

In memoriam

Easter a reminder of tragic anniversary

One year ago today, my friend died in a drunken driving accident. The truck he was in whipped around a winding road and flipped. Keith's neck was snapped and he was thrown from the truck. He died instantly.

Yes, it was a glorious evening for me, I had just returned to UNL after a semester internship in New York City.

I slammed the suds all night, and had to stay at a friend's house. Around 11:00 a.m. Saturday morning, I returned to my temporary fraternity room.

Feeling like hell, I sat down and rubbed my face, then pushed play on the answering machine:

"Bobby, I have some bad news from home, it turns out that Keith Lundstrom was killed last night in a car accident, please call us soon."

I stood up, rewinding the tape, making sure my mother had just said what I thought she had.

I reached for the phone, only to listen to my mother tell me again and then start crying. I was on the next plane out of Omaha — Chicago was a short one hour away.

Keith was a backup quarterback and second-string safety for the Illinois State football team. He was always laughing; he made me feel like a million-dollar comic.

He was the kind of guy everyone knew and everyone liked. If I ever heard one bad thing about him, it was probably out of jealousy. Finding a flaw in my friend Keith was hard.

The night I arrived home, I drove to the accident scene with a few friends. We walked around the site, picking up car pieces and wondering how and why this was all happening.

Many of us came together that night, we sat around, talking and crying. Except for me, I tried to make everyone laugh, I couldn't cry, and I hated it.

Sunday morning, I woke up, put my suit on and drove to the wake.



Bob Ray

"Many of us came together that night, we sat around, talking and crying. Except for me, I tried to make everyone laugh, I couldn't cry, and I hated it."

More than a thousand people came to say good-bye. It had to make his family proud.

Keith's father had coached us in sports for many years, and Keith was his idol. I walked in and hugged Mr. Lundstrom, he cried and cried. He told me Keith had just called him one week earlier to tell them to watch for me on the David Letterman Show, where I was interning. Keith's father told me how proud Keith was of me.

I had no idea what to say, I just hugged him hard and told him I was sorry, over and over. The line of people to walk up to the casket stretched out the door and onto the sidewalk.

I stood patiently, my hands folded and my heart broken, yet I still could not cry. Everyone around me was crying loudly. I felt rude and upset at myself.

Finally, it was my turn to say good-bye: I walked up to the casket my friend lay in, he was grinning.

People were talking about his silly grin, it was so like him. I knelt and bowed my head. I told him that I would never forget him and that he was the most popular guy I would ever know.

That night, Easter Sunday, Keith's closest friends gathered at my parents' home. We sat around laughing and talking, it was like everyone forgot that our friend had been killed.

As the night went on, people began to leave. Eventually, there were only a few of us left. It was then that I broke down, in front of three great friends and my mother.

I was crying like I did when I was a kid. My throat hurt, my mouth was dry, I couldn't breathe.

The next day was the funeral. The procession of cars was like something from a movie — it was glorious. Everyone Keith knew was driving behind him as he lay with that grin on his face.

It was cloudy and rainy all morning. As we all stood at the cemetery and touched the casket to say farewell, the sun came out and the clouds cleared. Everyone had to laugh — it was Keith, it had to be.

Keith Lundstrom was 21 years old. He was kind and wonderful. But most importantly, he was a friend, a son, a brother and someone to look up to.

Like many, many people, I loved Keith Lundstrom, and there's not a day goes by that I don't think of him.

Keith will never be forgotten, not by me, not by his relatives, and not by all that knew him.

I'll tell you what the tragedy is — Keith was young and full of life; his dreams were alive, and the world would have been a better place with him in it. We human beings are so damn self-destructive, sometimes we forget how good it is to be alive.

Ray is a senior broadcasting major and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Indoor/outdoor? Conservative/liberal?

Even for Slat's Grobnik, it was a strange question. "Hey, you ever use an outhouse?"

You mean an outdoor toilet?

"Yeah, like they used to have on farms in the old days."

Well, it's been a long time, but, yes, I have used them.

"So, what do you think?"

About what?

"About an outhouse?"

Think? I don't think about outhouses. I can't remember when a thought concerning an outhouse last crossed my mind.

"Then c'mon. Give me a curbstome opinion. Are they good, bad or in between?"

Well, I suppose they get the basic job done, but I definitely prefer in-house comfort and a bit of tile here and there. But why are we sitting here discussing outhouses?

"See? Sometimes you don't keep up with the issues. I guess you don't even know that the outhouse is one of those liberal and conservative things?"

That is news to me.

"Then let me straighten you out. I was reading a column by a liberal lady pundit in Washington. You know, the kind who is full of compassion and love for the downtrodden."

Yes, I'm familiar with the decency and capacity for love of liberal pundits.

"Right. So she says that President Clinton is a real true-blue liberal and the outhouse proves it."

What, is Clinton putting an outhouse outside the White House?

"Nah. She says Clinton is a true liberal because he don't like outhouses."

Well, I don't consider that any kind of liberal/conservative litmus test. I'm sure Pat Buchanan doesn't like outhouses, although I've never asked him.

"You still don't get it. See, this liberal lady pundit says that when Clinton puts together his federal budget, he wants to get rid of the outhouse."

Whose outhouse?

"Everybody's outhouse."

What do you mean, everybody's outhouse? Is there some sort of national outhouse I've never heard of?

"Uh-uhh, what she means is that there are some parts of the country where people still got outhouses because they don't have the right kind of plumbing so they can stay home and pull the chain. And she says that Clinton wants to fix things up so everybody has got an indoor toilet."

Well, that makes sense. As the greatest nation in the history of the world, we have the amazing capacity to put a man on the moon, so we should be able to put every man, woman and child on an indoor toilet seat.

"Yeah, that's what I've always said."

I'm sure you have. But I still don't understand how indoor and outdoor toilet seats become some



Mike Royko

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kind of liberal and conservative issue.

"Because this liberal lady pundit says it takes a real liberal president with a big heart to figure out that it's the job of the federal government to worry about the little guy who ain't got an indoor toilet and to make sure that he gets one."

Ah, now I understand. We're talking about the liberal belief that the federal government should provide the basic needs that have been neglected by local government.

"Yeah, something like that."

And where are all of these outhouses? Not in Manhattan or Palm Springs, I'm sure.

"Right. The liberal lady pundit says that in the Texas panhandle and in some parts of Mississippi, you still got people who get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and hoof through the darkness to get to their outdoor john."

Right.

"But why should I pay taxes so some guy in Texas can sit on an indoor toilet seat?"

In other words, you are taking more of a conservative position that Texas and Mississippi should be responsible for providing the plumbing facilities that would make it possible for its citizens to sit comfortably indoors.

"Right. And if they don't do it on their own, then they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

But what if the states don't have the funds?

"Then they should put in a toilet tax. Everybody in Texas and Mississippi should pay a few bucks for every indoor toilet."

"And a state toilet tax would mean the federal government wasn't getting into the toilet business, which would make the conservatives happy."

But that would deprive Clinton of an opportunity to demonstrate his liberal generosity.

"Hey, he can always try for jacuzzis."

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Estrangement

Adoption show sparks unsurfaced feelings

It was one of those priceless days last week when you had to run the heater AND open the windows. Outside, sunlight fell on the lawn, the color of iced tea. Dirty snow lay all over the place.

I was home, flipping between charismatic fundamentalism and daytime drama on TV, my mind drifting, something about televangelist chutzpah — how it's all been turned into talk shows.

So off I go, to surf the talk shows.

And lying there on the couch, sort of taking mental notes — all cynical and knowing — I realize suddenly that this one particular talk show, this infotainment with a gospel minister in drag as the host, is about me; it's a show about my life, and it's going to make me cry.

I don't like to cry over trash TV. It was a show about adult children of adoption seeking their biological half brothers and sisters.

Worse, Oprah was reuniting half and even full siblings — a brother and two sisters, three brothers — about every 30 seconds.

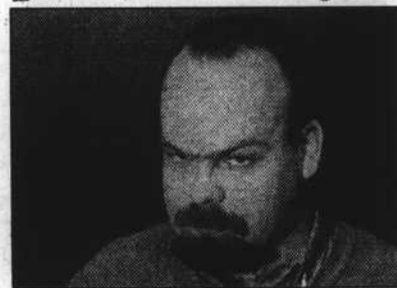
I was mesmerized.

Now, I already have a mother and a father. They live in Texas, in the ancestral condo; I picture them in their pajamas, reading this.

But I don't even know what to call the two strangers who produced me, like a rabbit out of a hat, just over 30 years ago.

Did I mention yet I was adopted? Am adopted. I never have known which way to say it. But I was never alone; in my family, the adopted children outnumbered the "natural" ones (a term I love for its 19th century charm) at something like 1.5 to 1.

I'm not related to anyone in my family; we share no genes. But somewhere in the world, if she lives



Mark Baldrige

"... I don't even know what to call the two strangers who produced me, like a rabbit out of a hat, just over 30 years ago. There is no good word for my relation to them."

yet, I have a sister, a half sister, my "other" mother's first child. I have never met this person, yet I have no trouble thinking of her as a sister.

Meanwhile, Oprah is pulling them out of her ass, a whole string of children with one mother and a dozen different fathers, each child uglier than the last, ending with some sort of pinhead. I felt as if I'd burst into tears at a freak show.

Of course, I wasn't the only one. Oprah kept saying things like "That's why I love God so much" — thanking her "angel." Really, it couldn't have been more bizarre; I don't know when I finally turned the damned thing off.

But suddenly, out of nowhere, I had a sister. I mean, I'd always known I had one — I probably have other half siblings out there some-

where — but until Oprah hit me over the head with it, I'd never felt it.

Or I'd felt it, but on a level so deep that it had just never surfaced.

An innocent afternoon at home had spilled all of these feelings out, and now I had to deal with them. It doesn't seem fair.

A couple of years ago, my "little" brother (a strapping U.S. Marine) sought out his biological mother on doctor's orders.

I watched from a distance but with a lot of attention. The part that seemed best to me was when he got to meet his uncles, a whole bunch of them, at some kind of family reunion. He said it was interesting to be among people who looked like him.

I can imagine. And they shared more than looks, from what I understand — being, like, a family of sharpshooters or something.

But I choke on what to call his brand new mother.

I've never met her, never even seen a photograph, but I can tell you one thing. She was never his mother. He and I have the same mother, the same father. At least we always used to have had.

Now things are different, and I'm sure he's found it at least as confusing, at close range, as I find it from my more disinterested vantage point.

I have to admit to a certain curiosity about my biological parents, but any feelings I might have about them are really opaque.

But this sister thing's got its foot in the door now, and I can see it's not going to be easy to shut it again...

And maybe I don't want it shut.

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

