

Out of control

Tragic, bizarre news is only an escape from real life

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This world is a very scary place. No, I'd go a step further and say that, this world is one (I wish I could cuss) messed-up place.

I've known this for a while but was smacked in the face with this realization upon reading Monday's Lincoln Journal Star.

Have you heard about Kris Ann Haddad? Last Thursday morning, 25 miles north of West Palm Beach, Fla., Kris was seen throwing her 2½-year-old son out of her car window. She was traveling at 90 mph down Interstate 95.

As of Friday, the boy is in serious condition with broken bones. Haddad said she was trying to protect him from pornography and was ranting about a government conspiracy.

In Port Angeles, Wash., Dr. Eugene Turner is under scrutiny for manually obstructing the airway of an infant.

A baby came into the emergency

room 39 minutes after he had stopped breathing. The emergency room doctors were able to get the baby's heart working again, but there was no detectable pulse and no signs of life. The parents agreed to have him taken off of life support. A half-hour later, a nurse found the infant gasping for air and regaining color. Dr. Turner and another doctor spent an additional two hours trying to revive the infant.

After this failed, Dr. Turner was seen, as described by one of the nurses, "plugging off the infant's nose."

Locally, an Omaha priest, the Rev. Daniel Hereck, pleaded innocent to fondling a boy and to making child pornography. The prosecution's case includes two photographs and a video found in the priest's rectory.

He was sent for evaluation and treatment at the St. Luke Institute, a treatment center in Silver Spring, Md. This institution specializes in the treatment of clergy members with sexual disorders.

Stories that make the headlines are not always about petals on roses and whiskers on kittens. Newspapers only have so much room, but I wonder if more insane things don't happen daily. Did the story about the pedophile clown who makes dirty balloon ani-

mals get left on the newsroom floor? Maybe the newspaper editors are screening us from the truly bizarre.

In a world where insanity sells, I doubt it.

As a literate person, you can read these articles and feel empathy. You can attempt to put yourself in the shoes of a spectator at one of these events. Can you really imagine being a motorist on the interstate and seeing a child come flying at you? Can you imagine being on the side of the road hearing the child scream, holding his battered body in your arms and wishing his pain away? Can you imagine being an emergency room physician, so stressed out over your inability to revive a baby that you decide to suffocate him? It brings these stories down to a personal level, and that is really scary.

What is the purpose of relaying these stories to us? The answer can be seen when you look at the articles that appear next to these stories.

Next to the article about Dr. Turner is a story of a tattooed guy who has had his name legally changed to "The Scary Guy."

Next to the priest article is a cute little story about a dog winning \$10,000 in a charity lottery. It seems

that the dog is the only lucky one in the family, so the owner put the dog's name on the ticket. To top that off, the dog has won lotteries before.

These stories, the tragic, the bizarre, and the heart-warming, all serve the purpose of taking our minds off of our own problems. Reading about these events makes people see their own trials and tribulations as rather insignificant. You can sit around and feel sorry and bewildered about your life, but it pales in comparison to the events that make the headlines. It makes you less concerned about your problems, but it also raises some questions. Has life really gotten that confusing for all of us? Is normal no longer the norm? Is the world evil as well as messed up?

Greek tragedies were developed to ease the mental anguish of its audience. Movies and television are made to make us laugh and cry but ultimately to take our minds off of whatever is bothering us. It seems that now the news has replaced pure entertainment.

Entertainment is good, I won't deny that. The trap that we seem to be falling into is that we are relying on the news and entertainment to alleviate our problems. The responsibility of curing ourselves has left.

Psychiatrists are being replaced by books entitled, "Chicken Soup for the Soul" or "1001 Ways To Make You Happy." Soap operas are counseling people daily.

These things are not self-help items; they only distract us from the true problems. How can we as a society break out of this pattern? I have an equation from a short story I read a few years ago:

"Find the value for *n*, such that *n* plus everything else in your life makes you feel all right. What would *n* equal? Solve for *n*."

I don't remember the name of the story or the author, otherwise, I would give proper credit to this passage. (I think there might be something to this whole "alcohol kills brain cells" thing.)

The essence of the quote is that something is missing in your life if you are not happy. It doesn't condone hiding from your problems; it proposes that you find the missing part.

I don't know what that missing thing is. I know it's not writing articles like this because now I'm depressed. What I do know is that the "n" to be discovered will come from within you. Hiding from your problems is not the answer - exploration is.



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Former president Ronald Reagan turned 87 this month, and to honor him Congress renamed Washington, D.C.'s National Airport as Ronald Reagan National Airport.

It seems properly ironic to name our capital's airport after a man whose greatest contribution to the history of aviation was to fire 11,600 overworked air-traffic controllers who are still bitter about the whole mess.

With a rash of newly published biographies, an immense new federal building inscribed with his name and suggestions to carve his likeness on Mt. Rushmore, Reagan is on his way to becoming the most memorialized president in our history. We seem to have entered a phase of nostalgia for the 1980s.

In the decade since his presidency, Reagan's supporters have come to celebrate him as a brilliant visionary who profoundly reshaped our nation for the future, returning America to its strength and confidence as a nation.

Critics, however, regard the Reagan era as a period of looming economic disaster, unrestrained militarism and ruthless insensitivity to social needs.

Reagan gave America the illusion of growth and prosperity in the '80s. However, it was only an illusion - all done with paste and glitter, mirrors and lighting, and borrowed money. The Reagan administration presented us with a television pageant of patriotic glitz and glamour. Meanwhile, the social fabric rotted, the infrastructure crumbled and the national debt grew faster than everything else in America (save the level of religious intolerance).

Reagan's inauguration swore in eight years of unconscionable greed and consumption, ridiculous weapons procurement and unprecedented budget deficits that will continue to burden America for years.

"What I want for this country above all else," he once told us, "is that it may always be a place where a man can get rich."

Our noblest principle. Our dream of greatness. A lot of people did get

rich in the '80s, thanks to Reagan's economic policies: tax cuts, getting the government off the backs of the people, prime the pump, helping the rich first, trickle-down economics and laissez-faire.

These were Reagan's basic approaches to governing. It was easy to make a lot of money in the '80s, granted you had a lot of money to start with. The rich got richer, and the poor and middle class got saddled with a greater tax burden.

In 1986, Reagan was told the Congressional Budget Office had statistics showing a dramatic redistribution of wealth from America's poor to the rich. "Oh, I don't think that's true," he twinkled.

It was a typical response. The Republicans never questioned their faith in supply-side economics and the Laffer curve. They haven't bothered to notice that the demand side never did catch up.

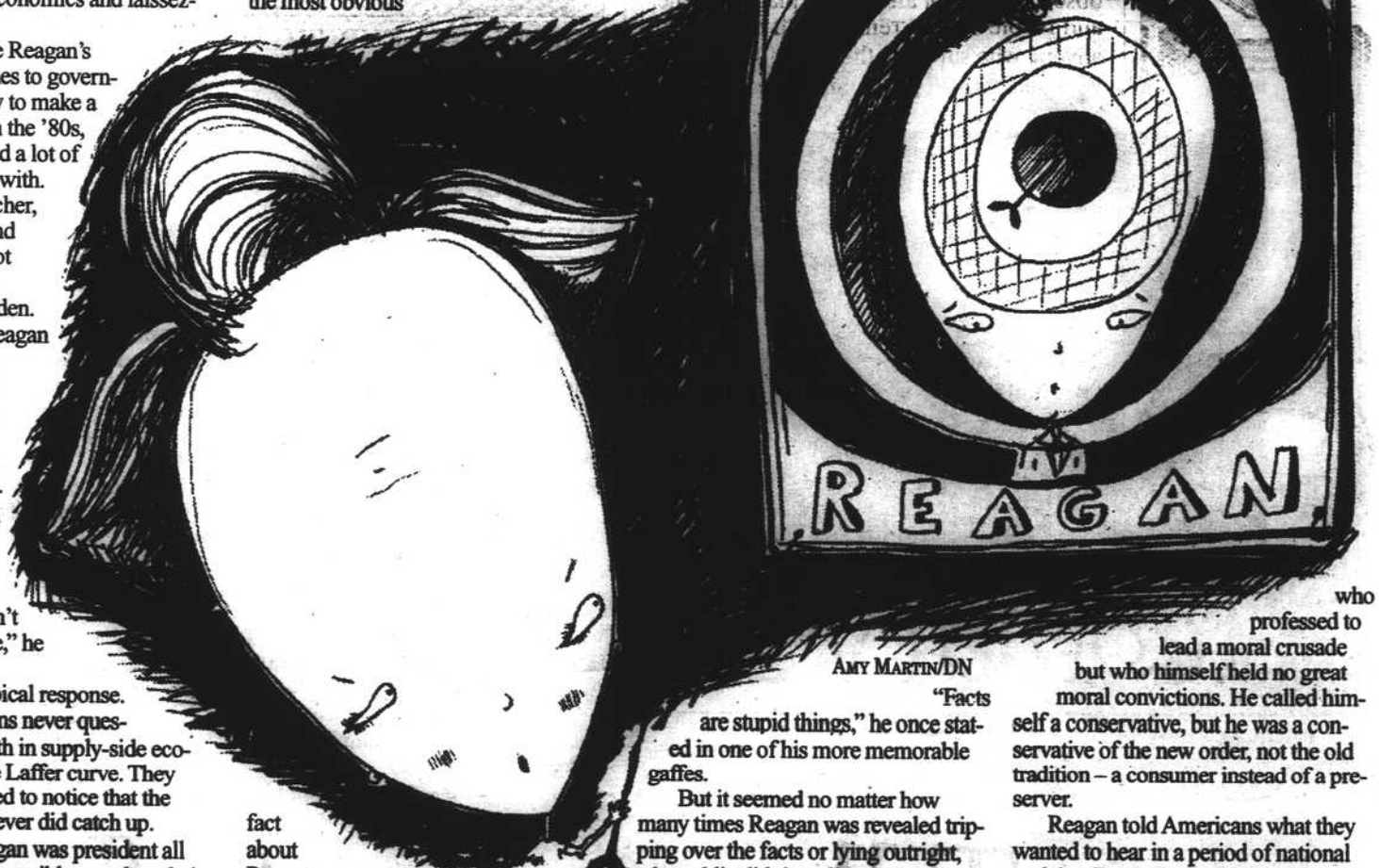
When Reagan was president all things seemed possible - as they do in fantasies. We could all be rich and powerful, and we could all sleep peacefully at night, knowing we were keeping the spread of communism in check. No effort would be required to partake of this dream, just unquestioning faith.

Tax revenues would rise when taxes were cut. The Soviets would be stopped by our heroic conquest of Grenada. The terrifying threat of nuclear holocaust would be abolished by building a Star Wars fantasy in outer space. Reagan showed America that wishing was doing and that saying something made it so.

Maybe it is possible to believe that the '80s was a prosperous decade for America if you don't care about health care, energy consumption, education, the environment, criminal justice, the spread of AIDS, equal opportunity, mismanagement or government fraud.

The Reagan administration's conduct on such issues ranged from merely disinterested to actively destructive.

In reviewing his presidency, the most obvious



AMY MARTIN/DN

fact about Reagan always has been dismissed: The man was an actor. To recall his pre-political career is considered somehow offensive, as though to evaluate Reagan's political leadership one should ignore his training as an actor.

But Reagan's histrionic past is hardly insignificant to his role as president.

Reagan governed America through the eye of the television camera. His was a presidency of pictures, publicity and staging. Every public act of his presidency was planned by media experts to have maximum impact on the evening news clips. Every word he uttered was scripted. Every presidential appearance was conceived of in terms of camera angles and lighting.

As a public speaker, Reagan was legendary for his egregious misstatements. Facts never mattered to him.

"Facts are stupid things," he once stated in one of his more memorable gaffes.

But it seemed no matter how many times Reagan was revealed tripping over the facts or lying outright, the public didn't really care much. Journalists were vexed by his Teflon quality. They would scrutinize every statement the president made for accuracy and publicize every error, and none of it had any impact whatsoever on his popularity.

Reagan never really believed he was lying. For him, facts didn't make his beliefs true - his personal convictions gave life to the facts. If one fact didn't serve to support his beliefs, another would do, even if it was made up. It wasn't simply that Reagan was ignorant of the facts; in his view of the world, facts just weren't important. Criticism of his statements or policies never touched on his central beliefs.

Reagan began his political career as a liberal New Deal Democrat but made a sharp turn right in California and became the icon of the new Republican conservative era. Reagan was a man

who professed to lead a moral crusade but who himself held no great moral convictions. He called himself a conservative, but he was a conservative of the new order, not the old tradition - a consumer instead of a preserver.

Reagan told Americans what they wanted to hear in a period of national malaise: Better days were ahead, national pride was being rekindled, and faith in our future was restored. Reagan accentuated the positive, encouraging Americans to believe that all was well, and their troubles were all behind them.

In light of the scandals, dishonesty, greed and waste of his administration, praise of Reagan rings hollow. Expressing warm nostalgia for the '80s seems particularly demeaning for the many less affluent Americans who truly suffered from Reagan's politics of the wealthy, for the wealthy.

Monuments to Reagan are kitsch, in the truest sense of the word - a pretentious and hollow display, calculated to have popular appeal. Perhaps in an abstract, conceptual essence it is only fitting to build empty tokens to an empty presidency.

Reagan can die venerated for all the things he only pretended to be, and the lessons of reality can be ignored.