

ALAN PHELPS

# Bellevue's a suburb, nyah, nyah

As a native of Grand Island, I had to laugh as I read the newspaper this weekend. It's not a law that people from Grand Island have to laugh as they read the paper or anything, it's just that I saw something very amusing.



**I don't want to say the Islanders would resort to violence, but if I were a Bellevue sissy, I might think twice about this whole deal.**

The Omaha World-Herald reported Bellevue residents still haven't given up their pipe dream to become Nebraska's third-largest city.

"We're coming up," City Administrator S.P. Benson was quoted as saying. Laugh, I did, and heartily at that.

Bellevue officials estimate they're about 1,000 people behind Grand Island and moving up fast. Pshhhh.

In the 1990 census, Bellevue recorded around 32,000 residents. Grand Island's total was 39,300. Folks in Bellevue say 7,000 people have been added to the city's tally since 1990, bringing them within striking range of the Islanders.

Of course, everyone knows it will never happen because Bellevue is simply too stupid to make it as Nebraska's Third City. It's not an easy job. Growing up in Grand Island, we learn from an early age how much depends on us.

You can't just wake up and decide you don't FEEL like being the Third City that day. You know that as a resident of Grand Island, you have to carry on, lest Nebraska be forced to skip from second to fourth.

Besides that obvious matter, it would be a big hassle if Grand Island wasn't No. 3 anymore. There are a lot of businesses and places in Grand Island named with the population figures in mind: Third City this, Third City that.

If Grand Island were ever to lose that third city status, I think some people might take it kind of hard. I don't want to say the Islanders would resort to violence, but if I were a Bellevue sissy, I might think twice about this whole deal.

After all, it would be especially bitter for Islanders to give up third

city status for the likes of a hamlet that wouldn't be more than a speck on the map if it weren't next door to Omaha.

I believe Bellevue boosters are deluding themselves. You can even see it in City Administrator S.P. Benson's title. He doesn't administrate a city. He looks after a suburb.

I lived in Omaha over the summer, and I saw Bellevue every once in a while when I was forced to drive through it. There's Omaha, there's a highway, there's the air base and that's it. Except for the lame mall. That's Bellevue.

It will be a big day when they get around to opening that new freeway connecting Bellevue residents with their jobs in Omaha. Then Bellevue will have two highways to be proud of.

Just looking at a map of Bellevue makes the blood of an Islander boil. The gerrymandering city limits of Bellevue, snaking around the south of Omaha like some hungry serpent, reminds me of the Antichrist himself. That evil suburb is slowly wrapping its tentacles around all the poor Omahans caught south of the Douglas County line.

I like to think of Bellevue as that creature in "The Blob." Well, that's not quite true—I don't like to think of Bellevue at all. I suppose I might like to think of it as far away.

I'm always surprised when I learn someone is from Bellevue. First I'm surprised they would admit it. Then I wonder how they appear so normal,

like your average human. I might poke them with a pencil or look closely to see if they really swallow their food instead of pretending.

Bellevue had its chance at Nebraska greatness. It was actually one of the first settlements in the state, but the people there apparently didn't notice when Omaha sprang up next door.

Some people in Bellevue still can't seem to read the writing on the wall, or the writing at the top of the Woodmen Tower. They cling to the belief that they live in an actual city rather than a Big "O" bedroom.

Instead of trying to join the ranks of the real world by stealing away what belongs to others, Bellevue should be content to play with its friends Papillion and Ralston. Run along, children, run along.

But no. Rather than fit in with the other kids, the Bellevue annexistas have to strut around, full of pomp and puffery, talking big all the while. Sorry folks, but some of us see through that charade.

It takes more than tidy middle-class developments full of identical homes to be the Third City. It takes more than a fancy-dancy French name. I think Bellevue officials have been drinking too much of that Missouri River water.

You get a Skagway, come and talk. Until then, see you in fourth place.

*Phelps is a senior news-editorial major, a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter and a columnist.*

RICHARD WRIGHT

# Lone tree won't let town forget

It's the tree that bothers me. I don't know why. It just bothers me.

So this is the place.

It's a quiet place, at one time it was just a grassy space between two milo fields.

Now it is more than that.

Her photo showed her standing next to another tree, smiling. It was her senior picture. A photograph of a smiling, innocent girl with the rest of her life ahead of her.

She ended up under this tree. Her life ended under this tree.

Standing on the gravel road, I listen to the sounds of this place. A crow squawks. A combine harvests off in the distance. The breeze flows through the stand of trees across the road. Shotgun blasts echo from afar, reminding me that it's hunting season.

This place has a quiet, somber feel to it. It feels sad.

So this is where it all happened. This is the place.

It's that tree, it does something to this place. That tree that stands alone. It's a tall, black ugly thing, reaching to the sky. Half of it is dead, scarred white.

A few empty beer cans litter the side of the road. A crushed soda can lies where it was thrown. People used to come here to drink and maybe party a little.

That tree stares down at the spot where it all happened. A red flag marks the spot. At least I think that's why its there.

This is the place.

The tree, a kind of gravestone. Grass covers the place now.

This is where they found her. We knew her as Candi. Another victim. When I lived in Dallas, this kind



**At one time, this tree gave this place shade, plenty of it. Now it stands as a kind of monument, telling us that something terrible happened here.**

of thing happened all the time. But this is Lincoln. This stuff doesn't happen here. I want my children to be raised here. It's supposed to be safe here. This isn't Dallas or New York, this is Lincoln. That kind of thing doesn't happen here.

We've all seen this place before. A snow-covered field, a big green tent next to the tree. Police officials examining the place.

We now know what happened at this place. The trial is nearing completion, we are hearing the grim details of what happened at this place.

At one time, this tree gave this place shade, plenty of it. Now it stands as a kind of monument, telling us that something terrible happened here.

Why did she have to die here? She didn't deserve that. No one does.

I wonder what went through her mind, her killers' minds. I feel a dread come over me as I walk around this place. What went through her parents' minds?

How do you say goodbye to your child?

A car drives by, leaving a dusty wake behind.

How many other cars drove by this place while she lied here? How many people have seen that tree, and wondered why it stands alone?

So this is the place.

Since it happened, we all have changed. No one is safe. We all fear the unknown. It could have been anyone.

Why her? Why did they do that? What kind of person could do that?

Some day, that tree will fall. It's half dead already. It won't be missed.

She is missed everyday by those who loved her.

In a way, we all miss her. It was her that was taken away. When she was taken, we all felt it.

That kind of thing doesn't happen here.

She is gone. The accused stands trial. Guilt or innocence will be determined. Sentence imposed.

That tree still stands.

Why this place? Why that tree?

That tree stands, a memory of where her life ended. And, when the tree falls, the grassy area plowed up, maybe, just maybe the story of Candi Harms and her killers and what happened at this place will become another chapter in Lincoln's history.

A chapter many of us will want to forget. But we won't be able to, ever. I'll always remember that tree and that place.

*Wright is a graduate student in Journalism and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*

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