

# A final note from the rookie

by Quinn Solem

During the past semester I have written this column for *The Collegian*, using it as a public forum to air some of my views about the world as I see it. I have said some truly ugly things; I called Behrend students slugs, George Bush a liar, inferred that most politicians are swine of the lowest order, stated that all journalists are depraved, made fun of the president's wife, dumped on the arms industry...

In other words I had a pretty good time.

Not many people in this world get a chance to vent their twisted, anti-social sentiments in print without being physically restrained, or at least censored by narrow minded Fascists who view the First Amendment as a sinister loop hole for communists, liberals, flag burners, atheists, gay activists, drug addicts, or anti-American anarchists seeking to destroy "Our Way of Life."

None of the ideas I have written as columns for this paper has ever been altered by the editor, Todd J. Irwin, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Simmons. I was never called into the Dean's office and threatened with

dismissal for "politically incorrect" thinking. No angry mobs chased me through the Reed building with torches and pitchforks screaming "Kill the beast!"

For good or evil, I was allowed to say what I wanted to say. This is not the case at many college newspapers, which are carefully reviewed by the administration's faculty advisor prior to publication. Articles that might subvert students, offend parents, or damage the image of the school never get printed. I have personally seen this happen, and if you think I am exaggerating, pick up a paper from one of the local colleges and try to find an article that opposes the administration's position on any topic.

Withholding opinion and information is the most vile form of censorship where ever you are, but especially in a democracy like ours, where a well informed public is essential for good decision making. *The Collegian* does not withhold anything, and my ravings during the past semester bear grim testament to that fact.

This will be my last column for *The Collegian*, unless Todd J.

Irwin wants to start paying me for my labor (and we *can* make a deal Todd, if the money is right). I am being sent away from this place with a pat on the head and a diploma in hand, to seek my fortune and fame in the wide spaces of the world. Graduation presents and gifts of money or jewels can be sent to me C/O *The Collegian*, Behrend College. And I'd like to thank everyone for the thousands of cards and letters I've already received...

But forget the tearful parting for now. In January I will be gone from the noble pages of this paper forever. So will Rob Prindle, the life long defender of "Erieism," (a militant religious sect), and the other columnist for *The Collegian*.

This leaves a big hole in the paper for Todd when the next semester begins. If he doesn't get some people into his office who are willing to write inflammatory columns for the paper, he'll have to go out on another "recruiting mission," which is a frightening thought.

I was the last victim of Todd's unorthodox "recruiting" methods, and the mere mention of that horrible ordeal still causes me to

cringe in horror. He had been calling me on the phone about 15 times a day for weeks, demanding hard copy and delivering savage threats. I started screening my calls with my phone machine, and took to wearing disguises. It was terrible.

Eventually he showed up at my house. It was around 3:00 a.m. early one Sunday morning. He was dressed in military fatigues, and I could tell by the smell of his breath that he'd been drinking industrial cleaning solvents again.

"I've come for the article," he snarled, "and it had better be double-spaced, with all the names spelled correctly and verified."

I just need a few more days to get it together, Todd. Honest, I'll have it in by Wednesday morning.

"I've had enough of your stalling," he hissed, pulling a razor sharp steel lay-out ruler from his combat boot.

No! Anything but that. What do you want me to do?

"Something controversial," he said, his eyes narrowing into slits. "Why not insult the student body?"

But I *like* the students at

Behrend.

"Then what about President Bush? Or better yet his wife," he shouted, his face contorting horribly.

They're so kind and gentle. I couldn't.

"You'll do what you're told," he screeched, menacing me with the ruler and rolling his unfocused, bloodshot eyes.

O.K., O.K. Just give me a moment to think.

"Never mind that, just take a few gulps of this," he snapped, pulling a quart bottle of cleaning fluid from his hip pocket...

The rest is history. I wound up writing all kinds of demented gibberish under the influence of powerful industrial chemicals, but I managed to avoid being mutilated beyond recognition by a hard nosed editor with no tolerance for delay.

So as of this printing my job is up for grabs. So is Rob's.

If you are interested in becoming a writer for *The Collegian*, why not drop on by the office and have a long talk with good ole' Todd.

Take it from me, it's a lot better then having him come looking for you.

# Swan Song from an old timer

by Rob Prindle

*I'm accustomed to a smooth ride / or maybe I'm a dog who's lost its bite. I don't expect to be treated like a fool no more. I don't expect to sleep through the night. Some people say a lie's a lie's a lie / But I say shy / Why deny the obvious child?*

-Paul Simon

"The Obvious Child" From "Rhythm of the Saints"

So I've been asking everyone I know. I've been asking what advice I should give in the last column of my college career. I asked my friends, "What's the best advice I've given you?" I got some interesting answers.

One friend said "tell people that once they graduate from college they should stay away. Tell them not to come back and visit like those people did after high school. Those dinks just look like they don't have anything better to do."

Another said "Get rid of the damn DOS shell that comes with DOS 4.x. It sucks."

Still another said "Tell people that just thinking that something is important isn't enough. Tell people that they have to get out and take a stand for what they believe."

One professor suggested I remind students that they are a major part of the problem when it comes to lifeless classes and lifeless teachers. Teachers can only teach what the mass of

students wants to learn. And if the mass wants to blindly take notes for 45 minutes a day then regurgitate them into little fill in the dots on answer sheets so they believe they've learned something, then that's what they get.

ALL OF THAT IS GOOD ADVICE. I believe in all of it. But none of it clicked with me, if you know what I mean. So I asked myself the same question I'd asked my friends. "What's the best advice I'd ever gotten?" The answer came fast and clear.

Four years ago, on December 7, syndicated columnist Sydney Harris died. I should say that I never really liked the guy's columns. They were usually full of the ultra spiritual-be good to your family-don't swear in church-don't kick cats just because they are different than you and me type of goody-goody rambling. That stuff always depresses me.

But I read it faithfully each day for the same reason I read George Will or Dear Abbey or any opinion column I can get my hands on. Because no matter how knee-jerk-jerky it is, you never know where you're going to hear something you've never thought of before.

When the local newspaper started running essays from Harris' last book in place of his column, I read one that I hope I will never forget. It was titled "Ambiguity."

Harris wrote that a college student once asked him what the most important lesson he'd learned was. The columnist replied, "How to accept ambiguity and live with it." He continued, "What I meant was learning how not to be frozen into one attitude toward events that happen in the world, to myself or to others.... We can do much, but not all; the task is to do as much as we can and to accept what comes after that."

I was a freshman then and that advice couldn't have come at a better time. The thought that a I could keep and lobby hard for my own convictions and still be able to keep the necessary distance from them to be able to see them for what they are: Just ideas that are subject to constant evaluation.

I realize it is not good to be so open minded that just anything can crawl in, in fact, I believe that a person should fight hard to defend his or her beliefs. But that person must not ignore logic when defending beliefs. In other words: fight as hard as you can for what you believe, but don't lie to yourself to do it.

Harris made me understand that there is more than just my side to every issue. So, I do as much as I can and then accept what comes after that. Getting people to change their minds isn't as important as pushing an idea which has been festering in the dark out into the light of debate.

You get a chance to do stuff

like that in college. You get a chance to try on any opinion to see if it fits. You get to stay up all night talking about the meaning of life, or the meaning of vector analysis, or the meaning of vanilla ice cream for that matter. What ever you feel is important. I'm not so sure you get those same opportunities in the world that exists away from college. I'm not sure you don't just get too busy with pay raises and mortgages and marital bliss. So, the choice is yours:

STUDENTS: you can either sit in class and allow yourself to think that learning is memorization and that life can be broken down into Roman numeral outlines, or you can use this time to figure out how you will contribute to the world. You can get through college as efficiently and quickly as possible, or you can fight a little bit to see if there is anything to be gotten behind the text book facade.

PROFESSORS: you can either go on teaching the same way you have been since you were a T.A., or you can take the time to keep learning yourself. You can keep telling yourself "kids just don't want to learn so why should I bother," or you can take classes on things you don't know, just so you can remember what it's like to be on the other side of the desk.

ADMINISTRATION: you can keep pretending the construction is the golden path that leads to a quality university, or you can concentrate on the people and the product of education. You can keep pushing good teachers to do research and good researchers to teach, or you can allow people to do what they are good at so students aren't hurt by lousy teachers or by good teachers who don't have the time to teach. You can keep trying to prove that the school is perfect, or you start making it better.

I truly do not know which combination of those many diverging paths leads to the best place, but I know which ones I have and would take. The point is simply to put enough energy into testing your own values.

There are so many good things about this campus. I've met so many good people, had so many fine classes, spent so many long nights talking about so many wonderful things. But good things take care of themselves. The things that don't work are the things that need the energy. And this school and this world need a lot of repairmen.

So, thanks for everything and I'll see you in a few years when the administration begs me to come back to be part of the speaker series titled "YEAH, RIGHT"

Love,  
Rob