

Ponderings of the past

Remember U.

Editor concludes five-year career with gratitude, memories



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I don't remember who fought the Peloponnesian Wars. I don't remember orographic lift. I don't remember how to conjugate Spanish subjunctive verbs.

But I will never forget how the chocolate cake smeared on my editor's face ended up on my dining room wall.

And every holiday season reminds me of Steve, the Christmas tree that my roommate and I abandoned on a stagecoach headed west on East Campus.

I'm sure those recollections are not going to help me in "Jeopardy!" but I wouldn't trade those memories for all the term papers in the world.

In keeping with the tradition of many editors before me, I want to use my last words in the Daily Nebraskan to reflect on my memories and lessons at UNL, and to thank the people who made them possible.

First of all, I wouldn't have gotten to UNL without the person who helped me carry 100 pounds of clothes up 10 floors in Abel Residence Hall.

She's made a million sacrifices for me and hasn't asked for much except to help her mow the lawn.

She's the person to whom I owe the most but probably thank the least. For the money, groceries, moving boxes and moral support, thanks, Mom. I hope I made you proud.

More fond memories of home are the two friends I've kept through college. To Julie Sutton and Damien Stednitz, thanks for providing a little sanity outside the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

At UNL, before I even set foot in a classroom, I had my hands on a story assignment for the Daily Nebraskan.

It was a moving account of the Plant Variety Protection Act Amendment of 1993. I'm sure you all remember.

Yes, like all freshman reporters, I had to write some boring stories that if left near an open flame would be dry enough to create a fire hazard.

Sometimes I had a little fun. I put on a bee suit and stuck my shaking arm into the hives on East Campus. I drilled Newt Gingrich on education-funding during his flag-waving visit to Boys Town. I was humiliated in a racquetball game with former Chancellor Graham Spanier. I even interviewed a squirrel.

I had some zany ideas, but most of my editors put up with them.

Remember the chocolate cake? That was Jeff Zeleny. As an editor and reporter he pushed me to be a better journalist, and he reminded

me that there is a reason for where we end up — because that's where we're supposed to be.

I guess I was supposed to be at UNL, where I could meet great people like my aforementioned roommate Brian Sharp, who helped ditch the Christmas tree.

There are other great people here I've been happy to work with. When I was on news desk, I remember a young crop of reporters who didn't care if they had to write profiles on geese and garbage collection. They were just happy to be published.

Now, a Page One story is just old news to them. To Brian Carlson, Lindsay Young, Josh Funk, Sarah (my favorite alien prodigy) Baker, Ieva Augstums, Brad Davis, Jessica Fargen and all the others, good luck in your very promising futures.

They didn't have to put up with me as much as did Doug Kouma, whom I must thank for not taking my mad fits with a pica pole personally.

For all the staffers who worked with me in this year of transition, thanks. I owe a Milwaukee's best to

Chad Lorenz, a potato head to Dave "The Fiddler" Wilson in Idaho, and a visit to the trailer park for Erin Schulte in Little Rock. And to Sparky, I owe a kick in the ass — out of respect, of course. And, Ted Taylor, you can have all my forks.

To Erin Gibson, who will be in the driver's seat next year, keep your seat belt buckled. You will retain the respect you have worked hard to earn.

My days at the Daily Nebraskan also remind me of missed classes, close deadlines, skipped Saturday morning cartoons in favor of exhilarating NU Board of Regents meetings and waiting for the next UNL scandal to break (and waiting, and waiting, and waiting...).

I also fondly remember waiting for UNL administrators who never called me back and finally getting a call from Phyllis Larsen to apologize on their behalf.

The good part of the university hierarchy was the professors, especially in the J-School or, as we experienced it, Slavery Hall.

I will always treasure the fond memories of the grizzled, Santa

Claus paradox that is Uncle Buddie — as fine as aged cheese. And to the never-ending affirmations of George Tuck and my lingering fear of trapped white space. And to Charlyne Berens, for giving the place a little class in the glare of all that baldness, I offer my gratitude.

The first impression the J-School made on me was by the late Dick Streckfuss, who taught me the most important question, "Who cares?" For the many people who cared about him, he will not be forgotten.

And I can't forget the professors from the political science department. Someday I may be a graduate student in international relations if I ever feel the urge to rule the world.

Because of Bill Avery, any future home of mine will have a bomb shelter. And I can use coercive diplomacy to "amaze my friends and foil my enemies" thanks to Valerie Schwebach.

Though the professors made life challenging, the real reason anyone goes to this prairie university is to paint their bodies red and spend every fall Saturday in a

2,000- or 20-degree stadium.

Last semester, I remember sitting in the back room of the Daily Nebraskan with a few other staffers piecing together Dr. Tom's vague reference that he would retire when the heavenly bodies are all aligned. We pondered.

Then someone dashed to the phone to confirm with as astronomy professor that a planetary phenomenon actually was happening — and the sky would soon fall on the state of Nebraska.

Osborne's 25 years as head coach is longer than my current life span, but that's not what I'm thanking him for. I'm thanking him for putting into practice the ideal of this state.

Some of my best memories are from the Saturday afternoons in Memorial Stadium looking out on that sea of red and realizing how big Nebraska really can be. I was lucky to see Osborne's last game, the Orange Bowl in Miami, where that same sea of red poured into the stadium like a tidal wave.

I was born and reared a Husker faithful — even have the little red pompons to prove it. And the closer I get to leaving the capital city, the more I realize how the state identifies itself with integrity and pride.

Pride in the Huskers, in being the No. 1. Pride in our Midwestern values. Pride in being a Nebraskan before you're an American (because everyone else in America thinks we're a bunch of hicks).

Yeah, we have weird weather, but we live in a beautiful state with a lot of character and many good people. I take pride in that.

For me, that pride turned into individual pride. And for that, I will always be thankful.

As much as I like Nebraska, though, Gov. Ben Nelson will be sad to hear that I'm leaving to pursue my career.

Yes, the job market will force me to leave the Husker faithful. However, one of the lessons I learned during the past five years is that as much passion as you may have for your field of study, you need to have a life outside of it.

The one thing I regret is spending so much time in the basement of the union that I didn't get to attend all the speakers, functions and mini-festivals at the university.

You must learn this: Job does not equal Life.

I've made a decision to prevent that equation in the future — and it has its bonuses.

Jim Sullivan, this wonderful young man from Maryland, asked me to marry him a few months ago, and I said yes. The soon-to-be Army lieutenant and I are sure to be hopping around the globe, but I'm sure there will be a good metro newspaper nearby so I won't end up writing obits for Small Town Times. Wherever we go, he's worth it.

It took me a long time to figure out what is worth it and what isn't.

A good indication to that is to find out what things, people or events make you happy. Then remember those things, as I have here, and learn from them.

And always remember to say thanks.

That's the frosting on the chocolate cake.



AMY MARTIN/DN