

MICHELLE PAULMAN

Small things add up to change

Unless your roommates locked you in the closet, you know the presidential debates have been a big deal for the past 10 days.

I watched about 20 minutes of each one. That was enough for me. The good stabs, quotes and soundbites were in the newspapers the next day.

I've seen and read enough to know that no one really said anything I hadn't already heard.

Bush preaches trust. Clinton offers change. Perot is all ears.

But none of them have spent the night with Maxine Moul.

I did. For you closet dwellers, Moul is the lieutenant governor of our fair state.

Maxine Moul was in attendance at the Great Plains Winter Sleepout benefit for the homeless Friday night.

As were Jeff, a fearless reporter, Corey, another fearless reporter, and myself, a fearless photographer, to cover the event.

Moul spent the early morning hours in a cardboard box in the shadow of the Capitol, the seat of our fair state's government.

Jeff and I spent the early morning hours in a warm building, drinking lots of coffee and chatting with the medical crew since everyone else, including Moul, was asleep.

So, after our umpteenth cup, we decided we could say we spent the night with the lieutenant governor.

Maybe you had to be there.

Maybe you should have been there.

More than 100 people braved the cold Friday night to raise about \$25,000 for organizations that aid the homeless.

Student participation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln was sorely lacking.

True, student-athletes and members of Golden Key National Honor

Society collected food and clothing for donation.

But when it came time for Corey to find a camping UNL student to interview, he had to hunt awhile.

Union College, an institution significantly smaller than UNL, had a significantly larger warm-body count at the sleepout.

It's a big deal that out of some 26,000 students, only a handful cared enough about homelessness to show their support.

Really, it wasn't that hard. The Salvation Army canteen handed out lots of coffee, sandwiches, pizza, doughnuts and orange juice.

Sure, the temperature dipped into the low 20s, but with lots of clothes and a nice, warm sleeping bag, the chill was probably minimal.

OK, so I spent the really chilly hours inside, but I stepped out frequently to check on my sleeping subjects, like Moul, and to get more coffee.

I care about homelessness. I cannot imagine not having a place of my own where I was able to sleep, shower and eat.

Some of you feel the same way, I'm sure. We need to be concerned, because any one of us, rich or poor, young or old, could find ourselves living on the streets someday.

Being on the streets is entirely different from what happened Friday night. Comparing the sleepout to actually being homeless is like comparing a paper cut to getting bone marrow sucked out of your body.

My friend Kara has donated marrow in two separate operations to help a little girl she has never met who is suffering from a blood disease. That, to me, makes the sleepout look like a cakewalk.

The sleepout wasn't even on a debate night, when citizens everywhere were glued to their televisions.

However, it was a Friday night, much like this Friday night, and I know how Friday nights are for stu-

dents: "Hey, Debbi, you going to that big party on 19th Street?"

"Oh God, no, Heather, I'm going to the bars with Steph and Jenn and Bart. I am, like, SO stressed out, I need a drink big time."

"Well, maybe we'll see you at Duffy's."

"Yeah... on the floor!" (Hysterical giggling under professor's monotone.)

We drink ourselves into stupors on weekends and watch the debates with bated breath, hoping that some political savior will step into the White House and cure what ails us.

Get your head out of the closet, and smell the Salvation Army coffee.

If you want trust, act responsibly. If you want change, then act. If you want to be all ears, well, Halloween is right around the corner, and I'm sure you can find some sort of attachments.

The government, the bureaucracy, the deficit, the debates, the special interests, the baby-kissing and the perk-protecting are all out of control.

Expecting the government to solve this nation's problems is like expecting Nebraska to win the national title this year — it ain't gonna happen unless someone gets busy.

In the case of this grass-roots nation, that someone is us.

You don't have to donate marrow or sleep outside or stay out of the bars or give up all your worldly possessions to be a responsible citizen. Donating old clothes, food, money or time helps a little, and every little bit helps.

You also might register to vote, if you haven't already. Today's the deadline.

But don't expect your vote to change the world.

Only we can do that.

Paulman is a senior news-editorial and history major and a Daily Nebraskan photographer and columnist.

JON BRUNING

Finnegan has tools for Congress

In 1 1/2 weeks the voters of the 1st Congressional District will decide whether Democratic challenger Gerry Finnegan should represent Nebraska in the U.S. House of Representatives.

To this point, Finnegan's attempt to win the seat of seven-term incumbent Doug Bereuter has been an uphill battle. Because challengers have defeated incumbents in less than 4 percent of the Congressional races in recent history, however, Finnegan's battle is nothing strange.

The nationwide mood of anti-incumbency may improve those odds slightly this year, but it is still unlikely that a challenger who is not independently wealthy or facing a scandal-ridden incumbent will break the trend.

Although Finnegan is not wealthy, he does stand out from the typical Congressional candidate in a number of other ways.

Perhaps foremost among Finnegan's assets are the leadership skills he developed as a U.S. Navy pilot. Anyone who has ever been around him will not only testify to his unassuming and down-to-earth manner, but the confidence of someone who is accustomed to being a leader.

For those of us who have not served in the armed forces, however, Finnegan's recent endeavors as an instructor in the finance department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln may strike closer to home.

I never had the privilege of taking Finance 260 from Finnegan during my years as an undergraduate, so I contacted Manfred Peterson, chairman of the finance department, to get a better feel for how Finnegan's peers on the faculty felt about him.

Peterson had only positive things to say about Finnegan and noted that he was always well-liked among the faculty and continually received fa-

vorable reviews in his student evaluations.

Peterson had never taken a course from Finnegan, however, so I called several of Finnegan's former students to learn about his effectiveness as an instructor. As someone who was already convinced of Finnegan's extraordinary character, the results of my inquiry were not surprising.

Pete Castellano, the first of Finnegan's former students I spoke with, took Finnegan's class in the spring of 1991.

Castellano said that as a certified financial planner, Finnegan was uniquely able to connect the concepts he was teaching into real-world experiences. Finnegan was eager to prepare his students for the problems they were beginning to face, Castellano said, and his personal experiences were an extremely effective teaching tool.

While esoteric discussions are useful in many subjects, it struck me as significant that Finnegan was wise enough to focus on the pragmatic aspects of finance that students could apply directly to their personal experiences.

Learning for the sake of learning can be thrilling, but it's equally important for college instructors to prepare tomorrow's work force to face the problems they're certain to encounter.

Castellano also mentioned a practice of Finnegan's that illustrated the instructor's interest in each student as a person. On the first day of class, Finnegan would have each student write his or her name on a placard he had handed out prior to class and place the placard on each student's desk. After only three or four classes, Finnegan had learned the names of each of his 40 or 50 students so that he could call on them by name in discussions.

As I look back on my years as an undergraduate, I would guess I've

had more than 40 professors. At the most, three or four took the time to learn the names of those of us in the class.

The professors who did reaped the rewards, as the classroom discussion was always more exciting. People who didn't normally participate felt more at ease volunteering their opinions, and students were generally better prepared.

At a large institution, a professor who knows your name can give you the extra incentive to be prepared and ask the questions you might have, as opposed to letting you melt in with the classroom scenery.

Another student I spoke with, Barry Eby, took Finnegan's class last fall. Eby, who will graduate in December, said Finnegan was one of the best professors he had had at the university.

Eby said he particularly enjoyed Finnegan's ability to present the class material in realistic terms. Finnegan was also extremely approachable, he said. Eby talked with Finnegan after many of the classes about a wide variety of subjects and was impressed by Finnegan's ability to explain things in a clear, straightforward manner.

Approachability and clarity are priceless characteristics for a congressman to have, and Finnegan has demonstrated both in his capacity as an instructor.

Finnegan's exemplary record as an instructor at UNL is one more reason he will receive my vote to represent Nebraska's 1st Congressional District.

I encourage you to think about some of the characteristics you respect most in your instructors and congressman — honesty, straightforwardness and approachability. When you cast your vote on Nov. 3, consider the person who has all of those qualities, Gerry Finnegan.

Bruning is a second-year law student and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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