

No bad words

Profane language is a matter of perspective



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It's just a word.

I mean, whoever thought a word would have such an impact?

This was the situation. It was about 2 in the morning and I was working on a paper at home when I decided I needed a bite to eat. So I tossed on a shirt, some shoes and my leather jacket, hopped in my car and drove to a supermarket that shall remain nameless.

I just needed a microwavable pizza and a bottle of (university-endorsed) Pepsi before I headed back to my apartment to finish my paper and sleep for five hours. I got to the check out, my pizza and pop rung up, and the cashier gave me my total.

I opened up my jacket to get my wallet out of my inside pocket and the cashier got a very blank look on her face. "I'm sorry, sir; you'll have to leave."

"What seems to be the problem?" I asked her, totally taken off-guard.

"We don't allow profane T-shirts in the store, sir. You need to leave now."

It being late at night, I had just grabbed whatever shirt was on the top of my shirt drawer and took off. As I looked down, I recognized the multi-color print and things became clearer to me.

Emblazoned across my chest were the words "Too Much F***ing Joy."

"Look," I told the cashier, "just let me pay and get out of here, and I won't wear this shirt again in here."

"I'm sorry, sir. You need to go now."

It was way too late for me to put up with some cashier's smart-mouth, so I took off and went to a different store. This time I left my jacket

unzipped as I walked around the store, so everyone could read the bright lettering.

No one said a thing.

Maybe you've heard of George Carlin's "Seven Dirty Words." That was the early '70s. Since then, one of those words has slipped from unacceptable context to the you-can-get-away-with-saying-it-on-network-television level.

That's right, it's now OK to "piss someone off."

And there was much rejoicing. (*A pathetic cheer of lifeless enthusiasm*)

The fact remains, however, that six words are still so bad that it is considered inappropriate to say them in public context. I can't even list them here for you.

We actually keep those words in a small vault in the back room of the offices, buried under Jimmy Hoffa's body and the lost Watergate tapes.

Just to even get the asterisks in print I had to send a lackey in, and it's a shame, because that lackey made good coffee too.

By now, I hope you're starting to realize the absurdity of this lecture. What I'm trying to relay to you is that there is no such thing as a bad word to me.

Words have only the context that you give them. They aren't that bad. Sure, you may take offense to them, but you have to ask yourself this one simple question — why?

When someone spouts what you think is an obscene word, that's your perception. It has nothing to do with the word itself.

And you're voluntarily letting yourself get worked up about it.

You, our gentle readers, may think that my columnists and I have puritanical language based on what you've read in our columns, but let me tell you that you couldn't be further from the truth.

I probably have the worst mouth out of my staff, though there's a columnist or two who come close.

What I think is funny, though, is how they can get so worked up about it. One of them complains because she thinks she swears too much. Another told me he thinks I swear too much.

Unlike the cashier last night, though, I'm not that disturbed by the

words, and I'm proud to say that my staff hasn't complained about my foul mouth much either.

You see, Too Much Joy is a band (a very good one, I might add) that had some run-ins with the law because of profanity in the past. So, natch, some of their shirts read "Too Much F***ing Joy."

Gentle readers, I know you know what letters hide behind those three asterisks. So do I.

Some people say they're afraid their kids will see my shirt because they would learn a profane word from it.

News flash to parents: Most kids who can read already know these words. If they didn't hear you saying it, they heard some other kid saying it.

The reason they keep saying it is because they know you don't want them to.

Just like cats love to get into trouble, children love to irk parents by doing what parents don't want them to. By telling these kids,

"Don't say that!" parents are just going to make a kid

want to say it more and more — they just learn to be more careful about when and where.

So who are parents protecting? The

kids know them, the parents know them.

And if you don't like my shirt, don't read it. But I have as much right to buy my food and wear what I want to wear, no matter what someone says.

An atheist who says he finds religious shirts offensive is told to be more tolerant. They're told that religions promote peace, disregarding centuries of religious crusades and holy wars.

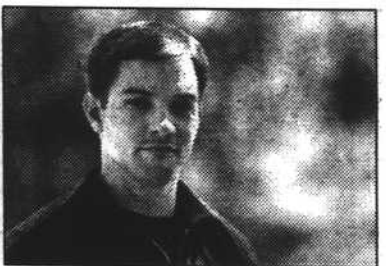
I'm not condemning

religious clothing, I'm merely saying there's room for everyone in the wide world we're in. So let me wear my damn T-shirt and buy my damn pizza, huh?



Surviving the game

Don't lose sight of what's really important and meaningful



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We are all put to the test.

We are all left to stand in the face of adversity, only to rise to the challenge or fall into the abyss of defeat.

It may not come in the manner we would hope or at a time we would prefer, but it comes nonetheless.

About this time every semester and approximately 187 times during the year, we find ourselves looking into that sinister reality, pondering the ever present question of, "To fail or not to fail?"

Somewhere in that chain of events — the midnight pop run, the computer disaster before a paper is due, the sweat induced by chronic procrastination — the test itself becomes the most important thing if

we're not careful.

Maybe you forget about the paper you wrote two months ago that you felt good about, the impossible math test you got an A on or the kind soul that lent you 13 cents at Burger King because that Whopper cost more than you could dig out of your faded high school blue jeans.

At best, maybe you realize that finals are only a few exams which won't matter in 10 years. At worst, you can look around campus at the zombies walking to class and wonder if "The Invasion of the Body Snatchers" was based on a true story.

The other day, I was standing on Stadium Drive across the street from one of the busiest construction sites on campus, and I, too, was a bit preoccupied with events of the near future and even beyond.

Then I noticed something.

A red sign with white lettering was hanging in the southwest corner of the stadium that read "Gates 4, 5, 6, and 7." Above that sign were numerous support structures in the form of beams, boards and pillars. But what caught my eye was something higher up.

It was a different sign of sorts, a heavily obscured engraving hiding in the shadows beneath the overhang

of the construction. Those who are familiar with the traditional appearance of Memorial Stadium might recognize it as one of four cornerstone tablets atop large gray pillars.

It hit me that the words etched on this particular tablet were probably not going to be visible for much longer, assuming that the engraving will remain intact once it is hidden behind new additions to the stadium.

It is a series of seventeen words that make up perhaps the most important principle of higher education and of the work we have done here, be it for one or 20 semesters.

They represent what I feel should be the heart of every university, every athletic team, every business, every search for knowledge and every human's desire to carve out his or her place in the world.

They represent hope.
*Not the Victory but the Action;
Not the Goal but the Game;
In the Deed, the Glory.*

It is the simplest ideal and the most profound wisdom I have ever encountered, because it provides the answer to some of our hardest questions.

And the question is, as we scurry to class or make a beeline for the parking garage, whether or not we

take time to look up, to read the signs that are meant to help us find our way.

These words have been the bedrock principle upon which I have grounded my journey along this wild ride through higher education.

I wrote them at the end of my application essay to the honors program because I believed in what they stood for. Four years later, as I find myself infinitely closer to the end of my journey than the beginning, I believe in the truth they provide more than ever.

Maybe that means I am the last American optimist or just a raging idealist. Or maybe it means that one day, rather than staggering through a sea of mindless obsession and preoccupation, I actually looked up.

What I do know is that stress finds its way to my doorstep with a vengeance, much like it does for many others. I have known my days in the house of pain and felt as though my problems were more important than anything else.

We are all put to the test. I guess the defining moment comes not in taking an exam or receiving that final grade, but in the manner we choose to face the challenge.

The Primitive Radio Gods said it

best in that song few people can remember the name of: "Can money pay for all the days I lived awake but half asleep?"

The answer is no. It can't. Remembering that the challenge itself is the most important thing provides the key to true success.

It is the one thing that can make winners out of those teams and individuals who feel they have endured life's greatest defeats.

Hey, I think about grades like anyone else, and I grumble over defeat, but I don't dwell on them. As for finals and the rest of this thing called life, I figure you do your best, you study/cram/pray until your eyes can't stay open any longer, you put the pencil down and remember to exhale.

The rest is out of your hands. As for me, I'm going to enjoy the few remaining months of undergraduate madness and await the return of the boys of summer.

Things could be worse. **Cooper's Law: When the game becomes more important than a number on the scoreboard, you can't lose.**

Thanks for your hospitality, Lincoln.

It's been real.