

Acts of warmth return tenfold

My grandmother, like most grandmothers, is a wise old lady. She often uses old proverbs and adages to make a point. And the strong lady that she is, she makes it a point to make a point very often!

One of her favorites — an oft repeated Tamil adage — when roughly translated, means, "When you provide for others' children, yours will be provided for — somehow."

I suppose this is our own version of "Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty!"

I truly believe it's human nature to help people in times of need. It does not have to be outstanding or truly brave. Simple acts of smiling at strangers and helping them find their way are just as special as jumping into a burning house to rescue a 3-year-old.

As the saying seems to suggest, when you help others, you get paid back in some form.

Like the time when my parents helped an Australian couple stranded in India. My parents did not do anything out of the ordinary in helping the couple, nor did they expect anything in return from them.

But they got paid back, anyway. Not by the Australian couple, but by a stranger from Hong Kong who helped their stranded daughter (could that be me?) in Singapore.

Osceola McCarty I am sure has never heard of my grandmother, or the Tamil saying, but she sure has made a point to provide for some of the world's children — even though she does not have any of her own.

Osceola McCarty, the 87-year-old washerwoman from Hattiesburg, Miss., has been washing clothes by



Vennila Ramalingam

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hand for the town's people for most of her life.

She would wash clothes from sunrise to sunset, in the backyard of her small wooden house, where her mother — and her mother's mother before her — washed clothes for the townspeople.

The tiny old woman, who — one has no choice but to agree — was not exactly born with a silver spoon, put many a privileged person to shame when she donated some money to the local university.

Last June, Osceola McCarty donated some \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi to finance scholarships for the area's needy African-American students pursuing higher education.

One hundred and fifty THOUSAND dollars!

A mighty sum for even an upper middle-class family! How can a

poor old woman with no education whatsoever and a very underprivileged background ever get so much money?

She obviously did not inherit it! Nor did she win the money in a lottery!

She "got" the money the long, hard way — by saving her meager salary. The money she earned from washing others' dirty laundry by hand for more than 70 years — one scarce penny after another.

It is really amazing that Osceola McCarty managed to save such a princely amount. But it is truly outstanding that she actually had the heart to give it away!

The generosity of this simple selfless old soul has touched the heart strings of many self-righteous people and has made them open their purse strings as well.

The first beneficiary of the Osceola McCarty scholarship of \$1000, Stephanie Bullock, may not be able to pay back Osceola directly — how can she pay this selfless old lady back?

But I think the whole point here is not in "paying it back" but rather in "passing it on." Osceola will get paid tenfold back, when Stephanie Bullock helps someone else when she gets a chance.

Osceola McCarty has set the ball in motion. I sure hope that this is a snowball, that it gains momentum and that it sets off an avalanche.

An avalanche that hurts no one but instead smothers you in kindness and warmth!

Ramalingam is a graduate student in computer science and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

FAA system endangers fliers

Nothing sends a day down the toilet faster than having the plane you're riding in plow into another airborne vehicle at 500 miles an hour, sending a spiraling fireball of twisted, burning wreckage plummeting to earth 35,000 feet below.

Don't believe me? Try it. It'll ruin your entire day, for about a tenth of a second.

Not many things put a damper on travel like being blown into tiny, flaming bits in an infernal conflagration of jet fuel.

Some things might come close — like having friends or family on one of the planes involved. Down the list a ways, although still traumatic, is being the air traffic controller responsible for those flights and being helpless to prevent the disaster.

For air traffic controllers, who hold thousands of lives in their hands every second of every day, life quickly can become a morass of Pepto Bismol and blood-pressure pills.

And that's when things are working right.

Last week, the computers at the Chicago Air-Traffic Control Center, which is responsible for most of the flights crossing the Midwest region of the United States, crashed — again.

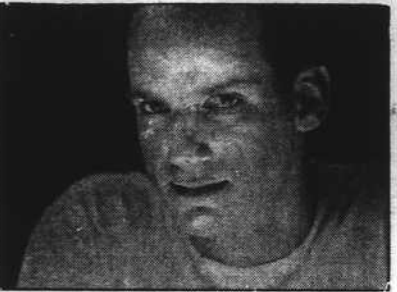
The little green blips disappeared from ATC screens in Aurora, Ill., and controllers (and pilots) were left in the dark.

As if their job weren't stressful enough.

It wasn't foul weather. It wasn't "human error" either. Those things happen — they're regrettable but unavoidable realities. The computers just crashed. That's it. And suddenly, hundreds of flights were without air-traffic control support.

Bummer. Listen, let's get this straight. The air-traffic control crashing is a little more severe than, say, your map flying out the window on a cross-country drive. We land-lubbers can always stop at a gas station and ask directions — when we hit our brakes, we don't have 6 1/2 miles to fall. Planes do. This is serious business.

Last week's incident in Illinois was the Chicago Center's sixth computer failure this year and the



Doug Peters

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20th incident this year nationwide. One computer failure in California this year was coupled with a telecommunications failure that left controllers not only blind, but mute as well. They couldn't communicate with pilots, even by radio.

Strange, isn't it? Air traffic is at an all-time high, and high-tech is the buzzword all over the country. The ATC computers, one would think, should be state-of-the-art Mighty Morphin' Super Robo-Mutant Ninja from Hell computers or something.

They're not. The computers that the air-traffic controllers have to deal with predate "Pong," the beloved predecessor to such technologically astounding games as "Super Pong," and, later, the high-tech marvel "Tennis." They have been up and running (usually) since Robert Kennedy won the

California Democratic Primary. And, unfortunately, it appears they're entering their version of a midlife crisis.

Luckily, according to our friends at the Federal Aviation Administration, the current system has a failure margin of only six-tenths of one percent. That's reassuring.

"Thank you for flying with us today, ladies and gentlemen. Our estimated arrival time in Chicago is 2:35, and we have a 99.4 percent chance of making it there alive. Enjoy the flight."

Who knows what the case really is, though? It could just be that those crazy controllers keep forgetting to close the "Solitaire" program before attempting to download naked pictures of Cindy Crawford and the system just freezes up. Or maybe somebody kicked the plug while scrambling under the desk for a dropped donut. Could be.

But I doubt it.

For being part of a government that finds it necessary to buy a new inventory of ashtrays every year for its (nonsmoking) office buildings, it seems odd that the FAA, so intimately linked to the safety of everyone who flies across this country, would depend on computers designed well before Elvis was abducted by the aliens.

But at least they're trying to change.

Interim computers are on the way to replace the archaic IBM 9020E computers that are currently in use. Phew! Big sigh of relief there — expected implementation date: 1997.

A brand-new system, ostensibly designed since Nixon's resignation, is slated to be up and running (constantly, I hope) by — hold your breath — 1999.

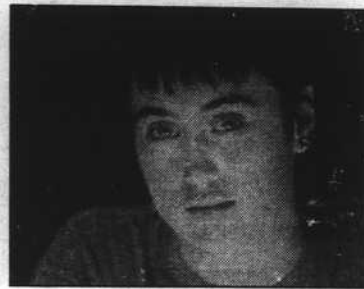
Until then, I guess we'll have to take our chances.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we will begin our descent into Chicago shortly. Please return all seatbacks and trays to the original upright position. Thank you for flying Now You See 'Em, Now You Don't Airlines, and have a nice — Boom.

Peters is a graduate student in Journalism and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

A letter... from the FROSH

Money's crazy grip has religious hold



Adria Chilcote

It's weird how money can make you so happy. It feels good to walk down the street with a lot of money in your pocket. To know that if you see anything you could possibly want, you can just buy it.

It's especially gratifying when you acquire money you weren't expecting. Even if it's a buck off the pavement, it makes your day. And finding anything more than a buck lying on the street is worth bragging about.

It's great when you get out an old coat from the closet or put on a pair of pants, to slide your hand into a pocket and find a wad of paper money.

The effect it has on people is strange. It's almost like a drug. Finding or winning money can elevate your mood.

I think it would be great to be filthy rich. Then go out on the street and hand people hundred dollar bills, or maybe just fifties. It would be great to see people's reactions.

How many stupid things could you get a total stranger to do for a hundred bucks? I wonder how much it would take to make someone sing a stupid song and do a jig in public, when they're sober.

That would be fun if I were filthy rich. Since I'm not, I'll just have to wait until I win the Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes.

The whole concept of money is so abstract. It's just pieces of weird paper with pictures of dead white guys on the front. And you can just go into a store and exchange this paper for real stuff. It's amazing.

Everyone trusts that these pieces of paper will always be worth something. Almost everything around us is built on this stupid paper.

People will do anything for money. They'll kill for it and die for it. People go crazy for money.

I think we've all gone crazy. The whole world has put such a great amount of power in these little rectangular pieces of paper. Our lives revolve around it.

In America, it's like our national religion. The banks are our places of worship, our temples. The disgustingly rich are our gods. Everyone works their whole lives with the hope that they too will one day become a god.

Some "churches" claim that they have selected you to have a chance at becoming a god. All they want you to do is fill out a

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form and order a magazine subscription.

Then one day their band of holy servants will knock on your door and transform you into a god by giving you a humungus check and put you on the Clearing House commercial.

We devote most of our lives to performing such religious ceremonies. Years and years are spent in preparation for these ceremonies. Then, after you've acquired a certain amount of knowledge, you earn a certain position and spend 40 hours a week earning more of this holy paper.

We put humans into categories based on how much of this holy substance they possess. There is constant strife between these groups.

The rich think the poor are the scum of the earth because the poor aren't holy enough.

And the poor think the rich are slime because the rich have what the poor don't have.

Money causes many problems. But without this religion we would all be lost. It's difficult to imagine a world without money.

Our holy paper doesn't really mean anything once you take it outside of civilization. We all act like it's one of life's most important necessities.

If you lose all your money or the means of acquiring it, everyone in this religion shuns you.

People act like the amount of money you possess is directly related to the amount of personal worth you possess.

Once you have no holy paper, and can no longer maintain your appearance in the manner that people in possession of money can, people act totally different toward you.

People no longer make eye contact. They avoid you on the street. For some reason they can't talk to you once you don't have money. And they will go to any length to avoid physical contact.

Even though the whole concept of money is strange, I still kind of like it.

Maybe I just like the stuff it can buy.

I'll probably keep on practicing the same religion that practically the entire human race is practicing.

And when I'm walking down the street, I'll keep my eyes open for any stray dollar bills blowing in the wind.

Chilcote is a freshman women's studies major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

BE OUR GUEST

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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.