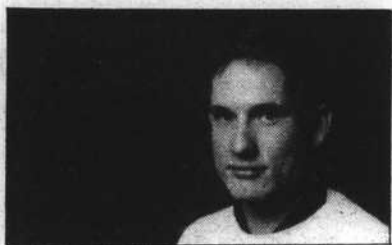


College is life's treasure chest

Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! I borrow that famous phrase from the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. not because this is the last week of school, or even because I am graduating Saturday.



Todd Elwood

I'm not that bold. I have this eerie feeling that any moment now, I'm going to wake up, find Bobby Ewing in my bathroom taking a shower, and realize that I'm really a junior chemical engineering major who has just slept through a final test. I will realize that I've been dreaming this past year, and that the graduation thing just isn't happening.

No, I borrow the phrase from Dr. King because it has to do with one of the most important things that I've learned at UNL.

It's not a fact that I've learned in any science class, or a figure I've learned in math. It has to do with living, and what I've learned can't be found in a textbook.

When I arrived in Lincoln, oh so many years ago, I knew everything. I was the smartest new freshman to hit the campus. That's what I believed about myself.

I believed it so much that I decided I really didn't need to know the facts about anything. I knew everything basic in life, and I knew what it took to succeed. Classes became optional.

Why would I, a person that knew everything, have to go to a class to learn about U.S. history? It was just a bunch of dates and names, wasn't it? Would I really need to know them? And even if I did know them, I would never use them, and I would forget them as soon as the semester ended anyway, right?

My problem for the first couple of years in school was that I worked harder to get out of going to class than I did inside the classrooms. I was even thinking about writing a book on the fine art of skipping school. "Life as a College Student: An Imposter's Guide" would be the title.

But then, a funny thing happened. I got terrible grades. Can you say "academic probation"? I knew that you could.

I found myself in the position of having to go to class, and this is when I began to learn the lesson that makes me think of Dr. King's words.

I still had the attitude that I didn't belong in the classroom and that a college degree is just a piece of paper that helps you get a job. But then, as I began listening and taking notes and reading books, I had a revelation.

I realized that I was learning. It was as if my professors were handing me little pieces of knowledge. "Here Todd, take this knowledge, I offer it to you." It's amazing to think of it in that way. We are here for no other reason than to learn. It is an opportunity that will never happen again. I repeat that: It will never happen again.

I realize that now. I know that I will never be able to sit in a classroom and learn about U.S. history for the pure sake of just learning it.

The aspect of not remembering facts from a class a semester later is still true. But the things that do stay with you, that actually affect how you look at the world, and that literally affect the way you think, are the real treasures in college. And I wasted at least two years of finding these treasures because I knew everything already.

A professor of mine once told me that we may learn very little in college, but when we do learn something, it becomes one of our most valuable possessions.

When I heard him say this, I made a smart-aleck remark to the effect that, if we actually learn so little, the university should charge us tuition for just the things we learn. Boy, did I know it all!

"You couldn't afford it," was his response. He was right, oh, was he right.

In a sort of twisted way, I would like nothing better than to have those first few years back. I missed many opportunities to free my mind, to take valuable knowledge with me, and I regret that a great deal.

What I have learned in college is that I know so preciously little about this world. But I am miles ahead of where I was coming in as a freshman. I won't remember many dates and facts, but I will take with me countless treasures. They are the treasures that I have found through allowing myself to be free.

Free at last.

Elwood is a senior English and sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Nature's habitats not private property



Ellen Goodman

The problem is that the spotted owl has no respect for private property. Birds are like that.

A toddler can be taught not to step on a neighbor's lawn. A schoolchild can learn not to chase a ball over the fence. Adults can carve a rambling topography into square subdivisions, and allot ownership over mountains, valleys, prairies.

But birds claim territory by an entirely different set of rules. The rules of nature. The rules of their nature. And when those rules are broken, they disappear.

So it is that two ideas, about property and about the use and ownership of nature, came into conflict before the Supreme Court on April 17.

The case pitted the timber industry, the private owners of millions of acres of forest, vs. the government, the public protector of the environment. The issue was whether the 1973 Endangered Species Act — itself an endangered species of law — was meant to protect only animals or their habitats as well.

On the face of it, the debate played out like the theater of the absurd. The law had made it a crime to "take" an endangered species. The government regulations said that "taking" a creature meant killing it, harassing it, harming its ability to breed or find food and shelter.

But the question before the court was whether chopping down a forest was the same as killing the creatures that live there. Justice Scalia seemed to believe that the law was intended to penalize people who harm animals by hunting, not by logging.

The lawyers for the timber industry argued that felling a forest that houses an animal was not the same as deliberately shooting down the animal. You could destroy the habitat without destroying the species that live in it and off it.

They argued for a neat, legal way to separate what nature had put together. Though the beauty of their legal argument might be lost on an owl.

If the case of *Babbitt vs. Sweet Home Chapter* is widely accepted as a crucial one, it's because this is a moment when environmental laws are at risk. The movement is also at risk.

Today the adjective "environmental" comes with a ready-made noun: "extremist." As another Earth Day came and went, many Americans seemed to love the environment and scorn the environmentalists.

Every business colors itself green while "the greens" are caricatured as government intruders, bureaucratic busybodies. The found it easy to attack the Endangered Species Act while portraying

themselves as the protectors of the little guys, not the agents of big business.

But the case is also crucial because it again brings up the conflict between our desire to protect the environment and our belief that someone can do whatever he wants with his own property. It raises the question: What does it mean for a person to own 400-year-old trees, or a mountain, or a forest?

In his book "Slide Mountain," Theodore Steinberg writes about "the folly of owning nature." He describes it in terms of our desire to control the whole world, to possess something as fluid as water, as ephemeral as air, as enduring as land.

He details legal battles over water rights to underground streams, air rights to buildings in the city, property rights to the moon. He talks of the dilemmas of "living in a culture in which the natural world has been everywhere, relentlessly, transformed into property."

Indeed, in the 25 years of a full-scale environmental movement, we've had difficulty moving from a concept of ownership to one of stewardship, from possession to caretaking. Property rights are still, in Steinberg's word, our religion.

Human beings who live less than a century claim land that has been there since the dawn of time as "ours." We maintain the right to "develop" this land, to behave as if the only time frame that mattered were our own lifespan.

It isn't just big business that wants to pave Paradise and put up a parking lot. It's also homeowners who feel outraged if their back lot is designated as a wetland when they want to use it for a garage.

But in the end, we don't own nature any more than we own the birds at the feeder. Or the owls in the forest. Whatever fine points the lawyers for the timber industry can draw in a court, nature draws other laws. We can't save the owl and cut down the forests any more than we can destroy our own habitat and survive.

As Henry David Thoreau wrote in words fit for any Earth Day, "Man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone."

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Writing stirs up war on values

About a month before her death, my great-grandmother told me how lucky she was to have lived such a long and blessed life. She said she felt privileged to have been a part of America's glory years, but she feared a day was soon coming to the country that she would rather not see.



Jamie Karl

My great-grandmother blatantly told me, "Jamie, I feel I am leaving this world at a time when America's best days lay behind her."

I did not want to believe that, as much as it seemed to be true. It was then I decided I wanted a return to the days of the American high. At the very least, I wanted to be a voice of support for the ideas and ideals that had made America a uniquely great country.

When I came to our university three years ago, I saw an all-out assault on the small-town, traditional values and family virtues that I had believed everyone held sacred. For the first time in my young life, I witnessed the war between those who would maintain the traditions and values of their childhood, and those who would not. It was here, at college, that I came to understand the concept of the culture war within America.

Of course, now I realize college is a time of expected rebellion and limited decadence. But I also have come to understand that college, in many ways, is a time to grow up.

College is a time when we either confirm or deny what we have learned at school and home and church. It is a time when we either admire and appreciate, or mock and deride who we are and where we come from.

My college days have taught me that we traditionalists can never retreat from the front lines of the culture war; for that war is about who we are. Nor can we simply yell from the sidelines. Instead, we must engage in the fight ourselves.

It is because of this knowledge

that I stepped up to this podium I have come to cherish. And it is the reason I will continue this vocation I have come to love.

A loud, constant message needs to be sent on behalf of the majority of students: A message which makes it clear that simply because we are on our own for the first time in our lives, we are not about to leave our values and beliefs at home with the family.

For sending that message, I have paid a price. The verbal attacks and name-calling do take their toll.

However, my writing has taught me that consensus in the debate over our values and beliefs is an illusion. Never will we have a general agreement in America's ideological debate. Nor should we.

Instead, a majority ideology will always prevail, making the minority unhappy and angry. I have learned it is impossible to have everyone agree with you — or even like you. And I've grown to accept that. Gone forever are the days of go-along-to-get-along.

Our campus — and more disturbingly, our country — has become a house divided against itself. But as I wrote early in the school year, this war can only go on for so long. There will be a winner and a loser. Someone's values must prevail.

While the words and ideas of my columns would have been taken for granted half-a-century ago, they stir controversy today, simply because America has changed. Those who say America has changed for the better need to step back and look

around.

Throughout my life and the life of my generation, America's leaders have sought to replace the enduring, proven values of yesterday's America with new, "liberated" ones. Yet the national epidemics of teen pregnancy, abortion, child abuse, drug abuse, wife abuse, divorce, murder, suicide and the emergence of gay rights prove that something has gone fundamentally wrong with America. These problems did not exist three decades ago. And the few other problems that were present have yet to go away.

Despite the seemingly desperate conditions, much of what we have lost since America's glory years can still be retrieved. Most students at this university have instilled within them the ideas and ideals that made America great when our grandparents were in their prime. The great days of hope for all Americans are not gone forever. They are still attainable, but it is up to our generation to bring them back.

Over the past year, some said I was taking my columns too seriously. But I believe the ideological conflict we have had on the opinion page is the debate that will shape our future. If we traditionalists and conservatives lose the battle of ideas today, we ultimately forfeit our tomorrow.

As we bring an end to this school year, let it be known that everything written in this column has come out of a love for country, family and faith. I have no regrets for the words I have put on paper, nor do I offer any apologies to those who feel threatened by the ideas linked to those words. I do thank those who stood beside me and offered support.

So until next fall, goodbye. And thanks for listening.

Karl is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist and wire editor.



Mike Luckovich