

A promise to keep

Vows for hope, responsibility by Bush are ones the people will remember



Sunny Side Up
with Jessica Flanagan

Dear Governor George W. Bush: I had the distinct honor of meeting you in Omaha this Tuesday evening at a fund-raiser.

I wanted you to know that what you said about the future of our country and the direction it needs to take in the new millennium really resonated with Nebraskans. At least from what I could tell.

I have to be honest. I was somewhat skeptical about a candidate who has seemingly been anointed, not only by the establishment but essentially by the media, as the next president of the United States of America. Well, at least anointed as the Republican nominee. But your message spoke straight to my heart.

I felt so inspired when you told us that the "purpose of prosperity is to make sure the American dream touches every willing heart."

It would seem that in the hustle and bustle of our busy world, we underestimate the potential of people. I believe if we raise the standard of expectation, give our children a foundation to cling to and reject the classist idea of second-rate citizenship — America will once again be headed in the right direction.

So often people assume poverty and the tribulations of life beget more poverty and failure. So often people see the lower and working class as a burden to society.

But I'm from the wrong side of

the tracks, and I'm doing quite well for myself. I feel fortunate to be a citizen in a country where I can work hard and get ahead. I believe the promise of America is the hope for a better tomorrow.

Here in Nebraska we have real American heroes. Farmers who get up with the sun and work through the night to provide for their families. Mothers who take on a second job so their daughters can go to prom. And students who work their way through college with the prayer that they can do more for their children.

And I think it's heroes like these in this country who are banking on your promise to match a conservative mind with a compassionate heart.

You talked about school yards that have turned into battlefields, the failures of education, children who don't have dreams, drug abuse, illegitimacy — and you defined these things as the burdens on the conscience of our nation. "The next president must close the gap of hope," you said.

More than a dozen children died of starvation or malnutrition right here in Lincoln last year. In the middle of the Heartland, not in some thriving metropolis with walls and ghettos.

I guess it just strikes me that closing the gap of hope in our torn nation is a monumental task.

And it strikes me that if our national leaders, our public servants, keep sight of that task, it is achievable.

Tears of relief welled in my eyes when you explained how the Republican Party must help to usher in an era of responsibility.

The tears were for the lost people of my generation who believe that self-fulfillment will come by living for the moment. The relief was hearing you say you were willing to draw a moral line. In the wake of my idealism, Governor, I found myself nod-

ding my head in agreement.

Then I caught myself. I was one of only a handful of people in attendance who hadn't pledged \$1,000 to be there. I was surrounded by the financial powerhouses of Omaha — and I was just wondering — does your audience, this audience, understand what kind of hopelessness many of their fellow Americans experience?

And I'm still wondering if your audience will give so freely to their churches and faith-based institutions to combat the suffering and hardships that will fill the inevitable void between welfare and dependency.

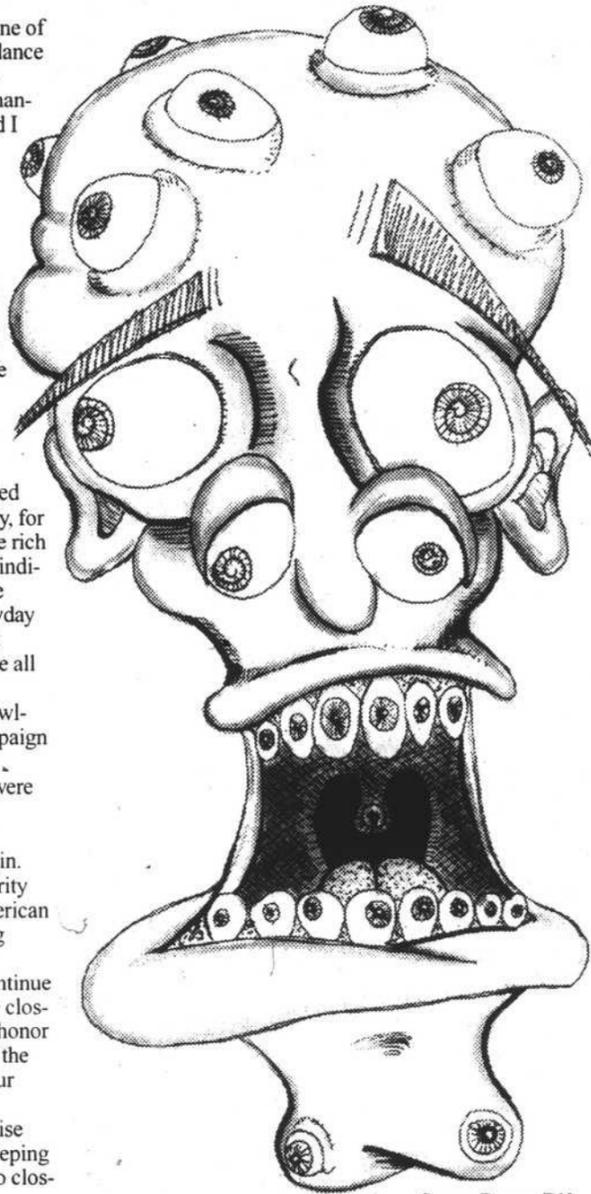
You've been called a "fund-raising machine," so I suppose you often find yourself surrounded by the rich and powerful. Actually, for all practical purposes, you are the rich and powerful. And I suppose it's individuals like you, who address the plight of the poor, that give everyday Americans reason to believe that maybe the higher-ups still believe all people matter.

Here, in the youth of my knowledge, I want to believe your campaign promises.

I want to believe that if you were in the White House, with a Republican Congress, an era of responsibility would be ushered in. That we really would see prosperity with a purpose, and that the American dream would reach every willing heart.

So as things undoubtedly continue to go your way, and as you move closer to having the chance to bring honor and dignity back to the office of the president — please remember your promise.

Please remember your promise because Americans will. And keeping it will take us that much closer to closing the gap of hopelessness.



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

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Out of Africa

A wealth of experiences rises from cross-cultural adventures



After two days on the airplane, the pre-departure tension and anxiety had been fully digested, leaving me with a knot of pretzels and cheap, PBR-style, British beer moving rapidly through my bowels (always a combination for a Maalox moment).

I was glad to get out of London, that destitute, deplorable city of debauchery and congestion.

The 12-hour layover had given me just enough time (actually, I could have done it in much less time) to become fully jaded and annoyed by the crude, cold congeniality the British conquered the world with.

Leaving Gatwick Airport, I took a bus downtown. What I found in central London was hardly the attitude and style in which I wanted to begin my trip around the world, nor my year-long study abroad in Tanzania, East Africa.

The crew-cut, Puritan, Midwestern work ethic and self-reliant dogmatism — trumpeted by the Nebraska "Big Red" flag, which is embellished into all of our personas over the years, was quickly fading to a London muckish color of mutton or shepherd's pie.

Calling upon the strength, resilience and amplitude of dignity

my ancestors conquered the Plains with, I managed to make it to London Heathrow airport in time for my next flight.

Twelve more tedious hours later, our descent began into the East Africa Rift Valley, the cradle of mankind.

I looked out the window with a childish fascination at the geographic intricacies interlaced before me. I saw Lake Victoria surrounded by a lush green thickness, followed by the historic and world-famous Masai Mara and the Serengeti, the home of perhaps the largest population of ungulates in the world.

For a moment, I thought I could see the 2 million wildebeest making their semi-annual migration. Ahead, there appeared to be a crater from a giant meteor that landed in some prehistoric era.

Later I discovered that that crater was in fact the Ngorogoro Caldera, the most lush and populous game reserve in the world, which holds 25,000 large mammals within a 16-mile diameter, elevated caldera ridge.

The beauty and awe of the Rift Valley from 30,000 feet was just what I needed to provide tranquillity and peace of mind after my disenchantment with the Brits.

When we landed at Dar es Salaam International Airport, in Tanzania, I could feel the anxiety setting in again. I was about to come face to face with Africa in every form possible.

I didn't have any expectations, so I couldn't be let down. I was worried, curious, yet proud and confident. Having barely lived outside of the

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The only thing I brought with me was an open mind and lots of energy. I was ecstatic to see so many potential adventures to apply my rambunctious, aloof tendencies toward.”

Midwest (like most of my fellow Nebraskans I'm sure), I couldn't imagine what a transition this would be.

Would I have culture shock? What the heck is culture shock, anyway? Nothing shocks me; I'm tough as nails.

But what if I got malaria and died? Who was going to tell my mom? London didn't have public bathrooms. How did they use the bathroom here? Were there going to be lions and hyenas outside the airport waiting to kill me?

Was there a war or something outside and people starving to death everywhere? My God, I was really in the middle of nowhere.

Hey, these are reasonable questions when you're 20 years old, have never left the Plains and suddenly wake up in East Africa.

I didn't quite feel like Dorothy landing in Oz, although it was obvious I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

The heat overwhelmed me, but the humidity was almost debilitating. I made my way through customs, the faces became darker and I went to

gather my bags.

The program I was on arranged for somebody to pick me up at the airport, and sure enough, there was somebody. I took my travelers' checks to the moneychanger and bought my Tanzanian shillings. "Sixty-five thousand shillings for only 100 dollars! Holy schnikes, you can really buy a lot with your money in Africa!" I thought.

I took my wad of bills, my bags, my sweat-soaked clothes and exhausted self to the Range Rover waiting for us and off we went to the university dormitories.

The ride to the school was mind-blowing. I felt like I needed eyes all around my head to see all the amazing things along the sides of the road. Something I had only read about, the Third World, materialized like a Star Trek transporter before my very eyes.

The informality and genuineness of the people and their reality instantly gave meaning to what I was doing, whatever I was doing. I didn't have a plan when I left; I didn't know what I was going to do or what I was going

to find.

The only thing I brought with me was an open mind and lots of energy. I was ecstatic to see so many potential adventures to apply my rambunctious, aloof tendencies toward.

What I began discovering that day was a land full of spirit and spice. Despite the world of difference in cultural orientation, the people welcomed and accepted me unlike anything I'd ever experienced back home.

The hospitality and genuine desire of the Tanzanians to teach me their language and culture absolutely made me feel embarrassed in comparison to how guests are treated in my own country and on my own campus.

Over the next year, I studied Swahili, African history and international relations.

I taught English, swimming, sociology and American history.

I traveled across five countries in Southeast Africa, bought over 300 pounds of indigenous art (as determined by the Tanzanian Postmaster) made lifelong friends all over the world, learned more than I had in the previous five years of my life combined, and yes, I did get malaria.

In the next series of my articles, I'll share some of the stories I accumulated over the year.

I'll explain how to do some of these things yourself, even for the most cross-culturally challenged and sheltered.

And, more importantly, I'll tell you how to do it without getting sick, robbed or disappointed. See you in two weeks.

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