

RAINBOW ROWELL

Editing: all grammar, no glory

Coming back to school wasn't a big change of pace for me this year. Back to school meant back to work, back to editing for the old Daily Nebraskan.

You see, I spent my entire summer in a newsroom. I was an intern at the Omaha World-Herald.

For the first six weeks, I was a reporter. There's nothing exciting to tell you about being a reporter. You've seen "Lois and Clark."

But for the last six weeks of the summer, I was a copy editor. Copy editing is a not a well-known profession. Most kids don't say they want to be a copy editor when they grow up. Nobody dresses up like a copy editor for Halloween.

Most people don't even know, or probably care, what a copy editor does.

A lot of the confusion is tied to the word "editor." The editor of a newspaper is the head honcho, the big cheese, the Arthur Carlson of the newsroom.

Then there are a string of lesser head honchos — managing editors, city editors, executive editors and their assistants.

But an editor — not THE editor, just AN editor — especially an editing intern like me, is no cheese at all, not even a snack-sized cheese cube or an hors d'oeuvre, the Les Nessman of the newsroom.

I was a copy editor. A copy editor reads stories, checks for errors and writes headlines. After I read the story, a more experienced copy editor read it and checked my headline.

My mother never quite understood my role at the paper. "Rainbow's an EDITOR," she'd say, in all capital letters, to anyone who would listen.

"Oh," the listener would politely respond, "what do you do?"

"Check spelling," I'd say.

"She's always been an excellent speller," my mother would rave. "Ask



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her to spell something, anything, go on."

And so they would just to appease my mother. And so I'd spell for them. "Separate." "Accommodate." "Onomatopoeia."

I think Mom imagined me sitting all day in a plush leather chair, answering spelling questions for my underlings. She probably envisioned a brass sign on my desk reading, "Rainbow Rowell, Editor."

In reality, I didn't have a desk. I had a chair, if I could find one that someone wasn't using. I liked to stand around looking innocent until real employees had to use the bathroom. You move it, you lose it.

I worked Tuesday through Saturday, 3 p.m. to midnight. And that was a good schedule; some of the copy editors had Tuesdays and Wednesdays off. And not just for 12 weeks. Some of them hadn't seen "Saturday Night Live" since the Eddie Murphy years.

Copy editors at that paper worked late. The news kept coming in until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m.

I became educated about our crazy world. I came dangerously close to understanding current events. For six weeks I almost knew what was happening in Haiti, Rwanda, Cuba and Bosnia.

And I went to the bathroom a lot. When you sit at a computer terminal for nine hours, drinking little plastic

cups of Diet Coke, restroom visits are a welcome break in the routine.

Now, don't get me wrong. My weeks on the copy desk were a lot of fun, but that sort of job makes you weird after a while.

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Copy editors don't get bylines or much attention. They're the newspaper's cleanup crew. They get all the messy jobs and none of the glory. And they take grammar very, very seriously.

The difference between "that" and "which" and the proper placement of commas are rules most people never stop to learn. But for copy editors, those rules come somewhere between "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife."

I started at the DN the day after I left the World-Herald. Things are different here. The DN puts out one edition a day, not five or six.

The World-Herald gave me a nice pen-and-pencil set. At the DN, we fight over grease pencils.

But even here in the minor leagues, you've got to watch where you put those commas.

Rowell is a junior news-editorial, advertising and English major and a Daily Nebraskan associate news editor.

JAMIE KARL

Forrest Gump: America's boy

"America's Gone Gump!" according to the newspaper ads. After finally seeing the movie "Forrest Gump," I hope the newspaper ads are right.

"Forrest Gump" is based on the life and times of an Alabama boy crippled with leg braces and an IQ of only 75. The story begins in the '50s, with Forrest's spirited mother (played by Sally Field) pleading with the boy's principal not to send her son to a "special school."

To get her son into public school, she sleeps with the repulsive, perverted principal. Forrest (played by Tom Hanks), who has no father figure, not only loves his mother for all she does for him but also idolizes her, quoting her maxims throughout his life.

On the first day of school, Forrest befriends a pretty blonde, Jenny, who will be his only friend throughout his school days. The separate paths the two travel as they grow older — and the different values by which they live their lives — make the movie.

Always being chased by bullies, Forrest learns to run, even in his leg braces. On one particular autumn day, Forrest is pelted with rocks thrown by the bullies. Jenny tells Forrest to run, and run he does. He runs so fast, he breaks right out of his braces, leaving the bullies to eat his dust.

And Forrest keeps on running — all the way to becoming an All-American for Bear Bryant's Alabama football team. He even meets JFK as a member of the All-American team. Meanwhile, Jenny poses for Playboy, gets tossed out of college, works at a strip bar and dreams of being a singing beatnik.

Forrest is forever faithful to Jenny; he waits for her, even as she comes home from dates. But Jenny is like the Army — open to all men between 18 and 45. She is sluttish and grows impatient with Forrest's persistence and with her Alabama home. When Forrest gets drafted, Jenny goes hippie and heads to the East Coast.



In "Forrest Gump," the true heroes, both black and white, come from the small towns of the South. The human debris comes from Berkeley and Woodstock.

In the Army, Forrest meets a not-so-bright black youth named Bubba, who dreams of being a shrimp boat captain. The two become such good friends that Bubba offers Forrest the job of first mate on his boat once they are out of the Army.

Forrest and Bubba are sent to Vietnam. In the depths of the Vietnam jungle, Forrest's platoon is ambushed. Forrest's commander, Lt. Dan, orders a retreat. Faster than anyone else, Forrest is the only one who makes it out of the jungle. Thinking of Bubba, he goes back in, rescuing seven of his fallen comrades — including Lt. Dan and Bubba, who dies in Forrest's arms.

Upon his return to the United States, Forrest is given the Medal of Honor by Lyndon Johnson. While in Washington, he again runs into Jenny, who introduces him to the leaders of a peace rally.

As Forrest, wounded war hero, stands straight and at attention, a group of Black Panthers yell in his face about the failings of America. In the background, Jenny's boyfriend slaps her for bringing a military man to the Panther party. Forrest sees the slap and pounds the hippie boyfriend's face into something resembling a blob of strawberry Jell-O, only to have Jenny yell at him again.

The movie presents a message throughout its story: Forrest, though a slow and simple being, always does the right thing. And in doing so, he becomes an all-American football player, a war hero, a world pingpong champion, a shrimp boat captain, a

famous marathon runner and a millionaire who gives all his money to charity.

And what about Jenny?

Well, Jenny joins the subculture: sex, pot, acid, intravenous drugs, hippie philosophy, the anti-American peace movement, suicide attempts and finally a virus (presumably the AIDS virus) from which she dies — the ultimate consequence for the life she has led.

Throughout his life, Forrest is asked, "Boy, are you crazy or just plain stupid?" His response to his critics: "Stupid is as stupid does." Those words are more than just Forrest's snappy retort; they are the message of the film.

Jenny, born pretty and intelligent, follows the ways of the counterculture in the '60s and '70s. Because of her lifestyle, she dies young — the result of acting stupid. Forrest, despite his handicaps, does what he knows is right and, in the end, wins fame, fortune, honor and love.

Forrest, the character, is everything good about America. The movie celebrates the values of most Americans — family, friendship, faith and decency.

"Life is like a box of chocolates," Forrest says. "You never know what you're going to get." The same holds true at the movie theater, and in "Forrest Gump," we have found ourselves a gem.

Karl is a junior news-editorial and political science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist and staff reporter.

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