

COMMENTARY

Thursday, May 15, 2003

Editorial

Why is it that 'diversity' leads to a whirlpool of difficulties?

Recent guest commentaries about Eugene Weekly's May 1 cover story, "Two Languages, Two Worlds," again raised issues of diversity representation, tokenism and what at times feels like a gulf of understanding between different segments of the campus and city community.

This topic isn't new. The Emerald has been criticized in past years, alternately for disregarding, overregarding or tokenizing minorities in its news coverage, and the editorial board has been blasted for daring to take sides on diversity issues.

Similar types of concerns were raised about the EW article, namely that publishing it as the cover story before Cinco de Mayo ghettoized Latino issues and that the article's cover treatment characterized Latino struggles as boiling down to nothing more than a language problem.

After a long, free-form discussion, the editorial board has some free-form comments about this. However, with only one racial minority and one sexual minority on the board, we may not be considered qualified to weigh in at all — but it's the best we can do.

• Does no one believe in empathy or imagination?

It's difficult to operate as a white ally of ethnic minorities if those minorities are unwilling to accept that a white person may be able to understand their situation, their oppression and their world view. Understanding is possible even without direct experience — otherwise, literature would be impossible. There seems to be an ongoing negative reaction to allies who are well-intentioned but make some small mistake in their wording of opinions. How can we slow this trend?

• Doesn't personal interaction count?

Straight-up anger about institutionalized racism seems to blind some people to the fact that individuals can get it — and individuals are the only ones who can change the institution. Regular, personal interaction makes people see their similarities and humanity, but the impetus for interaction gets reduced when allies feel they're input isn't valuable or isn't correct.

• Who can change things?

This question has no right answer. Although, if the liberal doctrine is correct and straight wealthy white people are the holders of power who won't play nicely with others, then don't they need to be allowed into the conversation — even if they might say the wrong thing — and valued when they're allies? On the other hand, much liberation has been won when those without the power demand it long enough and loud enough.

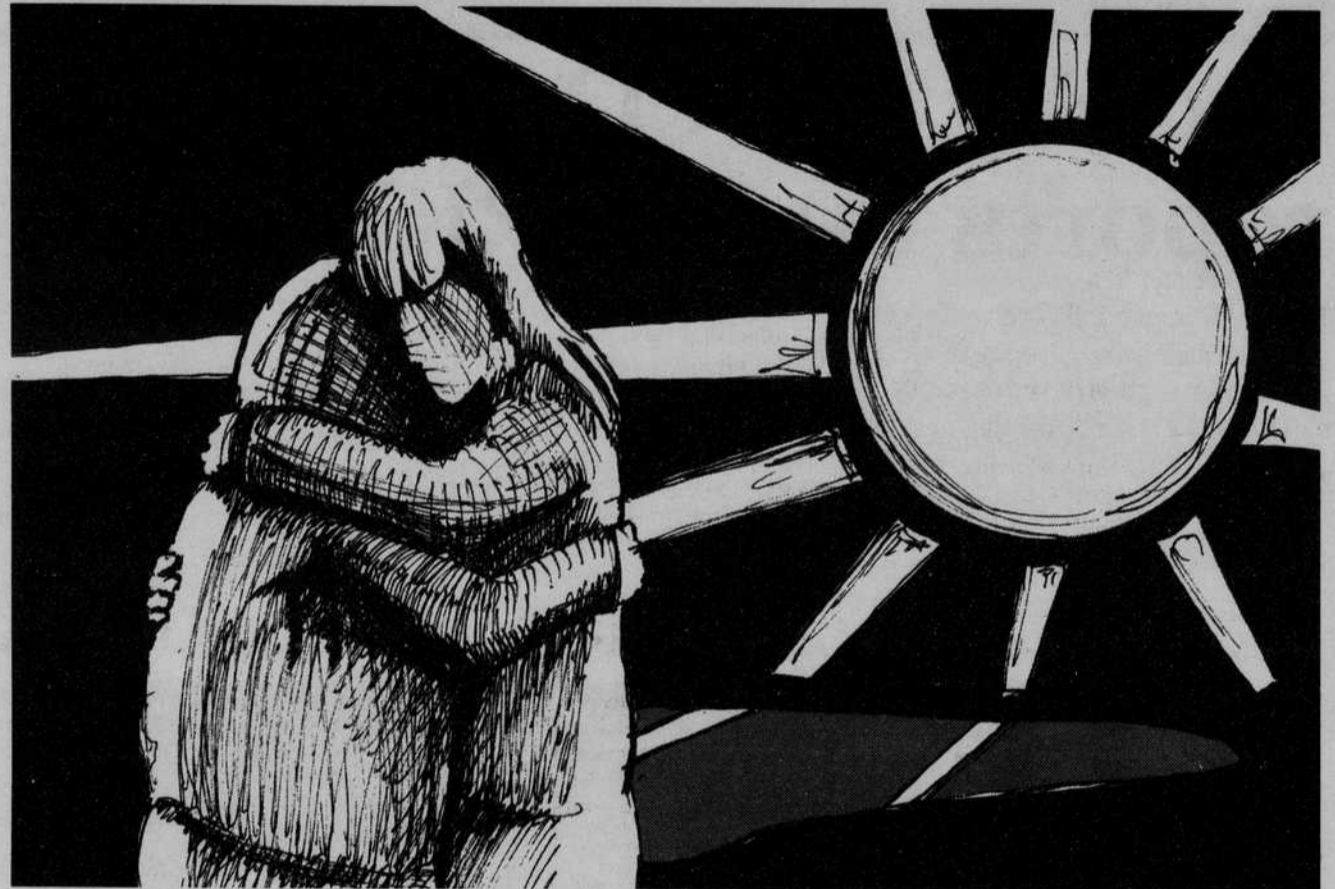
• How did we get here and how can it end?

It sometimes feels like America is stuck in a whirlpool of identity politics. Rather than reaching a point where the culture can focus more on what Americans have in common, there is still a regular need to focus on the differences — and the problems those differences create. Some of this has to do with the dire situation in which many oppressed minorities find themselves. As long as some people still are shit on every day by the majority culture, there is a need to speak up.

In thinking about the first waves of immigration to America, it seems that those groups were more quickly assimilated, and the culture didn't have to continually address these issues. While the situations aren't strictly analogous, one thing stands out: For those first waves, the power-holders eventually let those people play the game as full partners. In America today, many minorities still are only allowed to play from the sidelines, and even then it's a battle. As long as this continues, the whirlpool will keep bubbling.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailymerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged.



Peter Utsey Emerald

Preparing to let go

The blue Seattle skies were a little gray this past weekend. Even though the sun was shining unusually bright over the lake at my grandmother's house, I could not enjoy its warmth. Beautiful spring days aren't as promising as they used to be when death is threatening to overshadow all of the new life spring promises.

If you're in a good mood, you may want to quit reading here.

You see, my 89-year-old grandmother, everyone's bluebird of happiness, is dying. And Sunday may have been her last Mother's Day on this earth.

My grandmother has a terminal disease called myelodysplastic syndrome, which basically means that she has bad blood that can't regenerate normally to heal any injuries she may incur at her tender age. From the outside, she is just as chipper and independent as she used to be, the way I will always remember her no matter what happens in the future.

My grandma is the most active I know; she still lives in her own house on a half acre, takes care of her own garden, cooks and cleans, attends social meetings and even drives at her doctor's encouragement.



Julie Lauderbaugh
Judge Julie

You would never know from one glance that her time is limited to about six months, according to the medical textbooks.

After all, this disease has no known cure. It can't be killed off with radiation or cut out with a knife; it has crept up on my grandma and the rest of my unsuspecting family and slapped us in the face. Suddenly getting an A on that next economics midterm doesn't seem so important.

I guess most college students have gone through the process of letting one of their loved ones go. I have buried two grandfathers and a great aunt, among many beloved pets in our makeshift backyard cemetery. But this is my first time to deal with certain death in adulthood of someone with whom I have shared an unconditional love with since birth.

And I'm not sure what to do. The five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance — are hitting me like a load of bricks.

I'm worried about what kind of pain my grandma will experience as her disease continues. I'm worried what my mom, aunt and uncle will go through when their own mother passes away. And I'm worried about what will happen to her after her death because I can't imagine what a soul's life beyond this one holds.

At the Sunday get-together, everyone seemed to accept grandma's fate and rejoice in the fact they could still spend this holiday with her. But in the

shadows of my smiling face brimmed tears of agony.

How could I pretend things were normal, bullshit about Mike Price and "the million-dollar lap dance" when the world's landscape, as I've seen it for 23 years, could be obliterated before Christmas?

If I went by grandma's life standard, I would have to find the silver lining to this dark storm cloud.

The best I can think of is that my beloved grandmother has an indeterminate amount of time to live yet, giving me the opportunity to spend as much time with her as I can. I knew it may or may not be the last time I saw her, given the dire circumstances of her disease and the five-hour I-5 trek.

So on Sunday I showered her with more hugs and kisses than usual, listened to more stories of yesteryear and generally soaked up her warmth and love that she has always given so selflessly.

Paying attention to her was the least I could do for a woman who has spent her whole life putting others' needs ahead of her own.

Even the cheery spring sunshine can't lighten this emotional burden. But I will try my best — for my grandma — to be the beacon of hope, even in her darkest hours.

Contact the columnist at julielauderbaugh@dailymerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

Letter to the editor

Cutting financial aid would hurt University

Receiving a Dean's scholarship? Diversity Building Scholarship? Graduate Teaching Fellowship? Too bad for you, if the Joint Ways and Means Committee co-chairmen's budget proposal goes through. As stated in the Emerald ("Plan would curtail tuition waivers," ODE, May 13), the co-chairmen's budget

would cut \$30 million from the "fee remissions," which are part of the Oregon University System's financial aid.

The remissions are the tuition discounts that come to us in the form of the merit- and need-based tuition discounts (often given as scholarships). With the cuts in fee remissions, 5,000 students could lose their aid and scholarships — along with their chance to finance higher education. Many of these students have already been "guaranteed" their scholarships for the remain-

der of their time at our University. Also, without the ability to give out new scholarships to incoming students, the University will lose its appeal to students and the parents who pay the bills.

With the current and future increases in tuition, the cuts to fee remissions would be even more detrimental to OUS by cutting off current students and shutting out incoming students.

Kaitlin Kerwin
ASUO intern