

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Coming to America

Fairy-tale romance exaggerated by media, blatantly disregards immigration process



CAYLA CARR

The storybook romance usually ends with Cinderella and her Prince Charming escaping all evils and living happily ever after — not in today's society. As a real romantic tale unfolds, criminal charges quickly kick it back to reality. Bahraini Princess Mariam Al Khalifa was smuggled into the United States by then United States Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jason Johnson. The two fell in love last year at a mall in Bahrain, knowing they would find a way to be together. The couple eloped in Las Vegas and now live on a military base close to San Diego. But while the media insists on glamorizing the chivalrous actions of now Pfc. Johnson, U.S. immigration officials take a different stance.

Even when love is involved, rules must be followed. The actions of these two individuals, an illegal immigrant and a soldier obligated to defend the country, are neither glorious nor romantic. The couple must step out of the spotlight and focus on reality, because when laws are broken, negative consequences should follow.

Johnson is not a hero. He used his military affiliation to smuggle an illegal immigrant into the country. He secretly brought Al Khalifa into the country by forging military documents. Johnson claimed to have encouraged his fiancée to disguise herself in American clothing to keep from raising suspicion on a commercial plane. And since the Johnsons now reside on a California military base, the two criminals are living comfortably off government money. Johnson has been demoted from lance corporal to private first class and assigned extra duty. Is this punishment severe enough? His actions might warrant a dishonorable discharge.

When Princess Al Khalifa fled her home and country, many felt she dishonored her family and religion. The fact that Al Khalifa is a princess makes for a good

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fairy-tale romance. If this story involved a commoner instead of a princess, she would not still be in the United States. The media are trying to transform this into another Elian Gonzales crisis. They overlook the facts, and try to convince society that this is a heartwarming emotional tale. This princess has no right to stay in the country, and since she came to America illegally, government actions have been taken to remove her from the country. The American dream is sometimes seen as having the freedom to do virtually anything. This belief has led many to leave home and seek refuge in the United States. However, to have a chance at the dream, the trek must be made legally. By following procedure, an immigrant has a greater chance of being allowed to stay; disrespecting American laws and coming into the country under a disguise are immoral.

If the judicial system takes its time and eventually removes the princess, many people will disapprove and once again be unhappy with the U.S. government. Therefore, action needs to be taken quickly in this case so that widespread controversy does not erupt. If these two individuals are not swiftly and severely punished, then the government will do a disservice to the process of legal immigration. Johnson needs to be discharged. If not, more military personnel will assume that it is acceptable to abuse their positions. Likewise, the media has made it easy to sympathize with a young woman now in a foreign country to her who is afraid to return home. But this woman is royalty. If she is punished, it would not be as harsh as the punishment facing a commoner in the same situation.

People want to see the princess and the private first class overcome obstacles and remain together, living happily ever after. However, Princess Mariam and Pfc. Johnson broke all the laws for love. America is not fantasy land where laws are lenient and criminals run free. Actions must be taken against these two individuals. They should have thought with their brains, not just their hearts. If they followed proper procedures, their



KELSEY ROBERTS/THE BATTALION

story might have had a real-life fairy-tale ending. But since they acted on impulse in the name of love, the law must step in. Ironically, though, if the couple is punished appropriately, then their story can join the millions of other tragic love stories, loved by society, that did not end happily ever after.

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Expulsion should be last resort

Earlier this month, state House of Representatives members introduced a new education bill to Illinois Gov. George Ryan, which he vetoed. The bill would have allowed, but not required, suspended or expelled students to attend alternative schools, and also would have required school districts to enforce full suspensions for disciplined students. After passing through the House and Senate unanimously, the bill was rejected by because he felt that signing it would send an inappropriate message about the importance of kids being in school. He is absolutely right. Students should be required to attend an alternate school when suspended or expelled, and school districts should be required to send suspended students to school while they are serving their suspensions. Do whatever is necessary, but kids need to be in school. It is most definitely the responsibility of the state's representatives to keep them there. Unfortunately, some of representatives and lawmakers do not agree with that.

The authors of the bill, Todd Sieben (R-Geneseo) and Kirk Dillard (R-Hinsdale) and contributor Gerald Mitchell (R-Sterling) have had more than a few choice words to say in response to Ryan's rejection. Mitchell came to the defense of the bill, saying, "This is not a bill refusing alternative schooling. We're not talking about kids who are talking back to their teacher. Students have to work pretty darn hard to get suspended."

Even though getting suspended might involve a lot of "hard work" on the part of a delinquent student, does it matter? Schools should not give up on the stu-

dents who misbehave "badly enough" to get suspended. Often, it is too much of a hassle or costs too much to set up an alternative school for suspended or expelled students or to transport students to an alternative school.

Instead of taking the initiative to include these kids in some kind of program, they are sent home to their parents, and often, their own devices — and that will never solve anything. Sieben said: "My view is, once they're expelled, let them sit out for awhile. Once they're serious about their education they can think about re-enrolling."

All of these representatives insist that this bill was meant to help kids and help keep schools safer. It does not help kids to simply send them home. They run the chance of being unsupervised because their parents are working, or in more unfortunate cases, cannot or do not give their children the attention they desperately need. It is also not realistic to see all kids who misbehave in school as "unsafe." It is not realistic for misguided youths to be concerned with their long-term education, and they cannot be expected to take initiative on their own.

Sometimes misbehavior in school is a cry for help or for attention. Because it is not always possible to determine the reasons behind the behavior that leads to suspensions and expulsions, the problem cannot be ignored in the hopes it will go away. Time and energy need to be put into the students who need them the most.

Staff editorial from the Daily Illini at the University of Illinois.

Mail Call

Vacationing student deals with GTE's poor phone service

In response to Luke McMahan's July 24 column.

Thank you so much for all the articles about the GTE monopoly in College Station. I spent 20 minutes on the phone with one of their "customer service" representatives last week because they have totally screwed me over on charging me this summer.

I am not even in College Station, but I chose to have my phone put on Vacation Freeze so that I would not have to pay to have it re-installed this August. Instead of charging me \$20 to reconnect when I get back down to school, as the original lady told me, they are charging me half of my regular phone bill each month.

However, I am still paying full price for features such as caller-ID, call forwarding, etc., even though

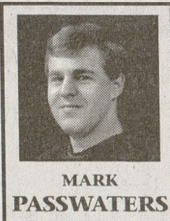
there is no phone even plugged into the line. It is absolutely ridiculous. I am going to end up paying \$60 for my phone this summer instead of the \$20 that I was promised. I told the representative that as soon as there was another option for local service, I would take it.

Sara Martin
Class of '01

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National mourning for JFK Jr. excessive, unrealistic

The first anniversary of the crash that claimed the lives of John F. Kennedy Jr., his wife and his sister-in-law was two weekends ago. The amount of attention the anniversary garnered was astounding. Fox News dedicated its entire weekend schedule to "JFK Jr.: as it happened," and three books on Kennedy were released, including one with the sappy title, *The Day John Died*. Members of America Online were asked: "JFK Jr.: Where were you?" when they logged on.



MARK PASSWATERS

While Kennedy's death was unquestionably sad, the nation's response to his passing — indeed, to his whole life — was unreasonably excessive. The desire of some Americans to place people on a pedestal prevented Kennedy from having a normal life. That same idol worship has also prevented many Americans from seeing the basic facts surrounding his death. Simply put, it is time for America to get over Kennedy's death.

Why was John F. Kennedy Jr. one of the most sought-after men in America? Why was he People magazine's "Sexiest Man Alive" in 1987? Because he was a Kennedy. President John F. Kennedy has become an almost mythical figure. People remember the young president, his glamorous wife and the ideal of Camelot. They remember his little son saluting his casket as it passed on the way to Arlington National Cemetery. And, in the process, the nation forgot that the Kennedys are human.

The flaws of Kennedy seemed minor compared to those of some of

his family members. He was a decent student, an adequate lawyer and the editor of a moderately successful magazine. Unlike his relatives, he did not have a drinking or drug problem, he was not caught having a sexual affair with an underage babysitter, and he did not cause the death of a young woman by driving his car into the Chappaquiddick River.

Basically, Kennedy would have been a regular guy, if not for his last name. He had some success, but most was not gained through his own personal merit. Yet, when he died, the country's outpouring of emotion was greater than for the deaths of Joe DiMaggio, Frank Sinatra or Payne Stewart, who all achieved greatness through their own efforts.

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If a son of a bus driver went to Brown University, became a lawyer and later a publisher and had been People's "Sexiest Man Alive," he would have been more worthy of the nation's note than Kennedy. After all, it would have been someone who worked hard, strove for excellence and attained it — all on his own. If that man, who had attained what many consider the American dream, died young, it would truly have been a tragedy. For some reason, people around the nation were obsessed with making Kennedy into something bigger than life, a base for their own personal American dreams.

Such idol worship has made it impossible for some people to see that Kennedy died because he made an error in judgment. Kennedy was a novice pilot, having flown solo fewer than a dozen times. He was not certified to fly an aircraft primarily by instruments instead of sight.

Despite of his inexperience, despite poor visibility, despite the nighttime landing, Kennedy decided to make the flight. The result was the deaths of Kennedy, his wife Carolyn and her sister Lauren. Showing the trait that has gotten so many of his kin in trouble, Kennedy acted as if he were invincible. Experienced pilots agreed that they would not have made the flight in those circumstances. The official report by the Federal Aviation Administration concurred with these assessments, blaming the crash on pilot error.

Yet, not one year later, the members of the press and public continue to act as if Kennedy were some kind of deity. Gone too soon, perhaps, but so are many others. Such blind worship of human beings, such as Princess Diana, is counterproductive. It prevents those in the spotlight from living real lives and denies the public to grow as people. By trying to shelter themselves in the aura of a figure who has become a modern legend, regular citizens deny the realities of life. These are realities that the younger Kennedy attempted to embrace, but was not allowed to.

Kennedy suffered a great deal of loss in his lifetime. He saw his father and his uncle murdered and watched his mother succumb to cancer. He saw his father and his uncle murdered and watched his mother succumb to cancer. He saw his father and his uncle murdered and watched his mother succumb to cancer. He saw his father and his uncle murdered and watched his mother succumb to cancer. He saw his father and his uncle murdered and watched his mother succumb to cancer.

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