

WHY DO THEY ALWAYS SAY "NO"  
WHEN YOU KNOW THEY MEAN "YES" ALL THE TIME?  
— THE JIM DANDIES  
"WHY DO THEY ALWAYS SAY 'NO?'"

I am floating in a glass bottom boat. I drift along over some small ponds.  
I can see the fish but I cannot join the fish. So I stare, wonderingly, at the  
strange life down there.

In a way, I am like some pompous god, remote yet interested in the  
doings of such creatures.

You are the fish.

I see you in my classes, I see the letters you write to the paper, I work  
with you and eat the same lousy burgers in the union.

I know your small concerns, what pisses you off.

But I am not one of you, and that's painfully clear.

Maybe it's the difference in our ages that separates us.

A girl I work with at the paper, talking about some friend or other (now  
I'm spreading gossip), said, disgust dripping from her pretty jaws, "She's  
dating a 30-year-old!"

That's a dainty way to put it, I thought.

Maybe it's my learning disability that keeps me at a cubit's remove from  
the life of the campus; every so often I hear some co-worker whispering  
about me that I don't remember his or her name.

They wonder why that is. How can I be so distant, so self-absorbed?

My social world at UNL has become an autistic and alienating  
experience. I'll be glad when it's over.

AGAIN! AGAIN!— A TELETUBBY, THE GAY ONE

A parody of the Big Purple Dinosaur's theme song jingles along nicely:

I love you. You love me.

Ho-mo-sex-u-al-it-y!

People think we're just friends

But we're really lesbians!

(Just once I'd like to see that magnificent carnivore take a bite out of  
one of those nauseating children. Starting with the head, like a chocolate  
Jesus.)

The interesting thing, to me, is that this parody appeared decades  
before Barney.

I first heard it chanted giddily by a girl jock in the boy's locker room in  
junior high (1979, if you want to know) with her best friend — a little fag-  
got if ever there was one, in his sock feet and tighty-whities.

They were holding hands and laughing hysterically. I think they must  
have just discovered one another, like a kitten discovers its image in a mir-  
ror.

Nothing in the world could convince me that their respective gender  
specifics were anything but genetic — they were gay long before they knew  
it themselves, and they knew it long before the rest of us had gotten much  
beyond calling them names.

There was nothing vague about it, they were each as God had made  
them, and it's really beautiful to see them, in memory, discovering them-  
selves, recognizing one another.

I can't imagine it was easy for either of them to come to terms with  
their ho-mo-sex-u-al-it-y in Lubbock, Texas, and I'm sure none of us  
made it any easier.

One thing for sure, they had to know themselves better than the rest of  
us who had more, and more contradictory, role models for our vaguely  
budding sexualities.

The song, and their frenzied chanting, gave them a sense of solidarity,  
served as a childish rallying point in defiance of a culture that wanted des-  
perately to press them into a heterosexual mold.

I think queer kids today have better queer role models, and that's good  
for them.

But I don't think anyone has to worry that their hetero-kids will grow  
up thinking they're gay. One or two consensual experiences with some  
guy's penis (from either orientation) ought to be enough to inform anyone  
of his or her own sexual orientation.

I SENSE A DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE. — OBI-WAN KENOBI

Cruciform: forming or arranged in a cross.

Negative Space: the shape of the space between objects

The cross as a metaphor, as a sign for something else, has the appear-  
ance of a junction of roads. An axis, the hub of a wheel.

The point of contact between planes at right angles. A meeting point.

It is here, at the crossroads, where we can meet, discuss things, make  
amends, agree to disagree.

We're going to continue to diverge, we're going to go our separate ways,  
we're never going to reach consensus.

But there must be a point, beyond matters of faith, political ideologies,  
private and public agendas, beyond even what we think are fundamental  
values — or even in the midst of all these — where we can make contact,  
come together, in the ground go our being, in our humanity, our ratio-  
nality, our creativity.

There must be a place, but damned if I can find it.

Maybe the cross is, in this sense, too, a myth, an idealized representa-  
tion of what might be, of a meeting place for humanity if only we knew  
where to find it.

Maybe by being invisible, by its failure to appear, it beckons us all the  
more strongly, as if, like the Christian cross, it gains power by being  
empty, by pointing out what isn't there.

Seeing what isn't there takes special eyes.

How do you develop this penetrating vision? Practice. Try it now.

INSERT NAIL HERE — TATTOOED (BOTH PALMS) ON A GOTH  
PUNK IN MINNEAPOLIS

My e-mail address is marqso@hotmail.com. Why not write and let me know  
what kind of job you think I'm doing.

I'm editing the opinion page this semester. I print the letters that fit, try to  
give everyone a voice.

I work closely with Neal Obermeyer, who draws the editorial cartoon — isn't  
he a hoot?

And I edit the columnists, which is an easier job than it sounds: I believe in  
the power of writing to teach you to write. One's own blunders are the best  
teachers.

But sometimes it feels like wrestling with a big ol' bag o' snakes: them  
columnists can have powerful egos — and punctuation skills that have atro-  
phied beyond use.

That's when I earn my meager paycheck.

Editing doesn't leave me a lot of time to write, drains the juju, if you know  
what I mean, but I try to keep a hand in, as you can see, just diddling out  
whatever comes to mind, hoping my pony knows the way home, as Tom  
Waits says.

I'm sure there are many people who read the Daily Nebraskan, who have  
some small writing aptitude, who feel underrepresented by their school  
paper.

Let me encourage you, if this describes you, to apply for a position as a DN  
columnist.

The job pays some ridiculous pittance, if that interests you, and provides a  
little notoriety for those who know how to use it.

Myself, I'm already world-famous in Lincoln, Nebraska — I don't think I  
could be any more famous unless I was catching a football on Saturdays, and  
a lot of good it's done me.

But there are other advantages:

You learn to write the only way I know how (by writing).

You overcome your fear of looking stupid (you will).

And, best of all, you get to take your place in a public forum as a public per-  
son with a public face.

To become, as the ancient Greeks used to say, a "good citizen."

I don't know if I'm a better citizen for my years of experience at the DN, but  
I hear my own voice joining the voices of others in a kind of dialogue that  
goes on and on and will continue long after I'm under the dirt — and it feels  
OK to me to be part of that.

MARK BALDRIDGE/DN

AT  
LARGE