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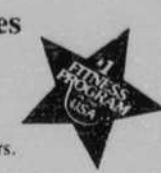

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Hanna

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to just the two of us, I drilled him in the head for the victory.

Twenty-three years of bitter frustration found a resolution that day. After eons of athletic failure, it dawned on me that to win, I only needed to play against people smaller, slower and weaker than me.

As I revelled in my triumph, I saw Destroyo brooding over in the corner with one of the girls in the class. I recognized the girl as the one I had teased in the hall earlier that day. They were whispering and looking at me with angry faces.

Then, I saw something that stopped my heart. They were holding hands. Oh no! It couldn't be. I turned to one of my classmates to ask a question.

"Are Destroyo and that girl dating?" I asked.

My classmates looked at me, puzzled. I rephrased the question in junior high terminology.

"I'm sorry, are Destroyo and that girl going together?"

"Oh! Yeah, they're real serious," he said. "If you so much as look at his girl, he'll pummel you into the earth."

I gulped. It was easy to beat Destroyo in the protected confines of P.E. class, but he was big enough to crush me on the lawless frontiers outside of class. Just then, he walked up to me.

"Hey, new kid," he grunted. "I hear you were picking on the girl I'm going with. You're dead after school. Meet me at the Crik."

Then he shoved me against the wall and walked out of the gym.

I remembered the Crik from my original tenure at Pound. It's where kids met to fight after school. I managed to make it through all three years of junior high without making an appearance at the Crik and now, on my first day back, I had an engagement with the toughest kid in school. "You're as good as dead," some kid next to me said.

And he was right. Destroyo was a big boy and I wouldn't stand a chance at the Crik.

The entire school was abuzz for the rest of the day with the news about Destroyo annihilating the new kid. The air of a condemned man hung about me all day and the kids avoided me like a root canal.

At lunch, nobody would sit next to me. I ate in solitude contemplating my after-school doom. At one point, I dropped a cafeteria plate, generating applause from my appreciative classmates. Yet when they realized that it was me who had dropped the plate, they all fell silent. Nobody wanted to have fun at the expense of a walking dead man.

After school, I headed down to the Crik. The entire school was assembled in a circle when I got there. I even saw my health teacher in the crowd.

Destroyo was already there, waiting in the center of the throng. He was breaking cinder blocks over his head in preparation for our battle.

I walked into the circle and approached Destroyo. I knew that if I was to continue living, I'd have to reason with him.

"Ready to bleed?" he asked. "No, but thanks for asking," I said. "Listen, Destroyo, before you beat me up, I'd like to address the crowd. I'd like to say a few words, my last words if you will, to all of our classmates."

"He's stalling. Pound his face in Destroyo!" a voice cried out. It was the health teacher.

"No, I'm in no hurry," Destroyo said. "Let's hear him out. It will make his miserable death all the more satisfying."

"Thanks Destroyo, you're a prince. My fellow classmates, I am here on a special mission today. In addition to providing you with a great deal of entertainment as I'm battered about like a rag doll, I'd like to give you some advice.

"I know it's hard to be a junior high student these days. We are at an awkward age. We want the right to be autonomous human entities while at the same time struggling with our dependence on our parents and others.

"Many of us, in our frustration, turn to attention-getting acts like violence and theft, in hopes that our voice can penetrate the walls of apathy that imprison us. We seek spiritual solace in a chaotic, seemingly uncaring universe of angst and indifference. Our dilemma is reminiscent of those detailed by the existentialists like Sartre and Descartes.

"But I am here to tell you that you don't need crime to be cool. Crime is a dead end street. There are other ways to strike out on the paths of independence. To get the respect that we as teen-agers deserve, we must channel our frustrations into positive, constructive avenues. Instead of mugging an old lady, join a church group. Instead of assaulting a stranger, volunteer at a nursing home. Instead of fighting, try compassion and cooperation. Not only will your oppressors view you with infinitely more respect, you will view yourself with more respect. You can stand up and say 'Hey, I am somebody and I have something to say.'

"So join with me! Let's take up arms in our struggle, using weapons of caring, understanding and personal growth. What do you say, are you with me?"

Before I could get an answer, Destroyo beat the crap out of me.

So now I'm recovering from both the physical and mental scars of my undercover experience. I was naive to assume I could have an impact on a phenomenon as powerful as adolescence.

Why are there so many teen-age crimes in Lincoln? I don't know. Maybe it's just a temporary statistical aberration.

But now, eight years after going through my middle teen-age years, I think the most likely answer is simply... kids will be kids.

I, thank God, won't ever be a kid again.

Hanna is a senior theater major and a Daily Nebraskan reporter and columnist.

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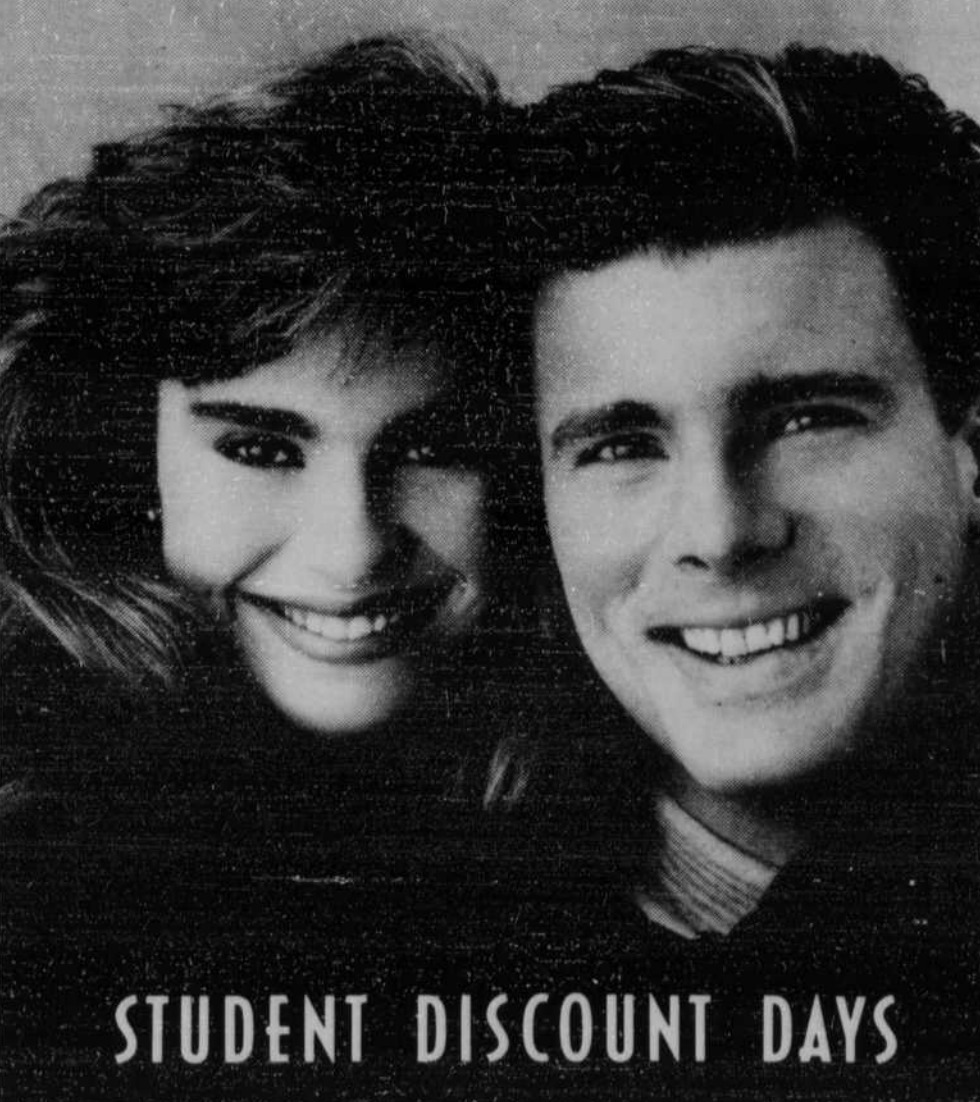
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STUDENT DISCOUNT DAYS

Leaves

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admitting it.

Schumacher, Breen and Lewis all perform expertly. Schumacher is a nervous, eccentric Shaughnessy and an eternal loser. And Breen, though a bit too forceful at times as Bunny, plays a passionate force in keeping the play off kilter.

But it is Lewis who generates the tears as well as the laughs. Bananas snaps from sane to silly with subtle fluidity. One moment she draws the audience into the apartment with a warm soliloquy about housekeeping, the next she barks like a dog.

"The House of Blue Leaves" is filled with deranged dialogue, Hollywood action and emotional teeters—nothing less. These days, too many people choose movies over plays for the happy endings and "feel-good" imagery. This play is a fine reminder of why.