

Editorial

Dead Week nothing but tired students, old coffee

Never has there been a name more inappropriate for a time period than "Dead Week." The real Dead Weeks came sometime in late February and early March; those were the weeks when we were "just about ready to get going" on those term papers and semester projects. It was easy enough then to forego a night of research for the quieter study of, say, the proper way to get beer cans out of the plastic 6-pack binders.

But Dead Week this week? The only two things that seem dead this week are the students staying up for late study sessions and the coffee those students are drinking. People who have been hibernating for three months suddenly crop up in classes that long ago stopped leaving empty chairs for them. Table space at Love Library suddenly becomes a premium item, a commodity only exceeded in value by the free services of a good typist.

Suddenly the rest of the world goes on the back burner. War in the Falkland Islands you say? Fine. Maybe it'll

be good for a term paper someday. It'll still be there a couple of weeks from now if it's really a war worth worrying about.

Should Dead Week be as all-consuming and important as it is? Of course not, but that's what we make it. Sure, there are things we have to get done by the end of the semester, assignments that more than likely were assigned during the first days of class with the idea that we would work on them as the semester progressed, during our free time. If those assignments were really as important to us as we make them out to be now, how could we have avoided them for so long?

The magic word for this week then is "relax." Keep working, because that's the only way you'll make it through this semester-ending crunch, but still relax. After all, if you've waited this long to start whipping your semester together, you've probably forfeited your best effort anyway. We are at that point where getting some-

thing done sounds much better than doing something well.

Maybe next semester, if you have a next semester, will be the one in which the projects get done on time, the papers get handed in a week early, and all of those things that happen in somebody else's dreams will finally come together to make Dead Week a truly dead week. But probably not. Chances are that the next Dead Week will very much resemble this one; the ulcers that started to form last semester and that are being aggravated this semester will require treatment next semester.

It gets to be a cyclical deal. We put off the work until we get jittery about it, then we get too jittery to study and we put it off again, and so on right up to the all-nighter before the final exam.

This is as good a year as any to break the cycle. But if it's too late to do anything about this semester except finish it, that's okay. Just keep reminding yourself that it'll be all over in a week.

Dark mood broken by Happiness Man

Ah, melancholia and dread despair. They have me in their icy grip again. Not for me the lukewarm emotions of "depression," "sadness" or "being down in the mouth." No. This is the real thing, a full-scale dark mood at its blackest.

One takes a risk in putting this sort of thing down on paper for the public to see. To be melancholy, especially for no immediately perceptible reason, is just not done in this world of perpetually smiling yellow buttons and cries of "Have A Nice Day."

"Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone," I mutter between clenched teeth as I walk carelessly between moving cars in the hope that one of



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them might relieve me of the tedious burden of remaining alive. Unfortunately, I reach my destination unscathed.

"How are you today? Isn't the weather gorgeous!" A carefree voice floats into my ear.

"I'm doing terribly, thank you. I think I might go jump off a bridge," I reply.

"Oh, you don't really mean that," says my well-meaning friend, slightly shocked. "Things could be worse, you know."

"I doubt it, but thank you for your concern," I say, refusing to be penetrated by her maddening cheerfulness.

"Well, just be that way and see if I care!" she says, flouncing off in a flurry of sunshine and roses. Hmmmm, I think, strange how she always said she'd be with me all the way, come good or bad.

I proceed along the street, my annoyance with the entire human and animal races growing with each passing moment. Another nebulous form runs up to me and grabs my coattails.

"Hey, cheer up! It can't be all that bad!" it shouts, breathing unwanted happiness with every word.

"Yes, it can," I answer severely, plucking it off with all the dignity I can muster. "Now will you go away and leave me alone?"

"I'm only trying to help you," it says, its squishy, ambiguous form attaching itself to my arm and exuding an unpleasantly sweet odor. I reach for the Mace.

"Now, now, we mustn't get upset," it croons. "Getting upset and depressed is bad for our sense of well-being, and more importantly, it causes other people to be uncomfortable."

"Let 'em be uncomfortable, I'm miserable!" I shout, turning to face my antagonist. It was, I discovered, a man dressed in a yellow plastic suit, an enormous plastic globe covering his head. His features consisted merely of two bland black dots for eyes and a calm, smiling mouth stretched across the face.

"Ye Gods! Who are you!" I exclaim.

"I'm Happiness Man, and I'm here to save the world from the unhealthy influences of depression and depressed people," it says. "Obviously, you look like a person in need of treatment for this unfortunate condition. Would you please come along quietly?"

"I'm not going anywhere with you!" I say, struggling to extricate myself from its grip.

"Now, now, let's not make a fuss," says Happiness Man, dragging me with surprising strength away from the street. "After rehabilitation, you'll be an entirely different person, able to see the world in a much better perspective. Our Happiness-inducing drugs (and, for the recalcitrant, our simple Happiness Brain Operations have saved many."

Ah, happiness and blessed peace of mind. Since my three weeks at the Happiness Clinic, I have become an entirely different person . . .



Military two-faced about wives

The story has a classic edge to it. A tale of Anywife who was told and believed that her marriage was a partnership. A tale of Anywife who later heard her "partner" swear in a divorce court that all the money he earned was his, that she didn't deserve a nickel of it.

The only thing different about the current version is that this time it's the military giving lip service in marriage and disservice in divorce.

But let me go back a bit.

Almost a year ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the prized military pension, the reward for 20 years of



Ellen Goodman

duty, could no longer be considered a part of family assets to be divided up in case of divorce.

The Court said that Congress had intended military pensions to go only to the person who was entitled. "The plight of an ex-spouse of a retired service member is often a serious one," the justices wrote, but unless the Congress changes the law, the pension belonged to him (usually a him) and him alone.

Since then, there have been no fewer than eight bills filed in the Congress by bedfellows as strange as Sen. Roger Jepsen, R-Iowa, and liberal Rep. Pat Schroeder, D-Colo. Next Friday, Jepsen will chair the fourth and last of the Senate hearings on bills designed to provide more protection for divorced military spouses.

But in step with our partnership fable, the opponents of these bills are none other than the armed forces. The brass from land, sea and air are expected to testify in full combat gear.

These folk are part of the same organizations that write endless odes to military wives in their Family Manuals. In San Diego, even the grocery bags bear the message: "The Navy Wife . . . The toughest job in the Navy! We want to keep the good families in."

Furthermore any of these officers can, I am sure, sympathetically list the special problems of the wives who often hold these good families together.

At the lowest level, the pay scale makes it necessary for most wives to work, and the mobility makes it impossible for most of them to build a career. Only 13 percent ever have their own pension plans. At the middle level there is often an overt or subtle expectation for wives to do extensive volunteer work for the military. Indeed "wife grades" often appear on their husbands' records.

Suzanne Davis, a longtime Navy wife and current head of the National Military Wives Association puts in succinctly: "You can be asked not to work (in order to) support your husband's career, asked to be sole nurturer of children for long periods of time when your husband is away, asked to live in some pretty unsavory places, asked to put the military first ahead of yourself and your children. Then at the end, if you're divorced, the military says you have no right to any part of it. It's a slap in the face."

The Pentagon position is, need I tell you, slightly different. The Department of Defense maintains that they need this pension as a perk to keep re-enlistment up. Citing some highly suspect figures — senators are still trying to find the source — they said thousands would drop out before retirement if their pot of pension gold had to be shared with ex-spouses.

But here, the military doesn't even have a grip on its own self-interest. All the branches know that the key to re-enlistment right now is the attitude of a spouse, not the existence of an ex-spouse. It is the wife who cannot help being affected by attitude portrayed in Divorce, Army Style.

Rosemary Locke, legislative chair of NMWA, wife and mother of career Navy man says, "There are so many pressures now on the military family to get out. The career army is a married army. About 75-to-80 percent of those at the four-year level are married. What are they going to say to women about the benefits of supporting their husband's career?"

The former military partner doesn't just part with her pension. The proposals before Congress also deal in one way or another with her lost survivor and medical benefits. But any bill that comes out of committee is likely to at least give divorced army wives the same pension rights as the foreign service or the civil service.

In the meantime, if you have the Pentagon for a partner, it's time to read the fine print on the military marriage contract.

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