

OPINION

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Infomercials can't offer everything

Ice cream or TV? I had so much stress in my life that the last thing I needed was a pint of ice cream. I was capable of eating, so the channel-changing game began.



JENNI HOWARD
COLUMNIST

"Thanks for joining us this afternoon, on 'Sit and Be Fit.'" Hmmm ... no thanks. Click.

"Cats who can't kick the habit ... today on 'Geraldo.'" Maybe that's what my cat's problem is. Click.

"Welcome to our show. Today we have something really exciting to tell you about — a revolutionary product that could change your life — but first, let's introduce our host ..."

This caught my eye, and I continued to watch the "show" for the next 30 minutes, only to discover I had been duped into watching an infomercial. The revolutionary product they were doing cartwheels over was nothing but a little bent piece of metal that promised amazing washboard abs in as little as 30 days.

It was appealing to think that I could look like Tamilee Webb by the end of summer school. That's more than my Shakespeare class is promising, but I questioned the happiness these washboard abs could bring to my life. What was this show really trying to sell me?

Infomercials like this would like to convince people that all we need to be happy with ourselves is a Visa, a Mastercard or a willingness to pay in three low monthly payments of \$19.95. Unfortunately, although many products will claim to slim you down,

the only thing they can really guarantee is to fatten up the producer's wallets.

Infomercials have become the hottest medium of advertising in the past few years. In a broadcast of "60 Minutes" on June 25, 1995, industry experts estimated that infomercials would bring in over \$1 billion that year alone. Major names have also jumped on the bandwagon, such as Apple Computers, Toyota and Magnavox.

Obviously, Americans are watching, and buying, but are they getting what the show is really trying to sell?

Whether the product is a cosmetics system or a vegetable slicer, a greater sense of happiness is promised by the producers, but for whom? Greg Renker, head of an infomercial empire, seems to have the answer. He can find profits in every inadequacy of the human experience.

"By the end of the program," Renker told "60 Minutes," "I have to have convinced you that if you don't have this product right now, your life can't be as good as it might have been if you had it right away."

The problem with infomercials is not necessarily the products they sell, but the changed life they promise will accompany it.

Author Barbara DeAngelis promises to bring your broken relationship from anger to love in three minutes. Dionne Warwick promises to introduce you to your exciting future as part of the Psychic Friends Network for only \$4 a minute. Infomercial guru Mike Levey can give women the soap-opera-style hair they've always wanted, and a boost in self-esteem, with his new clip-on hair.

And if Sparky gets jealous of all the fun

you're having with your new hair, there's now the Flowbee for Pets, a hair-cutting attachment that you hook onto the hose of your vacuum cleaner, run it across the dog and cut its hair, which is being sucked outward at 7.8 amps.

I do wonder, however, if the makers of the Flowbee for Pets have ever run a vacuum cleaner near a dog. If the dog is anything like mine, then nothing short of Valium would get it to stand still near a running vacuum cleaner that sported a pair of scissors at the end of it.

Some of these products may indirectly contribute to a greater sense of self-esteem, but for the most part, the happiness they promise cannot be bought with money. Satisfaction with your life and yourself comes from earning it.

Some of these products may indirectly contribute to self-esteem, but for the most part, the happiness they promise cannot be bought with money.

Maybe the half-hour spent watching TV could be better used by volunteering somewhere, or tackling a project you've put off for one year too long. Activities like these have been known to improve one's self-esteem, while also helping out others.

Whatever the cure to dissatisfaction may be, I've found infomercials to add happiness to my life only in the sense that they provide a good laugh every now and then.

But then again, Sparky has been needing a new haircut.

Jenni Howard is a Class of '96 economics and international studies major



MAIL CALL

Freakos have strange taste to pick A&M

This letter is for Allison, the freshman who doesn't like "freakos." I know that in The Battalion's Mail Call on June 17, you got blown away by a couple of freakos. I just wanted you to know, Allison (and all other freshmen), that there are freakos who have filtered through the system and ended up in Aggieland. The good thing about this is that nonfreakos outnumber freakos by about 98 to 2. That little school down the road in Austin has welcomed freakos into its midst for a long time now, and I think it is obvious of the catastrophic disaster that school has become.

But don't worry, Allison, even though these freakos seem to be louder than us, (this will become more evident as you continue to read The Battalion, Mail Call and spend your last years at Aggieland) it is good people like you and me who make up the majority of Aggieland. But you must remember that these freakos are Aggies, so they deserve respect for that alone. I just can't figure out why these freakos choose to attend a conservative, country dancin', Coca-Cola drinkin', Chevy truck drivin' college like Texas A&M when t.u. is just a couple of hours down the road. The way I see it, freakos should stop trying to change us, and if you don't like nonfreakos, Highway 6 runs both ways.

Kevin Harbuck
Class of '98

Church burnings affect all people

Since these "black" church fires have been surfacing in the news, I held on to my opinions about them. It was not until I was watching CNN News two nights ago that my feelings were confirmed with facts.

In Texas, the facts stated by a CNN reporter show there have been 33 church fires in the last year. The facts also bluntly show that 17 of the churches burned were considered to be white 7 were considered to be black and the remaining 9 belonged to mixed congregations — churches not claiming an ethnic majority. To me, these last churches seem to have a good idea — no ethnic majority.

At any rate, it seems that everyone's churches are burning and probably have been for years, centuries, as long as churches have been around. Whether these burnings were racially set truly has no bearing on the future of churches or of the races. But, if I had to play the "devil's advocate" with the readers, let's say they were racially motivated, that whoever did set these fires did for hateful reasons. But let's say that the person who did this believed that because the church called itself a black church, the church itself was being racist. Let's say that this person believed that he was combatting racism by burning a racist black church and that the world could be a better place without a church that segregates God's people.

Just a thought.

Lisa Wukits
Class of '97

Morales is silent on issues; Gramm isn't

While Ryan Runkle may or may not be correct about Dani Morales' college loan being a dead issue, Victor Morales is certainly "dead" on the issues. As his party's nominee for the U.S. Senate, Morales owes the voters more than his trademark "I don't know yet; it's a complicated issue" response.

Phil Gramm, on the other hand, has been very clear about his views, ever since he first represented Texas A&M and the Brazos Valley in Congress. While Morales has no opinion about raising taxes, Gramm has led the fight to cut taxes for middle-class Americans, most recently in the form of the gas tax reduction. On crime, Gramm has voted

for tougher laws and tougher sentencing to keep violent offenders out of our neighborhoods. On welfare, Gramm has led the effort for real reform, to make it a hand up and not a hand out. Gramm has taken a stand for America's youth by leading the debate on Social Security reform. And on health care, Gramm said Hillary Clinton's socialist health care plan, which would make going to the doctor like going to the post office, would pass over his "cold, dead political body." What would Morales have done?

Most importantly, Gramm has fought for fiscal responsibility. Liberal Democrats have for years resisted the need to control skyrocketing federal spending levels, and in doing so they have mortgaged future generations of Americans and cost the average Texan thousands of dollars a year in higher interest rates. But Gramm has fought for the future of Texas by leading the effort to force the federal government to pay its bills and balance the budget. Thanks to Gramm, even many Democrats agree that now it's not a matter of "if" the budget is balanced, but just exactly how and when.

We are proud of Gramm, and welcome the opportunity to share his strong record of standing up for Texas with Morales and the rest of the voters this fall.

Jeff Livingston
Class of '96

Disney's policies, films justify boycott

I wanted to respond to Jason Brown's column (June 20) about the Southern Baptist Convention's resolution to boycott Disney. I am not a Baptist, but I support the boycott. Brown is obviously uninformed about the reasons the SBC calls Disney anti-Christian and anti-family. Disney has repeatedly done things that are very offensive. *Priest* was a movie about a gay cleric; *Powder* was a film directed by a convicted child molester. Disney's Miramax allowed young actors to be under the authority of a child molester.

Even Disney's animated films, with the witchcraft and New Age undertones (*Pocahontas*, *The Lion King*), are anti-Christian. Its newest movie, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, portrays Esmerelda as provocative. According to the Associated Press, Disney had to cut out portions of the movie in order to keep a G rating. How are sexy depictions of Disney's female characters beneficial for children or families? Christians do not want to put up with having their children watch films that are trying to indoctrinate them with the sexuality, earth-worship, necromancy and homosexuality that can be found in various Miramax and Disney films.

Another anti-Christian factor is, of course, the insuring of gay partners. I have noticed that Disney is not insuring heterosexual couples who are living together. I am not proposing this, but making the point, why is Disney focusing on the gay community? Why does it produce so many R-rated movies? Why is its animated films becoming unacceptable for children? Will the boycott affect Disney? I believe it will. Christians boycotted K-Mart because of its subsidiary, Waldenbooks, which carried many pornographic materials. K-Mart lost money, sold Waldenbooks and made a public apology. My hope is that Disney gets the message, too.

Lisa Panak
Class of '93



MARGULIES
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Greed prevents badly needed tort reform

Two weeks ago today I lost about \$60,000. Actually, my insurance company lost in an accident settlement. I never thought I would consider my auto insurance company as anything but a big monster that eats at my bank account, but with lawsuit abuse running rampant in our country, the monster has become my friend.



MARCUS GOODYEAR
COLUMNIST

People everywhere are suing over everything. In Louisiana, Alesha Roxanne Wright is suing Grambling State University for not awarding her a degree as a major the school doesn't offer. Even a coalition of Catholic bishops are in on the fun. They have enlisted Texas Attorney General Dan Morales to sue Bishop Rene Gracida for his mismanagement of an oil-producing estate.

Some lawsuits are legitimate; some are not. The mass public is beginning to see a lawsuit as their ticket to easy money. After such fiascoes as the

McDonald's hot coffee suit, who can blame them?

Although ambitious attorneys capitalize on America's greed by pursuing clients, ambulance chasing is frowned upon by the Bar. Attorneys are not supposed to advertise directly to someone when the potential client is still in a state of stress.

Anne Harris, an insurance agent with much lawsuit experience, says lawsuits primarily benefit the lawyer. That is the great tragedy. She explains that high numbers in a lawsuit don't necessarily mean high dollars for the defendant.

When lawsuits go to court, the lawyer will take home 40 percent as his fee. (This percentage can actually be larger, but 40 percent is standard.) If a client wins a \$6,000 lawsuit, \$2,240 will go to the lawyer. Of course, \$3,760 seems like a tidy sum. Very often, though, the lawyer has run up his or her clients' medical fees to justify a larger 40 percent. Once the settlement is made, the client must still pay these often superfluous medical bills. If the client owes \$2,500 to doctors and chiropractors, only \$1,260 is left for their pain and suffering.

Harris explains that clients

who represent themselves often take home more money. Insurance companies want to avoid lawsuits, and they realize if they offer generous settlements, the issue will be less likely to go to court. If the same client who won \$6,000 earlier with a lawyer wins \$4,500 without a lawyer, he or she will take home almost \$1,000 more.

Yet people insist on hiring lawyers for protection. They equate inexperience with incompetence, and expect the big insurance monster to take advantage of them. Harris claims the threat of a lawsuit is enough to make the insurance agency appear generous. Accident victims wonder if the appearance of generosity is really generosity.

How can victims protect themselves without incurring high legal fees? Texas and Florida have found a way to avoid lawsuits by enabling residents to settle them out of court in mediation. Harris says a plaintiff's attorney will take only one-third of a settlement made in mediation court. Lower legal fees allow the client to take home more and the insurance agency to pay less.

Don Tomlinson, a professor at A&M, has practiced media-

tion law since 1991. He explains that the 1987 Mediations Statute made the process confidential and opened the way for mediation law.

The mediation lawyer is an unbiased third party whose job is to resolve the conflict. If a settlement isn't reached, the lawyer must destroy all notes and documents and can not testify about the case later in court.

Unfortunately, settlements made in mediation court are not legally binding. The process is based on building trust between the two parties of a lawsuit.

Perhaps mediation law is popular in only two out of 50 states because people don't know how to trust anymore. Lawsuits are everywhere. Anyone can sue anyone. Some people sue to get money; some sue to protect themselves. All suits are based on a lack of trust in the goodwill of humanity.

The real tragedy of lawsuit abuse is not the greed it reveals but the selfish tendency of everybody, both defendants and plaintiffs, to use others for personal gain. Tort reform may not be possible without the moral reform of America.

Marcus Goodyear is a Class of '97 English major

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.

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