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Family Weekend is all about showing your parents the things that matter most to you

by Michael Hogenmiller

The Ponies lost, SMU hosted Mardi Gras, and young and willing Greeks hammed it up on stage. Another Family Weekend is on the books. Bigger than football, tailgate, or talent show, though, is the real stuff of Family Weekend – the dinners, drinks, and stories told over drinks that briefly pull our families into “The Bubble.”

This year, my Family Weekend was on the brink of cancellation. Reports of Hurricane Rita and the possibility of getting stranded in Dallas seemed ominous, but my parents hadn’t missed a Family Weekend yet. After hitting weather.com and learning the intricacies of non-refundable tickets, the decision was made. They’d be here, come hell or high water.

They landed Thursday night, I picked them up, and then it was a stopover at Whataburger and on to the hotel (There are no Whataburgers in Georgia, a fact that my father has pointed out to the company in writing, and as such this is the first place they go whenever they’re in Texas). At the hotel, it’s a beer, a burger, and a brief preview of the weekend. We convened around midnight; I still had homework.

Friday is tricky, since I have to attend class. Mom sits in with me, and we catch up over lunch. My dad usually takes a few conference calls at the hotel and then becomes so bored that he irons everything in his suitcase. Once class is done, we all hit the school store for more college apparel and grab a bite. Friday night varies after dinner, but it’s never the talent show; we always opt for something more personal and interactive. This year, my parents came to the coffee shop, met some of my friends, and heard my band play. Years past have included the State Fair and a blues concert.

Saturday is lunch, shopping, perhaps a movie, and then a nap. It’s just hanging out, marked by the early update about my extended family, which totals to nearly a hundred people. Though I’m close to them all, I can sometimes hardly believe the ridiculous stuff my distant relatives get into. (I owe this to my cousins, the most sketchy of familial relations.)

Saturday night is the coup de gras of the visit, starting with dinner. We gather our family friends, none of whom have missed a Family Weekend either, and any important Dallas person the parents need to meet. Previous years have

showcased best buds and girlfriends, but this year revisited my first-year roommate, an old high school chum. Dinner is where everyone finds out what the hell we’ve all been doing for the past year and where we’re headed. Phone calls and e-mails are great, but dinner, wine, and a table for five or more works wonders for catching up – enough people for constant chatter, but not too many that you can’t make your way around the table by the end of the meal.

After dinner, it’s drinks, this year at the Dubliner, where we pick up unfinished dinner conversation, hold sideboards over anything that wasn’t appropriate for the table, and exchange jokes, stories, nicknames, friendships, plans for future visits – anything goes. It’s here that your mom and your girlfriend’s mom finally start to relate, where you and your best bud bet on who will make his first million, or get elected to public office, or find the girl to marry. Confessions to your parents about freshman year, embarrassing stories about when you were five, it’s all fair game, and it’s my favorite two hours of the weekend.

It’s these two hours that really matter – connecting with the people who care about you most. It’s finding out what your parents think about the person you’re dating or letting them meet the people they’ve only known by name and Facebook. It’s bouncing the important people in your immediate life off of the people who have known you all of your life. Connecting these two worlds puts it all in perspective.

When SMU started Family Weekend, it created the most important 48 hours of every student’s school year, and they have nothing to do with the football game, tailgate, or talent show. Forget the programming and find something in Dallas that really speaks to your style, something personal that your family can make meaningful. If your dad played SMU football, by all means go to the game, but don’t feel obligated to stick to the schedule after your freshman year. They saw the boulevard and the game last year; now show them the city and the life you’ve made in it.

Michael Hogenmiller is a senior political science and music major.

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Be Heard: Got an opinion? *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions and interesting feedback. Email your thoughts to hilltopics@hotmail.com.

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300–600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@hotmail.com by Wednesday at 8:00 PM to be included in the following week’s publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in *Hilltopics* are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of *Hilltopics* or any other entity. As such, *Hilltopics* does not publish anonymous articles.

Stuck in Neverland? With these post-graduation alternatives to work, you'll never grow up

by Courtney Hebb

No matter where you are in your college career, the inevitable looms on the horizon: the bubble break that will spit you out into the real world. Even if you are able to add a few extra years by going for a quadruple major or a graduate degree, it is still waiting for you: the desk, the suit, the cubical, the early morning commutes, the stale coffee breaks. Now, having perfected the art of procrastination, I wonder if it is possible to delay the inevitable and avoid settling for a "real job." It seems that with each step in a career path, the route becomes increasingly narrow, with fewer escape exits. However, let me remind all those who share my cold feet that there are plenty of roads (both literal and figurative) still left for us to explore. There are chances for us to side step the "real world" and find out what life can offer. Think about it: twentysomethings have relatively little tying them down. Most students don't have their own family or a mortgage, allowing them the freedom and mobility of packing up and following their dreams. Here are a few examples:

1. Sea your future in a new way- Travel the world by working on a cruise ship.
2. Teach in a far away land- From Korea to Hungary, Americans are getting hired left and right to teach English.
3. 'Rents: Pay them a visit- If you are truly in denial about real life, go back home and see how long you can take advantage of your parents' hospitality.

4. Work in a vineyard- Around harvest time, vineyards are always in need of extra help. From Napa to Tuscany, hard work is often rewarded with meals and accommodations.

5. Test out Transcendentalism- Find your own Walden, set up camp, and write. Maybe become a mountain man or woman and hunt your own food, surviving with just a piece of string and a nail file.

6. Fly around the world- Save up for the plane ticket, and plan your 15 stops to see what you want to see. Do the whole backpacking thing or work as you go.

7. From the mountains to the shining sea- Be a ski instructor, rafting guide or something else that's cool. Then, you can call your friends, knowing that the most exciting thing that happened to them all day was refilling a stapler.

8. Volunteer somewhere out there- Make a difference. Before you surrender to the real world, you might as well make it a better place.

9. [Insert Dream Here]- You can do it, whatever it is. Just make it happen.

The opportunities are limitless. You'll have plenty of time to eventually get a proper job and work towards that six digit paycheck. But for now, take advantage of being young, and dare to break the mold as you break out of the bubble.

Courtney Hebb is a senior marketing and political science major.

Deep in the heart of Texas? Five minutes at Texas A&M proves that SMU is life 'in the bubble'

by Dawn Jenkins

A few weeks ago, I took the well-beaten path from Dallas to Austin to visit a good friend, sit back, relax, and enjoy the weirdness. Then, on a whim, we decided to take the road less traveled by: the trek from Austin to College Station, TX. Although I've been to Texas A&M territory before, my most recent and totally spontaneous trip to Aggie-land got me thinking, and I've come to several conclusions.

First of all, Dallas ain't Texas. And neither is Austin. Dallas, the cosmopolitan urban-suburban conglomerate, home of sizzling seventies-era soaps and more shopping and dining square footage per capita than almost anywhere in the United States, resembles the general landscape of Texas about as much as Moscow resembles Siberia. Austin, the ultimate college town, is even more of an odd-man-out. Our state's conservative, Republican capital building lies smack dab in the middle of a liberal breeding ground filled with twenty-first century bohemians. So as we drove down two-lane highways alongside military convoys and trucks brimming with cotton, I felt about as foreign as I did during my recent excursion to Oak Cliff. Who were these people living two miles from their neighbors and twenty minutes (by car, even longer when traveling on horseback) from the nearest Dairy Queen? After months in my concrete jungle, I was struck by the endless, flat fields stretching to the horizon line, largely unobstructed by man-made structures. I admit that I was a little uneasy - where were the street lamps, the telephone poles, the billboards, any indications of civilization? Why did the tranquil emptiness make me so irrationally nervous? Although Texas may be remembered for its large cities, it is defined by its rural population. I began to realize that the countryside is our state's lifeline.

When we finally arrived in College Station, my Aggie host

gave me and my Longhorn friend a tour of the campus - a sprawling, oversized complex with an odd mix of building styles. A UT-like bell tower and a domed building suspiciously reminiscent of SMU's Dallas Hall constituted crude copies of the originals alongside austere barracks - I mean dormitories. Even though I was beginning to feel like Alice through the looking glass, I could at least respect one thing about A&M: their school spirit. I had the privilege of viewing the final resting place of the enshrined Aggie mascots, Reveille I-IV. The current collie, Reveille VII, is a five-star general in the Corps of Cadets. I was started from my contemplation of the loyal collie by a strange sound: the gentleman passing by us had just said "howdy." And sure enough, every person we encountered did not dare pass by without a hearty "howdy" and a courteous inclination of his head. I fought back giggles. Now I was confronted with a whole new subject of meditation: What would it be like if during my next stroll down the Boulevard, I was greeted with a "howdy" from a guy in a popped collar and loafers? And more importantly, what would one do if suddenly walking by a large group of people at once - should you float one blanket howdy for the entire crowd, or exempt them all from the common courtesy of a decent hello (surely multiple howdies were not possible?) Unfortunately, my time in Aggieland was too short to resolve these difficult questions, but I'm still working on it.

Now that you have received your daily dose of random stereotypes, use them wisely. The next time you step out of the SMU bubble, think seriously about all the wackiness out there, and the bizarre idiosyncrasies of our own city and university will become increasingly apparent.

Dawn Jenkins is a senior international studies major.

From the media to academia, America's obsession with sports hurts more important endeavors

by Yasmin Awad

Last Tuesday, the top story in the *Dallas Morning News* wasn't that North Korea agreed to eliminate its nuclear weapons, nor that Galveston was being ordered to evacuate. What took up about 80 percent of the front page was that the Cowboys lost to the Redskins.

I can now safely say that America's reign is going down the drain, probably one in a stadium.

Professional sports should be a form of entertainment, not life. Sadly, that's what they have become to many people, especially the male population.

Let's forget the insane salaries top sports players make. Or the expensive, taxpayer funded stadiums. Or the abuse of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs. Or the degradation of women used to sell sports. Or how it leads to gambling, hazing, and laziness.

Surely, there must be something good that comes out of it. However, the more I think about it, the more I realize that there really isn't.

It all came to light when I was introduced to Noam Chomsky. He said that professional sports dull people's brains and are a diversion from the things that matter – things people can actually control. They engender irrational jingoist and chauvinist attitudes and build up submission to authority. Before you dismiss this as another half-brained conspiracy theory, just think about it.

Ask any guy who represents him in the Senate. He probably won't know. Ask him who Tom Brady is and he'll give you stats and a full profile.

It also amazes me how much people let their talents and energy shine in a simple game. It's striking to see the intel-

ligence that's used by ordinary people when they talk about sports as opposed to political and social issues. Or how we can be moved to fits of fury by a missed call or a blown play but remain too under-confident and under-informed to raise our voices in anger when we are laid off, lose our healthcare, or in the unfairness of everyday life.

Let's bring this phenomenon closer to SMU. Scholarships, free room and board, and stipends are awarded to players in men's and women's basketball, cross-country, golf, soccer, swimming, tennis, women's volleyball, track and field, and the 50 football players (many of who don't even get to play all season).

Only 45 SMU students get awarded full scholarships on an academic basis.

Isn't SMU an academic university? Shouldn't the millions of dollars being drained into the athletic program be used for science labs, honors programs, other extracurricular activities, or even sports facilities for all students?

I understand if someone is awarded a scholarship to foster education for his or her future career. But unless "basketball" or "football" is a major, I don't see a reason to spend tuition money to enhance players' skills if most of them won't end up doing it professionally.

So for high school students, the solution is simple. Screw your schoolwork and play sports all day long. That's what's going to get you into college.

I hope that helps the American people, or at least, *Hilltopics* readers, put their priorities into perspective.

In the end, there's a reason it's called a game.

Yasmin Awad is a sophomore journalism major.

Let's all go to the movies: This fall offers great cinema choices, both at home and in the theater

by Amanda Wall and Douglas Hill

Crash – This focused look at race relations in the U.S. is alternately compelling and sickening. The film follows a group of characters as they weave in and out of each others' lives in Los Angeles. Though extremely gritty and somewhat depressing, this movie is an incredible examination of what it means to be an American in an ethnically and racially plural society. **Now on video/DVD**

Lord of War – Nicholas Cage plays Yuri Orlov, who originally enters the world of weapons trafficking in order to make a quick buck. However, as he gets deeper and deeper into the intense world of arms dealing, Yuri finds that, once entered, that world is nearly impossible to leave. Don't let the comic and action-heavy trailers fool you; *Lord of War* is based on a true story and is a serious look at arms dealing with all of its political, economic, and personal implications. **Now Playing**

Proof – Gwyneth Paltrow plays the daughter of a brilliant mathematician (Sir Anthony Hopkins) who recently died after a long battle against mental illness. The film follows her through the discovery of a world-changing mathematical proof hidden in her father's desk and her own struggles with mental illness. Paltrow is persuasive and skillful in this film based on the Pulitzer prize-winning play by David Auburn. Jake Gyllenhaal, though slightly unbelievable as a geeky doctoral mathematics student, does nicely opposite Paltrow as a former student of her mathematician father. **Now Playing**

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire – The hype about this movie is currently reaching *Star Wars*-ian proportions; *Potter* devotees and ordinary moviegoers alike are awaiting *Goblet of Fire* with sometimes histrionic glee. Although this installment has certainly bumped up the level of special effects, some doubt whether new director Mike Newell, whose record includes the flopped *Mona Lisa Smile*, will be able to fill the shoes of the last director, *Y Tú Mamá*

También's Alfonso Cuarón. **Nov. 18**

Pride and Prejudice – This adaptation of Jane Austen's most famous work stars Keira Knightley as Elizabeth Bennet, the typical young and headstrong woman who finds herself falling for the man she most hates. Though at first uneasy about another adaptation of the well-loved novel (coming after the 1995 BBC version and the modernized *Bridget Jones' Diary*), reviewers are now calling it both extremely well-made and very faithful to the book. **Nov. 18**

Walk the Line – You won't have to be a Johnny Cash fan to enjoy what looks to be a truly well-acted and well-written film. Joaquin Phoenix is reputed to give a spot-on performance of the Man in Black, sensitively handling Cash's addiction without being melodramatic. **Nov. 18**

Rent – Fans of the award-winning Broadway show *Rent* are looking forward to the movie adaptation that includes the talents of Taye Diggs, Rosario Dawson, and Anthony Rapp, among others. *Rent* follows the lives of a struggling group of East Villagers in New York City as they confront the problems of poverty, illness, and the AIDS epidemic. Some fans worry whether director Chris Columbus, better known for feel-good children's movies, will be able to handle the gritty social commentary of *Rent*. **Nov. 23**

Stewie Griffin: The Untold Story – A spin-off, straight-to-DVD movie based on Fox's *The Family Guy*. Unrated and uncensored, the movie does what network censors wouldn't let the show do. A foul-mouthed Brian and a surprisingly grown-up version of Stewie are at the center of the feature, but the funniest bits came from the Action 5 News team. Not exactly Oscar material, but worth renting. **On DVD Sept. 27**

Amanda Wall is a sophomore English major. Douglas Hill is a junior international studies major.

Southerners display unconscionable self-righteousness toward Rita and Katrina evacuees

by Rebekah Hurt

As Mardi Gras came – both out of season and out of region – to the Boulevard this weekend for Family Weekend’s SMU vs. Tulane football game, ironically coinciding with hurricane Rita’s destruction of the Texas/Louisiana coast, mustangs were reminded of the many evacuees in our North-Texas midst. Now, far be it from me to criticize SMU and Dallas’ response to the college-aged cohort in New Orleans during Katrina and in the intervening weeks. As a worker in the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, I observed first hand how SMU’s administration, students, and community instantaneously organized plans to bring Tulane and other New Orleans-area students to SMU without any immediate financial obligation, put in place the “3 Weeks for Relief” donation campaign on campus, and generally ease the transition of those university-affiliated Louisiana residents forced out by Katrina. However, as the immediate shock to our middle class sensibilities recedes it bears considering the continuing, unmitigated plight of the literally millions of less-well-off refugees that have relocated to the Dallas-outside-the-bubble in desperate need of housing, basic necessities, employment, and education for their children.

The old adage tells us that kids say the darndest things. Well, indeed, I was first alerted to the less-than-commendable response of some North Texans to the overwhelming need posed by Katrina evacuees by way of an otherwise unremarkable conversation with several of my siblings last week. I found myself playing the shocked and morally-upbraiding elder as my otherwise good-natured sisters told me flippantly how they and their friends observed those “poor kids” that had been placed into their unmistakably white, suburban, middle-class elementary, middle, and high schools were causing problems with the teachers, refusing to do their classwork, stealing from the “rest” of the students, coming to school unkempt and unprepared, boasting about how they were too good for the apartment space they had been offered, and so forth. In short, they figured those filthy, no-good looters should be thankful for what “we” had already so graciously “given.” Surely, I thought, this misplaced antipathy and prejudice is just some junior high school foolishness – the significantly more mature population of Dallasites must be extending a compassionate welcome, musn’t they? I was disheartened to learn that, in fact, they “must” not, and are – in large numbers – not doing any such thing.

In response to a recent *Dallas Morning News* article (in Tuesday’s Metro section), “Dallas accused of blocking aid for nonshelter evacuees – City cites cash-flow problem in refusing to sign apartment leases,” Robert Tate of Dallas wrote: “Evacuees and local activists need to realize that the city of Dallas owes them nothing. Instead of lashing out at Mayor Laura Miller for not signing apartment leases, perhaps they should thank her for all the city has done for them. And we citizens should thank Ms. Miller for not putting Dallas at financial risk to score quick political Brownie points. I dare say former mayors would have done so without hesitation.”

The first thing I would say to this correspondent is, man, you had just better hope that you’re never the one on the receiving end of any disaster, natural or otherwise. Reluctance to provide basic resources and housing to evacuees – who until just recently had in great proportions been living in the unenviable Reunion Arena and worse – on the basis of a perceived “financial risk” to the North Texas economy is ridiculous and unfounded. In the face of a disaster the magnitude of Katrina, the appropriate response is to provide aid first and approach the federal government for the inevitable reimbursement later.

Replying from a slightly different but related angle to the Tues. Editorial on “Long Road to Recovery – Proceed with caution in New Orleans” Jerry Berggren of Rowlett wrote to *The DMN*: “You stated that Mayor Ray Nagin failed to provide transportation out of New Orleans for its poorest citizens, the 23 percent who live below the poverty line. Let’s suppose the mayor put these people on a bus. Where would they have gone? What community in this country, much less in the Deep South, would have accepted the poorest of the poor, the disenfranchised, the needy, the part of New Orleans’ population that requires federal and state assistance for support? The answer, of course, is that no other city called the mayor and offered shelter. None would take them before the storm, and only when enough Americans felt embarrassment, shame and, to a lesser degree, compassion, did New Orleans’ evacuees have a place to go.”

While I’m not sure how much sense it makes to second-and third-guess the Louisiana administration as this writer goes so far to do (in point of fact Mayor Nagin did fail to provide transportation out, so what good does it do us to “suppose the mayor put these people on a bus?”), I agree with his unfortunate observation that the surrounding Southerners were and are none too happy about accepting this indigent evacuees into their midst. For more commentary on the racially-inflected aspect of this dialogue, implied by the editorialist’s reference to the “Deep South”, we need only look back to Samantha Urban’s fine *Hilltopics* article from two weeks back. Regardless, though, of whether Texans’ inadequate response has been due to the racial – or simply the socio-economic – “otherness” of the hurricane evacuees, the point is that however much we’ve already been doing in service of relief efforts, it’s simply not enough. And we’d be fooling ourselves to think otherwise.

Let’s not let our self-satisfied and “morally”-puffed-up back-patting get in the way of a recognition of the real issues at hand and the need for continuing outreach of a genuinely charitable nature.

Rebekah Hurt is a senior English major.

Hilltopics Staff

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