

PERSPECTIVES

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Just simplify



DIARY OF A MALCONTENT

MICHAEL J. KLECKNER

I was allowed to spend time in the presence of two dignitaries Tuesday, and from start to finish it was rewarding. I moved from awe to confusion to understanding in the course of nine hours. Now I hope I can synthesize the lessons and make them a part of my daily routine.

I began Tuesday morning by walking over to University President Dave Frohnmayer's office, as I was the lucky winner of a Student Alumni Association contest to spend the day with the president. I had coffee and talked with Frohnmayer, and I began to see the mind-numbing assortment of duties he undertakes every day.

From legislative matters to higher-education journals, Fanconi Anemia updates to the latest campus fracas, Frohnmayer has to shift gears at a moment's notice. He must move from presiding over a ribbon-cutting ceremony dedicating a new building or honoring a late, great scholar to grappling with big-picture questions of how the Oregon Progress Board (which Frohnmayer sits on and which develops and monitors benchmarks of Oregon's social public policy goals) should handle new legislation aiming to change the structure of the group.

As we sat in his office and he described his standard day to me, Frohnmayer pointed to a large stack of University Awards — to be given out Saturday during Family

Weekend — on his desk awaiting his signature.

I began to ponder the complex labyrinth Frohnmayer must navigate every day, but I was interrupted by the TV cameras that set up to shoot the requisite photo ops. Frohnmayer was no less at home here in the artificial light, taking the opportunity to eloquently pump the school, to explain the necessity of adequate state funding for higher education and to describe the way the University gives the state economy a 5-to-1 return on its dollar. And the whole time, he was signing those University Awards, occasionally interrupting his patter to remark that he knew one or another of the recipients.

I always feel as if I am navigating my own labyrinth. I am focused on a career and a goal, but I don't buy it 100 percent. I take classes, I get good grades, I work full-time, I engage in extracurricular activities and maintain some semblance of a life. Add to that the emotions, needs, desires and frustrations of our strangely disconnected postmodern life, and I wonder how I am able to function at all. I certainly don't have the effortless flow, the ability to deftly step from one gig to another, that Frohnmayer puts on as easily as his glasses. And I worry even more about developing a sense of peaceful contentment; how can I build a full career into a deep sense of inner happiness? I wonder what I need to do now in my life.

I left Frohnmayer's office in the afternoon to see the spiritual leader of Tibet, live in concert. By 5:30 p.m., I was nestled on my bench at the very peak of the back wall of Portland's Memorial Coliseum. Just before 6 p.m., I started to cry as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama came onstage, bowing and smiling repeatedly. I was still confused about my path-

ward effortless multi-tasking, and I thought perhaps this 66-year-old monk could help.

Then the Dalai Lama began to speak, and I was filled with clarity. It really is very simple.

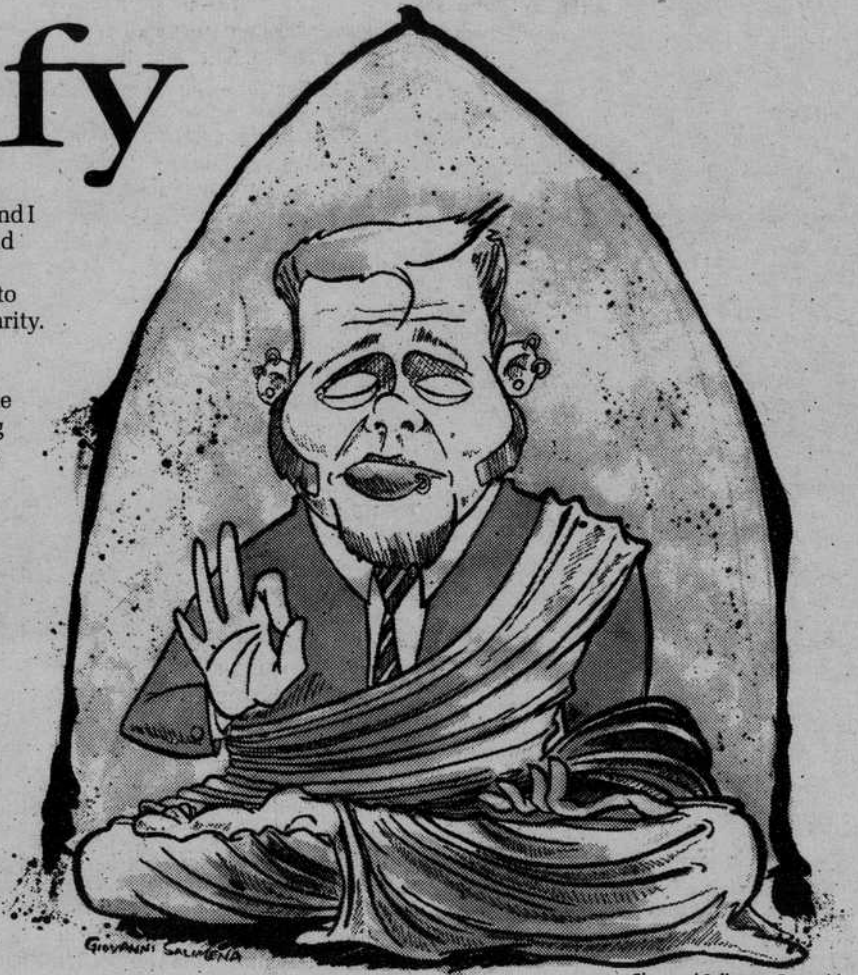
All of the trappings of our modern Western life are not the point. A career track and being able to multi-task isn't the key. National identity, race and gender, the Dalai Lama said, "are secondary. The important thing is humanity."

If we aren't content, if we are confused or unhappy, he said, it isn't because we're lacking material things or a better career. The 20th century saw the greatest expansion of material goods in human history, but it was also the bloodiest century ever, the Dalai Lama said. Obviously, we are lacking something else.

"We need to pay more attention to deeper human values," he said. "If we combine our brain and our heart, we can overcome man-made problems."

The Dalai Lama is a joyous, unassuming man. He laughed and giggled constantly, belying his stature as one of the world's most important voices in discussions of global disarmament and international relations. He stressed the need for people to reconnect with values — compassion, contentment and self-discipline — and to reconnect with other people.

"All parts of the world is part of yourself," he said in slightly shaky English. The modern world is totally interdependent, he explained. We rely on each other for resources, for products and for culture. Our reliance demands that we "take care of



Giovanni Salimena Emerald

others' interests. That's the reality," he said. "So actually, taking care of others is taking care of oneself."

The Dalai Lama specifically criticized Western material culture. "Your lifestyle should be more contented," he said. "There is too much consumed. Moralistically, I think this is not right."

I was amazed all evening by the sincerity and simplicity of his message. It seems that the greatest humans ever — the ones who understand peace, enlightenment, joy and compassion — have always had a very simple message. Love each other. Eliminate hate and fear from yourself. Be compassionate. Be happy with what you have and

who you are.

As I rode home from Portland at 2 a.m., I realized that being active and engaged in public policy and leadership may be important. It may be rewarding. But it won't make me content with who I am. Only by continuing to develop my spirit will I achieve peace. After that, I can worry about careers and shifting gears from one moment to the next. Although once I'm content, material accomplishment might not seem that important.

Michael J. Kleckner is the editorial editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at opededitor@journalist.com.

Letters to the editor

Let's stop date rape, not insult the victims

Charles G. Haller II, shame on you for sarcastically equating your drunken stupors with the possibility of a drug-induced date rape situation ("Is every unwise choice a drugging and raping?", ODE, May 14). Since you and I are not the judge nor jury in the matter and are only partially informed, we need to be careful at drawing conclusions of "what actually happened" and how that relates to our personal experiences. Instead we need to focus on the intent of the article:

- Date rape happens.
- Sometimes drugs are used to facilitate date rape.
- What can a survivor do if she or he thinks this might have happened to her/him?
- Inform readers that you need to act expeditiously given the life span of the drug in the body.
- Inform readers about House Bill 2353, regarding penalties for drug-induced sex assaults.

I am disappointed also by your competitive and dualistic/debate-oriented approach. Although our culture values competition and debate skills, I believe it perpetuates systems of oppression.

For example, you choose to find (or create) a hole in the narrative of the article, thus drawing attention away from the main issues of the article. In a collaborative approach, instead of sarcastically cutting someone down, you might have shown some interest in fixing the social problems at the core of these issues.

Lisa Foisy
 director
 ASUO Women's Center

'Coon' is still derogatory

I've been trying to think of some way to respond to Mark R. Baker's letter ("Coon" is short for 'raccoon,' ODE, April 20). He criticized Professor Edwin Coleman's disdain for the expression "a coon's age."

If Baker had taken one of Coleman's classes, he would understand how grossly inappropriate it is to use this term. Baker implies that Coleman overreacted about a point of political correctness. There's a lot more to it.

The term "coon" has a long and wretched history. It was and is used to dehumanize every member of an entire race. Over the years, the instances when "coon" was used for "raccoon" don't compare to the term's pervasiveness as applied to blacks.

I checked with one of the reference librarians at the Knight Library. The Random House Dictionary of American Slang traces the term back to the 1830s (from Zip Coon, one of the first of hundreds of "coon songs" used in the minstrel shows). "A coon's age" shows up in the 1840s.

For more than two hundred years, blacks have been characterized as less than human. In minstrel shows, sheet music, cartoons, films and jokes, black features have been exaggerated and ridiculed, their intellects and contributions scorned. The images of the happy servant, the mammy, the buffoon and the brute persist deep in the psyche of white America.

The reference librarian cautioned: "I'd be very wary of using 'coon's age.' It carries a lot of derogatory baggage." Baker doesn't get it.

Julie Delperdang
 graduate student
 folklore

Leftfield

Frank Silva

