

Private parts

Copyright piracy seen as harmless crime

We've all done it before. Two VCRs, one blank tape. presto, your own personal copy of the latest rantino, Rodriguez Cohen brothers film lease. You're not hurting anyone, right? The man, or big-name studio like Miramax, will probably never notice plain black copy sitting on your entertainment center next to its fellow stard video children.



Jenne Hamlin
 Senior Journalism major

is blasting the guts out of evil cyber-aliens. No harm done, right? According to the software industry and the E.B.I., however, it's software piracy, and it violates U.S. copyright law. It's also called copyright infringement, and it deprives the idea's owner of potential income.

On Jan. 28, the E.B.I. led an eight-city search, code-named "Cyber Strike," following an eight-month undercover investigation into nationwide illegal software duplication and distribution. While no arrests were made, agents were authorized to seize computer hardware, software, documents and records.

Arguments have raged on the Internet regarding intellectual property and copyright infringement. Apparently, to some the free sharing of ideas on the bandwidth also implies the free sharing of the

latest ideas in software. Pirate Newsletter, an electronic magazine, says computer pirates aren't bootleggers, they just promote computer literacy.

"A pirate is someone who believes information belongs to the people," the newsletter said. Microsoft Corp., Adobe Systems Inc., Sony Computer Entertainment, Sega of America and Nintendo of America disagree. Their losses, along with those of four other software companies, prompted the investigation. They argue the estimated \$2.9 billion lost in 1995 from software piracy suggests the situation has gone far from being a cyber-agera.

E.B.I. spokesman George Grotz said pirates obtain legitimate software, copy and distribute it through bulletin board services, file transfer protocol sites and relay chat channels. By most accounts, pirates were making a healthy bundle off the fruits of others' labors.

So, how evil is it to take a free test drive indefinitely of the latest ver-

sion of a program? I think I'd get pretty violent if some snot-nosed punk college kid decided to help himself to my hard earned cash by way of freeloading off my software. It would be like someone other than me getting my paycheck for my work. Forget it.

The notion becomes muddier for some people when they consider the legal and ethical similarities of popping out a copy of "Reservoir Dogs" and testing a pirated copy of Adobe Illustrator they don't have the cash to buy. Someone put a lot of time and effort into a product, and now others think it's just a gift.

It's flat out illegal either way. But, no E.B.I. agent in dark glasses is going to show up at your front door and raid your Hastings-esque video collection. Considering the months they spent tracking software downloads on the Internet, however, they very well might nuke your hard drive if you install a hot copy of Donkey Kong.

For now, I think I'll go watch a copy of "The Professional" I just made.



Stereotypes leave true personalities alone in the dark

Stereotypes are taking the place of common sense. Apparently, if an individual is in the Corps of Cadets, he or she is a fanatical right-wing conformist who hates non-regs and anyone else who opposes in-lining Canada.

If someone is in a fraternity, he has a tendency to wear Dockers and cowboy boots every other day. He also sports the 'slicked-back' look in his hair.

Moreover, we all know the stereotypes surrounding sororities.

These generalizations are hardly accurate. Jumping to conclusions is a problem in society today. People associate groups and organizations with having certain, specific characteristics.

This method of stereotyping is perpetuated by the

media when it portrays models as heroin addicts and sports figures as egoistic children.

While many times the stereotypes are true of some individuals, these generalizations do not always apply to every person associated with a particular organization.

Yes, some Corps members are — how should I say this — still living in 1861. Most, however, are only distinguished from the average "Joe Cadet" by uniform and commitment to the armed services.

Because stereotypes of success exist (individuals who are good looking, wealthy and living in New York City, etc.), people today are more worried about conforming and being accepted than with basic needs, such as breathing and eating.

Remember middle school years? Everybody who was

anybody had a pair of Z. Cavaricci pants.

Of course, those pants cost approximately the same as a used car. But in order to conform, it was necessary to break the bank to buy them.

Wearing Cavaricci's did not make one instantly popular, nor did it make one smarter.

But a good lesson can be learned. Just because a trend is popular and it seems like conforming will turn your life around, think again.

Today, stereotypes in politics are overly rampant. The word "liberal" has become a derogatory statement by conservative politicians. Bob Dole called President Clinton a liberal, hoping the "L-word" would knock Clinton down 15 points in the polls. Obviously, the tactic had no effect.

Moreover, liberals are regarded as bleeding-heart, hippie socialists who want everyone else to pay taxes so the poor can get paychecks for not working.

Conservatives, on the other hand, are viewed as right-wing wackos who love the rich, hate the poor and think everyone should have an AK-47 under their beds.

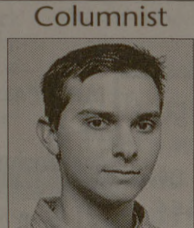
Once again, political misconceptions are brought about by the modern practice of jumping to conclusions.

If an individual questions the morality of animal research, ignorant people who have never met this individual immediately brand him or her a liberal, based on one philosophical view.

Along those lines, people may advocate lower taxes, but this does not make them militia nuts who read "Guns 'n Ammo" while polishing an arsenal.

Those who revel in assigning stereotypes should take the time to really get to know a person.

As for myself, I'll save you the trouble. I'm just a liberal, conservative, trendy, middle-class, non-smoking, tax-despising communist who hates stereotypes.



Jon Appar
 Junior Journalism major



Elizabeth Meloeny
 Sophomore General studies major

Positive outlook aids in dealing with tragedy

After the death of a sibling, friends can comfort, but only time heals

Editor's Note: The following is an open letter submitted by Elizabeth Meloeny and Keith Randolph. Meloeny recently lost her brother in an apartment fire in College Station. The sections in italics are the words of Randolph...

Saturday, January 18, 1997, my world changed forever. News of the accident came early in the morning. The fire had taken Paul's life hours before, but it felt as though it was happening while we were being told. Elizabeth went to answer the door just like any other time.

At 9:20 a.m., I answered the door to a police officer, fire marshal and two representatives from the University. The shrill screams that woke my roommate were screams I never thought would leave my throat. That morning there had been a fire at Kensington Apartments. The fire started in apartment 211, the apartment my twin brother shared with two other students. Three people were in the apartment that morning. Two people made it out — my brother, Paul, did not. Paul died of smoke inhalation between 4:30 and 5:00 that morning.

Her cries downstairs are a sound I can live without hearing ever again for the rest of my life. I can not even fathom the pain of losing your twin brother one week before your birthday. The scream was so frightening because it sounded like his part of her was being violently torn from her soul.

I would like to take some time to comment on Paul Lewis Meloeny. He was currently in his fifth semester at Texas A&M, majoring in electrical engineering. Before entering A&M, he competed for the Clear Lake High School Swim Team, and spent summers life-guarding and teaching young children how to swim.

He seemed to touch everyone he met. He was kindhearted, good-natured, down-to-earth and honest. He could find joy in many things and provide an uplifting word to those in need. He seemed to pass no judgment on people.

He would accept someone for who they were and only expected the same courtesy. I hope that quality will live on in me and in those who realize its importance. It is truly amazing to be able to see people for who they are, and to know that others are thinking of you in that way.

Later that morning we gathered our courage and drove to the site of the fire. From the back seat of the car, I watched the world going by as we passed Northgate and the polo fields. I saw people walking in and out of buildings and then to their unknown destinations. I watched trees, grass and apartments pass by as in a film. I didn't see any one object, it all moved before my eyes at once. I watched the traffic. The people in the cars looked no different from us.

Now that you know a little more about Paul, maybe you can accept and allow this tragedy to affect you on a more personal level.

Tragedies occur every day. Though we think we are invincible, tragedies still seem to break into our lives when least expected. I know my friends and I surely never realized as Paul left for home that Friday night, that would be our last real good-bye.

Paul and I had plans for our birthday the following Saturday. I never imagined he wouldn't be able to make it.

But we were different. I saw that even though we were in pain, the world was going on as always. That's precisely when I realized that this sort of tragedy happens every day, everywhere and my life continues as usual. It brought to mind the cliché "statistics are real people." I knew the day was not going to get any easier. I was experiencing more reality than I was accustomed to dealing with on a daily basis.

The burnt-out shell of the

apartment was still damp from the fire hoses, which were laying about on the grass, filled with water but slack without pressure. The ground was wet everywhere with muddy footprints cutting into the turf. Charred shells of stereo equipment and the metal frame of a reclining chair were littered around a pile of ash. A firefighter was shoveling it from the floor of the living room and dumping it over the balcony onto the ground below.

I came to A&M because my brother was here, and I think I truly believed that he would always be around. For birthdays, holidays, and eventually weddings and babies. This is something everyone must realize: We must treasure the time we have with those we care about, for it is truly those memories we keep in our hearts.

There is, however, another message in this story.

Smoke detectors often seem to be quite a bother. Many of us treat them with the same regard as a bicycle helmet. It isn't until something tragic occurs that we wonder where the precaution was. The smoke alarm in Paul's apartment had gone off several times before while they were cooking, and they often disconnected it. Paul was usually quite adamant about reconnecting it. Even so, the alarm was in the hall closet behind a closed door on the morning of the fire. There is no question that if that smoke detector had been in its proper place, Paul would still be with us today.

The fire presumably started in the couch and most likely could have been escaped with a fire alarm. There was found in a hall closet on top of a microwave.

My mortality has forcefully been placed a lot higher on my list of priorities. I see the precarious balance between life and death that every single one of us lives, and I feel closer to everyone.

These days, I'm learning much about questions that can never be answered. Paul and I have three

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young brothers in our family, ages four, six, and seven. I thought I had run through the gauntlet of questions, however, it seems to be a labyrinth. For the first few days it was, "When will we see Paul?" and "Where is Paul now?" These questions now seem to have turned into variations of, "Why didn't anyone get Paul out?" and "How come Paul didn't wake up?"

These are the same questions that will stay with me forever.

Why did Paul not make it out of the apartment when his best friend and other roommate did? Why didn't anyone go back for Paul? Why did the fire fighters, who arrived at 4:35, not find Paul until they went back to check for hot spots around 5:40? Why did it have to happen to someone who was so wonderful, loving and young? None of these questions have easy or comfortable answers, neither do the "what-ifs" that follow.

I've heard it said a thousand times "tell people how you feel about them." Write that down on your hand with a permanent marker and look at it when you see someone you love.

The sun still rises and the stars still come out at night. When it rains, the dirt washes away for a time.

I've explored life, death, love, trust and responsibility to my full capacity. Now I can only survive this ordeal until it is time to move on.

But my life will never be the same. Paul was my twin and soulmate. I never believed I would be in this world without him. I suppose it is some consolation that he is still with me in spirit, thoughts, and memories. The most important of these is that the last thing either of us said to each other was "I love you."



MAIL CALL

Confederate Flag not equal to heritage

While reading Ryan Kirkpatrick's letter in which he promoted his view that the Confederate flag is not a racist symbol, I was continually disheartened by his lack of knowledge of basic American history. At several points he just threw out "historical" statements and treated them as established facts, apparently not realizing that he was abusing history in the process. I only have space for a few of the more obvious examples.

First of all, I would like to know exactly how "the government" was "suppressing the South" by "tearing apart its ideas, way of life and economic foundation." Abe Lincoln and the Republican Party did not a darn thing to affect the institution of slavery in the South.

Next, Kirkpatrick states that there are "far more historical accounts of slave owners providing for their slaves and treating them humanely." Could he name a couple that have been published in the last 80 years that say so? Curiously, he failed to name even of these "historical accounts." He seems to be under the false impression that the majority of historians think slavery was not a harsh system. It also appears that by deluding himself into thinking that slavery "wasn't so bad," he can believe that the Confederate flag can't be so bad. Also, he should know that the Rebel flag never appeared on Southern state flags until the 1950s, when it became a symbol of defiance against the Civil Rights Movement.

I do not believe that Kirkpatrick is a racist, I just believe he is not knowledgeable about some basic elements of American history. Whatever view one takes on this issue, if they use history to legitimize their arguments they

should make sure they get the historical facts straight. I agree with his statement "one should not degrade something they do not understand," but I would also add that one should not praise something that one does not understand either.

Keith Volanto
 History Lecturer

Aggie Spirit comes to comfort motorist

I just wanted to thank two Aggies for their thoughtfulness and kindness. Sunday night, flying from Dallas to Austin, I sat next to an Aggie on her way back to Aggieland. As we left the plane, I told her to have a safe drive. She said she and her husband would look out for me on the road. I stopped to fuel and there she was again. Because it was late and I was traveling alone, they offered to caravan with me back to College Station. In this time of racial tension, these two saw me as an Aggie, not anything else. David and Marilyn, thank you for showing true Aggie Spirit.

"We are the Aggies, the Aggies are we, true to each other as Aggies can be." Gig 'Em

Carino Casas
 Class of '99

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