

Spring revitalizes low spirits

The great thing about spring, beyond the natural revitalization of various dead-looking plant life, is the rebirth of our collectively dormant minds and spirits.

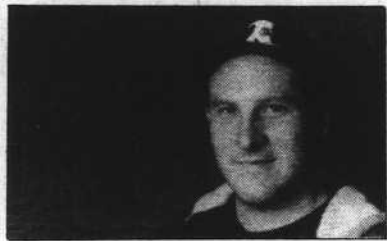
After suffering and struggling through a winter of subhuman conditions, it is remarkable how warm the air can feel, as if it were coming from that vent in front of the Military and Naval Science building.

You know that spot. It's the only warm morsel of land on campus during the freeze and it usually has a line of students, resembling "Star Wars" figures with their inability to bend any joints, waiting for a glimpse of heat that has become, like sleep and money, a vague recollection and more of a concept than an actual reality.

As embittering and confining as winter is, spring is equally revitalizing and liberating, eliminating the need to hibernate or wander aimlessly in department stores. Summer is the evil twin sister of winter, blowing humidity around as if it were snow, clinging to the skin like fungus on a log, lining the lungs of those brave enough to breathe in August, forcing sweaty, sticky bipeds back into the cool of the cave.

Spring does not impose like her cousins. No harsh conditions to flee from. Spring cleans us unlike anything else. It is this cleansing, slow and gradual yet seemingly instantaneous, that has become a necessary component in the rehabilitation of my sub-zero stricken psyche.

It is the beginning of all things good, as I remember them, and the end of the waiting. I despise waiting



Michael Justice

now more than as a child. At least I could take my frustrations out on my parents.

Green is good. Green is under-rated and largely taken for granted. When spring arrives, no one comments on how nice the green grass or the oak buds look. More compliments are made for the flash-in-the-pan colors like purple, pink, red and white, and though they do play a vital role in the transformation, it is the green that strikes me most.

When the grass looks good enough to lie in, to lounge on during mid-afternoon, then spring, blossoms or not, is true. Grass is the measure of spring; before the burning of summer, the covering of autumn and the suspended animation of the distant winter, grass is green, thick and bountiful, worthy and deserving of recognition.

If there is a heaven of choice, mine would overflow of this season and all that it represents: the coming freedom of a few months without the conditioning of a largely misguided education, eternal afternoons of wiffleball in my father's backyard (complete with a four-foot-high chain-link homerun fence), driving through the back roads of Wisconsin in the red Miata,

trips to Wrigley Field, Saturday barbecues with no less than a dozen friends and the blissfully ignorant comfort of having nothing to do.

I wish I was still 11 years old. I don't remember it specifically, and at the time it was probably entirely forgettable, compared to the excitement of my silver-screen idols, but it was a great time and I would give plenty to get it back. Or at least get that unspecified, yet individually recognizable, feeling back.

You may vaguely recall what I'm talking about. The feeling that everything is new and exciting.

When you're young, the whole world is just waiting for you to open the door. No first kiss yet, no R-rated movies, no driver's license, no class beyond grammar school, no worries (except missing "Scooby-Doo"), no parties, no beer, no staying out past dark and absolutely no sex.

I suppose this is why spring is my eternal hope and crutch of choice. It helps me regain a sense of new and remember that which can only be remembered. As much as I wish it were possible, I'm no longer a child, able to indulge in childhood for its own sake.

However, I still have my old wiffleball bat, full of notches from homeruns I hit off that kid up the street. I'm sure I could still whack a few, between the blooming oak and cherry trees next door. I think I'll go to the park, drink some Kool-aid, walk barefoot in the thick green grass and hit a few.

Justice is a junior news-editorial and broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Fans must relearn baseball's language

Because of the long strike, many baseball fans could have trouble communicating because their special language skills have grown rusty.

A fan can't just plunk himself down on a barstool and say something like: "Tell me, do you think that the Cubs are capable of winning enough baseball games this season to be considered worthy competitors or be awarded a divisional title?"

There would be snickering or suspicious stares because that is not the proper way to talk baseball.

Those fans who want to brush up on their baseball talk are advised to tune in to "Sports Yak Yak," the most popular round-the-clock sports radio call-in show.

You will hear the host, Billy Babble, and Chicago's most dedicated sports fans saying things like this:

And now for our first call from Joe in Cicero. Yo, Joe, how you doin', yo?

"I'm doin' great, Billy, and I wanna tell you that you're doin' a great job too. So what are ya callin' me about, yo?"

Uh, no, Joe, you called me. I'm the host.

"Hey, you're right, I forgot. OK, so, the strike's over, right?"

You're right on top of the news, Joe.

"Yeah, well, then tell me this. You think we can go all the way? Can we do it?"

Who you talking about, yo?

"Hey, I ain't talkin' about your kid sister, there, Billy, yo?"

You better not be, Joe, even though I don't have a kid sister, yo? So who you mean?

"I mean the Cubs, Billy. How 'bout them Cubs, huh?"

Yeah, how 'bout them?

"Yeah, I said it first. So, what 'ya think, yo?"

Well, I got to tell it like it is. They got a lot of question marks.

"Hey, the only way it is, is the way it is, and the only way to tell it is the way it is, you get me, yo?"

Right, because if you don't tell it the way it is, you're telling it the way it isn't, and the way it isn't will never be the way it is.

"Yeah, so who'd we be kiddin'; nobody, right?"

You got it, Joe.

"So, what about your kid sister, huh?"

I told you, I don't have one, but watch yourself anyway.

"Oh, yeah, I forgot. Hey, I meant the Cubs."

Right. The biggest question mark is the pitching.

"Hey, that's what I told my boss, just ask 'em. Like I always say, pitching is 190 percent of the game."

No, Joe, it can't be any more than 100 percent, and pitching is 90 percent of the game.

"Hey, I bet you're using a pocket calculator, yo? But I'll take your word, on that 19



Mike Royko

percent."

Ninety, Joe.

"Whatever. And you know what else I think? I think they're shaky up the middle. And you got to be strong up the middle, know what I mean, yo?"

Exactly. They got to get somebody in center who has got wheels and a glove.

"Oh, yeah, got to have them wheels and a glove. I mean, you'd look pretty dumb without a glove, right?"

You got it, Joe.

"But I think the kid at short, he's OK if he stays healthy."

Right. He gives you 110 percent every day.

"Wait a minute, you told me there can't be no more than 100 percent, yo?"

What I mean is, he comes to play.

"Oh, yeah, I know what you mean. And Sammy, there, in right. He's got all the tools."

No question, all the tools, and if he ever puts it all together, he could have an MVP year and be a superstar.

"Hey, that's just what I told my neighbor, just ask 'em. But I think the guy at first, he's got to start giving us the ribbies."

No question, we need him for the ribbies. Doesn't give you the long ball, but he's got the eye and he gives you the alley shots. And we got to get more production from the kid behind the plate. Another career year, you know what I mean?

"Hey, that's what I told a guy on the bus this morning, just ask 'em."

I believe you. But I worry about the bench.

"Hey, me, too. I worried about the bench last night so's I didn't get any sleep. Ask my wife again. I told her I was worried about the bench and she told me to shut up and go sleep on a bench. What 'ya think of that?"

I know what you mean, Joe. So the way I see it, if the starting pitching comes through and gives us six, seven innings, and somebody comes out of the bullpen, and we get some production from the three, four and five guys, and somebody with wheels gets on ahead of them, then like I always say, hey, who knows, anything can happen, right?

"Hey, and maybe anything will happen, yo?"

If it don't rain.

"That's just what I told somebody, I forgot who, but you can ask 'em."

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Different folks, different notes

Being a musician helped me learn to like all kinds of music. Having played some kinds that are less popular and less understood, I learned to appreciate almost anything. There are special treasures to be found in all music.

As a young musician in Lincoln, it was easy to get exposure to different kinds of music. But the emphasis was strongly western and central European. There are other forms of American music that are not so strongly influenced by European life as they are by American life.

When asked what kind of music I like, I reply, "You mean as a player or as a listener?"

As a player I've always preferred hard rock or swing jazz. As a listener, however, I'm torn between several types. Having to play so many different kinds of music as part of my job expanded my taste so much I can't make up my mind.

Rock wasn't really born in the United States; it comes from Eurocentric chord progressions. The same goes for jazz music. As a result, those became my favorite forms of musical expression. I had effectively shut out all others.

I was raised on classical music. My "legitimate training," as I used to call it, emphasized mostly western and central European styles. Though the focus was on classical, making the switch to jazz and rock was easy. Both are theoretically aligned with classical and are recognized as European-influenced forms of music.

Some forms of music are unmistakable the world wide as American creations. Like country, western, bluegrass and blues, the creation of these kinds of music is more definable as something American. People who ignore them are losing out in the end. Anyone who truly enjoys music can find



E. Hughes Shanks

things to appreciate in all types of it.

Blues, for example, is an undeniably American-born thing. Country music as well could not otherwise exist without American culture. You might say that people who can appreciate or even enjoy the different kinds of American music are the real patriots. It goes without saying that the types of music created in the United States are the purest forms of expression of who we are as a people. Accepting them is in effect accepting who we are.

Learning to appreciate blues and country music was not easy. I used to make fun of them, saying things like, "All blues is about is being poor and sad," or, "Country music is all about being broken down and broken-hearted."

Playing music isn't the same as listening to it. And that doesn't mean a person will learn to like what they play, but it helps a person learn something about history and culture. And if they try, they may be able to see it for something other than what it appears to be on the surface.

A dancer, though performing a dance of sadness, may well be counting steps and concentrating on every next move, oblivious to the image she/he portrays to the audience. In much the same way, a drummer might play a certain lick in a certain place because it fits there, not because it feels right.

Years of experience have taught me that everything that fits doesn't always feel right. There is no doubt,

however, that learning to make music feel right bridges gaps between cultures. That may be the special advantage a musician has over a non-musician.

I've been fascinated by the blues boom and resurgence of country in Lincoln. My interest in both has helped me bridge gaps between myself different kinds of music, even different ways of life. I've been so fascinated by the influence of old-style country music, I never take a road trip without my Mark Chesnutt and Sammy Kershaw tapes. Interest in both has brought me closer to ways of life I might otherwise ignore.

For one year I played the blues in chicken shacks and juke joints in southern Louisiana with Lil' Ray and Willy King ("Benny's cousin," he said). I didn't have a clue what I was doing, but it was fun.

As wannabe rock star of the '70s, it was frustrating to learn that most of the steady gigs belonged to country and western players. At 17, I wasn't quite open-minded enough to cross over to country or western, so I left town.

Without having played so many kinds of music, the gaps in my ability to appreciate anything besides jazz, classical or rock might have might have denied me the opportunity to enjoy things like blues and country, which are two American treasures.

It isn't fair to say that a musician can appreciate more kinds of music than a non-musician. But only the most open-minded kind of person, musician or not, likes the most kinds of music. Being a musician can help one to understand and appreciate different forms of musical expression from the inside. But so can walking up to someone and listening to them.

Shanks is a graduate student and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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