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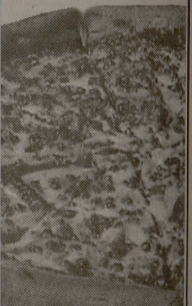
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# OPINION

## Sbisa presents: meals gone mild

Renovation of OSbisa has killed Aggie traditions and camaraderie

An eerie silence fills the boundless room. Hundreds sit at the tables, quietly eating the mysterious meat of the day. Two salaried officials stand observing the masses, ready to pounce on any deviants.

Sadly, it is just another day in Sbisa.

In years past, the word Sbisa would conjure up images of Sbisa balls being tossed back and forth between friends, Hullabaloo being pounded on the tables, and yells of "Pick it up!" when an inexperienced freshman dropped his tray on the way to his table. It was these traditions and the camaraderie that were built between students that made Sbisa a unique dining experience instead of just another ordinary dining hall. Yet since Sbisa's renovation and subsequent reopening in 2001, there has been a con-



NICHOLAS NEUMANN

certed and continued effort by Department of Food Services officials to remove such uniqueness from the hall. Unfortunately, Food Services fails to realize that much of Sbisa's popularity is due to the traditions and camaraderie associated with it. Less expensive and better tasting food is available less than a block away at Northgate, but droves of students still fill Sbisa every day because of its unique atmosphere. Food Services needs to understand that if it is successful in its attempt to remove all remnants of tradition from Sbisa, it will be left with nothing more than a dull dining hall, and students may choose to take their business elsewhere.

Students used to have no qualms about taking a brown Sbisa napkin, carefully folding it into a compact Sbisa ball, and throwing it at one of their friends at a nearby table. But the practice is now outlawed, and Sbisa officials stand watching and waiting to discipline any student caught throwing one. Food Services Director Ron Beard said he objects to the tradition because students get carried away, causing messes and other disruptive behavior.

While disruptive behavior such as a food fight is questionable, the simple tossing of a Sbisa ball at a friend does not incite a riot. Furthermore, the effort required to clean up the mess Sbisa balls create is minimal, since they can be swept away with the food and other debris

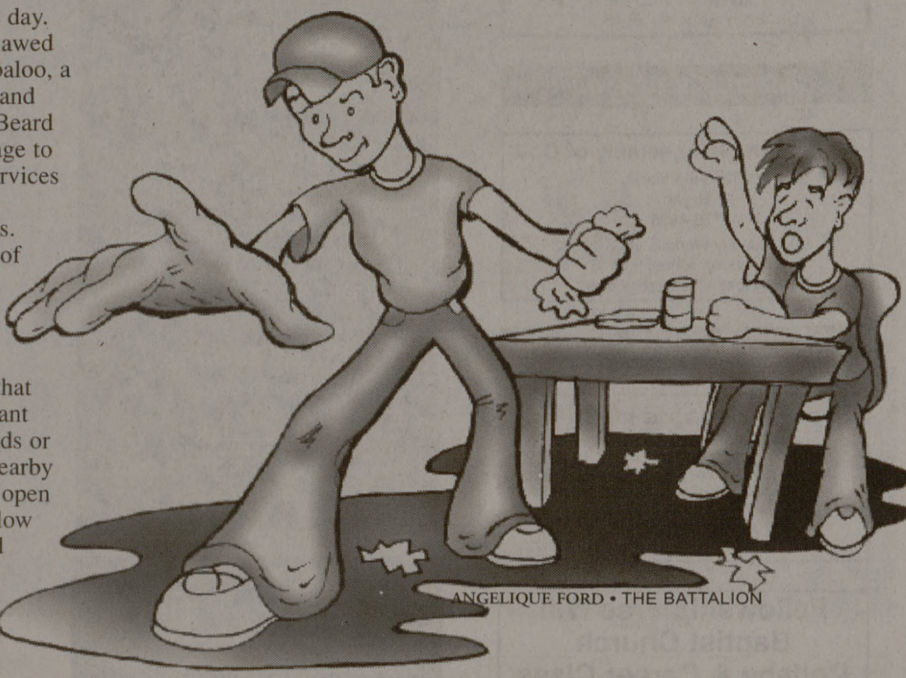
that falls from tables during the day.

Sbisa officials have also outlawed the practice of pounding Hullabaloo, a tradition that helps to establish and display dorm and Aggie unity. Beard says pounding has caused damage to Sbisa tables. However, Food Services officials will not even allow the pounding of Hullabaloo on trays. They seem opposed to the idea of anything that deviates from their image of a sterile and quiet eating environment.

Food Services may have some validity to its position in that some patrons of Sbisa do not want Sbisa balls flying over their heads or Hullabaloo being pounded on nearby tables. Yet Food Services is not open to any sort of compromise to allow the traditions to continue. Beard even said that he would not be open to the idea of having a designated area of Sbisa where traditions such as Sbisa balls would be allowed.

In fact, Food Services is so opposed to traditions in Sbisa that it has distributed fliers to its patrons that attempt to argue against them. The flier contains a bulleted list defining an Aggie in Sbisa. Apparently, Beard and his co-workers believe themselves more qualified than the student body to define an Aggie. An Aggie, the flier says, does not throw napkins and does not bang on trays. Anyone who has ever thrown a Sbisa ball or pounded Hullabaloo should be offended by the insinuation that he is not an Aggie because of his actions.

Sbisa patrons should be further



ANGELIQUE FORD • THE BATTALION

insulted by the way Sbisa officials treat them. One or two Food Services officials are always watching the students as if they were criminals, and the officials frequently exchange condescending glances with potential troublemakers. A customer at any other restaurant would take offense if the manager stood against the wall glaring at him during his entire meal. Yet Food Services officials have no problem doing this to their customers.

A framed poster in Sbisa claims that Food Services is building community through dining together. This

couldn't be further from the truth. Food Services has removed a good deal of the character, tradition and community-building atmosphere from its establishment, yet despite its best efforts, some still remains. Students should refuse to let the last bit of uniqueness be removed from Sbisa, and Food Services must realize why Sbisa is special, and begin to treat its patrons more like customers and less like criminals.

Nicholas Neumann is a graduate computer science major.

## Guns save lives

The Dallas Morning News reported late last month that a resident in the far north area of the city fatally shot two men after they forced their way into his home and attacked him. For this quick-thinking citizen, the personal firearm he kept in his home likely saved his life and the lives of his family.

Perhaps those who persist in assailing the constitutional rights of American gun owners should reevaluate their position.

The 29-year-old victim of the home intrusion, who was unnamed in the article, was home with his wife and three children on Jan. 23. At 9 a.m., two men appeared at a side door and asked for someone the man did not know. Before he knew it, the two forcefully entered the home and shot him in the arm. After retrieving a firearm from his bedroom, police said the resident shot and killed the two intruders in an ensuing gun battle.

When lobbying for further restrictions on Second Amendment rights, gun-control advocates love to call attention to the number of crimes committed with guns in America. Brushing the Constitution off like a Transportation Services parking ticket, these groups call for more laws, more interference with average citizens seeking to exercise their outdated (albeit enumerated) rights. Somehow, they confuse good citizens with criminals. Ignored is the fact that, in the hands of the law-abiding, firearms are frequently used to prevent crimes.

An exhaustive study on the effects of firearm ownership on crime by Professor John R. Lott bears this fact out. In his book, More Guns, Less Crime, Lott examines the results seen in many states after allowing qualified citizens to carry concealed weapons. Lott found that, in counties allowing concealed handguns, the violent crime rate dropped an average of 5.5 percent, while neighboring counties not allowing concealed carry saw murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault and property crimes all rise. Apparently, the criminals decided it would be in their best interest to choose victims less likely to be armed.

Noticing the clear trend in these areas of the country, Lott was curious as to how the crime rates would have been affected had all states adopted right-to-carry laws. In one year alone, he estimated that 1,500 murders and 4,000 rapes would have never taken place. While substantial on its own, this analysis does not even begin to tell the whole story. Lott reports that, according to surveys, 98 percent of the



JERAD NAJVAR

time guns are used defensively, and the mere sight of a gun will send an attacker running. Many such instances are never reported to police, distorting the true role of firearms in self-defense. Rather than being blamed for violent crime, firearms in the hands of average and law-abiding citizens should be credited with much success in thwarting crime.

Another trend anti-gunners should take notice of is the falling crime rate under the Bush administration and Ashcroft's Justice Department. As the Wall Street Journal reported this week, Ashcroft was initially attacked as attorney general because he believed Americans had a right to own guns. After two years in office, the violent crime rate is down from 12 percent to 9 percent. The reason? Ashcroft implemented Project Safe Neighborhoods, a plan similar to those long-advocated by the NRA and other gun-rights groups, as well as by law enforcement.

The plan called for more money and officers to be directed at enforcing the gun laws already in existence. In contrast to the Brady waiting period, which, according to John Lott, only put four criminals behind bars in the four years before it was determined to be unconstitutional, Project Safe Neighborhoods has been wildly successful. The same Journal article reveals that federal firearms prosecutions have increased 32 percent over Clinton administration prosecutions, with the vast majority of convicts receiving jail sentences of three or more years. The Ashcroft Justice Department has treated the right to bear arms with the respect it deserves, simultaneously reducing the rate of violent crime, simply by enforcing the laws already on the books. Somehow, this strategy had been conveniently overlooked by those hostile to gun rights.

When the Redcoats attempted to seize colonial arms in Concord, they were met by minutemen at Lexington Green, and the Revolutionary War began. These early Americans appreciated first-hand the importance of an armed citizenry to ensuring safety, whether it be against a tyrant or a simple intruder. The Second Amendment is by no accidental circumstance or historical anomaly enumerated in the document establishing this nation. Even in today's society, guns serve as an invaluable tool for self-defense. The gun-control lobby owes an apology to all Americans for seeking to undermine both their rights and their safety.

Jerad Najvar is a senior political science major.

## Blue laws antiquated

Freedom-loving Aggies must unite. The state of Texas has restricted personal freedoms for too long through archaic "blue laws." These laws are defined by Merriam-Webster as, "one of numerous extremely rigorous laws designed to regulate morals and conduct." In other words, special interest groups have high-jacked Texas state law to force their version of morality on Texas citizens. These laws restrict personal freedom, go against our free market system and blur the line between the separation of church and state. Frankly, they are unconstitutional.

On any given Sunday, the usual sad scene starts something like this: Two brothers who attend an early church service, go grocery shopping afterward at the local HEB. The brothers like to peruse the beer section every week, especially the foreign and domestic specialty brews when one of them happens to spot some TsingTao (a beer from China) that looks worth trying. They finish their shopping around 10:30 a.m. and head for the checkout. After the first few items in front of their six-pack of TsingTao are scanned, they are politely informed that Texas does not allow the sale of beer before noon on Sundays. They put the beer aside somewhat sullenly and finish checking out.

What is the big deal you might ask? It's just beer. Please explain the difference between purchasing beer at 11:59 a.m. and at 12:01 p.m. on Sunday. Sunday is not inherently different from any other day of the



MATT CHESHIER

week. If you go to a restaurant, you are unable to purchase beer with your meal until 10 a.m. according to TABC code. Liquor stores are not even allowed to be open on Sundays. The answer, as an article by Ari Armstrong puts it, has everything to do with religion.

The first amendment states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. Sunday is the Sabbath for a majority of Americans. A law prohibiting commerce on a holy day is clearly respecting an establishment of religion.

Equal protection of the laws is guaranteed by the 14th amendment. It is impossible to justify any business but a liquor store being able to operate on Sunday. Someone might like to pick up a nice bottle of wine to go with his or her Sunday dinner. These laws benefit no one.

This is not an advocacy of reckless early morning drinking. No, this is a demand for personal freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. Our local State Representative Fred Brown best summed up these laws by calling them, "outdated and poorly reflective of modern consumer practices." That is something we can all say amen to.

Matt Cheshier is a senior economics major.

### MAIL CALL

#### Ross Volunteers did not harass protesters

In Ms. Walch's article, Thursday, she wrote of an incident in which the Ross Volunteers allegedly harassed anti-war protesters holding a candle-light prayer vigil. I was there during this supposed incident, and I saw no harassment taking place. Almost every Monday night as I walk back to my dorm after dinner, I see the Ross Volunteers doing their PT from the Quad to the Academic Plaza and back. Monday night was no different. They ran in doing their jodie (in lay terms, a cadence), got on one knee and rested while their leader gave them a speech, did some drills with their rifles, and then ran back to the Quad. Throughout this regular routine I did not witness one iota of hostility toward the protesters.

In the 60's, anti-war protesters faced down National Guardsmen and never complained. How sad it is for the anti-war effort that

this era's protesters are so sensitive that they can't even be in the presence of the Governor's honor guard.

Kerry Chandler  
Class of 2005

#### Crush party allowed time for guests to attend Silver Taps

In response to Matt Giese's Feb. 6 mailcall:

Please allow me to set the record straight on behalf of my organization. I would first like to apologize to any member of the Texas A&M community offended by the scheduling of our crush party on the same evening as Silver Taps. I assure that Kappa Kappa Gamma supports Texas A&M and its traditions and our event was by no means an effort to take away from Silver Taps or those being remembered.

We were aware that Silver Taps and our event would be held on the same evening. Our

risk management policies require that we have set times that men are allowed to enter our event. In effort to accommodate our members and guest wishing to attend Silver Taps, the check-in time was extended to midnight allowing for attendance at both events. It was possible to attend both Silver Taps and the crush party on Tuesday evening. The party had originally been scheduled for the week prior, but members of both the Corps of Cadets concerned with their selection of Corps Block and fraternity leaders with recruitment conflicts had asked to change the date.

Our purpose was misrepresented by Mr. Giese's letter, and I regret that our event was held on the same evening as Silver Taps, but assure you that there was no disrespect meant by my organization or any of its members.

Jade Fountain  
President,  
Kappa Kappa Gamma  
Class of 2004