

# Faithful Herbie gets the boot

As per usual, the university higher-ups have made a great big decision during the summer when there was no one here to take arms and lead a revolt.

While you were savoring the last free moments of your summer vacation, the athletic department was sticking it to a university tradition — Herbie Husker.

That's right, freshman, you've wanted to meet Herbie Husker your whole dang life, and now he's leaving.

I've only met Herbie once. I was sitting on a bench outside the Wick Alumni Center and he sat next to me.

We then had a very uncomfortable five-minute exchange in which I tried not to make eye contact and he just patted his mouth and pretended to giggle.

I tried to engage him in a conversation, but he raised his hands and shoulders in that, "sorry" gesture only used by people in costume and Ice Capades skaters. Apparently, Herbie has taken a vow of silence.

And probably a vow of chastity, too. Those overalls scare chicks off like the plague.

In short, the man has made a lot of sacrifices to be Nebraska's favorite son.

After years of sacrifice and devotion — not to mention always getting too much pepper on his salad because he can't say, "when" — Herbie is out on the streets.

Why? Because he's stupid looking.

What kind of jacked-up reason is that? I can think of scads of things (and people) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln much more stupid looking than Herbie. Heck, I'm more stupid looking on any given day, and no one has asked me to



**Rainbow Rowell**

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leave yet. No one who matters, anyway.

Not only is it a stupid reason, it's downright mean. Would it have been so hard to say he was leaving because he had found a brighter horizon elsewhere? That he wanted to spend more time with his family or go back to school?

Oh no, that wouldn't work. That wouldn't give all the athletic department bigwigs the same thrill as telling a poor, helpless slob that he's stupid looking.

"Ha-ha, hee-hee, jab-jab, this is almost as much fun as sticking the students in crappy seats," one athletic department bigwig probably said.

"Yeah, but not as much fun as raising ticket prices," another probably muttered.

Poor, Herbie. Poor, poor, poor Herbie.

He probably looks like he's holding up all right. I'm sure he's

wearing his usual stupid-looking, snarling face. But on the inside? He's crying.

He's trying to stop crying, of course, because, man, once the inside of that head gets wet, it takes days to dry.

But he's still crying. It will get much worse once an equally stupid-looking mascot is chosen.

And it will be stupid looking, I promise you. The whole "Cornhuskers" motif is devoid of cool possibilities. What else is there? An ear of corn? A tractor? A farm animal? How about you during that summer you spent detasseling?

Stupid looking. But poor Herbie will lose sleep, wondering what the new mascot has that he doesn't.

"Is it my height?" he'll ask. "My big, red hat? My pot belly? Does the new mascot have better legs? It's my laugh, isn't it? What? Tell me. I'll change. I can change — I want to."

"Baby, it doesn't have to end like this. We can work it out. We're so good together..."

I admit, I hate Herbie as much as the next guy. I think he looks mean and stupider than stupid. I refuse to buy any NU gear that features that ugly little wretch.

But I'm not willing to end years of tradition and send Herbie to mascot heaven just to be stuck with an even more abominable mascot — like a big red pig or sneering tractor.

Unless it's a cool tractor. With free rides for all students and a scary name like "The Harvester."

Yeah, I'd be OK with that.

*Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and the Daily Nebraskan Managing Editor.*

# Racist evil subsists on slurs

The latest twist in the already contorted O.J. Simpson trial came last week with the revelation that detective Mark Fuhrman — contrary to his sworn testimony — actually used the word "nigger" not once, but several times in the last ten years.

This brings up all kinds of questions about other items of the detective's testimony and the role race may or may not have played in the charging of Simpson, a black man, with the murder of two whites — one of them his former wife.

More importantly, to my mind, it brings out very clearly the way in which race and language can combine explosively.

Because the problem of race in our society is not a single, simple concern with a simplistic solution, "Can't we all just get along?" won't cut the mustard.

The problem of race represents a bundle of social ills, each feeding from the other in a living and self-replicating structure. Racism is a remarkably stable force over time. And it's a game everyone can play.

Problems involved include the gross inequality of resources and opportunity and antiquated or just plain slanderous stereotypes, as well as language.

But it may be language that plays the most important role.

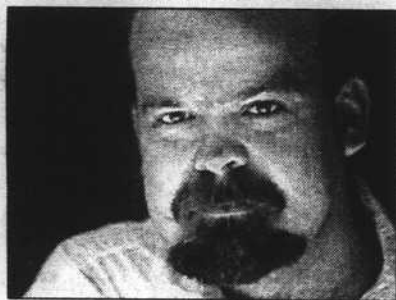
Words embody our ideas — about ourselves and our world. Racial epithets are a quick and fairly permanent way of alienating those different from ourselves — once the slur is coined it remains in circulation long after.

And words have the advantage of being grasped intuitively, from context. Even small children, unfamiliar with the lexicon of hate, know when they are hearing a slur.

We can detect when certain terms remain conspicuously absent — we catch ourselves or others talking around them.

But this brings them all the more forcefully to mind. What list of epithets does your own mind compile while reading this column?

A solution to the language problem — proposed in recent years by proponents of hate speech regulations — is to remove racial epithets and other stereotyping and



**Mark Baldrige**

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demeaning words from public use.

The obvious flaw in this line of defense is that racial slurs will not simply go away because their public expression is censured.

If we make it inconvenient to utter them in public, we give them extra value as private epithets, a kind of legal tender for all debts private, not public.

But we can live without that kind of coinage.

When deep feelings of alienation and hate cannot find a forum they will seek more subversive outlets. We don't need any more secret societies of hatred here, thank you.

But the problem remains. And it is closer to us, to where we live, than many people seem to want to believe.

Everyone uses terms of derision: moron, bastard, liar, bitch. We do it constantly, trying to separate ourselves from those we dislike or simply don't want to know.

Without the ability to separate ourselves in some way we would sink into the goop of the melting pot in a way that no one really wants.

Some think it's better to use the language that expresses our sense of fear and alienation than to ignore those feelings and movements within our ranks.

Problem is, racial slurs carry a weight and force of their own. They represent a more intense level of feeling. Like fuses, they may burn to

the powder keg of racial violence.

It's here that the old adage about sticks and stones loses its childish hold: Words can hurt me.

They do hurt.

So what can we do about it?

One possible solution is to turn the tables on our enemies by reinventing words in our own way and after our own sense of pride.

The British called the rebellious colonists "yanks" and sang derisive, if bizarre, songs about Yankee Doodle — the epitome of the stupid yank.

But this very term was adopted as a badge of honor and raised as a standard by the rebels. The song became almost a battle hymn.

The fact that this happened long ago does not diminish the scale of the accomplishment. Terms of hate don't become pet names by themselves.

But we have more recent examples.

The word "queer" as an epithet against homosexuals has emerged in recent years in a transformed context. Queer Nation is a highly visible agitational group with many adherents.

One occasionally sees the term "bitch" applied favorably on coffee mugs and buttons intended for women who want to take charge and run things.

In the world of rap music, bands like NWA (Nigga's With Attitude) and the lyrics of many songs betray a sense of rebellious pride in language originally intended to keep blacks "in their place."

And why not? The time when racist whites in this country could dominate by sheer numbers is passing — if it has not already passed.

And not a moment too soon.

But hate and fear are part of the human condition. And there will always be those willing to play upon these strings — and there will always be those who will dance to this harsh music.

They will stop at nothing and the fight against them will never end.

But we can take the words right out of their mouths.

*Baldrige is a senior English major and the Daily Nebraskan opinion page editor.*

## Our special guest

*Sheryl Schmidtke*

# True victory needs personal risk, loss

Our students. Our school. 105 fighting men and a championship won after years of plodding and close calls. We all had something to toast this year.

This is true whether you embraced the pigskin and pulled on those red polyester pants or whether you spent your Sunday morning sleeping off a hangover from the ravages of New Year's Eve.

We all at some point took pride in our victory.

Naturally, it was a good excuse to raise a Mickey's Big Mouth to your lips and take a swig.

It's all good.

But.

I hesitate on the words "our victory." Who's victory is it exactly? What have YOU accomplished?

*When was the last time you considered your own plot of ground and crop?*

Many have ridden on the crest of their school: the merits of Vassar, the rich tradition of Cambridge. But who are the real victors?

I would argue that the people who can truly raise the glass to their lips are not those who hide behind some seal or sacred oath. The real victors are those who achieved greatness independently, through discipline and risk.

Take Emerson, for example, who forged his own championship, not on football turf, but on the field of literature. He was convicted to the ideas of independence and responsibility for one's own advancement.

In his essay "Self-Reliance," Emerson says:

"...though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to [one] but through [one's] toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to [one] to till."

Big deal, right? A guy talking about pig feed and soil. Look closely though. When was the last time you considered your own plot of ground and crop?

Remember how many times our team walked off the field, pelted with oranges? Remember how your relatives groaned at the narrow loss as they began pulling out tens from their wallets, paying lost bets?

No one ever said victory would be easily won, as I'm sure Coach Osborne would agree. But victory lies not in a team mascot or big red "N." Achievement for

the football team — as for any student — comes from time, energy and desire to see the fruition of a certain goal.

Many of us seem to be lacking these essentials for achievement when buried in class loads, armfuls of overpriced books, and busy social lives. And before we can summon up the courage to withstand the hurled oranges, we must decide just what is the intended victory for ourselves.

Even the wise, disciplined Siddhartha, familiarly known as Buddha, needed many hours of meditation and a Bo tree to reach enlightenment. He achieved this by eliminating all outside distractions, thus allowing himself to focus.

You can reach your own enlightenment (with or without the tree) by urging yourself into contemplation of your desired personal victories this year. You must give yourself time to ask questions of yourself and search for those answers.

Not everyone can aspire to be an Emerson or Buddha.

Greatness can be achieved in even the most ordinary, non-prophet lives. Take Shannon Faulkner: In her quest for victory and an opportunity to become admitted into the esteemed Citadel, she risked her private life and the respect of her peers.

She embarked on this goal with courage and conviction and showed the world that without risk there is no real possible gain. Risk brings meaningfulness to our victories.

The darker side to risk is loss. Faulkner felt this when she left the campus amid honking horns and jeering men. Whatever goals we set for ourselves, we must accept the threat of loss, just as the Huskers have in the past.

If you take no responsibility for your own achievement at this great institution, you rob yourself. You give satisfaction and glory to a team, when you should be harvesting your own excellence in philosophy, science or education.

And besides that, Emerson would look down his nose at you and scoff loudly — as perhaps your relatives did when they defended the Huskers against the winning Huskies and the Buffaloes.

I encourage you to push yourself, your ideas, your desires, until you sweat like a man who has just tilled one hundred acres. Reap and sow your own crop, as did 105 red-clad men at the national championship last year.

Cultivate your own victories. Focus your intentions. Risk at your own expense. Don't let yourself be carried downstream blindly in a rush of red and white.

*Schmidtke is a UNL alumnus and a teacher with Lincoln Public Schools.*

### BE OUR GUEST

The Daily Nebraskan will present a guest columnist each Monday. Writers from the university and community are welcome.

Must have strong writing skills and something to say. Contact Mark Baldrige c/o the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588.

Or by phone at (402)472-1782.