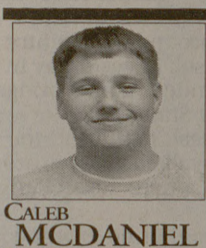


## TV or not TV? (That is the question)



CALEB MCDANIEL

When my roommates, restaurants and friends' apartments.

I have not stooped to stopping by Circuit City and pretending to browse through their color TV section.

But don't think I haven't thought about it.

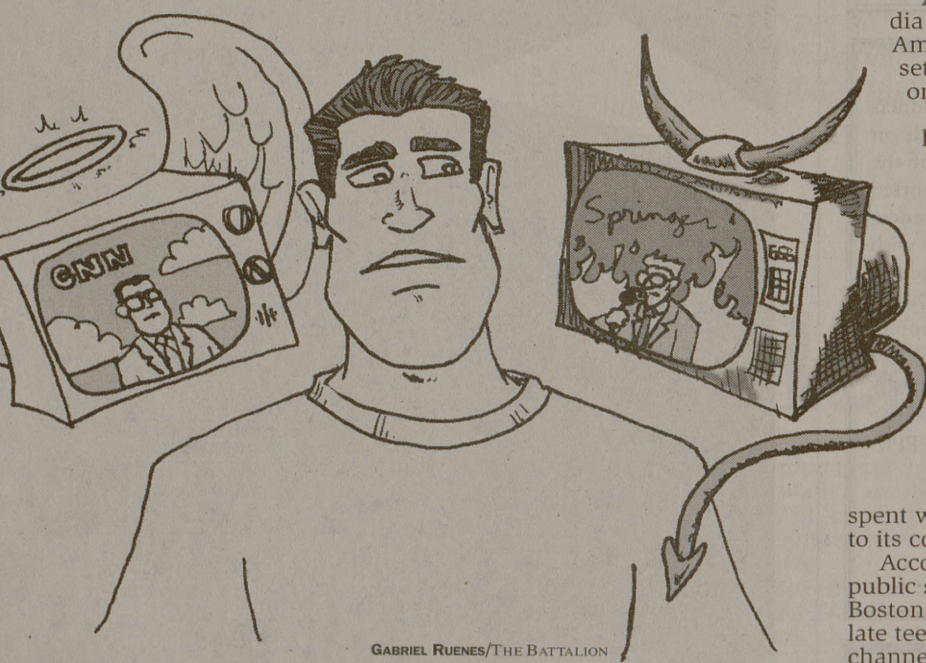
So life without television has not been entirely easy. But slowly and surely, the true value of TV-less living is beginning to shine clear. There is a rainbow in the clouds.

At the end of that rainbow, I have found myself working more productively than ever, accomplishing more in less amounts of time and actually getting to bed at sane hours of the night.

I have actually picked up books that were not assigned for a class and (gasp) thumbed through them while eating dinner instead of plopping down to watch "Everybody Loves Raymond" while robotically shoveling mac and cheese into my mouth.

Believe it or not, I have even contemplated exercise, although I am still motivating myself to start the illustrious jogging career that is surely in my immediate future.

After all the pacing and regret, the truth is that losing a television



GABRIEL RUENES/THE BATTALION

### Cutting back on television viewing can be beneficial for college students

has not meant losing a trusted friend. I now realize the TV had been robbing me of time, energy and health all along. I am slowly reaching the point where I can say I am glad to see it go.

To those naysayers who are now shaking their heads, those TV-faithful who have seen every "Seinfeld" episode twice, you are not alone in thinking life without TV is an unthinkable fate.

According to Nielsen Media Research, 99 percent of Americans have a television set — many have more than one.

Adults spend over four hours a day with the tube. That means that in the five years it takes the average young Aggie to get a degree, a college student will watch 7,300 hours of TV. Students will spend, on average, more time flipping through channels than sitting in class.

The truly depressing side of this statistic is that most of those hours are not even spent watching a single program to its completion.

According to research done by public station WGBH-TV in Boston, viewers who are in their late teens to early 20s change the channel an average of 41 times per hour.

A little more math yields this incredible result: the average 5-year college student will change the channel 299,300 times during their stay at an institution of higher learning.

So even if spending one hour with 41 channel changes a day may seem deceptively like a "break" from the routine of studying, 299,300 channel surfs add up. Reducing the amount of TV we watch can do students a world of good. It seems crazy, I know, but I have been to the frontlines of TV deprivation and back. It is not so bad.

First of all, surely four hours a day of a student's life can be spent with better things than "Change of Heart."

Secondly, excessive TV viewing has been linked in numerous studies to obesity and poor health.

Dr. Lisa Hark of the Heart Information Network said, "The more television you watch, the greater your chances are of becoming obese."

And because cholesterol levels increase as weight increases, watching lots of television can increase the risk of heart disease, Hark said.

In the formative years of young life, college students must especially guard against making their lifestyles too sedentary. TV can be habit-forming — in a bad way.

Television, of course, is not necessarily the incarnation of absolute evil.

Having a TV can keep one connected to the outside world, thanks to the abundance of talking heads on television news programs. And TV can provide a needed outlet for relaxation at the end of a long day.

But losing a TV is not like losing a limb.

Every so often, actively pursuing entertainment can be better than receiving it passively over the airwaves. Seize the day instead of the remote.

The dividends will be 7,300 hours of the free time we constantly complain about not having.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.

#### MAIL CALL

#### School breaks not needed

In response to Jeff Becker's July 13 column.

At the risk of sounding like a proponent of the "good old days," I believe Becker needs to think why he came to Texas A&M.

In 1959, I was over-whelmed when I was admitted to A&M because it was considered the most difficult state university in Texas and one of the most difficult in the country. Believe me, it was.

We did not have the most difficult state university in Texas and one of the most difficult in the country. Believe me, it was.

We now have the benefits of the hard work we expended then. Consider that time to be the best investment I ever made.

If you really believe academic performance will increase, and the more important benefit

will be the favorable psychological effects of giving students a break," you are in the wrong place. Maybe you need to find a place that is more fun.

Frank Lovato  
Class of '62

#### Speeches to grads helpful

In response to July 8 mail call.

As a former student, I went through graduation when it was still at G. Rollie White.

The ceremony itself, while long, was very important to me.

The opportunity to cross the stage and shake Dr. Bowen's hand is one of the most memorable moments of my college career.

People say the speeches need to be shorter or fewer people need to speak, but as I remember it, the speakers took up only a very small portion of the ceremony.

A vast majority of the time spent in the ceremony was spent award-

ing degrees to graduates.

Many schools today do not give graduates the opportunity to cross the stage. The school I went to for graduate school did not even call graduates' names at the ceremony.

I would discourage Texas A&M from heading in this direction.

Danny King  
Class of '94

#### Prof explains annexation

In response to Marc Grether's July 8 column.

Texas is one of about 16 states that allows annexation by a vote of the city council with no voter approval required.

In states where annexation requires a vote of the citizens being annexed, there is almost no annexation.

Why should someone living just outside the city, enjoying the benefits of the city and using some city services, choose to pay for those services by voting for annexation?

The voters in the cities of Bryan and College Station pay 85 percent of the Brazos County property tax. Only 15 percent is paid by rural residents.

So because county residents are getting a free ride, paid for in large measure by city residents, why would they choose to join the city and pay their share of the cost of local government?

They are mad because they do not want the free ride to end.

The petition I would like to sign is one that would allow rural residents to pay for all the services they receive without help from city residents. Unfortunately, Texas law does not allow this.

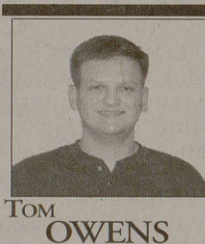
In short, if you want to end annexation in Bryan, you must amend the charter to require voter approval of all annexations.

Bryan is as big as it will ever get unless landowners and developers petition to be annexed.

Gary Halter  
Faculty Member

## Auto industry illustrates harmful effects of NAFTA on U.S. workers

Six years have passed since the U.S. Congress, against the will of 70 percent of the American people, passed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), establishing tariff-free commerce among the United States, Mexico and Canada.



TOM OWENS

Republican and Democratic leaders embraced the treaty as the gateway to a panacea of increased profits, greater regional stability and lower consumer prices.

Admittedly, some have benefited from the lower costs of production provided by NAFTA. Corporations which have moved their plants to Mexico, where they can operate free of fair labor laws, minimum wage and pollution enforcement, have seen higher profits.

Investors in these companies have also benefited as the stock market rose on the news of greater earnings.

The only losers in this economic game are those Americans who do not possess enough capital to benefit significantly from a bull market. Their only wish is to receive an honest day's wages for an honest day's work in a decent paying job so they can support their families.

Manufacturing has historically been the source of the highest paying jobs for those without a college education. Therefore, the decline of American production means the decline of the American worker.

NAFTA has resulted in the transfer of thousands of hard-working American laborers from the steel mill to low-paying service-oriented jobs, such as fast food or retail sales. Americans who once built automobiles are now selling those built by Mexicans.

For example, General Motors (GM) used to be the largest employer in the United States. Today, it is the largest employer in Mexico, where it has built 50 plants in 20 years.

In Juarez alone, there are 18 plants of Delphi Automotive, a GM subsidiary. El Paso is becoming a glorified truck stop as Texans watch manufacturing jobs go south.

This treaty was supposed to open Mexico to U.S. auto exports. NAFTA has been an unquestionable failure in this respect.

In 1996, America shipped 46,000 cars to Mexico, and Mexico shipped 550,000 cars to America. Mexico got this booming auto industry from Michigan, Ohio and Missouri.

In the 1950s, "Engine Charlie" Wilson immortalized himself with the remark, "What's good for America is good for General Motors, and vice versa."

What Engine Charlie said was true when he said it. However, GM's four newest plants are going up in Argentina, Poland, China and Thailand.

**"The promise of lower consumer prices through free trade is a myth."**

As quoted in the *Wall Street Journal*, "GM's days of building new plants in North America may be over."

Another interesting illustration is the history of Volkswagen. In its early days in the U.S. market shortly after World War II, the company benefited from a positive stereotype portraying its German workers as meticulous perfectionists. Indeed, the VW Beetle was often of such high quality that its tight air seal would allow the car to float.

As Germany moved to a more socialist economy, however, VW moved some of its plants to the United States to reduce labor costs.

Now, thanks to NAFTA, all new VW's are built in Mexico. Volkswagen closed its last U.S. plant in the Mon Valley and moved production of its new

Beetle into Mexico, where it will produce a minimum of 450,000 vehicles a year.

Wages at Volkswagen's plant in Puebla average \$1.69 an hour, one-third of the U.S. minimum wage.

The "people's car" is now produced by some of the most exploited and underpaid workers in the world.

Consumers also have not benefited from the move of factories to Mexico.

Again using the example of Volkswagen, it can be easily estimated that the company is saving at least \$10 per hour per worker in its Mexican plants.

But Volkswagen's prices have not been reduced accordingly.

A new 1999 Volkswagen Jetta with no options lists for \$15,345. The comparable Nissan Altima, built in Tennessee, lists for about the same price, but with 35 more horsepower and more storage space.

Where have the savings reaped from the Mexican plants gone?

They have been stolen from the wages of American autoworkers and hoarded into the pockets of shareholders.

Any marketer can tell you that price is more a function of what the consumer is willing to pay than the cost of production.

Thus, the promise of lower consumer prices through free trade is a myth.

If all trade barriers are removed between a Third-World economy like Mexico and a first-world country like the United States, first-world manufacturers will head south to the advantage of the lower wages, and the Third-World workers will head north to the advantage of the higher wages.

Since the free-trade era began, 4,000 new factories have been built in northern Mexico, and 35 million immigrants have come into the United States — among them five million illegal aliens, mostly from Mexico.

If that is prosperity, then America should have none of it. Truly, free trade is not free.

Tom Owens is a senior chemical engineering major.

