

## THE BEHREND BEACON

published weekly by the students of Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

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**•Letter Policy•**

The *Beacon* encourages letters to the editor. Letters should include the address, phone number, semester standing and major of the writer. Writers can mail letters to behrcoll2@aol.com. Letters must be received no later than 5 p.m. Sunday for inclusion in that week's issue.

## A View From The Lighthouse Reality loopholes

We have all heard about reality TV: "Survivor", "Big Brother", "The Mole", "Temptation Island". And, of course, let's not forget "The Real World" that really isn't — and perhaps the show we have to blame for all the rest.

The media, critics, sociologists, psychologists, and whateverologists have all gone to the edge and back analyzing these programs and explaining to us simpletons how unlike reality these shows really are. And we get it. They aren't real; they are the creations of some television executive types who decide how to best entertain us and pull in the almighty Dollar.

And that's all well and good. The majority of the population isn't fooled into thinking "The Real World" is the real world. But are there other things we consider real that really aren't?

Are there things on television and in the newspapers that are presented as reality but really aren't? Do you really have to ask?

Let's take all these shark attacks for example. Oh my goodness, it isn't safe to swim in the ocean anymore. Put one foot in the water and you're dead meat. Sharks lurking under every white cap. Sharks, sharks, sharks. This is the worst season for shark attacks in years, if not ever.

Well, not quite. The fact is, it's not any worse than it usually is; there were just as many shark attacks last year as there have been this year. Actually, if we want to be accurate (which we do), there have been fewer shark attacks this year than last. According to the International Shark Attack File that is maintained by the Florida Museum of Natural History, there were 79 confirmed shark attacks in the world in 2000. As of Sept. 3, there have been only 49 reported attacks this year.

Furthermore, since we are doing our research, while the number of attacks per year has steadily increased, the percentage of people being attacked has stayed pretty much the same for the past 10 years. In other words, there are more people in the water to get attacked. That doesn't necessarily mean shark attacks are a bigger problem.

So! What's all the hype about? Sure, we want to know where the really unsafe places to swim/surf/jet ski/skinny dip are. But why is it a bigger deal this year than last year? Why are we more worried about jumping in the water now? Because we have been led to believe it's worse.

If the media hadn't told us there was a problem, we wouldn't be so concerned. Sure, it is important to know there is a risk and to know the precautions. That's where the media comes in handy; indeed, to keep the people informed is the primary purpose



of the media. But there is a line between informing us and whipping us into a feeding frenzy (pun intended).

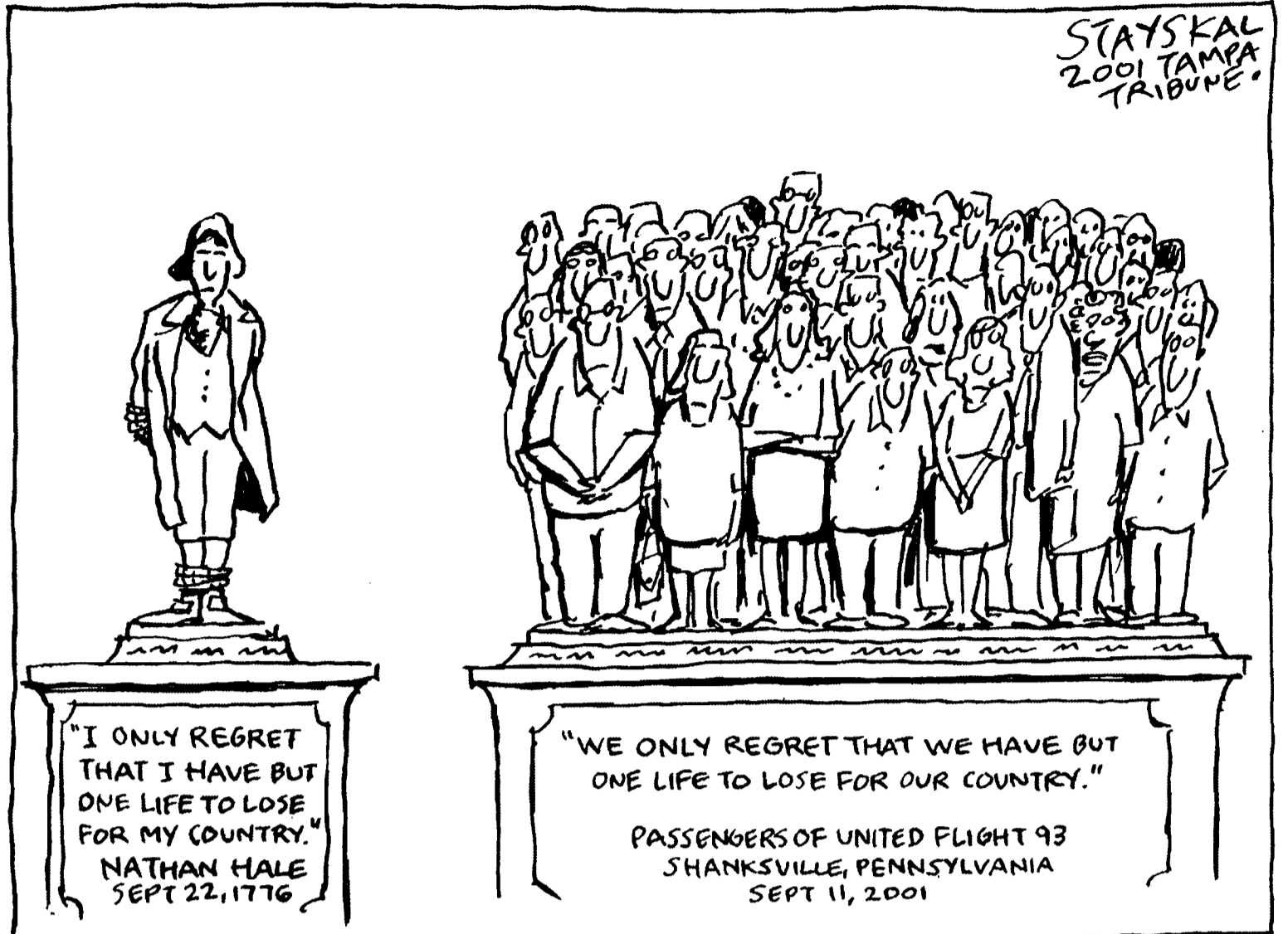
"So what?" you ask, rather bored by this time and rapidly being distracted by the latest reality show on the tube. Well, doesn't it bother you in the least to know that someone else can completely determine not only what you know, but how you think about it?

It's good you know about the shark problem. But why do you think it's a problem? Did you come up with that thought on your own, or was it implied elsewhere and you just adopted it? Just because there were a few shark attacks doesn't mean we've reached national disaster phase. But if you mention the words "shark attacks" to John Q. American on the street, odds are he'll reply, "Yeah, they're a real problem this year."

We communications majors had an introduction to this that the general population may not have had. Let us educate you (and show off to our profs who will be determining whether or not we graduate). This phenomenon is called media framing. Whatever the media writes about is what you care about. There you go, four years of classes and lectures narrowed down to one sentence. Now all you need to know is the model of communication and the COMBA degree is yours.

But seriously, if the campus newspaper didn't write about issues on campus, would you still be concerned about them? Would you even know about them? Though it may sometimes seem hard to believe (especially for the paper's staff), people do occasionally read the paper and get fired up about things that are mentioned. But if they were never mentioned, would anyone have a reaction? Interesting, yes. Provocative...

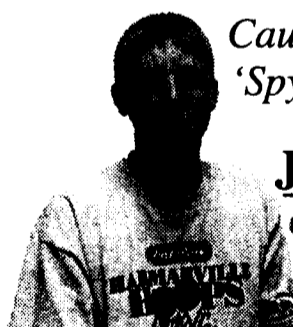
Now, we aren't saying you should start burning newspapers and throwing away televisions. And maybe it seems hypocritical for the newspaper to be pointing out the problems in the media. But just give it some thought the next time you find yourself reacting strongly to what you hear. What you are hearing may be technically true, but there are always loopholes to reality.



## Be in the paper somewhere besides the Police and Safety Reports.

Send letters, both positive and negative, to the editor!  
**behrcoll2@aol.com**

## Fair-weather patriotism



Caught in the 'Spyder' Web

**Jason Snyder**  
editorial columnist

It's been a roller-coaster ride of emotions for most Americans the past two and a half weeks in trying to deal with the cowardly acts that hit our country on Sept. 11. For me, the ride is taking different turns every day in trying to understand what happened. But one thing has been able to keep this ride smooth for me, and that's the constant reminder that America is strong and unified when we need it most.

A lot of critics see Americans as having what they call "fair-weather patriotism." This is the idea that Americans are only patriotic at times of war or conflict. And the sudden purchasing and waving of American flags is a good indicator that this is true. But it's also a good indicator that Americans understand when it's a good time to be divided on issues and when it's a good time to be united in beliefs.

You could consider me a "fair-weather patriot." I must admit, however, that I am probably a little more patriotic than many Americans during times of peace. I have an incredible respect for the men and women who came before me who gave this land freedom, and the servicemen and servicewomen who have fought to maintain it.

I'm one of those Americans who gets fired up when protests involve the burning of our flag. I question how

people who are protesting for equality in America can burn the exact symbol that represents "liberty and justice for all." To me, the flag represents what America and the world should be, even though we don't always follow these principles.

It is the lack of these principles in our government that turns me off to the idea of American patriotism. Our Constitution tells us our rights and freedoms that we must maintain in the U.S. But it doesn't tell us the obligations that we have to the rest of the world.

The Constitution was written in a time when America was new and not nearly as powerful as it is today. Today, America has different obligations to weaker countries, given we are the most powerful nation in the world.

I've learned a lot in the past week about very poor decisions made by our government when it comes to foreign policy. I've learned a lot in the past year about how America doesn't always defend the principles that we preach here on our soil.

We haven't always been a protector of democracy. In fact, we have been known to overthrow democratically elected officials. We never did aid South Africa in its period of apartheid. We had the power to turn South Africa into a country with democratic policies. Instead, we used South Africa's corrupt government to aid us in our "war" against communism. It wasn't until after the Cold War concluded, that the U.S. aided in ending South Africa's apartheid.

Do you ever wonder why we were once allies with Iran, Afghanistan and

Saddam Hussein's Iraq, and now we are not? We were allies when we needed these countries to protect our own interests, even though these countries have never followed the principles that we claim we protect.

It has become quite evident to me that the American government has always fought for what will benefit this country, instead of fighting for what would make this world more democratic.

Senator Dick Gephardt captured my thoughts perfectly this past Friday in a speech that he made to Congress. He is the first U.S. government official to blame the devastation of these attacks on the American government. He asked how the government could allow this to happen to its people. It was the first speech made since the attacks that made my eyes water.

But don't get me wrong. It wasn't the first time that my eyes have watered since that fateful day. No person, no family or friend should have to endure what happened on Sept. 11. And that statement includes countries outside of the United States as well. This world needs to begin taking a new approach to how we treat one another. And it needs to start in the home of freedom and democracy, the United States.

Even though I understand that America isn't perfect, I still stand behind our country today. I stand behind our president who vows to end terrorism. I stand behind our military that will have to carry out a mission that we have never fathomed before.

But before we retaliate, we have to make sure that we are sticking to our principles. We can't retaliate until we have a proven enemy. And we can't kill more innocent people. If we do, it will defeat our purpose. We will become the terrorists, killing innocent people just as

the hijackers killed ours.

There is a common misconception among some Americans who see our government and the people who support it as being reckless in our need for retribution. These critics keep reminding us that 90% of Americans want retribution even though we don't really know our enemy. What these critics don't mention is the fact that 85% of Americans don't want to retaliate unless we have proof that we know the enemy.

It's numbers like that that make me proud to be an American. We have just suffered a loss like never before. In one swift blow, America lost what will end up being more than 7,000 innocent people. And despite our anger, despite our sadness and despite our need for answers, Americans don't want retribution until we have proof of our enemy. As arrogant as I might sound, you won't find restraint like that in any other country.

Today, I drive throughout Erie and see stores with signs that read, "God Bless America," and "United We Stand." I look at the houses that I pass and see American flags flying proudly. I've attended events that have thousands of people singing "America the Beautiful," waving flags and holding up signs that support America's cause to end terrorism. I see America at its best.

You can call it "fair-weather patriotism" if you want. Or you can understand that America's freedom gives us the right to disagree on issues, but America's faith in freedom gives us a greater cause worth uniting for.

Snyder's column appears every three weeks.