

GLBT community needs more than silence



Chris Boning

I am writing this column to right a wrong.

Last Thursday, a few individuals positioned between the library and Magruder Hall displayed a large white banner with "Outlaw Homosexual Acts" on one side and "Sodomy Ruins Nations" on the other in bold, black letters.

An acquaintance of mine at the Women's Resource Center had warned me in passing about the

banner, but when I went to walk out of the doors of the Student Union Building, I just stopped and stared and felt that plunging feeling that was my stomach departing for my shoes — as I myself am gay, it seemed as if the hatred of those with the banner was directed entirely at me at that moment.

I felt pulled in two different directions: Do I somehow run away from the people waving the banner, or do I approach them and reluctantly listen to what they have to say?

I decided my best option was just to ignore them because I knew if I lingered I would just be angry.

As I stomped back to my apartment on the other side of campus, I imagined various scenarios had I given in and stopped to pay attention to them.

Finally, I came to the conclusion

that because the University is public property and that waving a banner displaying the words "Outlaw Homosexual Acts" is a form of free speech, those individuals are entitled to do what they did. Conversely, I also realized that in a sense University property is my property because my parents pay good money for me to go here, and they certainly are not paying for me to be harassed.

That last thought was somewhat half-hearted, but it's the best I could come up with. I reluctantly let the issue go, but I still felt as if I had failed. My frustration was compounded the following day, which happened to be the Day of Silence. The premise to the Day of Silence is that for one day students across the nation take a vow of silence to symbolize how GLBT people are often voiceless. I think that

in some ways the Day of Silence is a thoughtful gesture, but overall I am opposed to it.

My objection can be summarized as thus: one day cannot replicate an entire life, and the emphasis on silence is misplaced. I think the simple act of talking to people and educating them about the importance of hate crimes legislation or workplace protection for GLBT people is far more constructive than refusing to speak for a day. One of my friends who participated in the Day of Silence observation at the University of Missouri-Columbia pointed out to me that when people stop talking, others notice. However, I would have to agree with the late Martin Luther King, Jr., who once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter."

In other words, allowing ourselves to be silent is doing a great disservice to those who dedicate their lives to speaking out on behalf of the gay rights movement, or any movement, for that matter. If I could do it again, I would probably stop and listen to what the people waving the banner had to say. I'm not sure what I would say back to them, but hopefully it would be intelligent, if not meaningful. I know that those with the banner would probably not agree with me right then and most likely never, but I'd have to at least try. After all, I would rather my life not begin to disintegrate because I was silent about something that mattered.

Chris Boning is a junior communication major from St. Louis, Mo.

Overseas traveling brings out worst in American tourists



Megan Klco

I hate tourists.

Maybe that's hypocritical of me. After all, I just returned from a week-long painting excursion in a country of which my cultural understanding is restricted to Olive Garden commercials. But having visited Venice, Italy, as a painter instead of a tourist, I'm allowing myself a smidgen of distance from the plague of gelato-crazed English speakers that overrun the city's hotspots every afternoon.

True, I snapped a few pictures of gondolas, but it's a fine line that separates me from a tourist, and I'm drawing it. In part, the difference is between attraction and spectator. In a city whose population is 80 percent tourists, anything local becomes a freak attraction. After a week of setting up my easel in the streets of Venice, I have a newfound sympathy for animals in zoos. On the first day, I learned the hard way while trying to paint in areas with even the lightest tourist traffic. Before I had finished setting up, I looked up at the canal I was about to paint to see about 40 people, an entire tour group, lined up on a bridge with their cameras pointed at me.

Being on the receiving end of tourist ogling brought home just how brash and insensitive tourists can be. One of the painters in our group had a woman yank his brush out of his hand and push him aside so she could play "artist" for a photo. I watched tourists harass street sweepers and construction workers for photo-ops. Maybe it sounds redundant, but everyone hates tourists. They're loud. They treat locals like sideshows. They don't know the language. But, like it or not, they represent their country.

It's for that reason that the image of the American tourist is in serious need of a face lift. If it weren't for Barack Obama (who the French go

bananas over), I'd be a little embarrassed to own up to my citizenship abroad. More so than other tourists, Americans have the reputation of being culturally insensitive and ignorant. And before you get your star-spangled undies in a bunch because I said America is not the most loved country on the planet, let me tell you: It's true. Whether it's actually because of our behavior or a result of the spread of pop culture is irrelevant in the face of the fact that Europeans tend to compare American culture to the movie "American Pie."

Tourists represent the culture they come from, and if we want the world to have a positive image of Americans, we have to send good representatives. True, there are plenty of cultural nuances that would be impossible to grasp within the span of a short vacation, but representing your country abroad during any length of time requires a high level of cultural tolerance and respect.

For starters, this means not treating foreign countries like Disney's Epcot Center.

It is possible to come back from abroad with more than a rockin' slideshow and a carry-on full of cheap souvenirs. If you really want to know a culture you have to be open enough to learn. And this can't be done solely from the windows of pubs and tour buses.

Instead, take time off the beaten path when you travel, talk to locals as much as you can, and learn what brochures don't tell you. In Venice, an old Italian man gave me a short tour of the architectural history of his neighborhood after he saw me painting outside his home.

Most importantly, regardless of where you travel remember you are a guest in the country, and as such, you owe a certain level of gratitude and respect. You'll get more out of your travel experience if you play more than the part of the spectator. It's true: Everyone hates a tourist. So instead, endeavor to be a good representative of the United States. Be a guest.

Megan Klco is a senior painting major from Liberty, Mo.

Tru Rants

Index readers get to sound off about what's on their mind.

Got a rant? E-mail us at trurants@gmail.com

"The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus/Ludo concert was one of the worst shows I have ever been to. It was a waste of my time and a waste of the activity fee."

"If we're in such an economic crisis can someone please explain why we have new plasma screen TVs in the SUB? How do they enhance my education? Spend money on something that matters."

"I'm so glad JoEllen and Isaac won the election."

Weapons law deserves debate



Zach Vicars

The Missouri House of Representatives has given preliminary approval to a piece of legislation that would allow college students and staff to carry concealed weapons on campus and would also lower the concealed carry age from 23 to 21. The bill was approved by a vote of 106 to 41.

The possibility of this bill becoming law, and the thought of citizens carrying handguns in the classrooms, dining halls and libraries of college campuses, has spurred both criticism and praise from politicians, school officials and citizens at large. However, I believe such a piece of legislation will provide a safer, more secure campus.

The first (and weaker) argument against the law is that concealed weapons lead to higher rates of crime. This popular notion began in left-wing circles and is completely false. The FBI, Department of Public Safety and police forces around the nation all agree that concealed weapons reduce violent crimes. According to the research of Brian Pendleton, a sociology professor at the University of Akron, "as of 2002 Right to Carry states had 24 percent

lower total violent crime, 22 percent lower murder, 37 percent lower robbery and 20 percent lower aggravated assault when compared with non-RTC states (FBI statistics)."

Some readers might ask, can the presence of guns reduce the impact of guns?

That question, however, wrongly assumes that guns aren't already present. The fact is that on campuses all around the nation, students could be carrying firearms right now, but these students probably did not go through the proper legal channels to do so. Rather, they most likely illegally obtained that firearm with the intention of illegally putting it to use.

However, if a rigorous system is set in place to regulate the right to carry concealed weapons, law-abiding students and staff will pose an ever-present threat to the violent criminal.

The second dissenting argument surrounding concealed carry is more directly related to college campuses and the problem of widespread alcohol use. Truman serves as an apt test case for the problem. We've seen students fall down flights of stairs, drive cars into apartment buildings and urinate in campus elevators. While we might like to view these as isolated instances, the truth is that pathetic displays of irresponsibility occur nearly every day. Any student who would dare carry a gun while intoxicated — legally or otherwise — represents a grave threat to our student body.

For this reason, I must reject the bill proposal as it stands, with the hopes that Congress will provide a later bill with stricter regulations on who can carry. I propose that, in order to obtain a permit to carry a weapon on a college campus, the citizen must be at least 23 years of age, be free of any alcohol-related offense within the last five years, and be willing to attend yearly gun-safety training, including performance tests.

Currently, the only above regulation that is in place is the age limit, and even that is being called into question by the up-coming bill.

So, we can see, as some of the best research has shown nationwide, the presence of legally obtained concealed firearms leads to a safer civilian life with lower rates of violent crime. There is no reason to think that the same wouldn't be true if firearms were allowed on college campuses.

However, the bill that currently is making its way through our legislation system is not the answer Missouri needs. The bill does not adequately address the problem of firearms in the hands of intoxicated or irresponsible students. Let us hope that in the coming weeks, congressmembers will make the proper revisions to the bill and pass it into law, allowing Missouri schools like Truman to serve as a model for secure student- and staff-policed campuses.

Zach Vicars is a freshman physics major from St. Louis, Mo.

Graduation evokes nostalgia



Jackie Gonzalez

It's time for my swan song.

For the past three years, I have contributed more than 40 columns to this particular section. I've received hate mail, and I've received thank-you notes. I've read letters to the editor that have completely misunderstood my point, but I've also read some with new insight and constructive criticism which I have taken to heart.

Although there might be many of you who are delighted that this will be the last time you'll see my byline and photo, I genuinely hope that a few of you have learned something or thought about something differently after reading something I wrote. Never forget that columnists are students just like you, and are concerned with the same issues you are.

I challenge you to become an active member of this community. Voice your opinions at a City Council meeting. Join a community church. Participate in the community band.

If there is any bit of advice I could give to Truman students, it'd be this: embrace Kirksville. I've mentioned this theme in columns past, but I feel like I need to reiterate this as it has been such a critical part of my Truman experience. I'm not just talking about community service. There are a ton of events outside of the Truman bubble and a plethora of people worth knowing.

During the senate campaigns, newly-elected Vice President, freshman Isaac Robinson spoke at an organizational meeting about campaign goals and planned initiatives. One thing that struck me was his insistence that the community have Truman pride. He talked about how the city needs to have Truman banners and signs scattered throughout the town, like Columbia has for Mizzou. All I could think about was that in order to get love from the community, we need to give it.

How can a community open up to a school that isolates itself — a school where the majority of students complain about the town or rant about factors beyond its control like the weather? In order for Kirksville residents to have Truman pride, its students need to show an interest in city issues. Most might agree that voting

is important, but my boyfriend and I were two of 10 Truman students who showed up to the campus polls two weeks ago to vote in the local election. That alone is a horrible reflection of Truman's concern for community advancement.

Voting, buying locally, volunteering and working off-campus jobs are small ways to contribute to the community while also seeing Kirksville through a different lens. The city has a lot to offer college students, but unfortunately most choose to make false assumptions and not even try to warm up to this town. If you're here this summer, go to the Farmers' Market every now and then. Check out the Summer on the Square concert series.

Coming to Truman has been one of the best decisions I've ever made. I've had so many memorable moments and meaningful experiences here that I really can't imagine having had a better time elsewhere. I've made an effort to contribute to this community, and in return I've developed a network of friends both inside and outside of this University. I hope you too will do the same.

Jackie Gonzalez is a senior communication major from San Diego, Calif.

WEB POLL

Do you use trays when dining in the cafeterias?

Sometimes: 8%

Yes: 54%

No: 31%

This week's question:

Do you think the University has enough safety precautions in place?

Vote online at trumanindex.com