

ANNE STEYER

Lunch with the mayor, on me

Everyone dreams of being omnipotent at one time or another. I know I do. Often when I have free time, which incidentally isn't very often, I daydream of how I could be a mutant member of the X-Men or how I could make Lincoln a much cooler college town.



Shoppers wouldn't have to dodge traffic and browsers could buy a good paperback at A Novel Idea and sit under a tree and read. Go green space!

Now, people always seem to complain about how boring Lincoln is, how there's nothing to do here and how they can't wait to get out. I think those people have a bad attitude and not much imagination.

Lincoln is a nice place to live. I've lived here my whole life. As everyone always says, it's the perfect place to raise a family. However, I think I could make it a cooler place to go to college as well.

I have these daydreams where Mayor Mike Johanns and I sit down for lunch somewhere, oh, say Lazlo's, and talk about downtown redevelopment. I know, I know, that was now-defunct Mayor Bill Harris' big thing, and look how well that went over — but he had the wrong approach. We don't need to get the little family units downtown. Lincoln has a growing, sprawling suburbia to take care of those folks. Instead, we need to concentrate on the people that live downtown — college kids and the young thirtysomethings.

So anyway, Mike and I sit down for a burger and a beer and talk redevelopment. I show him my plans for closing 12th and 14th streets to traffic, from Vine Street to N Street, leaving the Big O open, of course. I'd show him my designs for closing R Street to traffic as well, and we'd discuss creating a more attractive, more enticing pathway from campus and downtown to the Historic Haymarket. He'd nod and agree the Haymarket is a great area, but it still doesn't get enough business. Mike and I would fix it.

Imagine how great it would be to

widen the sidewalks, put some trees, flower beds and benches down on what used to be the middle of the street. Street vendors could pop up here and there, just like on the Pearl Street Mall in Boulder, Colo. Shoppers wouldn't have to dodge traffic, and browsers could buy a good paperback at A Novel Idea and sit under a tree and read. Go green space!

Mike and I would talk about bringing better shopping for college students, including putting a Gap store in the complex across from the Post and Nickel. Forget that they've ignored franchising here for years; they'd be begging to come to Lincoln when Mike and I were done. Maybe an Urban Outfitters, too. Lincoln could easily support these stores. UNL is a large campus, and the town has seven high schools and countless junior highs. No problem.

Mayor Mike and I would work together to attract a super-cool comic store close to campus — maybe I'd open it myself and live out my X-Men fantasies. We already have record stores and cool bookstores, so we're definitely OK in that downtown department.

We'd bring in a greater variety of restaurants, too, with classy interiors like Yia Yia's, but different menus.

Parking would be a problem, but it always is, so why should it be any different in my dream world?

Oh, the conversation Mike and I would have, the plans we'd make. The cool, cool college town we'd create.

But this lunch probably wouldn't even happen, much less work. Even in my daydreams I can be realistic about how bureaucracy works, or doesn't work.

It might be easier to do the Alice in Wonderland thing. I could nibble a mushroom and grow very tall. Then I'd sprinkle sleep dust around town so I could just move buildings around, close off streets and landscape where I think necessary.

But if I could only get Mike to come to lunch with me, I know I could get him to at least listen to me. He's a nice fellow. He'd think murals on the sides of ugly, dumb buildings would be nice. Mike would like to give Lincoln's young artists a chance.

He'd like more landscaping; he's into the whole aesthetic thing — look at all those terrific Christmas lights. Mike likes to eat out, I'll bet, even though the mayor job probably doesn't pay all that well. He might have a hesitation or two about closing the streets off, but I have more than one good argument up my sleeve.

So come on, Mike, let's have lunch. I'll even buy.

Steyer is a senior English and history major, a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment senior reporter and a columnist.

MATT ZIMMERMAN

Truth elusive but worth seeking

It's hard not to be a cynic these days. I've spent countless hours this semester trying to keep up with current events and the various goings-on in the world, and I have to admit that at times, it can all be a bit overwhelming.



From the smaller, intimate events to the large, encompassing ones, it can often appear that nothing is going right and that, to be blunt, the world is being run by morons.

According to the proper journalistic mind-set, I've tried to approach events or ideas or theories, or column ideas, with a critical eye and attempt to get a bit closer to the "truth." The truth, alas, remains elusive, and the struggle occasionally leaves a bad taste in my mouth: The naysayers and the self-appointed prophets of doom might just be on to something. If you come at it from a certain direction, it's hard to dismiss these kinds of views.

While I was flipping through channels the other night, trying to come up with ideas for this column, the first reports started filtering in about the man who calmly stood up in a New York City train and indiscriminately began firing on commuters. A bit later, the Polly Klaas story came up, and it was reported that her confessed killer had led them to her body but that he reportedly was now asking for leniency because he was high and drunk at the time of the incident.

Still later, a follow-up story on the death of Frank Zappa was presented, absurdly belittling him as the man who "fought against the idea of keeping music with raunchy lyrics out of the hands of children." From the smaller, intimate events to the large, encompassing ones, it can often appear that nothing is going right and that, to be blunt, the world is being run by morons.

A few rays of hope pierced the veil of negativity, though. There was the amusing report about Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders proposing the idea of legalizing certain illegal drugs to stem the rising crime rate. You could almost hear the near-simultaneous thud-thud of Bill Clinton and Al Gore's jaws dropping on their desks in stunned disbelief. And then there was the news from the World Trade Center bombing trial. It seems one of the

key prosecution witnesses identified two of the jurors as the men he saw in the suspected truck that held the explosives instead of the two defendants also sitting in the courtroom. Whoops.

And then came a few stories that put an entirely new spin on things. The first was the report that finally, the United States and Russia were discussing turning their vast nuclear arsenals away from each other. It amounts to little more than a symbolic gesture, since the missiles could be re-aimed inside of 15 minutes; but the sentiment behind it is clear. Our leaders seem to have realized the idiocy of wasting huge amounts of resources on maintaining technological nightmares that could wipe us all out.

The coverage of the Hubble telescope mission also was an encouraging matter to contemplate. Regardless of the economic concerns, regardless of the squabbling over funding, regardless of the mess NASA is in, watching the astronauts work on the telescope hundreds of miles above the Earth puts things, literally, into perspective. The mission demonstrates the kinds of positive technological achievements we can take part in when we put our minds to it. Seeing the Earth from far above as a single, unified planet in an ocean of black space humbles our ridiculously arrogant attitudes and our insignificant problems.

Stories like these keep me going and give me the motivation to continue the pursuit. One of the main ideas that has been reinforced for me over the past few months is that your atti-

tude and preconceptions will affect your goals and conduct. There are many, many people out there who think they know exactly how to fix the world and who will make sure to let you know about it.

The problem is that most of them aren't really looking for the truth or for the real answers. They are looking for flaws in their opponents' theories and conversely looking for ways to smooth over their own ideas. They aren't really searching for the truth. They are looking for ways to make themselves feel secure.

Many people subscribe to the idea that "those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it." Being the big Sting fan that I am, I'm more inclined to the idea that "history will teach us nothing." Certainly it can, but we continue to prove it won't. There are many lessons for us to learn from history, but history is an invention that often has very little to do with what really happened. We tend to fine-tune our past in order to decide our future. We then blind ourselves to what is really going on in the world by restricting ourselves to our own limited interpretations. I'd like to think that with these columns, I've been able to learn more by refusing to limit myself to one viewpoint, political or otherwise. Thanks to those of you who were interested enough to come along for the ride with me this semester. It's been fun.

Zimmerman is a junior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.


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