

'Sesame Street' catches heat

Persistent rumors regarding Bert And Ernie's sexual orientation are based on ignorance

Bert the Muppet, of Bert and Ernie on "Sesame Street," is Ernie's gay lover. He is also Ernie's evil twin, a Nazi and yet another conspirator in the John F. Kennedy assassination, according to the allegations of various Internet sites.



HEATHER CORBELL

These urban legends have taken little pieces of "evidence" and started big rumors. For instance, they point out that Bert has three names, "Bert the Muppet," in conjunction with other assassins, like Lee Harvey Oswald. Internet photos hazily depict Bert standing on the grassy knoll in Dallas circa 1963.

A few years ago, he was rumored to have died of cancer on "Sesame Street" so that Ernie could teach kids how to deal with grief. It was also rumored that he moved away because parents were protesting the depiction of a gay couple on the PBS children's show.

Contradictions like these, like the one that Bert died on the show and moved away, are not uncommon in the slew of legends surrounding Bert and Ernie. It is unclear why the two puppets have been the particular targets of malicious rumors, but the rumors are clearly false. They are generated by mean-spirited, unimaginative, phobic people who do not understand the spirit of innocence that pervades children's television programming.

The rumor about Bert and Ernie's activities as gay lovers has been circulating for several years. While the exact origin of the rumor has not been discovered they go back at least as far as 1994 when Rev. Joseph Chambers blasted the "Sesame Street" pair on his radio show for having "blatantly effeminate characteristic." Chambers, using an old anti-sodomy law, even tried to get them banned from television.

Currently, no particular advocacy group claims the rumor or promotes it, but the falsehood continues to surface whenever "Sesame Street" comes up in conversation. Some critics point out that Bert and Ernie are two males who live together, share a bathtub and sleep in the same room, although they each have a twin bed, as their evidence for the puppets' alternative lifestyles. Furthermore, critics claim that female puppets never come to visit Bert and Ernie, implying that the boys are happier alone.

Some people can see that this is a ridiculous theory. The characters on "Sesame Street" do not have secret lives or hidden agendas. They relate to children because they behave like

children. The creators of the show intend to teach simple kids life lessons through the actions of innocent characters.

Bert and Ernie do not possess jobs, ambitions or sexual drives of any kind. Their function is to exhibit the follies and

forgiveness of friendship to young children, just like Grover teaches the meanings of words and Oscar the Grouch teaches lessons about attitude.

They live together because they are best friends. Producers in the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) use contrast in Bert and Ernie's friendship to show kids how to accept their differences and get along as friends.

Bert is responsible and likes to keep everything cleaned up. Ernie, on the other hand, brings spice to Bert's life with his creativity and eccentricity. They are a won-

derful study in contrast, and kids learn that friendship can bind together opposites. This is the purpose the twosome serve on "Sesame Street."

To the claim that the pair are gay because they live in the same apartment, The CTW says that Bert and Ernie share an apartment because of the outrageous rent prices in New York where "Sesame Street" has been filmed for the past 25 years.

The friends are obviously strapped for cash. Why else, other than economic necessity would they have worn the same clothes for over 30 years?

Like the rumor's of Bert and Ernie's sexual orientation, the jokes about Bert being involved in tragedies of histories are easily dispelled. Even overlooking the fact that he is a cloth puppet, Bert obviously was not involved in the Holocaust or the Kennedy assassination since he was not created until the '70s.

However, blatantly doctored photographs that allegedly reveal Bert's "dark side" remain on the Internet. Rumors also continue to circulate about Bert leaving the show through illness or relocation, the CTW disregards such rumors and emphasizes that there are no plans for the departure of Bert or Ernie.

Eventually, PBS and the Children's Television Workshop stopped ignoring the ludicrous claims against Bert and Ernie. Through station spokespeople and a number of press releases the CTW and PBS stated that Bert and Ernie in fact have no sexual orientation at all and that the two in no way represent a gay couple. Despite these official statements the speculation has persisted.

Sadly, photographs and flying rumors are leading to situations where some parents forbid their children to watch a great show. "Sesame Street" is educational, funny and endearing. It is also tenderly nostalgic for the college-age generation. Allegations against the popular show are heartbreaking. It appears that some adults have become so cynical and analytical that they can no longer appreciate purity.

There is nothing sinister or sinful about teaching kids life lessons. If cynics continue reading evil into innocence, childhood will be shattered. Children's shows will be forced to tiptoe around every issue in an attempt to avoid criticism, but criticism will be the only thing that remains.

Heather Corbell is a junior English major.



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

Dining Services improve during Sbisa renovation

When Sbisa Dining Hall closed at the beginning of the spring for a nine month makeover, the stage was certainly set for disaster.



CALEB MCDANIEL

But credit the good Aggies at Food Services for turning what could have been a miserable semester into a masterful performance.

The student body has not always been particularly charitable toward the hard-working people in the Department of Food Services. Instead of thanks for the meals they serve, they usually get pined in the face. In fact, students routinely deal with Food Services by expecting the best and belittling the rest. All the while, the department's staff has continued to do their thankless jobs with professionalism and pride.

But with such a history of hostility from patrons, no one could have blamed Food Services employees for learning the worst at the beginning of the year.

Despite the fact that the decision to renovate Sbisa was a good one, disgruntled students were prepared to make this the spring of their discontent.

The skeptical questions outnumbered the variety of cereals in Sbisa.

Where would students on the Northside eat?

Would meal plan customers be stuck with a heap of wasted credits?

And how would other dining locations deal with crowds caused by the closure of Sbisa?

Would a dropped cup clatter without comment, or would it still be permissible to shame clumsy students into "picking it up"?

All of these questions and more have been satisfactorily answered. Not only has Food Services triumphed in the midst of potential trial — it has even out paced its normal performance.

The first key to the Department's success has been the creative restructuring of the Outbound Dining option. Every Food Services location on campus now offers a special deal to students with a meal plan at no extra charge.

There were minor difficulties in the expanded implementation of Outbound Dining. It took

some adjustment for students to learn what they could get with a swipe of their Aggie Cards. But Food Services responded to early confusion by clearly posting Outbound menus in every location. Ever since, students have had the pleasant surprise of sometimes getting \$8 worth of food for one use of their meal plans. In some cases, the meal deal is more than even a hungry college student can conceivably eat.

Even more important than the quantity of the meals has been their quality. Food Services has discovered that students will more readily eat a well-made grilled chicken sandwich than a gourmet stuffed pepper.

So under the new arrangement, students are not limited to eating the food they really like in rare cases. Rather, the popular fare is available at every meal, carefully prepared to students' liking.

Finally, the piece de resistance of Food Services' new policies has been the excellence of the service.

The overflow from Sbisa has saddled workers at smaller locations with longer lines and longer hours. For the most part, these workers — whose faces are recognizable but whose names are often unknown — have held up admirably.

Good people like the regular employees at Rumours or the hard-working manager of Zachry Snackery still understand the spirit of a "howdy." They know service with a smile goes a long way toward making a student's day.

But they also deserve to know that their friendliness is noticed and their promptness is appreciated. The Department of Food Services has exceeded students' expectations, and they need to be thanked. It would take only a moment for on-campus diners to let servers know that their diligence has made an impression.

At the same time, Food Services should keep a good thing going. There is no reason the improvements made this semester should not continue once Sbisa re-opens. Students should actively suggest that Outbound Dining be available next year.

And if the present semester is any indication of things to come, the day may not be far off when it is finally true that dining on campus really is fun.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

PTTS does not serve A&M student's needs

In response to Richard Bray's Feb. 15 article.

When I was a sophomore, I received a parking ticket even though I did not own nor did I have access to a car or motorcycle. I never receive a logical answer from PTTS as to why this occurred. Naturally, I read with great interest the article concerning better PTTS/student relations. I was specifically interested in Tom Williams' quote: about PTTS managing the University's parking permit system.

Let's define the permit system. Is selling three blue parking passes for every one physical spot considered good management? Is trying to build a pay-parking garage on Red/Blue lots, thus removing more of an already scarce resource, considered good management?

Is management defined as telling all on- and off-campus students that they cannot park in the spots that they paid

for across from Kyle Field on football game weekends because the rich alumni want them?

PTTS serves the almighty dollar, followed very closely by the sports department. They serve two masters, but they shouldn't insult our intelligence by claiming that the students are one of them.

Scott Phillips
Class of '00

Doubts arise over role of A&M Student Senate

In response to Dana Jamus' Feb. 14 article.

Upon reading about the prospect of yet another tuition fee being raised (this time for our rec center), I began to wonder what our Student Senate is actually for. Are we not suppose to be represented, and to some extent protected, by our Senate? Does anyone remember Will Hurd ever opposing a fee increase? This school is one of the most conser-

vative schools around. Why then are we not fiscally conservative?

Whenever we have a fee or tuition increase we hear, there will be more financial aid available for students in need. Is this not just passing the buck to the taxpayers of our state so our departments can, "Provide better services?" This is not fiscally responsible and should be opposed by our student government.

Michael Emery
Class '02

MAIL CALL

EDITORIAL

THE BATTALION

Editorials appearing in *The Battalion* reflect the majority view of the editorial board members. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of other Battalion staff members, the Texas A&M student body, regents, administration, faculty or staff. Columns, guest columns, cartoons and letters express the opinions of the authors.

SUPPORT FOR PRAIRIE VIEW A&M

Tragedy should draw the same response Bonfire collapse did

Tragedy cannot break the ties that bind, but only strengthen them. The Texas A&M community discovered this as news of the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse unfolded on an early morning last November. Thousands gathered for a memorial service that very night, and flowers for the fallen and injured students adorned many locations across campus for weeks to come.

However, the tremendous grief of the moment was felt not only by members of the community, but also by those who watched the unity of this University from afar and support in the form of cards and letters as well as thoughts and prayers came in from across the nation. Prairie View A&M is experiencing this

same grief after a tragic accident that occurred last Thursday night. On that night, a van carrying the university's men's track team to a meet at the University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff swerved to avoid another car and flipped, taking the lives of four men and injuring six others, including the team's coach.

Thousands gathered on Friday for a memorial service, and mourners have placed flowers on the track field on the Prairie View campus as a memorial to the four fallen team members. A somber feeling has spread throughout the university as members of the Prairie View family cope with their loss.

This tragedy and its aftermath should certainly feel familiar to students at

Texas A&M, not only in light of recent experience, but also because Prairie View A&M is considered a sister school to Texas A&M, having been formed by the same Morrill Land Grant. If anyone is in a position to offer a shoulder of strength to Prairie View at this time, it is this community and the students of this campus.

Support for Prairie View has poured in from all sides following this tragedy, and *The Battalion* wishes to join that sentiment by sharing the understanding of a fellow school familiar with tragedy.

Likewise, one hopes that other schools and individuals will continue to further support Prairie View A&M as much as they did for Texas A&M during the Bonfire collapse.

EDITORIAL BOARD

MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
EDITOR IN CHIEF

BEVERLY MIRELES
MANAGING EDITOR
STUART HUTSON
CAMPUS EDITOR
ERIC DICKENS
OPINION EDITOR
KYLE WHITACRE
AGGIELIFE EDITOR
DOUG SHILLING
SPORTS EDITOR
JASON BENNYHOFF
RADIO PRODUCER
GUY ROGERS
PHOTO EDITOR
RUBEN DELUNA
GRAPHICS EDITOR
JEFF KEMPF
NIGHT NEWS EDITOR
BRANDON PAYTON
WEB MASTER

MEREDITH HIGHT
COLUMN EDITOR
MARIANO CASTILLO
OPINION EDITOR
VERONICA SERRANO
AGGIELIFE EDITOR
DAVE AMBER
SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY EDITOR
JASON LINCOLN
ASST. SPORTS EDITOR
NONI SRIDHARA
ASST. RADIO PRODUCER
JP BEATO
PHOTO EDITOR
ROBERT HYNCECK
GRAPHICS EDITOR
CRISTINA PADRON
ASST. NIGHT NEWS EDITOR
BRENT BARKLEY
ASST. WEB MASTER

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to: **The Battalion - Mail Call**
013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111
Campus Mail: 4111
Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com