

So long, farewell

Columnist's perpetual goal always giving people laughs



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This is indeed a sad day in my life. Don't get me wrong. It's not the saddest day in my life. It is not as sad as the day that arrived when I was arrested for "sexually assaulting" the torn-notebook sculpture last year.

But still, writing this farewell column is far from a joyous experience for me.

And it's not even my last one; I'll still write one next week.

But it has been kind of a tradition for me to make my last column of the semester a question and answer one.

To make this one extra special, I asked Gov. Ben Nelson to write an introduction to the column — I wanted to give him a chance to give it as good as he gets. He even agreed to do it. He must have been drunk or something.

Well, it never came. I guess he had something else to do. Something about being governor, or some lame excuse like that.

Left without it, I figured I'd say goodbye early.

Goodbye folks.

For more than three years, I have done my best at making the university laugh without removing any of my clothes. I wish I could put into words what my columns have meant to me.

But I fear the English language is too weak and feeble to relay such an emotion. It is an emotion that ...

Aw, who am I kidding? I was overworked and people constantly sent painful letters and e-mails to me.

And let's face it, Rhesus monkeys make more money from picking lice out of each other's hair.

So for once, I'd like to do something different and write this — my farewell column — for me. So if you folks would indulge me, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank a few people.

First, I'd like to thank the man who had the courage to even agree to write a forward for me. I had some apprehensions about asking such a



MATT HANEY/DN

high-ranking public official to say something nice about me and my columns. Usually, they have no problems *denouncing* my writing or personal hygiene, but it's seldom that I get them to be pleasant.

But Nelson is not your average politician. He's got a pulse. He's got a heart and a funny haircut. But most importantly, he's got a sense of humor.

I've made fun of him several times in past columns. Once I suggested he dress in drag to frighten students on Halloween. And I even claimed he lost his ears after he tried to squeeze in between two fat women at a Bee Gees concert.

But he never took it personally, even though that seems to be the distressingly common trend

nowadays. Everyone wants to get offended. But not him. Thanks.

I'd also like to thank the DN. Through the years, I have gained invaluable experience as a writer of bathroom-filth humor and I am forever indebted. I don't think a lot of students realize how great the DN is. Every year it is consistently rated as one of the best college newspapers in the country, although they don't pay like it.

I am truly convinced that one day when I'm sitting on death row for inciting a group of midgets to blow up the Eiffel Tower, I'll be thanking the DN for unlocking my potential.

And I'd like to thank my pappy. For years I have painted him as some backward Mississippi redneck who — in his darker days — once slept

with seven raccoons. Unfortunately, everything I ever said about dad is true; if anything, it has been substantially toned down.

But the good thing about Dad is that he's usually too liquored up to notice that I'm making fun of him. And since he can't read, I can change the words whenever I read my columns to him in person.

To this day, whenever he sees the phrase, "My dad is a drunk," he gets all excited. He grabs strangers by the shirt collar and says, "I knowed what that means! It say, 'Mr. Willey is the sole reason America won both World Wars!' (looking at stranger) 'That's me, boy!'"

Finally, I want to thank the readers. Without you, I would be ... a lot happier. Of course, I'm kidding. The single greatest pleasure of my life, aside from watching my father finally pass the second grade last May, is seeing someone laugh at my columns. It's something that lasts eight seconds, tops, for the reader, but it stays with me for the rest of the day.

On Fridays, I was addicted to watching my classmates. And even seeing someone smirk, was enough to make my day.

And I hope when I leave, people realize one thing about Steve Willey: Regardless of anything I've ever written, my words were always meant to make people laugh.

That was my sole intention.

I wanted nothing more.

If I ever wrote something that made a statement or made you think, I am now begging for your forgiveness.

Clearly, that was not my intention.

There's enough of those kinds of columns in the world. Laughter, however, is a scarce and precious resource. It should be nurtured and caressed like the back end of an Iowa sheep (ahem).

Because if you don't laugh and you don't respect humor, you end up a vegetable that has no reason for existence. You become Bill Byrne.

So goodbye everybody. Thanks for the memories. I wish I could stay, but the call of freedom writing during my last semester is too strong.

But maybe during the spring semester, my last semester at UNL, I'll write a guest column. Maybe if something strikes me as humorous, such as seeing myself nude in the mirror, I'll write about it.

And when I graduate next semester — Magna Cum Lousy of course — I assure you that I will never forget this day. And I will never forget what is important in my life.

Mayonnaise.

Standing my ground

Arguments over beliefs create fights that can never be won



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Fight the good fight.

It's what you hear from people who try to battle society's countless (and rarely obvious) prejudices, injustices and the like.

It's because the people who do aim to end it know it really can't be ended. Not for all people; not completely.

That's not as defeatist as it sounds, but it's hardly inspiring. "Fight the good fight" doesn't make it any more optimistic, but it does make people feel better.

I've been fighting the good fight for as long as I can remember (and at 19, that's not very long). I'm not quitting; I'm not even slowing down. I'm fighting with carefully honed weapons, trying to make myself understand as much

as I try to convince others.

But it's my growing awareness of the sheer scope of things that has killed any Utopian sense of victory. It's instead being replaced by occasionally grim, usually conciliatory and always tired certainty that I'm doing something, yet will never be able to do everything.

It's brought about a lot of humbling realizations, which has made me less prone to demonize those who disagree with me. I want to understand them, go down to their core, coax them to my view and see where I've gone wrong as well. It's slow, it's frustrating and it rarely shows immediate results.

My more radical friends find this approach to be ineffective, even treacherous, to "the cause." They want to yell at the infidels, sanction them, make them somehow see they are complete idiots. It's an emotionally satisfying thing to do. I know, because I've done it before, and I will again.

Because in yelling at them, I'm degrading them to nothing more than a force of evil in my world, an inhuman being that brings nothing but pain and ignorance. I want to feel that utter and untainted sense that I'm right, that everything I do is for that ultimate righteousness, that at least I know what's up.

I want to feel the way they do.

But where does it lead us?

Sure, it feels good. It brought

myself and those of like minds closer together as comrades in arms, a shining beacon in a sea of ignorance.

But it did nothing for the cause I claimed to be fighting for. It didn't change minds, it didn't even weaken the hardness of the "enemy." It just brought more shouting, more of their own identical feelings of superiority and righteousness.

We failed to change things.

Oh, sure, maybe if we shout loudly enough they'll be a little more quiet around us. Maybe we could even make the government shut them up for us. But they would still whisper among themselves, and the hate would still burn. And when some time had passed, they'd beat us down the way we did them.

And all we'd have to show for it would be a few fleeting moments of glory surrounded by empty and bitter pools of pain and rage.

Nothing.

I feel very tired at times, and I don't even feel I have the right. I see people with much more vested interests in the fight. People who suffer greatly, whose only solace would be to lash out. A solace which couldn't be achieved by attacking those who caused the pain. So they would take it out on others who have suffered.

Bitterness. Anger. Stretching back for centuries, rippling forward to our

own time where we can actually be aware of it, fight it.

The weight of a billion dead on the backs of the ones who know the most, who have seen the scope of what they hadn't even begun to fight.

The eyes of people whose souls have shriveled and sunken deep to support their broken backs.

Dead eyes, eyes that crave to see one moment of dignity, one sign that they are human and that what they have suffered has a purpose.

What can I say to them?

Fight the good fight.

I can't even know anymore what I'm doing. Whether this new approach, this careful, open approach, is right. I can't know if I should be fighting tooth and nail to feel the rage of the people with the burden.

What if it's not my rage to feel? What if the rage is what keeps the burden in place? What if I've spent my entire life in the wrong, just from different angles? What if I am right? What does that say about the others? What does any of this say?

What if one of the sides was completely wiped out?

What if all the black or white people simply vanished?

What if the whole Middle East was suddenly hit by a comet?

What if we executed everyone in the prisons?

What if we turned on each other in one final, triumphant battle of anger and hate?

What do we deserve under the rules of justice we have created? Either we're all guilty and deserve whatever comes, or we're all innocent and victims of some variety of another.

I can't help but think that we're both.

And I also think we're something more, and something less. That we're a people who are, for the first time, truly starting to realize ourselves.

And what we see both delights and frightens us. Break the mirror, give us back our tiny worlds, our individual justice. Give us something to make it all right, something to make it all numb and quiet for just a minute.

Better to be angry than numb, many would tell me. Better to fight than to sit in the corner, clutching my knees and rocking back and forth. Either you're with us or against us. Fight the good fight. Stand up, damn it.

I am standing. And as much as I would like to huddle in the corner, and as much as I would like to lash out with the fury of birth and death, I'm just going to stand.

Not backing down, not advancing forward. With people shouting on all sides.

Because it's all I can do.