

GUEST VIEW

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Don't play follow the loser Cobain's legacy lives on, sadly

This summer I worked at a newspaper in the hometown of Kurt Cobain, the self-loathing grunge icon who killed himself in 1994. By the way, Kurt's band, Nirvana, just released a new album.

The album is a great opportunity for a new generation of high-schoolers looking for a role model. Another chance to idolize Kurt, who showed the world that it is in fact possible to win simply by being a loser.

People argue that Kurt didn't want to be that role model. Aberdeen, Wash., the town where he was born and went to school (until he dropped out), and the town I lived in, produces mostly nameless loggers, who, for generation after generation, chop down trees and irritate those who love the spotted owl. I'm sure Kurt didn't grow up expecting to show the entire nation how they, too, could be shiftless and famous (unlike the hard-working loggers) at the same time.

Described in Time and Newsweek magazines after Cobain's death as a "desultory" and "depressed" town, how could a place like Aberdeen produce anything but a derelict drifter like Cobain? Cobain often cited his parents' divorce and growing up in Aberdeen as reasons for his rage.

During my first weekend in Aberdeen, I got the "Cobain tour." Usually commencing after a night out at one of the rough-hewn logger bars, Aberdeen natives take newcomers around to all the Kurt landmarks: his parents' home, the bridge he lived under for a short time after he dropped out of Aberdeen High School, a bar, now refurbished, that had the information "Kurt Cobain puked here" scratched into the woodwork.

It's a sickly fascinating guided tour, and one that many flannel-clad, dirty-haired youths have come from all over the country to take.

For the record, Aberdeen is not the dull, gray, horrible place the press has made it out to be. There's no reason Kurt should have been depressed simply because he grew



up there. The title of the new album, "From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah," refers to the river that runs through the middle of Aberdeen. The Wishkah is actually quite sparkly on the hundreds of sunny, cool days Aberdeen enjoys during the summer.

It seemed, while I lived in Aberdeen, that Cobain-mania had died down. Carloads of drunken teen-agers coming into town to pay tribute to their idol had slowed to a trickle. But with the release of the latest album, which consists of cuts taken from concerts before Kurt's death, an interest may be revived in worshipping the icon of loserdom.

Why is it that Cobain appeals to so many high-schoolers (and, for that matter, college students)? Why the longing to emulate someone who, at the pinnacle of his existence, was so depressed that he killed himself?

Maybe it's because we know we can be like him. Anyone can don a flannel, pick up a guitar, let their hair fall over their eyes, write about how depressed they are (which somehow makes them special) and growl out some semi-in-tune songs. It's easy to succeed at losing.

I'm not saying everyone should repress their feelings. Get the angst out, fine. But don't let it permeate the culture of an entire generation. There have always been antisocial people, and there will always be. Cobain cited his parents' divorce as the source of much of his anguish, and it's good he had an outlet, although the outlet eventually did him more harm than the original problem.

I thought the era of grungy, angry kids was nearing a close. The last thing we need is a resurgence of a cultural influence that tells kids they must express anger and frustration —

even if there's nothing to be legitimately angry or frustrated about — just to fit in with their peers. Let's hope this album doesn't elicit a new wave of teenagers angry about things they can't quite put their finger on (because it's probably not there) and eager to aggressively show the world how mad they are.

Come on, Kurt. Lots of parents get divorced, and lots of kids grow up in small towns where there's little for intellectual stimulation. Why didn't he look for other good things about his upbringing? Couldn't he have looked at Mt. Rainier looming over Highway 12, or travelled 10 miles to sit by the cold Pacific Ocean, or hiked in one of Washington's drippy, mossy rain forests and marvelled at how giant and astonishing the world was, how little his problems were in comparison?

No, his problems were as big as the Billboard charts, and those were bigger than the world around him. He revelled in desperation and passed it on to millions of adoring fans, and he's ready to do it again, posthumously.

If you like Nirvana, fine. But don't let the message of Kurt's life cloud your vision. In his suicide note, Kurt said "I can't stand the thought of Frances (his daughter) becoming the miserable, self-destructive death rocker that I've become." Yes, I'm sure by committing suicide, you did your daughter a big favor. Now she'll probably be Little Miss Well-Adjusted. His way of dealing with things was not OK.

Find a quiet hero — a hard worker, a noble soul. They're harder to find. People don't drive gape-mouthed past their homes or open up 100,000 web sites to commemorate them. But I guarantee if you take the time to find one, living your life patterned after a quiet hero will leave you a lot happier than followers of Kurt Cobain.

Schulte is a senior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior reporter.

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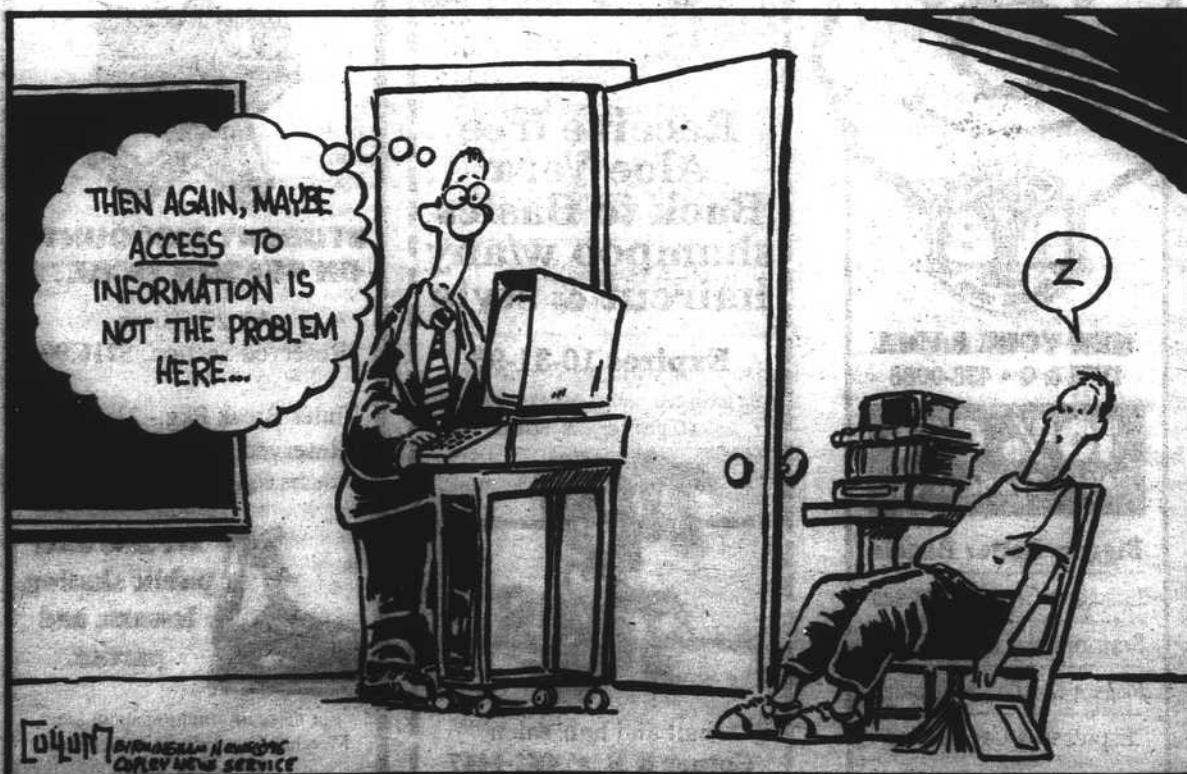
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