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Hilltopics Staff

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HILLTOPICS

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War in Iraq: Sterling Morriss shares what puts the situation in Iraq in perspective for her, page 2.

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Events at Virginia Tech spell need for a reevaluation of privacy laws

by Bill Meehan

I am not a member of the NRA. I do not own a firearm. I have never been hunting, and I have actually never fired a gun before. It's not that I was not exposed to firearms. My father was a cop, and I grew up with firearms in the household. My father just did not think I should shoot; infer what you will. My point is that I am not exactly a big proponent for everyone having and using a firearm. However, I do respect them, and the people who use them properly. That stated; the tragedy at Virginia Tech is in no way an argument for more stringent gun control laws.

No, I'm not kidding you. Here's why: the problem with what happened was not the gun control laws. It wasn't. Look closely at how that young lad obtained firearms, and you're going to have a very sad realization. The gun control laws were not the weak point of the system. Cho Seung-Hui should not have been able to obtain the firearms under current gun control laws.

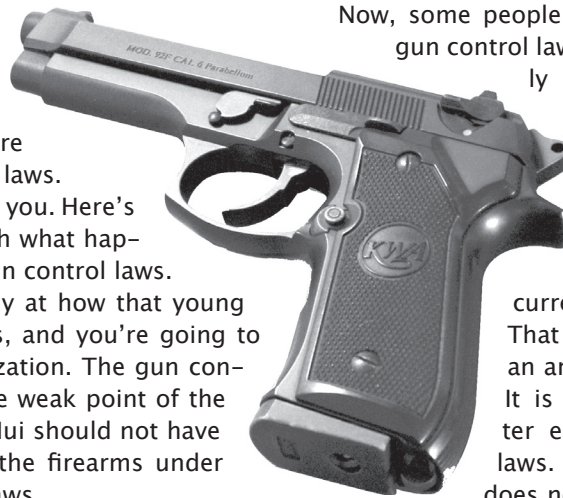
Right now, you might be asking, well then how did he obtain them? There was a background check performed on Cho Seung-Hui as required by federal gun control laws. That background check failed to reveal pieces of his mental history that would have prevented him from obtaining the firearms. The problem came from bureaucratic loopholes. Because Cho's mental illness was not properly filed, it did not show up on the mandatory background check required for the purchase of a firearm.

The loophole is quite simple. We have put so much effort into protecting the privacy and health records of people that we have put

ourselves in danger. It's actually quite sickening that the same people who throw a fit when police invade someone's privacy during an investigation are the same people who are upset that similar people are obtaining weapons because of privacy that they lobbied for. There was a serious failure of a system, but it was not a failure of gun control laws. It was a failure in the mental health care systems and in the proper disclosure of information.

Now, some people might propose that if gun control laws were more effectively enforced, authorities may have prevented him from obtaining firearms. This argument is valid; his ability to obtain weapons did violate current gun control laws. That however, is still not an argument for more laws. It is an argument for better enforcement of current laws. Nevertheless, this still does not properly address yet another argument against making current laws stricter.

There's something very important to remember: people who break laws tend not to care about obeying laws. For instance, someone who plans to murder a large group before killing himself is probably not going to be dissuaded by gun control laws. Cho Seung-Hui was not discouraged by current gun control laws; he found a way to subvert them. What would make one believe that he would not subvert stricter laws? That's something to remember before taking rash action that only has a negative impact on law-abiding citizens.



see GUN CONTROL on page 3

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 7:00 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.

The often forgotten war: One student recounts her personal connection to Iraq

by Sterling Morriss

America is at war, but it is often easy to forget it. I know that as college students, we often live in a bubble of classes, essays, organizations, and parties. There's nothing strange about this; it's a perfectly ordinary existence for any student of higher education. And while many of us are politically minded or actively watch and read the news daily, for the most part our day-to-day existence has not been substantially altered by the fact that our nation is at war.

My best friend from high school, Katie, married a West Point graduate in January of 2005. Drew is currently deployed on his second tour of Iraq since his commission began in May of 2004. The young couple hoped that this would be his last deployment until he is released from active duty in May of 2008, but thanks to Defense Secretary Gate's recent announcement of extended tours abroad, this is not the case. As the situation stands now, Drew will not return from his third tour of Iraq until June of 2009, having spent more than three years of his young life in Iraq, and not to mention his first three wedding anniversaries.

Obviously, this is a heartbreaking story whose impact is augmented for me only by my proximity to the persons involved. However, what impresses me more about this situation is that most of us are not confronted often by tales like these. If we are indeed at war, why does it seem like we are not? One reason is surely that the media seems to care more about who fathered Anna Nicole's baby than the lives of our own soldiers in Iraq. Another could be that we, as mostly middle-class university students, do not have many friends who chose the military path.

Katie called me the other evening to talk because I am her only close friend nowadays who isn't involved in the army. She lives in Killeen, Texas, outside of Fort Hood, and her life is filled with army friends and meetings of soldiers' spouses. She all too often helps to support wives when they become

widows; the network and sense of community around the base is intense. Even though she lives here in the States, her life is drenched in the war in Iraq, not only because her husband is there, but because all of her surroundings revolve around it as well.

When she told me that I'm her closest non-army friend, it made me think of the reverse: Am I close to anyone else in Iraq, or personally affected by another story? Not really. When I envision the war in Iraq, I think of Katie and Drew and not some multitude of faceless soldiers or Iraqi citizens. My first reaction to this cognizance was unease - perhaps I should automatically think about how many people are affected, and not just one specific couple, especially if I want to consider myself a responsible and aware citizen. But the more I thought about it, I slowly came to conclude that it is precisely the war's effect on my friends that makes it a facet of my reality.

So maybe we all need someone like Katie and Drew in our lives to help ground us in the truth of the situation. It is not impossible to care about something when it does not affect you personally - we have a lot of students on campus who spend a significant amount of time protesting the atrocities in Darfur, the illegal detention of political prisoners, and more. These students presumably don't have relatives dying in Sudan, but they are called to action regardless. But if we did have friends or family in Darfur, would that make it different? Would the genocide have stopped by now?

I wonder the same about Iraq. We are a young generation going through our first significant war, and most of us don't seem to be influenced by it at all. Yes, a good number of us actively participate in both sides of the debate, but I don't see any evidence that we have transformed notably as a generation on account of Iraq. Maybe it comes from the media or the fact that we aren't personally intimate with many soldiers. Regardless, it is important for us to remember that there is a war, and there are Americans whose entire existence revolves around it. If you don't have someone like Katie and Drew in your life, I pray that you will find another way to latch onto the war in a personal way. I know that having Katie in my life makes the war that much more of a reality for me. Is it real for you?

For a touching story about Drew's first deployment to Iraq during the couple's engagement, read their archived article in UT's Daily Texan at <<http://media.www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2005/02/14/TopStories/A.World.Apart-862689.shtml>>.

Sterling Morriss is a senior art history major.



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A commentary on the lack of integrity and communication in SMU's Panhellenic system

by Ashlee Rivalto

At the beginning of the fall semester all Panhellenic members attended a mandatory meeting at McFarlin auditorium. At this meeting, the sorority women received a piece of paper entitled "2006 RECRUITMENT VIOLATIONS." The paper listed 20 bullet points such as: 56 potential new members reportedly received text messages from sorority women, 5 potential new members reported eating dinner with sorority women, 36 potential new members reported being called by sorority women.

Upon receiving this paper, all of the girls took their seats unaware they were awaiting a brutal tongue-lashing. The meeting started off with a display of national awards that SMU's Panhellenic council received in the past year. That presentation lasted a grand total of about 5 minutes.

Then, there was the presentation on integrity. First of all, the list of violations was read aloud, so that we could fully understand the horrors of what had taken place. Second, we were told what integrity meant, since we obviously had no clue. This is where the presentation crossed the line: the speaker explained that not only did we not know what integrity was, but that we all had none. How could we have integrity since we had committed horrid acts of---communication?

Panhellenic's rules for recruitment fall heavily on "normal" contact with PNMs (potential new members). The by-laws for recruitment state, "Sorority women must follow normal contact rules...[they] shall not contact PNMs by outside devices...phones, text messages, email, instant messages, written communication or online communities [i.e. Facebook] and [when on party busses] sorority members and PNMs may not sit next to each other..."

How will Panhellenic find out, you might ask? SPIES! All of the sorority members constantly watch for violations by other sororities. You, rather, your sorority turns others in before you are turned in. Every girl for herself! For example, a PNM sits next to you on a bus, you are forced to either a. tell them to move or b. immediately get up before some other sorority woman sees you and decides to turn you in to Panhellenic. Yeah that's "normal" alright.

These rules contradict each other. What is normal communication? I don't know exactly, but I do know if a definition of "normal communication" was out there, it would not include restricting phone calls, text messaging, and where you sit on busses. Not only do these rules contradict each other, they encourage sorority women to tattle-tale. A former Panhellenic council member says, "This system promotes competition and unneeded animosity between the different chapters, basically they are tearing apart the 'sisterhood' and 'harmony' that they are trying to promote between the sororities."

Although I am not one to combat authority, I just don't understand the rules and regulations set by SMU's Panhellenic council. I fully support my peers and their efforts to make SMU's Panhellenic council an ideal community, but I do not believe that the present rules accomplish the goals that

Panhellenic mission statement displays.

"We, the members of the Southern Methodist University Panhellenic Association, agree to promote honesty, respect, and sisterhood through respectful adherence to the UNANIMOUS AGREEMENTS and all amendments established by the National Panhellenic Conference. We believe that sorority is a way of life exemplifying the highest ideals of sisterhood. We wish to be womanly always, to be democratic rather than exclusive, and to promote harmony, trust, and cooperation between sororities and fraternities."

This mission statement sounds great! I am all for it! Although would someone explain what restricting communication has to do with any of it? Panhellenic restricts communication in an attempt to create a fair playing field between all sororities. The goal is something that I am all for. The only problem is that this system of restricting communication does not work! Not only do people constantly break the rules---hello, you cannot restrict communication between anyone, especially college aged females---but, we are being turned against each other.

One member of the SMU Panhellenic community explains, "The recent changes that Panhellenic has made with communication destroy chapter individuality, and try to skew communication by putting too much authority over Greek women. They try to restrict relationships that otherwise would be formed."

What's the point? Obviously this system does not work. Why do we keep it? And furthermore, if there is a lack of integrity, it is not in the sorority women here at SMU, it is in the Panhellenic system itself!

Ashlee Rivalto is a sophomore corporate communications and public affairs major.

Gun control: not the only failure last week continued from page 1

There was a failure at many different levels this week. The greatest failure was not gun control laws. The greatest failure was the state of our mental health care systems. Even if you fault gun control for the tragedy, the failure was still not the laws themselves, it was enforcement. Before we take drastic steps it's important to evaluate the current system. We need to examine what went wrong, and then take corrective action instead of making a flashy show of buffing up something that does not need the work.

Oh and for the record, the New York Times pointed out this problem 7 years ago. Seriously, look it up. I entered "federal gun control, background check, mental health" into Google's search engine (just the regular one) and it is the #1 result. This is that saddest part of the entire tragedy.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=9800EED8143EF932A25757C0A9669C8B63>
Bill Meehan is a senior computer science and math major.

Hilltopics 2006-2007 Editor Application

Please return by 30 April to hilltopics@hotmail.com or any *Hilltopics* distributor.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Phone Number: _____ Year: _____

Major(s) and Minor(s): _____

Preference of Position: (please rank 1-6, 1 being your first choice; note that actual positions filled may vary from those on application)

____ **Editor-in-Chief** (conducts weekly meetings of editorial staff, directs overall management of publication)

____ **Business Manager** (spokesperson for *Hilltopics* to the SMU community, facilitates the logistics of keeping *Hilltopics* in good standing with the University)

____ **Copy Editor** (responsible for editing articles for length, grammar, and content)

____ **Distribution Manager** (designs and implements the *Hilltopics* distributions strategy)

____ **Graphics Editor** (designs each edition of *Hilltopics* and advertisements, as needed; responsible for generating and submitting PDF to printer each week; requires experience with Adobe Photoshop and Adobe InDesign)

____ **Managing Editor** (directs the content of each issue and, in the case of controversy, has the final say as to what articles are or are not included)

Please note that every editor, regardless of their particular position, will be responsible for distributing Hilltopics each week, and will also write articles as needed.

Application Questions:

Please briefly answer each of the following questions on a separate sheet and submit your responses with your application.

1. Why are you applying to be a *Hilltopics* editor?
2. What do you think are the biggest strengths and biggest weaknesses of *Hilltopics*?
3. What is a political, social, or cultural issue about which you care deeply? That is, what kinds of topics would you be most interested in writing about for *Hilltopics*? Why is this issue important to you?
4. Do you have any journalism/writing/design experience (lack of experience in no way disqualifies any applicant from consideration)?