

## Bring out the dead



RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

### Funeral home was wrong for leaving corpse on porch

When having to deal with the unfortunate experience of losing a loved one, it is expected that the funeral home handling the burial arrangements properly conducts and provides its services in a professional and dignified manner. However, for Nancy King, the treatment she received from a Missouri funeral home was far short of her expectations. On returning from the grocery store, King was astounded to find the body of her boyfriend, Robert Holder, lying in a bag on her front porch.



J.J. TREVINO

**A funeral home should never operate in such an irresponsible manner, with such a malicious disregard for the deceased and inflict pain on those who already grieving.**

Sadly, his wife had been claimed by cancer the previous week. Apparently, the reason the funeral home chose to leave Holder's body on the porch was because the bill for his cremation services had not been paid. Despite those who think the funeral home acted justifiably because of an outstanding invoice, a funeral home should never operate in such an irresponsible manner, with such a malicious disregard for the deceased and those who already are grieving. While the funeral home was due \$1,200, the thought of placing a dead person's body on their front porch out of spite for an unpaid bill is disturbing. At no point was King trying to avoid making the payment, but rather she seemed to be struggling to piece her life back together while dealing with the death of her boyfriend. Moreso, because King and Holder were not married, King was not allowed to grant permission for the cremation, and thus was not responsible for making the payment. Holder's daughter, who was his closest surviving relative, already had been contacted and made aware of the bill. One rightfully assumes the payment was going to be

made at some point in the near future.

When a funeral home places such an importance on an unpaid bill by electing to leave the body of a loved one on their front porch, they have clearly circumvented ethical boundaries.

At all times, it is imperative that the services funeral homes provide be performed respectfully, regardless of how or when the bill for their services will be paid.

Under normal procedure and to coincide with state law, the funeral home should contact the county coroner if a relative does not claim the deceased's body. Yet, in King's case contact was never attempted.

The State Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors that licenses funeral homes in Missouri has since said that should the accusations prove true, the funeral home could face a penalty ranging from a disciplinary letter to revocation of its license.

The director for the funeral home in question, Gary Peterman, has declined to discuss the allegations "out of respect to Mr. Holder." Where was that respect when the funeral home's employees were placing his body next to the daily newspaper? Thankfully, however, not all funeral homes operate with the same business driven, maximize-profit mentality. Jim Miller, an employee for a neighboring funeral home, realized that the respect for an individual goes far beyond the status of a pending bill, and picked up the body from the porch. "I'm not worried about the money," Miller said. "We'll cover the expenses, I just want to make this thing right."

Hopefully, it will not be long before the board convenes and revokes the license of this shameful funeral home. In a civilized society, there is no room for businesses who operate with a lack of courtesy and thoughtfulness.

J.J. Trevino is a senior journalism major.

### Family should pay expenses for cremation of corpse

If a month's electric bill goes unpaid, not one of the house's occupants really is surprised when the power shuts off. When 74-year-old Robert L. Holder's family decided not to pay his cremation expenses on time, it should have come as no surprise when Holder popped up, post mortem, on the front porch of his Cross Timbers, Mo., home.



GEORGE DEUSCH

Whatever the reason may be, people feel that because of woeful situations, things should be handed to them for free. Nancy King, Holder's live-in girlfriend, certainly was one of these people.

Playing her "little old lady" routine for all it was worth, it seems she was ultimately trying to weasel out of paying her late boyfriend's funeral and cremation costs.

But little old ladies can be deadbeats, too, and Hathaway Peterman Funeral home did the right thing by leaving Holder on his front steps like the morning paper. Hathaway Peterman still was faced with a \$1,200 problem, and human corpses do not dispose of themselves.

Still, the initial reaction is to feel sorry for a dead old man, especially one who is a World War II veteran from a hospital. But no one feels sorry for a crook, which is the role King and the other members of Holder's family played by trying to steal a cremation from a funeral home, which is a legitimate business.

A cremation is a costly affair, and anyone who works in a crematorium knows that their profession only is slightly more enviable than that of a garbage man. When Holder's relatives avoided the funeral home's bill, they knew it was a crime and that there would

be consequences.

King claims that, because she was not Holder's legal wife and cannot grant a cremation, his daughter in Oklahoma should cover the costs. Holder's daughter thinks that, as a live-in girlfriend, the responsibility should be King's. But if they love this man as much as they insist, it would not matter who paid the sum.

In today's politically correct society, everyone is a victim, especially little old ladies with dead people on their front porches. Instead of criminal charges being filed against King and the estranged family, it is Hathaway Peterman Funeral Home, who is facing disciplinary action.

Apparently the fine print on a Missouri state law says that if a body is not claimed by a relative, the funeral home should contact the county coroner. So now, the State Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors,

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which licenses all of Missouri's funeral homes, is breathing down Hathaway Peterman Director Gary Peterman's neck.

Pat Handy, presumably the state board's head embalmer, is looking into the matter. He says that Hathaway Peterman can face punishment ranging from a strongly worded letter to revocation of its license, in spite of all Peterman's protestations that they "just let this issue drop."

Holder has since been taken care of by Reser Funeral Home in nearby Warsaw, Mo., but it is still a travesty when such a cut-and-dry issue as payment for services rendered is complicated by miserly relatives. At least now all of Missouri knows that if they let grandpa's funeral expenses go unpaid, he might just drop by for one last visit.

George Deusch is a junior journalism major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Moral relativism is shortsighted

In response to Charlton Wimberly's Oct. 19 column:

I have worked for Reuters News Pictures for more than five years as a contract photojournalist, and I must protest Mr. Wimberly's ill-informed assessment of Reuters' policy regarding labeling certain groups "terrorists."

Blaming the Reuters policy on so-called moral relativism is a shortsighted view of the issue. A reason for the policy is not one of political correctness but one of safety. In my five years with the company, I have covered many controversial stories where the media became targets of violence stemming from resentment of prior coverage. Reuters employs journalists in all corners of the world — a network of coverage larger than the ubiquitous Associated Press. Reuters journal-

ists constantly are in positions of danger, be it in Chechnya, Rwanda, or Pakistan and Afghanistan. By using such language as "terrorist" or "madmen," a news agency can create added peril for its personnel in the area of concern.

The official stance of Reuters is that "we do not characterize the subjects of news stories but instead report their actions, identity and background so that readers can make their own decisions based on the facts." Reuters does not tell readers what to think, instead the company demands that readers think for themselves — a skill called upon so infrequently by most news outlets as to have atrophied for most of the public. While I am as ardent a patriot as the president himself, as a journalist, I must suggest we relegate name-calling to the opinion page and AM radio.

Brian Dear  
Class of 2002

#### Yell leaders were new at one time, too

In response to Kelln Zimmer's Oct. 23 column:

If this University intends to continue to be recognized for its tradition and its diversity, then it must look to the student body for support.

According to Kelln Zimmer, the creation of such a group is sending this University down a path that "could lead to the loss of the very traditions that help define the Aggie experience." I feel very much differently.

It is true that this school has been built upon tradition, and I fully feel that each and every one of those traditions have earned their place here and need to be preserved. However, at the same time, if you think back to when the tradition of yell leaders was first established, chances are there was quite a bit of opposition regarding the new "spirit direc-

tors," just as there is now for the Fightin' Texas Aggie Competitive Cheer Squad. Back then, having Yell Leaders was new to everyone and made no promises of becoming a famous tradition to anyone.

The students of Texas A&M are being offered a unique opportunity; the chance to begin a new tradition. Every one of the traditions at Texas A&M had to begin somewhere. What's to say that something new and different, such as a cheering squad, will not become as famous a tradition as anything else?

Another concern is that non-Aggies will be given the wrong impression, thinking that this squad is the sole spirit representation for the University. If there is as much confidence in the tradition of the Yell Leaders as is voiced, then it need not be a concern.

This University is famous for many things, of which the yell leaders are one. It is said that, as Aggies, we never "hiss" another

Aggie. Deep down, all this opposition to the new squad is just another form of "hissing" our cheerleading Aggies.

It is time that the 12th Man recognize that we are one student body that adheres to the desires of all students, and that by creating

the Fightin' Texas Aggie Competitive Cheer Squad, we are not destroying old traditions, but rather building new ones.

Stephen M. Bahr II  
Class of 2000

### CARTOON OF THE DAY

