

CHRIS HALLIGAN

'Decade of decadence' memories exiting, embarrassing

The article was right. The '80s generation was definitely the lost generation. It truly was the generation of ignorance and excess, and I was one of its worst perpetrators.

I grew up in the '80s, using plastic bags at the grocery store and throwing my cigarette butts out the window. I was one of those horribly wasteful middle-class kids, with more money in my back pocket than Grandpa earned in one year during the Depression, and I, like my friends, spent it frivolously.

Through something like Nazi brainwashing, Rolling Stone almost had me convinced.

It was last summer and I had just finished an article in my latest issue of Rolling Stone — something about the '80s: "The Real Lost Generation." Just as I set the magazine down, I heard my mother's voice beckon me from upstairs.

She was standing in my room, or what used to be my room. It had since turned into the "office" where Dad had his computer and Mom kept her P.T.A. file drawers. Tax cabinets now stood where my prized Simple Minds poster used to be. My cool blue Levolor blinds had long since been replaced with the old '70s discotheque curtains that used to hang in the laundry room.

There was one thing that had remained untouched, however: my closet. But this wasn't to last long. Mom was planning to put shelves in the closet and wanted me to clean it out.

I had no problem with her request. I didn't live at home anymore and

hadn't in three years. I didn't mind throwing away all that old stuff. I hadn't even looked in that closet since I left for college the summer of '88.

Thinking of the Rolling Stone article and planning my '90s purification movement, I began to pull out boxes and bags full of various junk — clothes I couldn't believe I actually wore, books I never read, trophies I had forgotten I won.

I was wondering how anyone could possibly compile as much junk as I did in 18 years. Of course! I forgot. I was an '80s generation kid, so I did a lot of frivolous purchasing.

I was down to my last three boxes when I saw it: the box I had packed more than three years before without even thinking twice, the box marked "Records."

At college, my musical tastes had taken a complete 180-degree turn. I now possessed a CD player and a collection of CDs that would make even Kurt Loder proud. I hadn't played a record in forever and forgot that I even owned any.

At any rate, I wasn't prepared for the monumental self-realization about to happen in what was once my closet.

I opened the box. As the dust began to clear, I slowly reached into this cardboard container, this treasure chest, this Pandora's Box of my past.

The first album I pulled out was (gasp!) "Wham! U.K." A feeling of great embarrassment engulfed me. What if my fraternity brothers knew I owned this?

But as I looked at the album cover, I began to remember when I bought it, when "Wake Me Up Before You



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Go-Go" was a big hit.

It was the summer of 1984 and I was 15 years old. The first memory that popped into my head of that summer was when my best friend Brent and I decided to "borrow" his mom's BMW and go to a friend's summer house on the beach.

Sporting our Polo shirts and Sperry topsiders (bought at Nordstroms with Mom's plastic, of course), we went salt-water skiing all day and partied all night. Brent's mom never did find out about the BMW, or the broken taillight we popped out while doing doughnuts at the golf course.

I again reached into the box. This time I pulled out Duran Duran. I was 12, and "Hungry Like The Wolf" was the anthem for all 7th-graders.

Mom would pick us up from soccer practice and "Rio" would instantly go into the Volvo station wagon's tape player. Mom would always say it sounded like the Beatles. My gang — Roger, Brent, Rick, Mike and Gary — would rock out all the way home. We were "Duranimals" in the truest sense of the word.

As I continued to pull records out of the box — records from the Scorpions, Mötley Crüe, Thompson Twins, A Flock of Seagulls, K-Tel's "The Beat," even that "weird" Smiths album that Roger loaned me in high school — the memories of my generation, the '80s generation, came flooding back.

Memories of when the Russkies were still our enemies and Reagan was still considered a good president, of when Rubik's cubes were cool and Walkmans were technology at its finest. Memories of BMWs and Madonna bubble gum, of Izod shirts and argyle socks.

A lot of us were indeed spoiled back then. We were given nice cars at 16 and bought gas for only 79 cents a gallon. We were taken on vacations to Sun Valley and Hawaii and didn't have to put forth a penny to keep our wardrobes stocked.

No one protested about environmental problems because, frankly, no one cared. Everyone was having too much fun.

Suddenly I began to realize that Rolling Stone might have been wrong

— not particularly about the damage we inflicted in the '80s, but more about the attitude we possessed during this decade of decadence. We weren't doing it on purpose!

So many people like to condemn the '80s as the lost decade. A decade of people addicted to drugs and spending money. A decade that ruthlessly thrashed the environment and thrived on Reaganomics. A decade that created a generation with no identity.

But as I closed that box of old records, I realized that this was not the full story, and no matter how hard some hippy journalist tried to convince me that the decade of the '80s was well-represented in songs like Madonna's "Material Girl" and U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," I know that it was something entirely different for me. My '80s — and many other people's — was better represented in Madonna's "Holiday" and Scritti Politti's "Perfect Way."

In this generation of the '90s, dedicated to martyrdom and self-punishment for past mistakes, I'm glad that I got to grow up in a time when we felt everything was on the up-and-up.

No matter how hard one tries to change the world with guilt trips and condemnation, people will always go for the "dough" and mindlessly throw their cigarette butts out the window. I still do. Hurray for the '80s!

Halligan is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

LISA PYTLIK

Society neglecting its children

Responsibility... Eeegads. It's a six-syllable word for "not fun," I thought as I paged through yet another newspaper at Love Library.

I have always thought it was the "responsibility" of a columnist to be well-informed on current issues. Therefore, when I was hired, I dutifully began to scrutinize the news. However, reading headline after headline of depressing stories about crime, serious economic difficulties and other seemingly hopeless problems is definitely "not fun" for me, no matter how much it might aid my column writing.

But it is my responsibility. Recently, during one of my newspaper reading sessions, I came across a headline suggesting that someone in the Nebraska Legislature also was taking on unpleasant responsibilities.

"Bill calls for criminal checks on teachers," the headline read. According to the article, LB522 was intended to "help protect children from sexual abuse and other crimes." I was pleased to read this because, as a psychology major who has worked in various clinical volunteer and internship positions, I've seen an awful lot of abused kids. Their heartbreaking stories easily convinced me that extreme reform is needed in the way America takes care of its children.

It's our responsibility. I naively thought everyone else would feel the same way I did. I was wrong.

LB522 was not without opposition. As a result, it did not even get first-round approval without serious revisions.

First, senators eliminated a provision that would require new teachers and other school employees to be fingerprinted. This provision would have simplified the background checks by allowing schools access to criminal files through the FBI. The schools could then more easily run checks on a national level without having to search for criminal records jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

Some schools, such as those in the Omaha Public School District, run criminal background checks anyway, but many do not. If it were easier to gain access to information about criminals, perhaps more schools would run the checks and more children would



Children are our most valuable resource. They deserve extreme protection, and it is our duty, like it or not, to give it to them.

be protected. The opponents of the bill said it "unfairly singled out teachers and trampled on their privacy rights."

One senator even said that to pass the bill "would be taking a little step down the road to erosion of civil liberties."

Another senator said, "It's an insult to the teaching profession."

I say, "Ridiculous." The opposition seems to have forgotten about its "responsibility." Children are our most valuable resource. They deserve extreme protection, and it is our duty, like it or not, to give it to them.

We may govern children now, but, in the future, they will govern us. Our future "civil liberties" will be defined by them. If we place children's right to freedom from abuse second to a teacher's right to privacy, we're bound to teach children that, as adults in power, it is OK to minimize the important problems of others and place personal rights and freedom first.

What a sad message. No wonder racism, sexism and all the other ego-centric diseases continue in our society generation after generation.

The requirement of background checks should not be viewed as an "insult" to the teaching profession. On the contrary, it would give the occupation more prestige.

Requiring prospective teachers to be fingerprinted and to undergo criminal background checks would not imply

that teachers are untrustworthy and suspect. Instead, it would emphasize the importance of positions which involve working closely with children by attesting that they merit a thorough investigation of all applicants.

Of course, even if LB522 had been left unchanged and in its full strength, it would only be a beginning. Americans have been failing to protect their children effectively for a long time. Many other reforms are needed.

For example, in 1989, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Bill of Rights for Children. Unlike more than 100 other countries, the United States has neither signed nor ratified the bill.

And though we college students are required to take all sorts of classes "for our own good" and "because the basic knowledge of these subjects is useful for all," we are not required to take any classes in parenting. This is especially interesting since more than 80 percent of us will have children someday.

Almost anyone is allowed to raise or care for children without any education, experience, regulation or investigation. Parents may be highly educated, loving, responsible adults with the means to provide for their child's needs, or a parent may be a 13-year-old unwed child who lives with emotionally abusive parents and decides to keep her baby because she feels that she's never had anything that was "really hers" before.

It may be true that many other professionals are not required to have criminal background checks. But if we are going to make reforms, we must start somewhere.

It's our responsibility. If teachers can excuse themselves from the responsibility of helping to keep kids safe just because other professionals don't do all they can, then I, as a columnist, am going to excuse myself from reading the paper and trying to write accurate columns.

After all, not everyone keeps up-to-date on current events. Besides, I'm tired of reading about all the world's crimes. Especially crimes committed by adults who were abused as children.

Pytlík is a senior art and psychology major and a Daily Nebraskan staff artist and columnist.

Race, athletics not relevant

I am concerned with the priorities expressed concerning the alleged beating of a woman by Scott Baldwin. An innocent person may have permanent brain damage, yet people are petitioning the Daily Nebraskan for an apology because they didn't like the way their friend (the attacker, by the way) was portrayed. This is not a racial issue!

At this point, I don't believe the victim or her family cares whether the attacker was black, white or green. I am also not particularly

interested that Mr. Baldwin had "impressive stats" as a football player or that he was plagued with injuries last season. What I am concerned about is that Mr. Baldwin gets the treatment needed to prevent him from hurting others or himself ever again.

I am praying for both people and their families, but make no mistake, I'm praying for the victim first!

Eric Larson graduate student

PLAY YOUR PART


American Red Cross

STUDENTS INTERESTED IN AN ACTUARIAL CAREER:

Representatives from
The CNA Insurance Companies
will be on campus on

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH
to interview Actuarial Science, Math & Statistics majors for Actuarial positions at our Home Office in Chicago.

Contact the Career Planning & Placement Center for details.



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