

# News puts truth over feelings

Last summer, I called a young man's mother to ask how her son had died.

"Well, when we found him," she said, her voice breaking, "he had been there for about a week."

Oh yes, I see, I understand, I said in my best soothing tone, but how did your son die?

"Well, it was a bullet, you know," she said.

Why wasn't this covered in our police reports, I wondered.

"He shot himself," she said. "My son committed suicide."

Oh, I'm sorry to trouble you. Thank you for your time, Ma'am, and have a good day.

My hands were shaking when I put the phone down, and I wanted to run to the bathroom, to get away from the newsroom and to go home and sleep for a very long time.

But I had a stack of funeral notices and a 4:30 deadline. So I picked up the phone again. I'm sorry to bother you, but I would like to talk to you about your father, your wife, your child.

I didn't write many obituaries this summer. But I made a few unpleasant calls.

Hello, is your father there? Hello sir, you've been charged with videotaping young girls in the locker room. Do you have any comment? No, I understand. Have a nice evening. Thank you for your time.

I'm a pretty nice person, the kind of person who'll tell you she loves your horrible new haircut, the type of person who apologizes just to make other people feel better.

Yet, I have chosen a profession where thick skin is the rule and swallowing your emotions is all in a day's work.

This is a business where it is far too easy to lose touch with your humanity. Journalists are adrenalin junkies, always itching for the next big story. And sometimes, when the



**Rainbow Rowell**

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story's big, reporters forget about the casualties.

On any given day, at least half of the people mentioned in the newspaper or on the news don't want to be there.

But that doesn't mean they shouldn't be there.

There's been a lot of talk lately about the fiendish press. The vultures, the bottom-feeders, the cruel.

And sometimes, I agree.

This campus was teeming with reporters last week. Some of them were OK. There's a story in Lincoln, Neb., this month, and they were here to get it.

We were tripping over "48 Hours" cameramen Thursday as we tried to finish up the paper. The week before, I answered half a dozen media calls a day.

Some of those reporters were rather slimy. They came to hear that the Nebraska football team is a pack of woman-beating, crack-smoking ne'er-do-wells. If you weren't saying that, they weren't listening.

Just as bad were those local reporters who refused to acknowl-

edge recent events because they were scared someone would yank their football passes.

In the thick of all these controversies, I have seen my Daily Nebraskan colleagues make some very mature decisions and some very mature comments.

At other times, I've seen all the stupidity of the outside press reflected right here.

I've seen editors laughing giddily at someone else's hardship. I've seen reporters refuse to write stories that might hurt Tom Osborne's feelings.

And I've thought, Jiminy Cricket, what am I doing here? What will I become? But I don't quit.

As distasteful and difficult as reporting may sometimes be, it is as important as any job in this country.

Citizens do not have time to attend every board meeting, to read every police report, to question every candidate.

But they have the right to do all those things. A reporter exercises those rights for all of his or her readers.

Doing so is a responsibility and a privilege.

Yes, in some ways, it hurts Lawrence Phillips and Damon Benning when the media publishes their arrests.

And in some ways, it hurts Kate McEwen and Vonetta Bowden to name them as victims.

However, in a greater way, it helps us all to live in a place where arrests and accusations are a matter of public record.

So I will bear that sick feeling that comes when I call someone who doesn't want to be called. I will never enjoy hurting people.

But I hope that will never keep me from revealing the truth.

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

## Our special guest

### Carter Van Pelt

# Democratic Party needs definite goals

On a cold and dark November evening last year, American politics passed a significant point in its evolutionary process. I am of course referring to the "political mandate" of conservatism imposed by a plurality of the American electorate.

That night was seen as a dark and terrible time by many Democrats. It was the end of 40 years of control of the House of Representatives. Many Democrats wondered, "what could be worse?"

I continue to see that event as a great opportunity for the Democratic Party to reform itself for the 21st Century. I'm not predicting this will happen, but it is nonetheless a ripe opportunity.

There are two directions for the Democratic Party right now.

With the short term political objectives of raising money and winning back Congress, the seemingly obvious approach is a continued appeal to the centrist voter — the moderates who currently determine the outcome of many elections.

However, I don't see adopting a middle of the road agenda as any solution for democratic woes.

The Democratic Party's already stumbling attempts to appeal to centrist voters who are vested in the system have watered down its messages and alienated its legitimate base.

The Party must remember one thing above all else: It represents the common people and must hold their power to be the ultimate authority.

Populism may be considered passe in our current party system, but this is only because it is undermined by constant assaults from financial interests.

The Democratic Party has become obsessed with its strictly electoral mission of getting Democrats into office and has lost sight of its greater mission of actually representing the best interests of all citizens.

Simply stated, the Democratic Party needs to abandon the lucrative centrist voter and stand up for people — stand up as people.

While abandoning the established financial base may hinder the party's ability to elect candidates to office in the short term, it is necessary in order to facilitate a new dialogue.

The Party needs to commit to what it knows to be right: an unwavering commitment to labor over capital; an unwavering commitment to Choice and the corequisite opposition to religious dogma; an unwavering commitment to affirmative action and social justice; and an absolutely unshakable commitment to tolerance of diversity.

The most serious problems threatening the long term viability of our democracy are social ones. If we don't address these, we have no future.

The source of much of the Democratic Party's identity crisis stems from a perceived failure of 1960s ideology.

More plainly, it stems from a perception that because government has failed in many senses, the institution itself is a failure and inherently incapable of working.

This is the greatest tragedy of modern political thought.

The fact remains that government has not failed, we have failed government. If we are pointing fingers, we can point in no other direction than at ourselves. We must commit ourselves to participating in the system. This goes far, far, far beyond going to the polls and voting in every election.

It means being informed on every issue and every candidate presented to us as an option.

As conscious citizens in a democracy, if we have any free time at all, then we have a duty to be informed. Some say this is not realistic. If that is true, then it follows that we don't have time to be truly free.

The Democratic Party cannot compromise the belief that government can work. Therefore, we have to take responsibility for failed systems by making them work.

If we want to dismantle systems, then we can only do so with the intention of rebuilding the systems stronger than before and making them more effective than before. This also means realizing that government requires constant care and maintenance.

The Republican Party is claiming to have the solution to our problems: Dismantle government and let the forces of the market drive the country.

The truth will never become apparent in this ongoing argument if political battles continue to be waged and no clear policy direction is established.

So let's really see what happens when Republicans have their way. Let them have the presidency for eight years, let them have the Congress. Let's see how far they're willing to go. Let's see if local government and private interests are capable of solving all our problems.

What we will see is the gross exploitation and all the inevitable social catastrophes of Economic Darwinism applied.

In the face of this disaster, the sleeping citizens will awake and realize that participation does have its merits.

Maybe then the people will realize that they are the only capable shepherds of our collective resources, and that unregulated capitalism is the worst thing for our future.

Then arguments could be settled. The fog would be lifted and we would really know who to blame. Maybe then our democracy would be back on course once again, and people would take their civic responsibilities seriously.

When I see the flight of moderates and old time Southern conservatives from the Democratic Party, I rejoice. It makes me think that the shift back to the left is finally on its way.

There is no more time to waste deciding whether "liberal" has seven letters or four. In case it's not obvious to you, it's seven. Now get involved.

*Van Pelt is director of the Lancaster County Democratic Party.*

# Darkness prevails in society

I am deeply troubled by the things I've seen and heard in the past few weeks. I'm troubled by the thoughts I've had about this world and my place in it.

My friends have all noticed, they ask me if I'm sick.

I have to wonder as well; is there something wrong with me?

I'm afraid it's become too easy for me to see the dark side of things. I feel paranoid and hopeless. I wish I could take refuge in a jaded cynicism — but I cannot.

What follows then, is something less than an opinion, something too opaque to be a column.

I'm not even going to talk about the events that disturb me. They are only distractions.

What follows is pure noise. At last I sense the desolation of "a voice crying in the wilderness."

Consider this my cry:

I no longer believe in the job I'm doing. I no longer believe in the power of dialogue to shape truths that can be shared or explored. I no longer believe in compromise.

All of the above assume a sincerity — a goodwill I can no longer project onto the seething rats' nest called society.

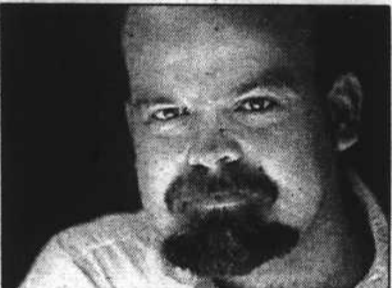
I feel the earth rolling beneath me — a darkened ball spinning in dark space. I have no hope in the power of intelligence and compassion to illuminate that globe.

We are a sleeping species; we lie half awake and murmur into the dark air. When we pass away it will not be the extinguishing of a great sun of consciousness, but a gradual shift from twilight into the pitch that comes after us.

We are only half alive.

The words "justice" and "morality" appear as empty costumes; they cloak a desire to be allowed to go on thinking ourselves in the right. To be right all the time, about everything, even the smallest movement of a mouse.

Our feeble imaginations can't conceive of a world better than the



**Mark Baldrige**

*"Our own lives seem so empty to us that we will take any medicine in order to forget them. We would rather leave our lives behind, shed them like a skin and shrug into new garments: the numb flesh of television, alcohol, routine."*

one we inhabit. So this world must be preserved, must lie inviolate for all eternity — all of its tiny particulars are to remain intact.

And what are our options? Politics, Religion, Science? Friendship? Art?

Political dissidence resembles nothing so much as a cloying attempt to swallow the world whole. As if flinging a brick through a window could shatter the mirror that holds us spellbound.

We are in love with corruption.

We honor a deceit that will dress up in Sunday clothes and pronounce judgement.

We crave the boot of control: "If it must rest somewhere, let it be on the backs of our necks!" And so we lie down.

I gag at what we call law and order.

I choke on the stench of what is

called mercy.

Science imagines itself as a kind of pristine angel, detached and aloof from political concerns — from the mud of superstition.

And so, thinking we could ride above the world, we would sacrifice our humanity under its massive, heavy wheels.

Millions have lived in darkness — and millions will pass away. Our own lives seem so empty to us that we will take any medicine in order to forget them. We would rather leave our lives behind, shed them like a skin and shrug into new garments: the numb flesh of television, alcohol, routine.

What passes for friendship is a huddling together of two wounded animals — next they will turn, and tear one another apart.

What passes for art is a gleeful shriek as the earth slips down the gullet of darkness.

Who will deliver me from the body of this darkness?

If I were a lump of clay, how would that existence differ from my own?

When I am once again a lump, what will this blip of life have meant?

Centuries will pass after my death. They will all be like this one — all imagining that they are going somewhere, that "here" is a place one can be.

But I tell you there is no place to go. Here is not even a place.

I will not speak of these things again.

Look for meaning where you find it.

If the kingdom of heaven is within you, try not to crush it — its bones are sharp.

Don't ask me to explain it any more than that.

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

*Baldrige is a senior English major and the Daily Nebraskan Opinion Page editor.*

### 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.