

Chew on this

Bus ride shows carnality of human condition

Today on the bus a woman was eating a sandwich.

It was the kind of sloppy, beefy affair, with a fragrant and almost overpowering "zesty" secret sauce, that large fast-food chains have led us to believe we prefer.

And she set to it with such obvious relish and gusto — and such feline fastidiousness — that I could hardly tear my eyes away.

The face she fed was framed by a fur-lined cap and a woolen scarf, which remained clean and apparently uncumbersome.

She ate methodically and very quickly. She must've been hungry.

In the end she rolled the paper wrapper into a tight little ball and tucked it neatly away in her purse.

The whole operation had taken almost less time than it took to write this down and, when it was over, all that remained was the sweet reek of ... of whatever they put on those burgers that makes them smell so.

"This I saw with horror."

All the while I was watching her, I knew I would write about the woman and the sandwich. I was writing, in my head, even as I watched.

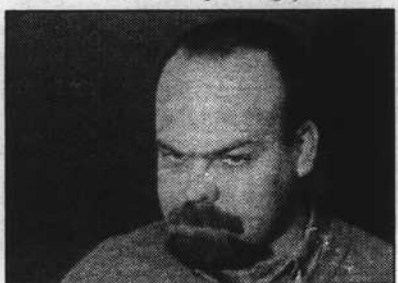
She represented something to me — though I'm hard pressed to say exactly what.

Missing everything that makes a person interesting: wit, sex appeal, style and grace — in short, entirely innocent of charm, she nevertheless remained recognizably human.

Her appetites gave her away.

Not to mention the care and cleverness that kept her neat and clean at such a messy job.

But it jarred me to recognize myself in her, to feel compassion for this lost woman, gulping greasy meat on a bus. To think, "there go I," with no "grace of god" provisos preserving my fragile self-image. To recognize in her the "human



Mark Baldrige

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condition" people used to talk about — my own condition.

I shudder to think.

When I was still a young person, I was dragged through the local "old folks' homes" on a weekly basis, bringing Communion and "Bible fellowship" to the shut-in.

It was a hideous task, placing the stale cracker between the toothless gums of old women whose hands were little better than swollen, arthritic lumps. Greeting blind men whose children all had died long ago — of respectable old age. They were all so happy to see us, come Sunday. It turned my stomach.

The old people smelled rotten, of urine and stale flesh — the smell of bodies that have not been caressed lovingly in decades.

I never forgave my older brother for forcing me into those confrontations — and he soon gave up taking me along.

But why do I think of it now? The woman on the bus was not old,

not much older than me, probably. She seemed in perfect health.

Still, the connection of feeling remains.

And here's another clue:

A few years ago, my best friend died in an accident; a sleeping motorist crushed him out on Highway 6.

Kirk had been biking to Milford, to his brand-new job as a counseling psychologist. People told me he never knew what hit him.

I was horrified.

And for weeks afterward I craved meat. Red meat, every day. Meat and plenty of it.

What was I feeling, what nameless need?

Maybe it was just desperation — an urge to cling to life, to the flesh — to fill myself, gorge myself on the fat of my own aliveness.

I know this is Friday, and no one wants to think about this stuff today. And isn't winter hard enough without this downer too?

But maybe that's what winter is for — a chance to think bad thoughts. Just bear with me.

For a moment, on the bus, all of this stuff came together for me in a feeling — or a feeling rose in me that I recognized from these other times.

It's a feeling of the tragic limits of biology — or maybe time. Time as a function of biology.

It's a feeling of superimposition — in which I look at life and see straight through it to the death that clings to its insides, sucking away.

It's not a good feeling.

It's a feeling I'm glad I don't have every day.

But it hits me like a revelation.

That woman on the bus — she's made of meat.

Like me.

Baldrige is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Divided Republicans wrecking game plan

WASHINGTON — The Republican game plan for 1996 has gone off-track. There is plenty of time to right it before November's voting, but it will take more work — and smarter strategy — than the Republicans have shown the last few months.

Instead of celebrating the start of their second year in control of Congress, the new Republican majorities elected in 1994 are frustrated. President Clinton has used his veto pen to scratch out large parts of the Contract With America and turned up the megaphone of the presidency to drown out Republican explanations of their policies and plans.

The original GOP theme for 1996 — "promises made, promises kept" — has been altered to read: We did our damndest, but it wasn't enough. Republicans conceded last week that it will take another election to gain a clear mandate for the changes they want to make in Medicare, Medicaid and welfare, and to enact the balanced budget and tax cuts they hoped to pass on the basis of 1994 returns.

They can blame Clinton, but the fact remains that they look like another set of politicians who did not deliver on their promises.

Another deviation from their plan is that Republicans had hoped for a short, sweet nomination contest. What they are getting is anything but sweet — and it may turn out not to be short.

In Iowa and New Hampshire, you cannot turn on the TV or radio without seeing or hearing one Republican presidential candidate carving into another one. Steve Forbes comes close to calling Bob Dole a liar and Dole assails Forbes for "untested leadership" and "risky ideas."

Rank-and-file Republicans are complaining about the meanness with which their hopefuls are treating each other. But Haley Barbour, the Republican national chairman, has not stirred himself to request restraint.

When asked why, Barbour says that he wants to preserve his reputation for impartiality, implying that any jawboning on his part would be interpreted as an effort to protect Dole's early lead in the polls.

Barbour has been brilliant in his first three years on the job, and his decision not to be a whistle-blower may keep him out of trouble. But Republicans have forgotten Ronald Reagan's 11th Commandment — "Thou shalt not speak ill of another Republican" — so completely that the nomination winner may be badly scarred before he ever has to step into the ring against Clinton.

With Dole's response to the Clinton State of the Union address drawing negative reviews, doubts are growing about his ability to wrap up the nomination early.

Meantime, the Republicans'



David Broder

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pet issue of 1996 also is taking it on the chin.

Barbour and other party strategists have planned for more than a year to make radical simplification of the tax code the main economic plank in their platform and the foundation of their promise to improve take-home pay for millions of middle-class families.

But House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, the leading congressional proponent of the flat tax idea, told me last week that he was worried that the debate in the primaries was tainting that plan.

"I had hoped it wouldn't get too much discussion until after the primaries," Armey said.

Instead, because of the success of Forbes' self-financed, multimillion-dollar ad campaign promoting the flat tax, Dole, Alexander, Gramm and former television commentator and columnist Patrick J. Buchanan all have been slamming the Forbes version of the flat tax.

Armey, who is supporting fellow-Texan Gramm, said he would have a hard time defending the Forbes flat tax. "It sounds like he took my 1994 proposal," Armey said. In 1995, after further analysis, Armey revised his plan to reduce revenue losses to the government, and to make it less likely that middle-class families would lose money in the deal.

Every dollar that Dole, Gramm, Buchanan and Alexander spend trashing Forbes' flat tax is a boon to the Democrats. The flat tax may have so many holes shot in it by convention time that it won't be available as the unifying economic message for the fall campaign. Without that cover, Republicans risk a renewed focus on a social-issue agenda that mobilizes the conservative base but costs them support among Perot backers and other independents.

They need a new game plan.

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Bogus booze rules

Logic of UNL campus policy comes under fire

I joined a fraternity at UNL almost four years ago, when the greek system was fun.

Negative publicity lingers over the greek system today. It seemed to start in the Fall of 1993, when Jeffrey Knoll, a Phi Gamma Delta pledge accidentally fell from a third-story bathroom window.

It so happened that the window was located in the fraternity's house. The accident was tragic, but what many people failed to realize was that it was not anyone's fault (I do believe that's what an accident is; correct me if I'm wrong.)

That single incident set off a countless number of biased articles from local newspapers, including the Daily Nebraskan.

The snowball kept rolling and rolling. Today's greek system is treated just as the Chicago Police Department does Cabrini-Green Housing Projects (the high-crime housing project in the city of Chicago).

Let's face it, the main issue is drinking.

Drinking on campus property is prohibited, in case you weren't aware of the fact. And to think, all these years I have been drinking on campus, and no one ever told me.

Get real, no one is going to stop students from drinking. If they think it's possible, then they should move to Utah and get a job at BYU.

Fraternities are definitely not the only places that drinking occurs. The dorms are full of freshmen loaded up on the sauce.

If a person were to visit a college or university on a Friday night in California or let's say London, they would find the same thing that UNL has. Students drinking and going to parties.

Two years ago, UNL took it upon itself to threaten the greek presidents' council to vote for the



Bob Ray

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wonderful and always cordial community service officers.

Fraternities are now places where \$4.25 an hour rent-a-cops can lash out their suppressed insecurity problems and write bogus tickets to kids who are just having fun and not harming a soul.

The University calls these individuals Community Service Officers; I call them case studies for Psych. 181 students.

No girls past 2 a.m. — who thought of that one, could it be Jayne Wade Anderson or Officer Friendly?

I came to school four years ago to get an education and claim my independence, hoping that the rest of the world would treat me like an adult.

The University rules made it nearly impossible for me to live in my fraternity any longer. Last year I moved out.

I realize that there should be rules and limitations for the UNL greek system, but the presently enforced laws are out of control.

(I've got one, how about no urinating after 11 p.m.)

Underage students are driving to off-campus parties in herds. They are risking their lives and the lives of fellow motorists.

We already know that it's impossible to stop student drinking on this campus or any campus for that matter.

So what is wrong with a fraternity holding an organized party? Everyone attending is walking to and from the party. No one is getting into a car and risking injury or even death.

I had a very dear friend of mine die in a drunken-driving accident last April, and I don't want to see any of the students on this campus die because of the ignorant rules that now stand.

I think certain people in high places at UNL are taking the buzz word "politically correct" a bit too seriously. Those individuals should probably follow their own generation's words like "swell" or "golly."

PC is our word, so don't act as if you know what it is.

Give us a break, treat us like students, not criminals. Realize that you are making students DRINK and DRIVE with these rules on campus.

And if you think drinking and driving is politically correct, you've eaten too many fruitcakes in your lifetime.

Ray is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.



Alien
Starring Phil Gramm