

Obama puppy adoption has wider significance



Tyler Retherford

If you're a news junkie like me, then you're probably still clinging to the last vestige of the presidential election, Puppy Watch '08. Barack Obama's announcement during his acceptance speech that he'd be buying his daughters an adopted puppy has sparked a following from bloggers, news networks and even the Today Show. It may not be quite as riveting as the debates, as important as policy discussion or as showy as the election

night coverage with its "holograms" on CNN and giant, painted ice-rink map on MSNBC, but it is exciting in its own way. Admittedly, I don't keep up on animal rights news, but I can't remember the last time the issue of pet adoption was broadcast this prominently by mainstream media sources. The overzealous media attention on President-elect Obama provides a perfect opportunity to champion some lesser-known, but still worthy, causes.

This might not appear to be an important issue for a president to be advocating, and compared to a lot of the pending policy decisions for the Obama administration it really is relatively insignificant. However, to organizations like the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which stated on its Web site that it was "thrilled at the prospect

that the Obama family will 'make pet adoption their first option,'" an endorsement of their cause from the president-elect is a huge help in drawing attention to an often overlooked problem. Advocacy in passing like this is even more effective for Obama because of his strong support from college students, who tend to actively champion issues such as pet adoption, recycling and other problems that people without a political office or much money to donate can help with.

Obama's decision to adopt a puppy might not have been an intentional attempt to call people's attention to organizations like the Humane Society or other pet adoption centers, but it undeniably has had that effect. Although there have been some examples of similar behavior by past presidents I'm hard-pressed to think

of them. Of course, it's a bit early to tout President-elect Obama as a return of the ideal American president, but regularly advocating issues like pet adoption that average Americans easily can influence would go a long way toward that goal.

As we saw very clearly on Election Day, the support for Obama here at the University got people out to chalk, man tables, hand out buttons and generally back up their passive support with active advocacy. If Obama could keep reminding supporters of the problems they can work to solve with relatively minimal dedication in terms of time and money he could harness the immense popularity and support he has garnered during his campaign and continue to put it to good use. This also could serve as a uniting factor for people who voted for either

party during the election. Many McCain supporters were just as active and hard-working during the election, and many of these smaller issues are bipartisan. Regardless of your opinion of the new president-elect and his platform, we all can come together and work for change on smaller matters like ending puppy mills and finding homes for shelter animals. Although there might not be a lot we can do to shape the recovery process from the economic crisis, aside from voting and writing our elected leaders, it's nice to have a reminder from our most prominent political leader that there are other issues out there we have the power to change.

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Americans should rediscover true spirit of Christmas



Zach Vicars

Here's a research idea for all you psych students out there: Take two ordinary human beings (30-something moms, if possible), set them down at a table, play a little Christmas music, drop a limited edition Hannah Montana lunch box in between them and watch the violence that ensues. Be sure to have a trained medical professional at the ready.

The saddest part about that attempt at humor is that it's actually not far from the truth. Throughout the decades, Christmas in American culture has morphed from a goodwill-spreading religious creation into a greed-fed commercial monster.

Indeed, although most people still get a warm and fuzzy feeling inside when they hear Christmas tunes, that positive veneer quickly is vanishing. In many American families, maxed-out credit cards have taken the place of holiday cheer, unrealistic expectations have replaced Christmas carols and heightened pressure has stolen the role of love and goodwill.

In some cases, the rapid commercialization of Christmas has gotten so out of hand that it leads to heightened levels of depression and suicide as Dec. 25 approaches.

Fortunately for Americans, there's a way back to the holiday we once knew. A Christmas that has more emphasis on the nativity than on the dollar sign is within our reach. To obtain this goal, I've outlined three easy steps to refocus our Christmas spirit.

1) Rekindle religious feelings about the holiday.

This step is especially important for those who are believers in the story of Christmas. Those of us who believe in the birth of Jesus are bound to draw hope and good cheer from reading the story as the pressures of the holidays sink in. The enchanting narrative of the events leading up to his birth provides meaning and significance to the sometimes arduous Christmas experience. But understanding the religious groundings of Christmas should help the non-believer enjoy the holidays as well. It may be that atheists

just get pleasure from jeering at all us "religious nut jobs," but the historical perspective on the celebration of Christmas also will help them cultivate an enjoyable holiday experience.


2) **Focus on giving, not the gift.** This may be a worn-out adage, but that's not because Americans have put it into practice. Let's face it, most peoples set out on their shopping quest with over-publicized, over-priced, over-the-top gifts in mind. It might be an expensive gadget for Dad, a gaudy piece of jewelry for a love interest or a perfume kit for Mom, but regardless of what the gift may be, they are all worth much less than the act of giving. So why are Americans so focused on buying the flashiest item they can get their hands on? Americans would be much better off if they realigned their giving priorities by purchasing gifts that are more reasonable in price, or maybe giving gifts like letters, works of art or handmade clothing that cost almost nothing.

3) **Spend a little more time on others, a little less on yourself.** Americans have gotten into the nasty habit lately of focusing Christmas on themselves. The focus on the holiday has shifted from spreading goodwill to others to hoarding the goodwill for yourself. No matter who Americans worship on Christmas — whether Jesus or Santa — it's important that they stop worshipping themselves. Christmas is meant to be a time when we focus on the needs of others, both emotional and material. In order to experience the true joy of Christmas, donate to the Salvation Army, volunteer at a food pantry, participate in an international charity like Operation Christmas Child or just spend more time with your friends and family. No matter what you do, just make sure part of your Christmas is dedicated to someone else.

So there you have it: an abridged version of how to make this Christmas season bright. There's not much original material here, nor is there a ground-breaking theory on how to reverse the regressing holiday trend. Still, if we can begin to follow these simple steps, I'm certain that our lust for Hannah Montana memorabilia — and all other meaningless Christmas junk — will give way to a love for the season of giving.

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AROUND THE QUAD



"Seeing my family, especially my cousins. And mashed potatoes."

*Meghan McDonnell
freshman*



"The food. Especially turkey."

*Ann Rosentreter
freshman*



"Eating sweet potatoes and caramel cake."

*Ivy Pierce
sophomore*



"Going home and being with family."

*Ginny Vincent
freshman*

What is your favorite part of Thanksgiving?

Sororities reinforce gender roles



Whitney Fay

First of all, let me say that I know I'm going to get a lot of flack for writing this column. That said, my question to readers is this: Why are sorority women, as strong and independent as they are, subjugating themselves to the patriarchal nuances of Greek Life? Let me explain.

Being in a sorority for two plus years myself, it's hard not to see the unspoken power balance that is inherent to the Greek system, and it all hinges on popularity — and boys. Let me clear something up: I've enjoyed my time in a sorority, and I've made some fantastic friends, but it pains me to see this happen. Lord knows, I've been guilty of it too, and yes, I do like men: I am not some shrill, bitter, castration-fixated jerk.

Here's my view of the plague that runs through Greek veins: Girls in sororities want to be popular. They usually join sororities wanting to fit into a certain group so that they don't have to make one for themselves (granted, most girls initially join for amorphous reasons like "sisterhood") because, of course, almost everyone feels more comfortable in a clearly defined social group. Once in a given sorority, they start going to mixers and events and slowly acquiesce to the power of the males in the system: the fraternities.

If the frat boys think you are cool, sexy, etc., then you are pushed to top sorority status. If they don't, then you are relegated to lame, boring, etc. sorority status. Do you see the problem here? Sorority members aren't giving themselves value based on their actions toward each other — arguably the point of a sorority — they are allowing fraternities to assign to them their level of self-worth. In this case, a sorority is no longer a tight-knit organization that helps to build strong, wonderful women. It is simply a battleground where girls strive to earn and keep a form of public approval that is utterly devoid of meaning outside of their four years of Greek Life.

Now, some of you irate readers out there might be huffing and puffing and telling me that I'm completely off base. "My sorority doesn't do that," you say. "My sorority is completely perfect and we are hot stuff anyway! You must be some loser girl who no boys like!"

But why do we care, both the "popular" girls and the "unpopular" girls? Why does any self-respecting sorority woman really care about what fraternity members think of her? Why does one care how many girls from their sorority were invited to the latest fraternity formal? Why put such great stock in how many men approve of you? The girls who are sanctimoniously agreeing with me and decrying shallow guys — did you not get invited to that formal? Who cares! And the self-righteous girls who are disagreeing with me and saying that your sisters are just so cool and don't need boys to tell you're hot — are you still hanging out with that heinous guy just to be able to say that you've snagged a frat boy? Who cares! Do

you think any employer really will care that you were pledge educator for your totally awesome sorority and that you made so many best, best friends? Probably not, unless they were a member of the same organization, and then who's to say you're really fit for that job or if you're just getting it as a favor? Do you think that any non-Greeks on campus actually are jealous of you? Probably not, assuming they've managed to make friends the old-fashioned way — on their own, no obligatory sisterhood necessary.

Here is my challenge to you sorority girls out there: Stop caring so much what fraternity members think of you. This challenge is for the girls who think that all those guys want them, and for the girls who are pouting because they think none of them do. Part of growing up is learning that you have to make yourself happy — no one's going to do it for you. Start loving each other for yourselves, not for how popular you are or what you can do for each other. Sororities weren't created to give you an arena for impressing boys. They were created to be havens from the overbearing patriarchal system that so many pioneering, educated women struggled with in the early days of higher education for women. Start celebrating each other's individuality, (and yes, even weirdness) and stop putting power into the hands of males. We worked hard to earn the right to be equal. We shouldn't disregard that right so easily.

Whitney Fay is a junior communication major from Shaw, Mo.

Green trend has positive effects



Molly Skyles

Americans have a fascination with green. No, I am not referring to the color of the U.S. currency (even though that is true as well). Americans recently have become enthralled in environmental awareness and the green movement.

Going green, in general, means becoming environmentally conscious in all of your decisions. To be green does not mean you have to go out and buy a Hybrid car or convert your home to entirely use solar energy instead of electricity. Little things like switching to canvas bags when grocery shopping instead of the traditional paper or plastic or not running the water while brushing your teeth are ways to go green on a smaller scale.

Now, I've always been a little bit of a tree-hugger myself. I recycle anything I can, walk to work rather than drive and turn the lights off every time I leave a room. I encour-

age you to do the same. But even I have become a bit annoyed with the concept of "going green" lately. I mean, when people's entire wardrobes consist of T-shirts with the recycling symbol on them and purses that say "Tree-hugger" and their idol is a ridiculously rich heiress, I tend to question their motives.

I guess I'm being a little cynical. Not everyone who is going green is doing so just to follow the latest trend. But I'm not convinced. So to all of you sporting the "Go Green" fitted tee, do you know how it was made? Prior to writing this column, neither did I. After a little research I learned that most, although not all, clothing and accessories that advertise something green are actually legitimate. Wal-Mart, surprisingly, even has a line of green apparel products that are made from recycled polyester and organic cotton. However, Target, which also sells a variety of apparel promoting recycling or going green, is not always as honest. For example, a few shirts that say "Go Green" are made from organic materials, but others are just regular old cotton.

Besides donning their green apparel, a plethora of celebrities have jumped on the green bandwagon as well. Everyone from Al Gore to Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad Pitt

are avid supporters of everything green. These celebs are doing things like raising money and awareness for various eco-friendly campaigns, driving hybrid cars and living in green homes. Although these and other celebs genuinely want to help the environment, some stars seem to be going green just to follow a trend and look like the hero. Now, I may be wrong, but I doubt someone like Paris Hilton is all that concerned about the environment. But I guess she is using her wealth in a positive manner.

I started this column thinking that most people are a little hypocritical and promote going green just because it's cool. But I've changed my mind-set a bit. I still think that you should support and advertise the green movement because you genuinely want to help the environment and not just follow a silly trend. So, whether you are a devoted tree-hugger, PETA sponsor and recycler or a Paris Hilton-loving wannabe, at least you are taking steps toward helping the environment. And, as long as the end result is still benefiting the earth, do personal motives really matter all that much? After all, this is the only planet we get.

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