

Condom parody didn't warrant firing en masse

HELP WANTED: Replacements sought for 33-member student newspaper staff. People who make jokes about condoms need not apply. If interested, contact Viterbo College, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Hah hah hah, right? Very funny, and sadly, very true.

Last week, 33 student journalists from this small private college were unceremoniously dumped on their keisters. The reason? The staff ran a parody about using condoms.

Such parodies are a staple of college newspapers. It allows student journalists the chance to go a little crazy. After all, in the real world, journalism can become dry and stale unless you happen to work for *Spy* or *National Lampoon*. The opportunities to press the boundaries of tasteful journalism don't come around very often, and college newspapers frequently take advantage of the situation.

It is likely the Viterbo College newspaper staff was trying to shock the administration. The parody seemed harmless — one joke suggested people should wear condoms on their heads to ward off the flu. Hardly the stuff purges are made of.

The administration didn't take it that way, and clearly overreacted. What was done to the students was undeniably wrong.

Yes, it is a private school, and yes, it was well within its legal rights to fire the journalists. But that isn't the issue. After the purge, Viterbo College adopted a new rule, which forbids the student newspaper from publishing obscenity, or showing disrespect to the school's Roman Catholic character.

Those are pretty broad parameters between which a multitude of things could be placed. What, exactly, would be considered obscene? Would criticisms of the Catholic church be tolerated?

Bear in mind this is no critique of the Catholic faith. Freedom of religion means people have the right to choose what they believe in. However, slamming the door on debate and analysis is not only wrong, but dangerous. And that is exactly what the Viterbo College administrators have done.

Without an unencumbered editorial voice, a newspaper is hardly worth its name.

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The *Oregon Daily Emerald* will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community.

Letters to the editor must be limited to no more than 250 words, legible, signed and the identification of the writer must be verified when the letter is submitted.

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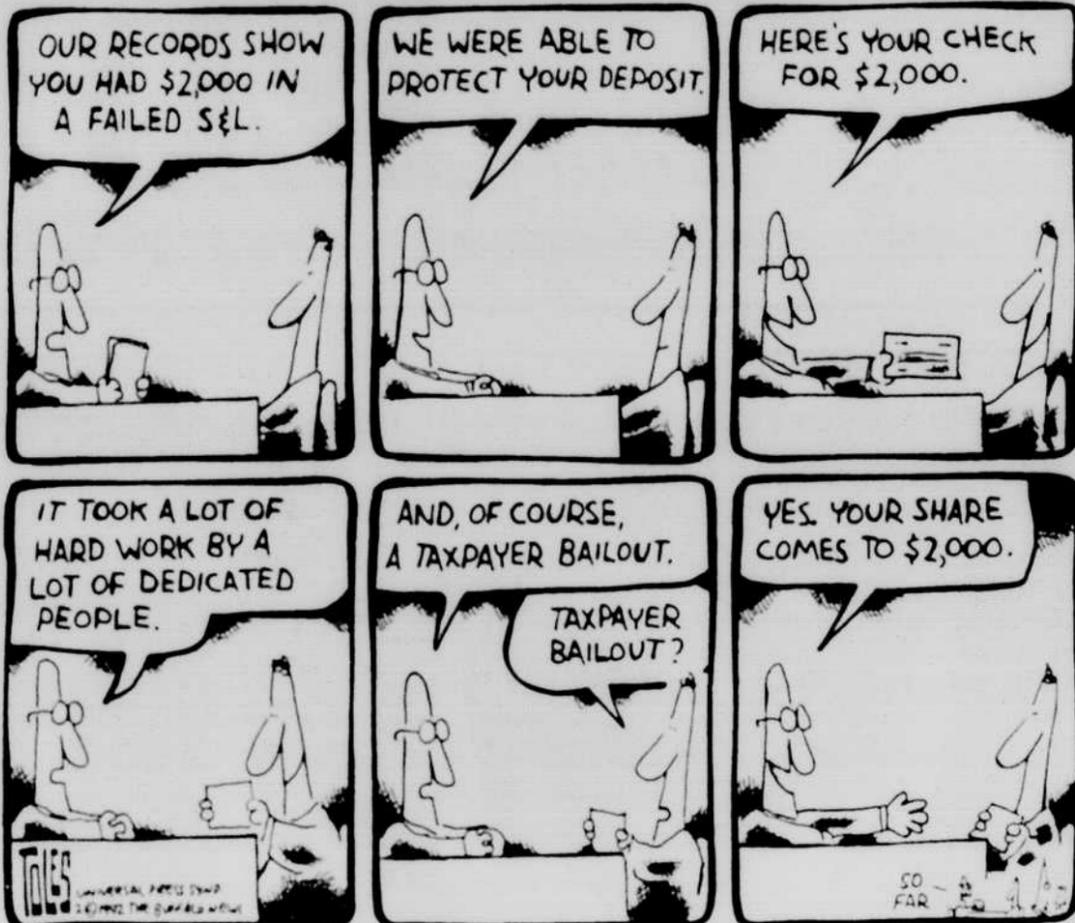
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OPINION

Can I get the Mercedes in red?



THE FINE PRINT

BY DON PETERS

A few weeks ago, I wrote a column defending smoker's rights.

The response, needless to say, was not exactly in my favor. In fact, the letters generally told me to enjoy the last cancer-filled years of my life. I knew the column would generate some response, but outright hatred was not expected.

However, those good people who were so worried about my health can now breathe a little easier (pun intended). On Thursday, Feb. 27 at 10 p.m., I gave up smoking.

Now before the anti-smoking zealots cry victory, I have something to say.

You weren't the reason. Did I quit because of health concerns? Do I have trouble walking up stairs, need oxygen on the short trips to class, etc?

Nope. Why then? I quit smoking for purely financial reasons.

Let me explain. As a college student, I am on a limited budget. When rent, tuition, books, miscellaneous bills, food, beer, golf and the other necessities of life are subtracted from my meager paycheck, there is little left over for entertainment reasons.

Since I like to live life to its fullest, I decided cigarettes hampered my jetsetting existence. To prove my point here's a little personal accounting, boiled down for simplicity, negating effects of inflation and other such economic terms I know nothing about.

First, the cost of a pack of Marlboro Light 100s (my cigarette of choice) is roughly \$2.20. For simplicity's sake, we'll make it \$2.25.

At 365 days a year (excluding leap years), smoking a pack a day would cost me \$821.25 per annum.

According to the 1991 *Information Please Almanac*, the average person in my age, gender demographic group can expect to live to the ripe old age of 73.4 years, which means I will be here for about 52 more years. Total savings by quitting smoking — a whopping \$42,705.

That's a lot of cash. Now that I am \$42,705 richer, I need to decide what to spend it on.

The home that came closest to matching my financial windfall was in the Monday *Register-Guard* classifieds, which described the Springfield house as a "cutie, older 2 bedroom home in a nice neighborhood. Single garage." Asking price was \$44,900.

But you know, with the recession and all, I think I can drive 'em down.

However, I have never been much for houses. Cars — now there's something you can blow large amounts of cash on.

The most expensive car I could find in the same classifieds section was a 1990 Mercedes 300E sedan with 19,800 miles on it. The owners wanted \$41,500.

Hey, who wants a used car anyway, right? So I called David Ferebee, the Mercedes manager at Hutchins Imported Motors Inc. in Springfield and asked him what my \$42,705 would get me.

Ferebee said he could put me in a brand new, bare-bones 190 2.3 Mercedes for only \$30,200, leaving me quite a bit left over for the Alpine CD player, air-conditioning and sun roof.

I wanted to blow the whole wad. Pressing further, I found out I could get either a 1992 300E or 300 diesel for a little more than what I had, but Ferebee assured me "a deal could be made."

That Mercedes would look real good parked in my driveway. I asked Ferebee whether he could get me into a '92 300E.

"Sure," he replied. "But first we would need a credit report."

Credit report. Oh well, so much for financing.

Those are just two of the many things I can afford now that I've kicked the habit. For example, I can buy approximately 4,274 12-packs of Top-Flite XL golf balls (on sale), or pay my rent for the next 18.98 years.

The opportunities are limitless.

Sure, quitting smoking has given me a large chunk of cash, but it hasn't been easy. In fact, it has been about as much fun as having my toenails ripped out by a rabid gorilla.

The first few hours were easy, but by the time I had reached the 20-hour sans smoking mark, I was ready to sell my sister to a Bodouin prince for a single Camel unfiltered.

Friday, up in the *Emerald* office, was a real joy. Full of nervous energy, I had to do something. So I cleaned out my desk; a move so extraordinary some staff members questioned whether my body has been taken over by a space alien with a neatness fetish.

For sanity reasons, I have not quit smoking cold turkey. That sort of thing is only for masochists. However, I have quit buying packs, which means the only cigarettes I get comes from begging them off friends.

That source should be drying up very soon. Nothing annoys a smoker more than a trying-to-quit smoker bumming from them.

So as the one-week anniversary approaches, I have time to ask just one small favor. If any of you should see a slightly crazed, nicotine-craving editorial editor come toward you, don't be alarmed. Just toss him a cigarette.

If you do, I'll leave quietly. I promise.

Don Peters is an editorial editor for the Emerald.