

## Editorial

# ASUN must emphasize issues rather than image

It's Thursday, and by this time we may or may not have a new ASUN president and senate. The vagaries of ballot tabulation and the potential for recounting make it impossible to tell whether the smoke has finally cleared around the annual ASUN shootout.

No matter who gets the job, the new ASUN president faces a whole set of built-in problems, most of which center on ASUN's public image.

The new ASUN president, like any other politician on any level, inherits the accumulated public disgust for everybody who has ever been elected to that office in the past and the accumulated public disgust for politicians in general. The politician who mistakes the glad-handing and back-slapping from his or her close circle of supporters for the attitude of the entire constituency is in for a rude awakening when the celebrations end and the business begins. Like the regents with (or against) whom he or she must now work, the new ASUN president must learn that becoming an elected official does not automatically make one a respected official. To steal a line from John Houseman, in politics you get respect the old fashioned way:

you earn it.

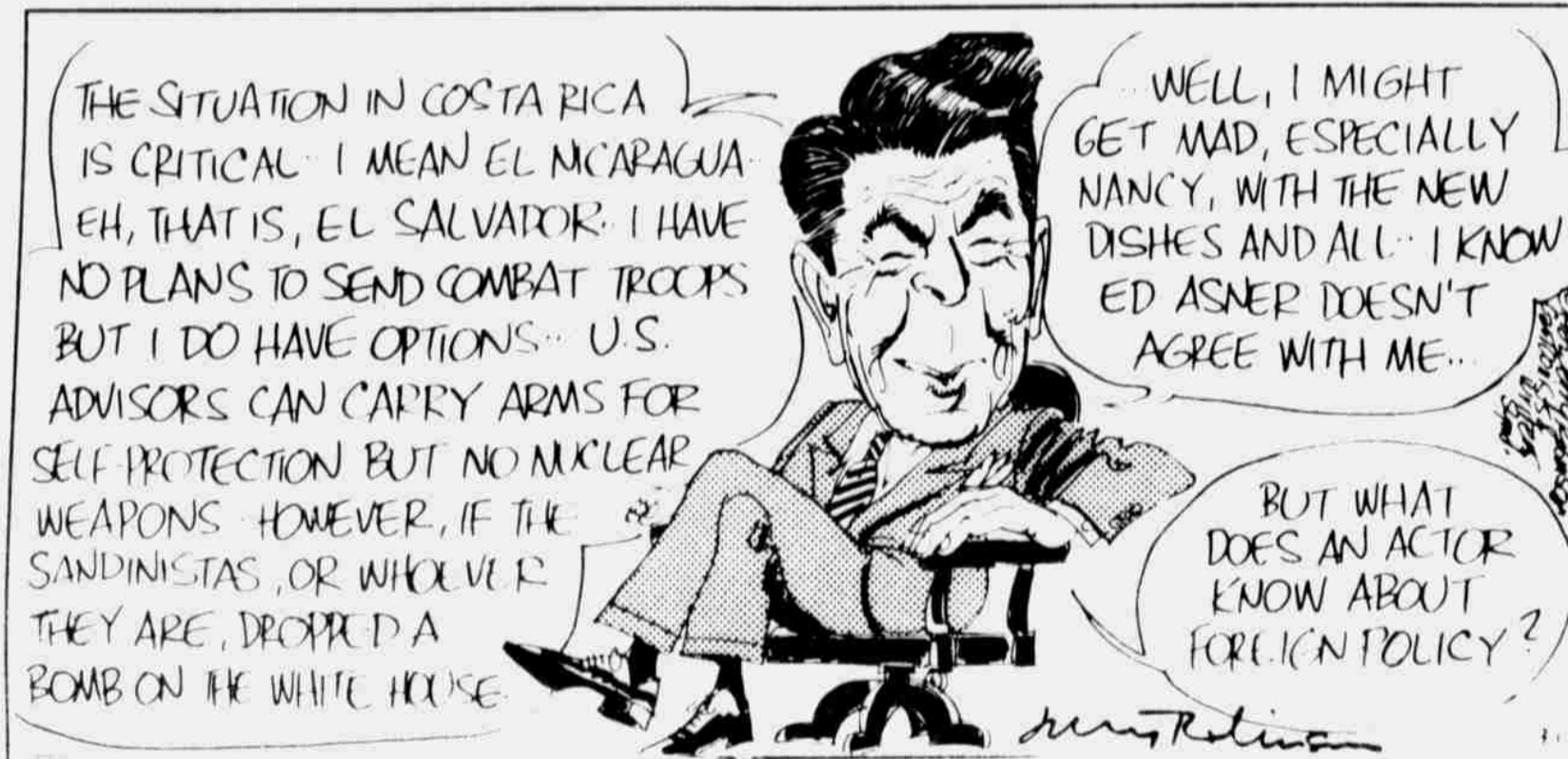
The problem that specifically affects the new ASUN president is the apathy and benign mistrust Joe and Jane Student maintain toward ASUN. Give the typical UNL student uncaptioned pictures of Bud Cuca, Renee Wessels and Rick Mockler, and a solid majority would correctly identify Renee Wessels as the female. Few would be able to tell you what went on during the reigns of these three ASUN presidents, or the many that came before them, for that matter. More important, few would care.

If the majority of students are to see ASUN as something more than a pre-Law playground and/or Resume Enhancement Society, it's not going to be because of mock funerals, souvenir matchbooks and catchy slogans. Nor will the same old "We're here to serve students" rhetoric carry any weight. Nor will the chosen route of the administration, the public relations blitz, do the trick.

For ASUN to work effectively, it has to understand that most students don't care about the in-house power struggles at ASUN. Everybody in the whole senate could sue everybody else in the whole senate, and they could all resign their offices in disgust, and some students wouldn't

care.

The thing that would keep most students at UNL interested in ASUN goings-on is self-interest. For ASUN to get any respect, it must demonstrate that its actions are truly in behalf of a majority of students. An important first step would be to find out what a majority of students are concerned about, whether by survey, attendance at already scheduled residence hall and Greek house meetings, open solicitation of opinion or any other method that would work. If it turns out, for example, that most students are concerned with low faculty pay, budget cuts, and the shrinking job market, then those are the concerns ASUN must address. Of course, it will seem that there is nothing they can do about some of these issues: the NU Board of Regents and the administration do have the upper hand in just about every endeavor. But the answer is not to assume one's own ineffectiveness and stick to matters of less import. The student body is a slow and lethargic beast, but it can be made to move when its interests are at stake. The trick is to find out what those interests are. The respect part will take care of itself.



## Woman runs family switchboard

The little girl doesn't understand.

A boy in her first-grade class has selected her as his recess quarry. All week he has pursued her, capturing her scarf, circling her with it, threatening to tie her up.

The look on her face as she tells us this story is puzzled and upset. She has brought home similar tales of playground encounters since Monday and laid them out across the dinner table.

My friend, who is her mother and amused by it all, explains again to the girl, "That's because he likes you." But she still doesn't understand.

Finally, the mother turns to me, because I have been through it before, seen the tears of another first-grader.



**Ellen Goodman**

offered the same motivations. "Tell her," says the mother in frustration.

I begin to form the analysis in my mind. I will tell her how the boy wants attention, doesn't know how to ask for it, only knows how to grab for it, confuses aggression with affection...

Then suddenly I stop.

I hear an odd echo from the words inside my head. What is it? An echo of a hundred generations of women interpreting males to their daughters? An echo of a hundred generations of women teaching their daughters the fine art of understanding human behavior?

All at once I find myself reluctant to pass on this legacy. I am wary of teaching this little girl the way to analyze. I am not so sure at this moment that we should raise more girls to be cultural interpreters for men, for families.

I look at my friend. This woman is admirably skilled in the task of transmitting one person's ideas and feelings to another. Indeed she operates the switchboard of her family life.

The people in her home communicate with each other through her. She delivers peace messages from one child to another, softens ultimatums from father to son, explains daughter to father. Under her constant monitoring, the communication lines are kept open: one person stays plugged into the next.

But sometimes I wonder whether she has kept all these

people together or kept them apart? Does she make it easier for them to understand each other, or does she actually stand between them, holding all the wires in her hands?

Last week, I watched Katharine Hepburn play the same role magnificently in the scenes from *On Golden Pond*. She placed herself between the angry, acerbic, viciously amusing husband (Henry Fonda) and the world. She was his buffer and his interpreter — to the gas station attendants, the postman, the daughter.

"He wasn't yelling at you," she tells the boy who comes to live with them. "He was yelling at life. Sometimes you have to look hard at a person and remember he's doing the best he can... just trying to find his way, like you."

Her caring was wondrous, inspiring, full of energy and love. But it was only when the boy confronted the old man, dialing directly, short-cutting the switchboard, that the man changed.

In Gail Godwin's new novel, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, there is another aging mother, still negotiating between her two "children" who are turning 40. She is like the woman in many of our autobiographies — the mother, or grandmother — behind the scenes.

How many families only know each other through these women? Some mothers, like the one in this movie and this book, have been forced to occupy the stormy fulcrum of family life, and others have chosen to be the power broker of human relationships. Some actually keep people at peace, others keep them at bay. Sometimes the endless interpretation, especially of men by women, keeps couples together. Other times it keeps men from explaining themselves.

I know it is a skill to be able to understand and analyze one person's motives and psyche to another. It requires time, attention, emotional dexterity to run these switchboards. Yet it can also overload the operator and cripple the people from talking across their own private lines.

Today, anyway, I feel particularly unwilling to explain the first-grade boy to the first-grade girl, peculiarly unwilling to initiate the 6-year-old into this cult of communication.

I offer only friendship and sympathy. These are things she doesn't have to struggle to understand.

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## Car-owner's cares bemoaned in play

*The Humiliation of Being Towed*, a new tragicomedy that deals with the misfortunes of a car-owning college student, has promise of becoming a nationwide hit, according to author Bornitbee Wilde.

"The play is a sensitive, emotional portrayal of life among the meters and asphalt of this nation's universities," Wilde said. "It should strike a chord in the hearts of



**Mary Louise Knapp**

all students who have experienced the anger and frustration associated with the ownership of a vehicle."

Here are some excerpts from the play:

ACT I, SCENE 2: The main parking lot of a large university campus, a seemingly infinite stretch of concrete and asphalt, adorned here and there with parking meters. It is late afternoon. The few cars remaining in the lot, the heroine Amanda's among them, bear several violation notices.

Enter Amanda's boyfriend, Steve, and Amanda, laughing and joking.

AMANDA: Here, Steve, let me give you a ride home. STEVE: (looking worried) Hey, Amanda, you've got a couple of parking tickets here. You know, those things are going to catch up with you one of these days!

AMANDA: (tearing them up and throwing them to the ground) Oh, don't be such a spoilsport, Steve. The cops will forget about them in a few days. Let's go!

ACT I, SCENE 2: Amanda's apartment. She and Steve are sitting at the kitchen table reading each other's mail. Steve opens a large envelope, gazes at it, and angrily throws it at Amanda.

AMANDA: What's gotten into you?

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