

Back to basics

Student discovers new attitude for second semester



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"Another year, another headache." "Well," James thinks, "this year will be different. It has to be." He sits on the loft bed of his dorm room, looking at his folded hands resting in his lap. The room is slowly beginning to warm up, and his luggage is still unpacked on the floor in the center of the room. He's been thinking a lot over the break.

On the excuse for a desk in the corner of the room lies his report card, the grades a bitter reminder of last semester's excesses. Too much drinking, too many parties and not enough studying. "I will learn," is James' new mantra. It replaces "Party! Party!" Sarah, James' ex-girlfriend, knocks on the door, pushing it open a little. They're still friends, but nothing more. "Hi, James," she says to him as she peeks her head in. "Hi, Sarah."

"Ready for classes?" she asks as she slips into the room, closing the door behind her. "Not really," he confesses, "but are we ever?" Sarah nods, taking out a pack of cigarettes and tapping them on her thigh. "I know what you mean," she says. "Last year was the same way. We got back and neither one of us wanted to be here. That's the problem with school - it's just not any fun to learn anymore."

He lifts his head up at the sound of plastic on denim, his blue eyes firm and rejuvenated. "I'd really rather you didn't smoke in here, Sarah."

She looks up, surprised, then puts the packet away in her jacket. "Trying to cut down?"

"Quit cold turkey."

Her eyes widen a little as she takes off her jacket, setting it over the back of one of the room's two chairs. "Really?" she asks. "Why?"

He smiles a little, shrugging as he jumps from the loft to the floor. "It wasn't good for me."

Her laugh is as soft and melodic as ever. "Neither is drinking, but you aren't giving that up."

His smile broadens a little as he picks up an apple, buffing it on his U2 T-shirt. "Who says?"

This time she looks even more shocked than the last time. "Oh come on, James! You can't give up drinking!" He chuckles, moving to lean

against the radiator, the capitol building visible through the window behind him. "Why not?" he asks before he takes a bite of his apple.

"What are you going to do at parties?" she asks as she straddles the chair, watching him curiously.

With the push of a button, his stereo comes on and the soft, lulling white noise of My Bloody Valentine floods into the room. "I don't think I'm going to be at very many parties this year, Sarah," he remarks, knowing this whole conversation must simply be stunning to her.

"You're just going to sit here and study all the time?" she laughs. "I'll believe that when I see it."

James moves to open up one of his suitcases, slowly taking out the clothes from inside of it. "Well, prepare to be a believer then." He pulls open a drawer, setting all his neatly folded jeans into it.

The whole room is James' this semester, and he knows it will be nice not to have the crowds of people coming in and out all the time and the loud yelling at 2 a.m. about stupid topics. When he is ready to sleep, he can sleep, he thinks to himself. Getting up will be the big challenge, though, since he has a tendency to oversleep.

"Aren't you taking French for, like, the fifth time this semester?" she asks, picking up his half-eaten apple and taking a bite from it. "It's not that hard of a class. I did it straight through my first time."

He shrugs, rubbing his bare chin. "Some people can do things easier than others."

Sarah sighs, setting the apple back on the counter. "You know, your mom told me once that you were like a genius kid back when you were young. What happened?"

James takes his shirts and puts them into the next drawer, then closes it before turning back to look at her. "I think I just got lazy. You know, all the basic subjects in school were never that hard for me, so I figured the advanced stuff would come that way too, but it didn't."

"So you change," she says. "You get back to working hard and doing what you have to do."

"I know," James replies. "That's what I'm doing."

She gets up, picking up her jacket with a finger. "You don't need to isolate yourself to do it, James. You just have to refocus and regroup. Don't cut back on your social life because you have a problem."

"But what if it's part of the problem?" he asks her.

There is a long moment of uncomfortable silence before she puts her jacket on. Sarah thinks to herself that James is just having another one of his mood swings. Part of the reason they broke up was because he didn't like her friends and she didn't like his, so him cutting back on the parties really doesn't surprise her.

"Well, I need to get going," she tells him. "Don't be a stranger. Give me a call sometime. We'll hang out or something."

He nods as she slips out the door. "Take care of yourself, Sarah."

"You know me, James, it's all I do well."

He locks the door behind her, sighing to himself. He knows he won't call her, because she was part of the problem. Trying to get him drunk four nights a week, telling him classes don't matter, trying to wean him away from his friends.

It's back to basics for James. Hard work, lots of studying and hanging out with friends he enjoys - no more senseless partying, no more clouds of cigarette smoke and no more drinking binges that make him forget his own brother's name.

College life is like a drug - you say a lot of times that this is the last time you do it to excess, but sooner or later, you get that bad hit and you need to get things in working order before they kill you.

Sooner or later, you have to quit cold turkey.

It's not the good life, but it's life and it's getting better.

"And to think," he says as he puts his books on the shelf, Irvine Welsh's "Trainspotting" staring at him ironically, "these are the golden years of my life."

With that, he can only laugh.

Todd's two-week year in review

Celebrity deaths make for bad start to 1998



TODD MUNSON is a junior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Greetings, my dozen readers. I've returned from the land of milk and honey to write for you once again. The last few weeks have been a hoot. I've been bustin' a move on tour with Puff Daddy and the Family as their special guest.

Quite a bit has changed since the last day of classes. The sun rose and set a few times and a new year has paid us a visit.

With a new year comes resolutions and goals, and in the world of journalism, the obligatory year-in-review story. Year-in-review articles are like teen-agers and smoking. Everyone's doing it. At least that's what the influential ones say.

Among all the year-in-review stories, the most appalling one came from the Denver Post. On the front page of the Dec. 29 issue was a photo of Jon Benet Ramsey between Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. The caption said their deaths were the most important events of 1997.

Mother Teresa, yes. Princess Di, maybe. But the picture of Jon Benet Ramsey between the next saint and a great humanitarian was just appalling.

When I pointed this out to Puffy on the tour bus, he didn't cease to amuse me.

"It's so obvious that the mother killed her because she was jealous of her husband having sex with her," he said.

The next day, the tour was post-

poned and I checked P.D. into Hard Copy rehab against his will. The doctor tells me he hasn't mentioned the British Nanny in three days. There's hope yet that he'll make it.

Anyway, back to the year-in-review concept.

Now it's my turn, but since I'm not your typical journalist, and I'm fighting a Green Bay Packer-induced, Old Style headache, I present to you the year in review for the first two weeks of 1998.

So far there's been death.

Let's start with Chris Farley. Granted, he died at the ripe old age of 33 on Dec. 18, but the results of his autopsy weren't published until the Jan. 3, so he counts toward this review. Found face-down, dead and bloated and loaded full of drugs isn't exactly the most gracious way to go out. Farley always said he admired John Belushi, and now he died like him. It was a bit of a shock, but when you weigh 295 pounds and spaz out on crank, your heart is bound to explode after a while.

But hey, according to the National Enquirer, he was entertained that night by an exotic dancer or two. Booze, drugs and lewd women - maybe that is a good way to die.

The silver lining to his death is that a spot has opened up for a Chris Farley/John Belushi impersonator, and I'm going to try to be that guy. I could gain 125 pounds, I'm fairly funny to people who are on Prozac and I guess I could do drugs, like speed, if it meant that I could sweat incessantly at will.

Ringin' in the new year was the death of Michael Kennedy. The son of Robert died while skiing the slopes of Aspen, Colo. Kennedy and pals ignored the warnings from the ski patrol that playing football while skiing among trees is dangerous.

Maybe the Kennedy family's rampant inbreeding was the cause of his lack of common sense. Poor guy was really the black sheep of the



MELANIE FALE/DN

family. He was a recovering alcoholic and was facing charges of statutory rape that stemmed from his lustful affair with his family's teen baby sitter.

But after all was said and done, I learned something interesting about the Kennedys. The family lives in a compound, not a home. A compound would be a neat place to begin my bloating and rampant drug use.

For a couple days, Michael's death looked to be cover story material, but those wily Republicans had to offer up Sonny Bono as a sacrificial lamb to prove that members of their party can die just as easily.

Their plan worked. Sonny's

death aced out Michael's as the cover story from this week's "People." The self-deprecating stooge of the "The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour" went on to become the self-deprecating stooge of Congress.

Sonny's death really hit home, though. It's not too widely known, but Sonny is my middle name. Bestowed upon me by my mother in honor of the late Mr. Bono.

Then Ted Kaczynski tried to join the party by hanging himself by his skivvies in his jail cell, but the guards stepped in before he could finish the job. The next day, as he stumbled into court in his shackles, The alleged Unabomber just didn't

look too happy.

The university's football team played a game over the break. They beat Tennessee like a bunch of red-headed stepchildren. The citizens of Lincoln took to the streets. The drunken revelry was so intense you'd think Ronald Reagan was re-elected for a third term.

Sometime during the ruckus, or so the authorities suspect, a statue was removed from the Sheldon's sculpture garden. It was a silly looking bronze thing titled "Man in Open Air." To a group of intoxicated football fans, it was the perfect souvenir of the night. And I thought I was being a rebel by helping myself to a pint glass from a local tavern.

The only problem was the bronze figure was worth \$500,000. I would have loved to see the looks on the faces of whoever stole it when they saw on the news that their souvenir, now dressed in a Huskers' jersey, Bermuda shorts, and a hat made from the packaging of a Busch Light 12-pack was worth half a million dollars.

Looking down the barrel of a lengthy prison stay, the offenders dumped it off on East Campus. My telephone psychic tells me it was some good ol' boys from Burr Hall.

My psychic also helped me make a few predictions for the new year:

- Jokes will be made about Bill Clinton.
- Newt Gingrich will clone himself to be twice as annoying.
- Unless Oasis makes a movie, the Spice Girls will be the next Beatles.
- Madonna will change her hair color.
- The Cubs won't win the World Series.
- Hulk Hogan will drop the "Hollywood" moniker and rise to the top of professional wrestling.
- Oh, yeah baby. I can already feel the thunder. 1998 will be one body slamming year.