurrection scene in front of the MSC reminding non-Christians of their minority status on campus.

The people who are in charge of Resurrection Week truly believe they have the best interests of the students in mind — after all, they are saving us from Hell, right?

I only wish they would display their beliefs through tender acceptance of all people, as Jesus did, instead of trying to force everyone to see the world through their Christian-tinted glasses.

There are many religious hues in the world — Christianity is only one shade.

Elizabeth Preston is a junior English major



MAIL CALL

Marijuana plant has many beneficial uses

In response to Kenneth Delling's April 11 letter on illegal drug use, the author's view reflects the typical stereotype toward marijuana seen at this fine University.

Delling says we should not sit passively amongst the wrongdoings on this campus. I am sure, however, that there are more pressing issues to deal with on campus. One example is the rampant underage drinking that occurs on- and off-campus every day of the week.

As a matter of fact I am aware of RAs who either ignore underage drinking or engage in drinking with the minors. This is not condoned by the University, but it is tolerated by many members. We never hear of underage drinkers taken to jail for engaging in illegal drinking. They simply receive a slap on the wrist. In fact, these students did not even have enough marijuana for formal charges of possession.

Marijuana usage causes contraction of a variety of disorders, such as psychosis, immune system damage, substance addiction, as well as violent crime. In refutation to these comments, a calm, relaxed attitude is attained and not psychosis.

In addition, no substance resides in the marijuana plant that causes physical addiction. Cultivated as a cash crop, hemp produces four times as much fiber per acre than trees do.

The textile industry could easily manage a major industrial shift to hemp if it was not illegal to grow. Also, hemp does not require pesticides, as cotton does.

In over 10,000 years of marijuana usage, there has never been a lethal overdose because of marijuana, because it is not possible.

Troy Moore Class of '97

Tattletales should not be our main concern

What planet is Jason F. Carr from? And where did he get the idea that "even young children know that 'tattletales' are the most morally reprehensible individuals possible?"

Carr even suggests that locking informants up as opposed to the drug offenders is some "higher degree of justice."

On my planet, I would bet that the general consensus is that people like rapists, murderers and drug dealers are somewhat more reprehensible than tattletales.

I'd go so far as to say that tattletales probably don't even rank in the top 20.

The fact is that drug use and abuse is against the law. We lock up drug users, abusers and dealers partly because these types of individuals tend to violate other peoples' rights to ensure continued supply of their drugs.

Therefore, I'd like to suggest if he doesn't like our "high degree of justice," then he should go back to his own planet where apparently everybody has been smoking too much marijuana.

Greg Williams Graduate Student

New professor sends thank you to students

I am a new professor here this year, and I want to thank some of my students. To list all of the students who have touched my life this year would take up too much space, so thank you all. You are all very different people, but you are all exceptional in your different ways, and all together, you've shown me the different sides of what it means to be an Aggie.

Teresa J. Rothausen, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Management

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor and will print as many as space allows. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, style, clarity and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald. A valid student I.D. is required. Letters may also be mailed to: The Battalion - Mail Call 013 Reed McDonald Texas A&M University College Station, TX 77843-1111 Fax: (409) 845-2647 E-mail: Batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu

A&M International belongs to A&M System

They're at it again. Our Big Brother up in Austin — the state Legislature — has once again decided what is best for the citizens of Texas.

This time Senator Judith Zaffirini of Laredo has ramrodded a bill through the Senate that would shift control of Texas A&M International University — formerly Laredo State University — to the University of Texas System, where it would become known as the University of Texas-International. Mrs. Zaffirini, in her infinite concern for higher education, took it upon herself to force this legislation through the Senate without consulting the president, faculty or students of TAMIU, nor the local citizens.

She contends she saw an opportunity and seized it. An opportunity for what? Personal gain... an ego trip? If this change is as important to TAMIU as she says it is, then she certainly should have waited and gathered input from the people whom Senate Bill 11 will affect the most.

Instead, she squeaked her bill through the Senate ala Carlos Truan-Texas A&M-name-change fashion. When first pressed as to the reason for her bill, she would give no reason other than that it is best for TAMIU. Upon further questioning, she gave reasons such as geographical location — in other words, it is closer to Austin than College Station, and the access



ZACH HALL COLUMNIST

that would be granted to Laredo students to UT's health science and Latin American studies programs.

Ironically, Zaffirini co-sponsored a bill in 1989 that placed then Laredo State University under the Texas A&M System. However, she was recently quoted as saying that she "always believed that UT would be a better fit." Her actions have caused many, including A&M Chancellor Barry Thompson and TAMIU president Dr. Leo Sayavedra, to question the transfer of the university "because one person doesn't like something."

As one member of the state House put it — "It shouldn't be up to the Senator's whim what system TAMIU is with. If she gets mad at the UT system, is she going to vote to put it back to Texas A&M?"

To some, Zaffirini's actions may not seem to be a big deal. But consider that her swift stunt has paved an easier path for this bill to pass through the House of Representatives and on to Governor Bush.

A similar bill is in the making for the House by Rep. Henry Cuellar, also of Laredo. However, Rep. Cuellar appears to have learned from the mistakes of his fellow Laredo colleague. He has already had public debates over the issue, and it appears that a majority of the public disapproves of the change. Nevertheless, if his bill does pass, hopefully Governor Bush will step in, veto the bill and put an end to the political gambling the state Legislature is playing with education in Texas.

Plans are currently under way for TAMIU to become a four-year institution, beginning on Sept. 1 of this year. Construction of a library, an administration

building, two academic buildings and a central plant is scheduled to be completed in July. Assuming there is a systems change, will the state Legislature require that the University of Texas reimburse Texas A&M for all costs incurred in the past six years TAMIU has been under our control? Or will the Legislature make yet another bonehead decision and force us to swallow a huge academic and financial loss.

It should be noted that the Texas A&M System was the only system interested in Laredo State University back in 1989 when a take-over was being considered. Not to mention that feasibility studies were conducted then, in which students and faculty were consulted.

Senator Jim Turner of Crockett summed things up in saying that, "no man's life, property or university is safe when the Legislature is in session."

It's curious that both Sen. Zaffirini and Rep. Cuellar both graduated from the University of Texas. Zaffirini herself has said that she is interested in becoming President of TAMIU when she is out of office. If she continues to pull stunts like this one, she may get her chance sooner than she thinks. One also has to wonder why Zaffirini has waited until now to propose a systems change after so much money and dedication has been spent by the Texas A&M System. The whole deal reeks of something fishy. But hey, I forgot, we're dealing with politicians.

Zach Hall is a sophomore mechanical engineering major

THE BATTALION Established in 1893 Editorials appearing in The Battalion reflect the views of the editorial board. Jay Robbins Senior Managing Editor, Heather Winch Managing Editor for Business, Sterling Hayman Opinion Editor, Erin Hill Ass. opinion editor. EDITORIAL BOARD. BUCKS STOP HERE. Non-reg students who live on campus should not have to pay for Corps programs. Footing the bill.