

# Unawareness requires action

I never understood the pink ribbons. Of course I knew they stood for breast cancer awareness the way people sport red ribbons to symbolize their support of people living with AIDS. What I didn't realize was the enormous importance those pink ribbons would come to have for me.



**Krista Schwarting**

*"Someone close to me has that tumor not because she deserved it or did anything wrong. But she may not have done the right thing."*

awareness, I don't set a very good example. I too avoid doctors like the plague, and while I've seen cards explaining how to do self-exams, I still wouldn't have a clue what to look for.

I remember a poster I saw in my college's health center. It depicted an older woman, and the caption read "Died of shame." What it was trying to say was modesty over potentially embarrassing diseases was not worth dying over.

When I lived in New Orleans, a city still associated with the Old South and all its antebellum traditions, I came to understand that modesty firsthand. Women in my sorority who could speak about most things without inhibition suddenly became hesitant about others. When someone came to speak to us about women's health, the talk went on for days.

The interesting thing about these conversations was not the topic, but the manner in which they were spoken. Voices normally loud and clear would dip dramatically to

almost whisper the words "breast cancer." I came out of them feeling that these were words of shame and degradation, things not discussed in polite conversation.

The lack of talk and action helps explain why symbols have gained in popularity. It's so much easier to wear red or pink ribbons rather than practice safe sex or learn to look for signs of breast cancer.

Most of the public service announcements I've seen for AIDS feature some version of the line, "I never thought it could happen to me." I'm sure the woman on the "died of shame" poster thought the same thing.

Unfortunately, life and health don't work that way. Someone close to me has that tumor not because she deserved it or did anything wrong. But she may not have done the right thing.

We have to stop lowering our voices when it comes down to difficult issues and health concerns. We have to stop thinking nothing can happen to us and put meaning behind the symbols.

Symbols have meanings, and they turn a complicated idea into something simple. It's become too simple to wear a ribbon or spout a phrase just because it's fashionable. Symbols make it too easy to forget the pain and reality of what they represent. They also let us think that AIDS and breast cancer still only happen to other people.

I'm not saying we should get rid of the ribbons. They're a small step toward at least admitting the problems exist. But people need to take that acknowledgement and move it forward into practice in their own lives.

I understand the ribbons now. I'm just not satisfied with what they say to me.

*Schwarting is a graduate student in broadcast journalism and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.*

I feel like my generation has really grasped the art of gestures. We wear our ribbons and say politically correct things about causes.

What disappoints me is how little awareness and action are behind those gestures.

I mean, how many people who support AIDS awareness actually practice safe sex?

They mean well, but can't apply the standard to their own lives. To most, AIDS is still something that only happens to "other people."

Unfortunately, awareness becomes reality in some people's lives. The pink ribbons gained new significance for me last week as I found out a woman very close to me had a tumor in one of her breasts.

I went through all the usual feelings.

I certainly never thought it would happen to anyone close to me, especially someone so vibrant, and yes, aware. In her case, awareness didn't translate to yearly doctor's visits or breast self-exams.

She's in her mid-50s, well past the age when women should start being aware of the reality of breast cancer.

Doctors' recommendations on the age at which women should begin a program of breast examinations have changed many times, but at the very latest she should have started paying attention in her 30s.

I'm not blaming her, and I'm certainly not one to talk.

And for a generation so self-consciously, vocally proud of its

# Garcia commands respect

Everyone needs a placebo: cigarettes, sex, god — all the same thing really. Emotional/philosophical fixes allowing us to go another mundane 24/7 without jabbing an ice pick through our skulls.

For more than 30 years, Jerry Garcia was the Geritol curing the tired blood of a culture that had grown disenchanted with the "American" way.

He served as the figurehead of a once important movement and a father figure for a lost generation. For this he deserves our respect.

Unfortunately, last week Mr. Garcia unwillingly took his place at center stage in the wonderful off-Broadway musical "Pop Culture Martyr" — that ever so glorious production that occurs whenever anyone of marketable relevance dies.

With this current wave of asinine seventies revival/worship in full force, a worse time for his passing could not have been picked.

As I sat with my lids opened wide, ingesting the news of his death, the unmistakable rank smell of this year's Big Thing came wafting in through the window.

Out in the distance I saw Generation X rear its ugly head and begin gobbling up and spewing out any sincerity the man and his music once possessed.

A sad trickle of vomit came tumbling down from heaven as Jerry watched his carcass become another mall-rat accessory item to go with your genuine Cobain-skin vest and mass-produced, factory-made, cannabis glorification cap.

His death became another badge to be placed on the shirt of someone desperate for acceptance; trying to prove that they saw it, did it, liked it, bought it, had it, heard it, knew it, lived it, and loved it first ... whatever the hell it was.

I doubt that even Courtney Love, smoking gun in hand, predicted that — once Madison Avenue took over grunge — the die-hard wannabes would pump 1.21



**Aaron McKain**

*"As I sat with my lids opened wide, ingesting the news of his death, the unmistakable rank smell of this year's Big Thing came wafting in through the window."*

jigawatts into their tattered libidos and travel back 20 years to rehash a scene that was tired four presidents ago.

C'mon people, the sixties are gone, daddy, gone. It's the nineties now, where raw expression is for sale and identities can be slipped on and off like a prom dress.

These days you can buy your counter-cultures over the counter — today's rebellion has been FDA approved and contains the recommended daily allowance of banality and teen angst.

Freed from the burden of thought, MTV sucker-punches millions daily, force feeding us their blueprint on the art of being different.

No matter how artistically bankrupt our society has become, retrieving artifacts of the past is no way to pave the road to the future.

I pray that the intensity of the nation's most entertaining blip this century can be credited more toward societal unrest and the burning fires of lost causes than to

acid and a guitar solo.

And if that is the case, you can't go back and re-create that political and social climate with tie dye, cheap drugs and bad vinyl.

A societal situation, such as the one experienced in the late '60s, is a masterpiece of time, space and dimension; it cannot exist in a vacuum, and it cannot be rebuilt like some sociopath's diorama.

Cultural movements are not TV dinners that can be yanked out of mommy and daddy's closet 20 years later and reheated for mainstream consumption.

When we refuse to accept the responsibility of forging a new path, we become no better or worse than hamsters spinning around in a wheel.

We're so indentitled that I'm not even sure how our kids will make fun of us.

But then I look back and think that I'm being overly critical of ol' Gen X.

Not only did we have the misfortune of being named after a suck like Billy Idol, but we were cheated out of the tragedies that put a face on Mr. Potato Head.

We didn't get a war, we didn't pioneer the drug thing, and our presidents weren't awe-inspiringly crooked. Hell, our rock stars aren't even cool enough to choke to death.

Anyway, Mr. Garcia was a lot of things to a lot of people. I was not one of them.

His death does not give me, or anyone else, an excuse to pretend that he was our savior.

A man is dead, let's not put his head on a pike for fast acceptance and a greased palm on the already slimy social ladder.

To the true Deadheads, my deepest condolences.

All aboard, next bandwagon stop ... Terrapin Station.

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## The N Stands For Knowledge

by James Zank

