

Letters to the Editor... Letters to the Editor...

GETTING GORGED

I am a Gannon student who lives closer to this college than mine.

You have a very beautiful campus, and you should be proud of it. I pay approximately \$15,000 a year in total costs to go to school. While you pay less than \$10,000 a year, you also expect to receive the best education and student services possible.

However, I feel that Behrend students are paying too much money just to eat a meal in the Wintergreen Cafe (The Gorge). This is not a complaint about the employees that work there, they do their best with what they are given. Rather administration has not chosen the best food service company to contract with or just have not set their prices fairly.

For example, Otis Spunkmeyer Cookies are three for a dollar at most Country Fair Stores and also at Gannon, they are over fifty cents each in the "Gorge" (The Wintergreen Cafe). Also, small container of yogurt is over a dollar, you could probably buy two at that price at Giant Eagle.

A great many of the students at Behrend are commuters, and several fast food places are less than two miles away. MORE of the commuters (possible customers) would eat at the gorge if the prices were competitive.

(MORE means more profit - hint - hint) Student Government should look into this, it's your responsibility!

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LURKING POISONS

At the end of the BBC adaptation of Robert Graves' historical novel "I, Claudius," the Roman emperor Claudius recognizes that the greed, cruelty and corruption of his time is so deep and unroutable, yet so repressed and hidden by the cloak of civility that he might as well play out the historical inevitability of his moment by allowing it to be seen. "Let all the poisons that lurk in the mud hatch out," he says, and they do.

One of the poisons lurking in the mud of our time hatched out in Alicia Hartman's column on AIDS, and it's just as well that we see it. What concerns me most about the feelings (and they're primarily feelings; there's very little in Ms. Hartman's piece that could be accused of anything as differentiated and sophisticated as thought) she expresses is that they're not rabidly off the wall or unusual.

On the contrary, I am afraid that Ms. Hartman speaks for a huge number of Americans. I suspect that many, if not most, students on our college campuses sometimes have feelings such as hers, but consider them inadmissible, very nearly outside the pale of civilized discourse, and so keep these feelings to themselves. It's probably good that we all see how moronic this position sounds when it gets externalized.

A friend who works in a local factory tells me that at his plant the workers are frank about AIDS: let those damned faggots die already, burn the corpses, and let's start over again with clean, decent people. It's dismaying to realize that this is the level of awareness displayed in middle America. It's unutterably depressing that a co-editor of a college newspaper shares the same ethic, based on

the same mind-boggling level of ignorance.

The errors in fact in Ms. Hartman's column, both direct and implied, are too numerous to mention. She is, in a perverse sense, an innocent. But hey, choices have consequences, and Ms. Hartman has chosen ignorance. That's her fault, her responsibility, and if the stakes are ever higher than she knew at the time, she'll deserve no mercy at her own hands. The price of innocent ignorance is death in Ms. Hartman's universe.

Mess around with drugs when you were young and stupid, did you? Too bad, you're dead. But she also likens contracting AIDS to the deepest forms of corruption, so she's got her bases covered. She compares contracting AIDS, through mistakes in judgment and unsafe behavior, with multiple murder.

I don't even know how to respond to that. I used to think that Ms. Hartman would perhaps have a future in speech-writing or activism for conservative causes, but she's so far out on this one that Rush Limbaugh wouldn't touch her with a dung fork.

The poison Ms. Hartman's column displays is the collectively mean-spirited heart of middle America in the 1990s. This is cruelty, plain and simple, the same mindset that dehumanizes, that wages war, that lets millions of people die in pain without help, that loads ovens and trains with bodies, that will probably, in its gigantic forms, sweep us from the face of the earth one day. Let all the poisons that lurk in the mud hatch out.

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STUDENT REACTION

I speak for many of my fellow students when I say that I was enraged by Alicia Hartman's article "If you're going to dance the dance, you have to pay the piper" in the Dec. 1, 1994 issue of The Collegian. While I do feel her argument has a valid point, it is narrow-minded and self-righteous in its approach. Not only is the article insensitively written, but it displays the author's own ignorance about the disease.

First, Alicia Hartman maintains that there are only three ways to contract AIDS: sexual activity, drug use and passing it on to unborn babies.

She states that if a person decides to engage in sexual activity and gets AIDS, then "it's their own fault."

She continues saying that if Pedro Zamora had not had promiscuous sex, then he would not have gotten AIDS. While this may be true, what she conveniently leaves out is that there is a large portion of people with AIDS who are neither drug users or promiscuous.

Has she forgotten about the thousands of married people who contracted the disease from their spouses? Also, let's not forget that you can get AIDS the very first time you have sex. There were plenty of virgins out there who got AIDS during their very first sexual encounter.

In any case, is personal blame really the issue here? Aren't we really discussing whether or not a person deserves to die for being a drug user or for being promiscuous? I admit that in this day and age, to have unprotected sex or to share needles is an ignorant, not to mention life-threatening thing to do. But by the same token, I do not feel that people deserve to

die for their ignorance. No one deserves to die from any disease. For many of these people, the only crime they committed was sleeping with someone they loved.

In the article, Ms. Hartman complains that our nation puts too much emphasis and research into AIDS. Call me crazy, but just maybe this is because millions of men, women and children are dying from AIDS in this country alone every year. I don't think it has dawned on her that she is not immune, no matter how "innocent" she deems herself. She seems very glib about the fact that her aunt's brother suffers from AIDS. I wonder if she would care just a little bit more if she was the one suffering. Would she only recognize a need for AIDS research if it directly affected her?

Finally, I would like to address her comments about Pedro Zamora. She states that she doesn't care that Pedro died. She went as far to say that one reason people made a big deal out of his death was because he was a "TV Star." Well, anyone who has ever watched MTV's "The Real World" knows that after weeks of seeing seven strangers live their lives in front of you, everyone on the show becomes less of a stranger. Many people, by the end of the season, felt they knew Pedro. For the first time, AIDS had a face. A sweet, intelligent, funny and angry face. So when he died, the MTV audience felt the loss.

Pedro did not go on the show to be a TV star. What good would that have done him? He did it primarily to broaden his educational audience. If it took someone like Pedro who was in the public eye to make people feel and care about the effects of AIDS, then so be it.

There are probably hundreds of AIDS educators in the world who go unnoticed. Pedro was just the only one we felt we knew. Besides that, even if Pedro's illness was self-afflicted, at least he owned up to his mistakes. That's more than I can say for most of us. His life was an act of bravery, and I will not condemn him or judge him for mistakes that any one of us can make.

Personally, I have lost a relative to AIDS. He was a good person and I loved him. I do feel that education is the key to eliminating or at least reducing the spread of AIDS. However, this education includes admitting to yourself that no matter what kind of lifestyle you lead, you

are at risk and should be aware. Being judgmental and self-righteous about it won't get us anywhere. AIDS affects us all.

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INSENSITIVE COLUMN

Regarding the rather insensitive column of Dec. 1, 1994, I feel compelled to respond. As an educator, I find Ms. Hartman's attitude toward those with AIDS frightening, and it demonstrates that we have only scratched the surface in our efforts to educate society about AIDS. AIDS is not a problem affecting a particular group of people. AIDS is a disease that we are all living with every day.

The people Ms. Hartman so callously spoke of in her column are human beings. They are not nameless, faceless statistics. They breathe, feel, laugh and cry in many of the same ways we all do. They are also loved by their families and friends, just as Ms. Hartman probably is too. However, because they "played the game," they are either already dead, or will soon die a painful death. To coldly dismiss their lives based on actions we do not understand is simply wrong.

I am wondering if Ms. Hartman's insensitivity carries over into other segments of the population. Does she, for example, have no sympathy for the chronic smoker who dies of lung cancer or the junk food eater who dies of a heart attack? These are voluntary behaviors just as having unprotected sex is voluntary (except in cases of rape). Does Ms. Hartman blame these people for their fates just as she blames those with AIDS?

It is easy to simply write off those to whom we cannot relate and this uncaring attitude transcends the subject of AIDS. This attitude is at the very core of racism, sexism and many other ills troubling our society. The challenge is not in taking the easy way out, but in addressing the problems that face our generation with empathy and compassion for the one thing we all have in common: being human.

Nancy Spriggs  
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