

Sharks, violent oppression, political prisoners and urinal ads

So here it is.

After six years of whimsical opinioning, I am now afforded the luxury of a formal platform. Better still, one that may get read.

I mentioned this to a close friend who said — referring to a couple friends of mine who may or may not be as opinionated as me — “do us proud”.

Those words are kicking my ass right now.

Because, presented with the opportunity to say something worthwhile, I am uncertain of just what monumental truth it is I will share. On the surface, I have many ideas.

I pondered doing a bit about the situation that is gaining chaotic momentum in the former Indonesian colony of East Timor. It wasn't until the late-August vote for independence neared that international media attention was turned on to East Timor. Prior, the East Timorese were a silenced little island, violently oppressed by Indonesia, their colonial rulers. The silence that surrounded the greatest per capita genocide since World War II was an eerie one. Why would Canadian and American forces circle the globe fighting injustices in Zaire, Rwanda, Somalia or Kuwait, and ignore East Timor?

It is here that the eerie becomes dispicable. As it happens, the East Timorese people were being killed with bullets that were made in Canada and were fired by Indonesian soldiers from the barrels of guns made by American companies — carrying on a tradition of excellence that has existed for nearly a generation.

That was four years ago. We all know what's going on today, after too many years of silence, this tragedy has become an overnight media-frenzy. Overkill, I guess.

I also thought that I could use the space to comment on the

case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, a black civil-rights leader and member of the Black Panther Party who was framed in the death of a Philadelphia cop in 1982. Ironically enough, Mumia was a leading

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critic of Philadelphia police brutality, and still is despite his ever-tightening Death Row gag-order. Mumia went down on a confession he made to police that, interestingly enough, was not reported by the officers until more than two months after the incident. This case amounts to a real life, systemic assassination by the US government and judicial system right here on this continent, in the year nineteen-hundred and ninety-nine. The United States, a beacon of freethought, the democratic albatross, is going to summarily execute an innocent man.

But what Mumia needs is news coverage, and I decided another rant about the shattered myth of ‘the Land of the Free’ seemed played out. So I looked backwards.

As well, I was interested in dusting off an editorial that I wrote last year, one I turned into a news analysis because I was not yet allowed to editorialize. It was about bathroom ads, and how, because they appear at eye level over the urinals, a guy has no choice but stare at the tripe.

It blows my mind. There was stuff about how the bathroom used to be an oasis amid the sand dunes of consumerism, and there was a neat little anecdote about how impossible avoiding the ad was, options being (and think about these options real good), 1. Close your eyes, 2. Stare at the ceiling or 3. Staring beside you. Those aren't encouraging choices.

But I needed something fresh, because people have already accepted this final violation of

space. Acting as a vanguard for the cessation of toilet ads is futile. Something current was needed.

More recently, I got all fired up about a shark contest that was held at the harbour a couple Saturdays past. A hobby fish, the rules were starkly simple — anyone with a boat and fishing rod can sign up. The gaming begins at 8:30 a.m. and contestants must be back ashore — with or without their catch — by 5:30 p.m. Biggest shark takes home the glory.

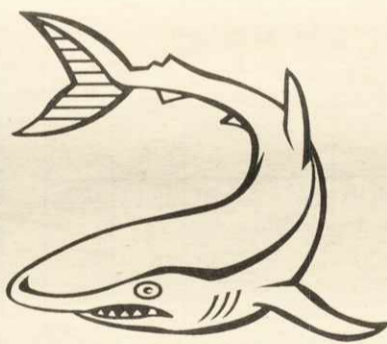
Ordinary enough, but here's the kicker: the event was endorsed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the governmentally appointed Father of the Maritimes.

The climax of the day went largely this way: The sharks were lifted by a small crane from the boat below to the dock, for weighing and gauging. The sharks were hung prominently, innards and all, before the audience of about 75 people, all the while the catcher shone proudly for prime photo-ops. And to top off an already festive day of sharking, the fish remains were, slightly less than ceremoniously and no longer in the name of science, dragged into a truck to be shipped off to a fish processing plant for their final injustice.

Yet, despite what seems to be good material — inspiring causes and notable happenings — I still have nothing concrete on which to write. I'm topical, I guess.

So it goes.

Jon Elmer



LETTERS

Bookstore scams

To the Editor,

Why is it the Dalhousie University bookstore is concerned with making a profit? How is it that both Michelle Lassaline, manager of the bookstore, and the DSU, who supposedly monitor businesses in the SUB, can justify marking up the price of a tool essential to education by 20-40 percent?

Textbooks are an undisputed necessity for all students at Dalhousie. To profit from their distribution is as ludicrous as charging students for the time they spend using the library's reference computers.

According to Ms. Lassaline, the bookstore “provide[s] a service for the students.” Students at Dalhousie not only pay tuition (and a high one at that), but they also pay dues to the student union. One would think that university and student union subsidization and the sale of “non-essential” items such as school supplies and Dalhousie merchandise would adequately cover the operating costs of the bookstore.

Ms. Lassaline also claims that higher prices are necessary to compensate for the loss of sales to online bookstores. Now really, how much could the university bookstore possibly be losing? The vast majority of students continue to endure what has become a fall tradition at Dalhousie — long lineups, high prices and a shortage of books. Besides which, common sense and microeconomics 1001 tell us that increased competition for a particular good should impel a business to lower, not raise, its prices to remain competitive.

Clearly, the University bookstore holds a near-monopoly on the textbook sales to Dalhousie staff and students; as such, it is an outrage that they are allowed to profit, in any way, from their position.

Textbooks are necessary and essential to my education. I am willing to pay for those goods, but I will not tolerate an attempt by a

subsidized student service to profit from my education. I demand that the university and the Student Union rectify this situation immediately.

With great anger and frustration,

Maggie Stewart

Poor taste

To the Editor,

I am writing in response to the “Varson” cartoon on the editorial page of the September 16th issue of *the Gazette*. The cartoon has a movie director first telling a woman's mother that he won't take advantage of her daughter and then trying to rip off her skirt, while screaming “show me the cunney.”

The joke just isn't funny. Not going to take advantage of her, oops, took advantage of her? Razor-sharp intellects your staff have.

Content? This is not a statement about Hollywood's objectification of women, it is a cartoonist demeaning a topic that people are passionate about by using the played out Jerry Maguire “show me the money” line. And maybe I'm not experienced, but I have never come across a cunney, or anything like a cunney before in my life.

Finally, and most basically important, is the fact that dude can't draw. Which, if I was in charge of new hirings, would be one of the main requirements for new cartoonists.

Why this cartoon for your second issue? Is this the best an entire campus can come up with?

I don't object to this simply because of the topic. I think that, by necessity, nothing should be above scrutiny. It's just that if you are going to tackle a serious subject, you need to offer something insightful.

If you can't, then stick to the inane. Controversial comedians and cartoonists are of value because they force us to reconsider how we perceive the society we live in. Varsons' cartoon forced me to reconsider picking up *the Gazette* again.

Brendan Murphy

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