

# Prayer for the dead

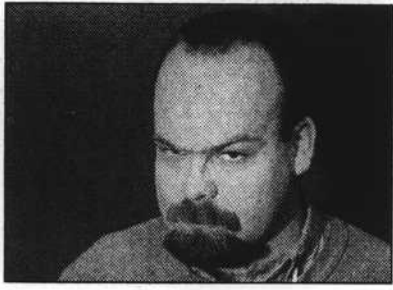
*Yesterday's future becomes history's flashcards*

*All of those things that I wanted to say? Well you can take those things and throw them all away.*  
— Men Without Hats  
"Messiahs Die Young"

It was a long time ago. I drove a Volkswagen Bug, overloaded and dying, across the country to a job in Pennsylvania. It was a hellish trip, but I was younger then and had more grit about me. Everything I owned in the world was in that Bug, and I had nowhere else to be. I did not know then that I was living in the past of the person I have since become. In those days I seemed to inhabit a perfectly endless present, its possibilities diverging before me.

I did not know I was headed here. It never occurred to me then, for instance, that more than a decade later, I might huddle in the near-dark, in a stained cardigan, recounting the time by the glow of a liquid crystal screen. Listening to the music I played continuously that summer, Talking Heads, Laurie Anderson, Men Without Hats. Is this nostalgia I feel? I really don't know. I recognize nostalgia as a different sensation, a clearer sentiment, kitschy and bittersweet. What I feel tonight is more confused, muddier. I have some questions I would like to ask of the past.

There is no way I know to ask them. When my best friend died several years ago, I went through the formal stages of mourning — which in modern times include denial, rage, and finding, quite by accident, an old message from the departed on your answering machine. I still have that tape. And I can imagine, years from now, saving it as a sound file on my home computer; a silly message,



**Mark Baldrige**

*"I am haunted by the thought that every word I write contributes to an imperfect record of my own passing."*

something that would never have mattered to me had he lived. But tonight, or rather this morning, I am haunted by the thought that every word I write contributes to an imperfect record of my own passing.

Decades from now, if the University survives, back issues of the Daily Nebraskan, yellowed and brittle with time, will still be available in the great bound volumes of the permanent paper archives of the DN. I will have achieved a trivial immortality.

It's moderately interesting to sit with these enormous books for an hour and skim a century.

And it seems likely that these very papers might supply, to some future student of ancient history, a wealth of anecdotal information on the subject of, well, us.

At least the us we have been since 1901, when the DN began regular publication.

What will this future student make of me?

Let me speak, just for a moment,

to that future — let me explain myself, if I may.

I do not feel trapped in the epoxy of time, I do not think of myself as a yellowed fragment of brittle newsprint from the age of paper — as long dead and dust. I don't feel like my writing or my thoughts particularly mirror my times.

But then again, I don't know all that you know, do I?

I don't know, even, my own future.

Maybe you are looking up these dusty tomlinns specifically to find me here. Well, your search is not over. You have not found me.

Maybe you were looking for something else and stopped at the ugly mug and the funny name. Well, stay a little, Comrade.

Because what I don't know is almost made up for by what I do. I know the depths of the troubled waters of these times in a way that you can never.

Time present passes into time past, growing more foreshortened. I am living inside your past and see everything right side up. Remember, there were lots of interesting things going on in 1492, too. Chris Columbus was just a speck back then.

My message to the future? Memento Mori.

I am already in the trash compactor we call History.

The future is already turning our time and everything in it into flash cards:

First Man on the Moon.

Cold War.

Millennium.

There is no card with my name on it and even if there were, it's just a card. It's shuffled in the deck among the others.

Tonight, I am lost in the past.

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

# Working moms blame feminism for guilt

WASHINGTON — "I hate feminism."

Recently, I confessed this heresy to my editor. Maybe it's just a lack of sleep, but ever since I started working part-time after maternity leave, I've fantasized about returning to my true vocation of holding, kissing and adoring my 6-month-old son.

I think of the nursing mom I met at Nordstrom, near tears as she contemplated returning to work. "I thought I'd be ready after three months," she said. And the businesswoman, 39, who wrote me that she has always wanted a baby but now has to have a hysterectomy. "I always figured I had the luxury of time," she wrote. "But I'm out of time." There's my homemaker friend who is raising two kids beautifully but who can't stop thinking she "should" be working.

Feminism — which offered so much opportunity with so little mention of the downside — seemed to blame. My editor seemed the perfect person to straighten me out.

A month ago, she told me how nuts I was for dreaming about full-time mommydom. "You have a great job," she scolded. When her babies, now 16 and 13, were born, she added, "I couldn't wait to go back to work."

But when I called to tell her I loathe feminism, the same woman blurted, "Me too."

"Maybe I'm having a bad day," she began. "But I feel like women today have to be absolutely perfect in everything. ... You have to be great at work, great at home, work out and be fit. ... Look at the (expletive) women's magazines!"

So much for my editor being helpful. The next call was even worse — to my police reporter pal, Avis, who is working part-time while raising her son, Zachary, 2 1/2.

"Girl, I hate some things about feminism, too," Avis said. "It was supposed to give us opportunities to do anything."

"But I know a really nice woman who is so hung up on being equal that she won't offer you food at her house because her husband wouldn't do it! Making breakfast is belittling!"

Another friend reacted to Avis' part-time arrangement with a pitying "Awww."

"She had no clue why I could enjoy being here with my son," Avis said. "I've heard women say about breast-feeding that they didn't want to do anything for their children their husbands couldn't do. It should be empowering to know you can nourish a child!"

I phoned Retha, a journalist who as a teen-ager marched for women's rights.

"I have a problem with feminists," Retha began. "Back when I was covering welfare, there was this unique proposal that even if you were married, you could still get AFDC for a couple of years if your husband was in job training. ... (Feminists) argued that it told poor women on welfare that they 'have to' have a



**Donna Britt**

*"The only friend who seemed astonished at my newfound antipathy toward feminism was, well, a man."*

man. They said women should be allowed to raise children alone. ... I was like, 'Wait — don't men play a role in the family? ... With a man in the picture, aren't women less likely to be in horrible poverty?' ... But they couldn't concede that.

"Plus, feminists were wrong when they said men and women are basically alike. ... I always ask, 'If you were stuck on Gilligan's Island, who would you want with you? Mary Ann?' Give me the professor, the captain — hell, even Gilligan. ... With a man, I'd survive until I found another boat."

The only friend who seemed astonished at my newfound antipathy toward feminism was, well, a man. David couldn't believe that I'd trade writing for anything as mundane as baby-raising.

Finally, I turned to every woman's last resort, mom. When I asked her feelings about going back to work in the '60s, my mother smiled.

"I was glad," she said. "I'd been home with kids for 15 years."

Fifteen years. It sounded awfully ... long. For all of our frustration with feminism's flip side, few women would relinquish the good the movement has wrought — independence, appreciation of women's varied capabilities, increasing financial parity.

But a couple of rooms away, I hear my baby crying. The sitter has rocked, wrapped and cooed to him, but he still wants me. And I want him. Surely there's a reason — cosmic and binding and beyond ideology — for that wanting. A reason worth respecting and encouraging.

I go back to my editor. "Name one thing," I challenge her. "that makes the balancing act that I and so many women are doing make sense?"

"Your mortgage," she said. Forget feminism. I hate editors.

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# Needless bureaucracy

*OSHA releases lengthy water guidelines*

Most businessmen aren't fond of the federal agency known as OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

It's OSHA's job to make sure that people have safe working conditions. Which is good.

But businesses say that OSHA's bureaucrats sometimes get carried away and bombard them with silly paperwork.

A small Northwest Side Chicago manufacturer recently received a set of instructions from OSHA on how to safely handle a certain type of fluid.

It is known as a MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet), and the owner of the company said: "Thought you might enjoy seeing this. Having dealt recently with the rather overzealous characters at OSHA, it does not surprise me that there is a MSDS for water."

That's right, water, the stuff that comes out of the kitchen faucet, the shower, and flushes down the toilet.

Space doesn't permit me to print the entire OSHA guideline for water. And some of it was such technical gibberish that only the most dedicated water freak could possibly appreciate it.

But here are some of the highlights:

- MSDS for Water
- Product name: water
- Formula: H2O
- Common Synonyms: Dihydrogen Oxide
- Product Codes: 4218,4219
- Effective: 05/30/86
- Baker Saf-T-Data (TM) System: Health - 0 None
- Flammability - 0 None
- Reactivity - 1 Slight
- Contact - 0 None
- Hazard Ratings are 0 to 4 (0 = no hazard; 4 = extreme hazard)
- Laboratory Protective Equip-



**Mike Royko**

*"I have noticed a few flaws in OSHA's guidelines."*

ment: Safety Glasses; Lab Coat

Physical Data:

Boiling Point: 100 C (212 F)

Melting Point: 0 C (32 F)

Specific Gravity: 1.00

Evaporation Rate: N/A

Appearance & Odor: Odorless,

clear colorless liquid

Health Hazard Data:

Effects of Overexposure: No effects of overexposure were documented

Target Organs: None identified

Medical conditions generally aggravated by exposure: None identified

Spill and Disposal Procedures: Dispose in accordance with all applicable federal, state and local environmental regulations.

Water is considered a nonregulated product, but may react vigorously with some specific materials. Avoid contact with all materials until investigation shows substance is compatible. Protect from freezing.

There was much more, twice as long, including information on how

to transport water. You simply transport it, as any restaurant busboy could tell them, although the bureaucrats made it sound like a major project.

But I have noticed a few flaws in OSHA's guidelines.

For example, under Health Hazard Data, the bureaucrats said: "Effects of Overexposure: No effects were documented."

Well, those bureaucrats must lead sheltered lives. Obviously, they've never been around when the cops pull what is known as a "floater" out of the Chicago River or Lake Michigan.

A floater is someone who jumped, was pushed or stumbled into the water and was "overexposed," not something you want to chat about over breakfast.

And the bureaucrats also said: "Conditions to Avoid: None documented."

Nonsense. Among the conditions to avoid are these: Don't make the potentially deadly mistake of stepping into a cold shower when you expect the water to be warm.

And you don't mix water with gin, vodka, rum, beer, wine and many other beverages, although it's permissible and even advisable with bourbon, scotch, or (this is open to debate) fine Irish whiskey.

The owner of that small company also said: "We have even received MSDS for 'Hand Cleaner' used in our shop."

See? There was a time when people knew how to use soap and water to wash their hands when they went to the washroom.

Now the federal government gives us guidelines.

We've come a long way, booby.

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