

Love from a distance

Long-distance relationship creates complications



A letter to Brown University, Oct. 20, 1999.

Dear sirs and madams,
I have put off writing this letter for quite some time, but after two months, I figured now was as good as any other time.

I am not writing this letter asking for acceptance to your university or graduate school or any other idea of the sort. Consequently, this could have been written to any other school, but I do ask you to read on. There is something I need to tell you.

I guess I should tell you something about myself. These are the basics. My name is Trevor Johnson, I go to a university in the Midwest, and I am in my fourth year.

When I began life here in the Midwest, I never figured our paths would cross, but in the middle of last year, I learned they would. Now that they have, you have got something that means a lot to me, something I want. Let me explain.

With all the knowledge of all the universities in all the world, there are some things we cannot figure out, and we will never be able to do so. Great Ivy League school that you are, I challenge you to find out the answer to the never-ending question of relationships. I am sure even you will fail.

I have, as many others have, figured out some things about these relationships. One such thing is that attaching the two words "long distance" to the word "relationship" is grounds for misery and pain and is many times barely worth the effort involved.

Against all logic some people still try, sometimes wondering: "Why?"

They say that, especially in college, the idea is even impossible, especially if one of you is a freshman. There are too many new people around, too many parties, too many new opportunities. I can't say I don't agree with them.

Brown, her name is Anna, and she means a lot to me. More than I ever wished she did. More than I can ever tell her she does.

I've never written about her before, and I rarely talk about her. As far as most people know, she and I are a dead item. For my own sake I think it's safer that way. But don't get me wrong, I do think about her... I think about her all the time.

The nature of our relationship makes it difficult.

Technology has made it more workable. Feelings are sustained, dropping the events of our lives through daily e-mails. There are 10-second phone calls to say goodnight and marathon phone dates that result in \$60 to \$100 long-distance bills at the end of the month. Sometimes we can last a week without calling, sometimes we can't even last a day.

There are letters (content always out of date), there are plane tickets and air terminals, long hours spent on longer highways and 500-mile stretches of interstate.

It's not real easy carrying the relationship on like this. You don't always know when the next flight will be. You can't do the little things, like going for coffee at 2 in the morning or having fast lunches at campus fountains.

To be honest with you, sometimes I don't know if our relationship will survive. Too many things say that it won't, but that's not my point here.

Brown, Anna is a great girl. She is far and away the most wonderful woman I have ever met in my life.

You've already seen that she's beautiful. Considering you let her in your doors, you know she's smart. But she has much more than that to offer.

She's got oddities, passions and desires that separate her from some of

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the cookie-cutter freshmen girls who take clueless steps into expensive universities that will consume and eventually form their identities for them.

I know that as she walks along the grasses of your campus greens and as she laughs with dorm-mates at 2 a.m., you will take notice of her.

I also know that many of you look at her as I have looked at her. I know you will want her. I can't blame you. She's worthy of every stare and crush you will bestow on her. I have wanted Anna since the first day I met her.

As things unfold, Anna will impart herself in your surroundings. She has told me for a long time that she has wanted to be a part of your university. She says it has driven her for the last four years of her life. I hope she truly finds what she was looking for all this time.

While she does find her way, in the marathon phone dates I will hear of the

unwinding tale of the journey she takes at your campus. There will be things I will laugh at, and there will be things I don't want to know. As the fates of lovers go, there will be things that I will only wonder about.

I will tell her my stories from the Midwest, leaving some things out that don't need to be said.

As is the case with many people in these relationships, there will be times when I get off the phone with Anna that I will want to drop everything and join her on your campus. I know that this will be impossible.

Brown, though at times we don't want to be so, Anna and I are far away from one another. I know that before Anna is mine, she is truly yours. She needs to be with you before she needs to be with me. You're lucky to have her, and if you wouldn't mind doing some Midwestern guy a favor, take care of her.

Trevor Johnson is a junior English and secondary education major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Fight against history

Columbus Day a celebration of racism and savagery in 'White' America

Once again, last week saw the national celebration — albeit on a reasonably quiet scale — of Columbus Day.

Now, as a Cherokee Indian, I'm not particularly fond of any day that celebrates the invasion of this continent by the "civilized" disease, bloodshed and savagery carried across the Atlantic by Christian Europeans.

And it puzzles me that Christopher Columbus is still honored in such a way, considering that all the popular (white) myths about him have been shattered: He didn't "discover" America, he wasn't trying to prove that the world was round, he wasn't just searching for "spices," and he and his successors responded to the welcoming hospitality of the native population with treachery, kidnapping, rape, torture, slavery and genocide.

Christopher Columbus is a contested symbol, a figure around whom emotions are strong and visceral. For whites, he heralds the beginning of Manifest Destiny, of the cultivation of the American wilderness, of the freedom from (royal) serfdom to the "American dream" of owning property and becoming "financially independent."

For African Americans, Columbus heralds the bloody start of institutionalized slavery by Europeans and their descendants in this hemisphere, beginning with the natives and spreading its crimson claws to African shores.

For American Indians, this lone, homely little man ushered in what American Indian Movement activist Russell Means recently called "the Columbian Legacy": "exterminate and/or relocate." And it's a policy still in full force today.

This is why we continue to see the murders of Indians go unsolved and unpunished — just talk to the families of Ronald Hard Heart and Wilson Black Elk on Pine Ridge or the thousands of Indian families who have lost sons and daughters, mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends to anti-Indian racism.

We don't have to go beyond the borders of Nebraska to see it. This is why the State of Nebraska can claim free enterprise when the liquor town of Whiteclay profits from the illness of Indian alcoholism but can harass Indian casinos with impunity for trying to provide an economic base for their communities.

Just one example of the constant double standard imposed by white America on natives: We're condemned for the problems forced on us by colonialization and attacked if we work to reverse the damage.

Indian-Giver. But the Columbian Legacy also extends into little things, the everyday insults that repeat the message that we're not really citizens. *Squaw.*

All you have to do is go to a "New Age" store and check out their build-your-own-sweatlodge kits, the find-your-spirit-animal books and the contact-a-real-Indian-spirit-and-get-your-Indian-name workshops. (Always some name like "Thunder Wolf Bear Heart" or something noble and stoic like that.) *Scalper.*

Or check out the spectacle of a Washington Redskins game. *Wagonburner.* We all know that there would be a huge outcry if we renamed the team the "D.C. Crackers" and had a Klansman running around as the mascot and representative of white America. *Red Man.*

And yet Indians are supposed to be "honored" by these racist appropriations and misrepresentations? *Tonto.*

Disney's "Pocahontas." Longfellow's "Hiawatha." "Cherokee people, Cherokee tribe..."

And native folks aren't the only ones who deal with this. People of other ethnic groups, diverse religious communities, sexual orientations and expressions, economic classes and nationalities are consistently subjected to offensive representations of themselves by popular American cul-

ture, images and ideas that all too easily take on murderous manifestations (as we have seen with the murders of Matthew Shepard, Brandon Teena and James Byrd, Jr.).

The Columbian Legacy is now intimately inter-

twined with the "Anglo conformity standard." White, straight, Protestant, upper middle-class Anglo-American standards are the "right" and "only" ways to live and be; anything else is deemed deficient, deviant and destructive.

It's the "real American," the George Armstrong Custer-Ronald Reagan-June Cleaver mold that few of us fit but to which many aspire. It's the image brought to mind when folks talk about "the good ol' days," the golden age when people were moral, religious, patriotic — you know, when challenges to the Anglo conformity standard were invisible, when the rest of us were silenced and erased by jailing, lynching, assault, torture and persecution from the visual and symbolic landscape of America.

Forgive me if I don't see the benefits of those upright and ethical "good ol' days" of white supremacy.

Now what? Should we all feel guilty? No, because guilt is easily transformed into resentment, thus ending any hope of communication or healing.

Is it about hatred, about "paybacks"? No. Vengeance breeds the unending desire for more blood, and it always brings more heartache than resolution.

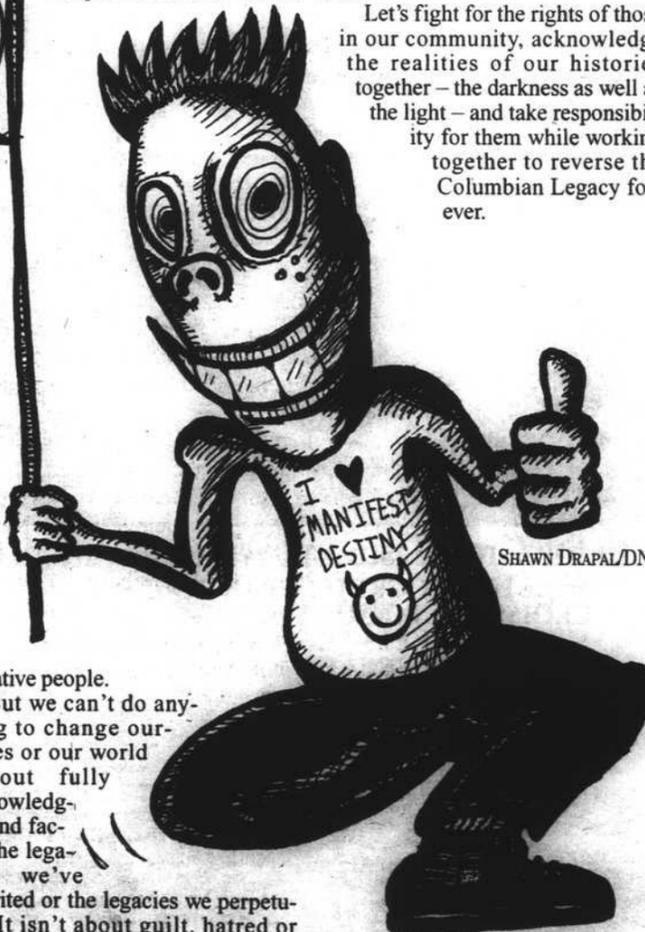
Besides, most of us are part of "the System" and are, to some degree, complicit in its privileges and its abuses.

I'm a light-skinned Cherokee man; white and male privileges have benefited me enormously at the direct or indirect expense of those who don't have those privileges.

I didn't grow up on Cherokee land. My hometown is in the traditional territory of the Ute Nation, so I've benefited from the displacement of other

Why do we recognize Columbus Day? Maybe we can all observe what Columbus Day really stands for, what it says about the dark side of the American consciousness and how looking at the holiday honestly can help us rediscover the people and issues that are good in America: the richness, the beauty and the necessary diversity of the American experience.

Let's fight for the rights of those in our community, acknowledge the realities of our histories together — the darkness as well as the light — and take responsibility for them while working together to reverse the Columbian Legacy forever.



SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

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