

11-13-2006

## Hilltopics: Volume 3, Issue 10

Hilltopics Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/hilltopics>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hilltopics Staff, "Hilltopics: Volume 3, Issue 10" (2006). *Hilltopics*. 56.  
<https://scholar.smu.edu/hilltopics/56>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hilltopics by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

# HILLTOPICS

always 100% smu-written  
www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics

volume three, issue ten  
week of november 13, 2006

## With everyone buying into the Christmas hype already, where's the love for Thanksgiving?

by Clare Taylor

This year, I couldn't wait for Halloween to be over! Dressing up as my favorite movie character and getting candy cannot even compare with the carol-singing, present-getting hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. "Wait," you say, "it's not Christmas yet. Didn't you get the memo?" Now that Halloween is over, we can now just forgo the tedium of Thanksgiving and get right to the good stuff: Christmas. I for one could not be happier.

According to some, there is evidentially a "war on Christmas." You may think we won this war last year, but let me assure you, the war is still in full swing (much like the war in Iraq). Since people are evidentially waging this war on Christmas, it only makes sense to start Christmas earlier. That way, we can lead a sneak attack against these so-called enemies of Christmas. Before they know it, we'll have red and green everywhere, Santa not just in one part of the mall, but in every store, and nativity scenes at every corner.

You may think all of this sounds foolish, but what really happens at Thanksgiving anyway? There are no presents, no trees, and no lights. You may have already noticed the beginnings of Christmas on the Hilltop. Lights

have been going up at Dallas Hall to prepare for Celebration of Lights. You may have noticed the glow of lights on and around campus already. It seems that for some, the Christmas season has already begun.

Sarcasm aside, my point is this. With presents to buy, decorating to be done, and parties to attend, Christmas is hectic enough as it is without prolonging the stress even more. Thanksgiving has become one of those holidays that gets shuffled into the big commercial giant that is Christmas. However, I love Thanksgiving because I love any holiday that allows me to eat all I want and sleep for 15 hours a night. Thanksgiving gives us the opportunity to reflect on what it is we're grateful for. It's a time to relax with family, watch football (or in my case, sleep through football), and pretend that you're

going to help with the cooking. And then, the day afterward, the Christmas trees, the lights, the decorations can be brought out. Thanksgiving isn't the apéritif to Christmas, but rather a day that deserves to be celebrated all on its own.

Christmas has its month. Give Thanksgiving its day.

*Clare Taylor is a senior international studies and French double major.*



## INSIDE this issue

**Campus:** Why one student doesn't make it to the games, page 3.

**World:** Doug Hill gives the new Defense Secretary some advice, page 2.

**School:** Todd Baty continues his ten-part series on what he loves and loves to hate at SMU. This week: the Student Body. Read the column, page 4.

**Be Heard:** *Hilltopics* is always looking for good submissions on virtually any topic. Email your ideas, feedback, or articles to [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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.

## An open letter to George Bush's new nominee for Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates

by Douglas Hill

Dear Robert Gates:

Your nomination last week to replace Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense places you in a unique position. Pending Senate confirmation, you will be the first new Pentagon head in six years, as you replace the longest-serving Defense Secretary in American history, and you will inherit a challenging global environment for the United States military. The ways you react to those challenges will have profound impact on the future of America and of the world.

First is the difficult issue of Iraq. Secretary Rumsfeld has shown a proclivity toward stubbornness and secrecy in Iraq, and it is important that you not continue the mistakes that have been made. President Bush nominated you to bring what he called a "fresh perspective" to the war, and most observers think that means fewer troops while avoiding civil war. Combined with the difficult geopolitical situation, however, is a difficult domestic political situation. With Democratic control of both the House and the Senate, there will be strong pressure to start immediately pulling out large numbers of troops and handing over more and more control to Iraqi forces. This would be the wrong strategy.

Many Democrats and foreign leaders seem to believe that

a smaller U.S. presence would be seen as an olive branch offering, and that tensions would be lessened. This belief shows a fundamental misjudgment, both of our enemy and of the nature of warfare. The Iraqi insurgency is a group of fundamentalist extremists who will not be satisfied with a cease-fire and an uneasy agreement for the Iraqi government to live alongside insurgency leaders. They have as their goal the destruction of the Iraqi state in its present form, and this is an objective incompatible with American interests. As such, it would be irresponsible to make a concession to the insurgency in hopes that they will somehow agree to just get along with the government in power.

A much better option—for America, Iraq and the world at large—would be for you to order small and gradual reductions in troop levels, and instead focus on restructuring the coalition military presence. The security of Iraq is the responsibility of the Iraqi government, and the role of the coalition should be to equip and train Iraqi forces, not to supplement them. Instead, American and other coalition forces should concentrate on rebuilding the infrastructure of Iraq. In a country where security on Army Corps of Engineers projects is sometimes four to five times the burden it normally is (both in terms of dollars and soldiers), it would be wise to focus American forces on the rebuilding of Iraqi energy, transportation, and communication infrastructure. The Iraqi insurgency will not be successful or popular if Iraqis are happy with their quality of life under the present regime, so improving the infrastructure of Iraq is our most important goal for the war, not just in economic and humanitarian terms, but in military terms as well.

Iraq is by no means the only problem you will face as Secretary of Defense. Iran and North Korea are burgeoning nuclear threats, and controlling the ballooning budget of the Pentagon is another Herculean challenge. The war in Iraq, however, is the most important landmark in American foreign policy since the end of the cold war, and both your legacy and the legacy of American power depend on your reaction to this delicate and challenging situation.

Best of luck,  
Douglas Hill

*Douglas Hill is a senior international studies major.*



**Want to be heard?**

Our advertisements are affordable, attractive, and effective.

contact [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto:hilltopics@hotmail.com) for more info

**Do you have an opinion about...** politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the Daily Campus, pets, club sports, or anything else ?

**we're listening at [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto:hilltopics@hotmail.com)**

## Stranger Than Fiction: strangely powerful

by Amanda Wall

*Stranger Than Fiction* is not exactly what it's advertised as: it may or may not be a comedy or even consistently comedic. That, however, is precisely one of the reasons I loved it. This smart and affecting movie goes about the dirty business of mixing together things that we don't normally want to put together.

Harold Crick (Will Ferrel) is perhaps the most deeply boring person on the planet. He is an IRS agent whose life is constituted by numbers. He counts his brushstrokes while brushing his teeth—76 every time—and everyday is scheduled precisely by his wristwatch—lights out at 11:13 pm. These obsessive numberings are aptly illustrated during the first 30 minutes of the movie by computer-animated graphics ticking away whenever Harold counts something.

When Harold suddenly hears a voice one morning that describes his disciplined teeth-brushing and then continues to narrate his every move, his well-regulated lifestyle begins to break down. His increasingly erratic behavior sends him from a human resources manager to a psychiatrist to a professor of literature (played by Dustin Hoffman with often hilarious flair). One of the funniest scenes in the movie happens when Professor Hilbert interviews Harold in order to find out what kind of story he is in, moving briskly through some significant literary archetypes: "Have you recently been given a gift? Flowers outside your door? Maybe a wooden horse?...Do you have magical powers?...Are you a Golem?" The main question, Hilbert concludes, is whether Harold is in a comedy or a tragedy.

This question gets complicated when Harold falls in love with a hippie-liberal baker he has been sent to audit (Maggie Gyllenhall) and even more so when he hears his narrator announce his imminent death. This narrator is actually a cigarette-addicted and morbid author named Karen Eiffel (Emma Thompson), whose writer's block will not allow her to think up the perfect death for Harold Crick. Everything comes to a head when Harold catches up Karen and begs her not to kill him.

*Stranger Than Fiction* is a slow and beautiful exploration of death, art, agency, fate, and the everyday little things that make up life. Some reviewers whined that the movie did not solve its central problem, that it flopped all over the place without giving us a true ending. If you want a movie that wraps up all its problems for you and tops all those easy answers with a bow—something that never occurs in real life—get yourself to a children's movie or a chick flick. *Stranger Than Fiction* blurs the lines between reality and fiction and, more importantly, between comedy and tragedy. How much control over your life do you have if you know that your fate—your ultimate death—is already determined?

True, the romantic storyline didn't really light any fires, but Ferrel and Gyllenhall are cute and did manage to make me smile. And every so often, the movie can be rather self-consciously clever. Overall, though, the deliciously creative cinematography, the whole-hearted performances, and the amazing story from first-time screenwriter Zach Helm, made me love this movie. We should all contemplate our mortality every once in a while, and this movie makes it fun.

Amanda Wall is a junior English, Spanish, and womens studies major.

## Why I don't make it past the boulevard

by Janet Arnold

I was reminded this past Saturday why I don't attend SMU football games. It's not that I don't have spirit, I do. It's not that I don't support drinking on the boulevard, because I support that as well. I will concede that my luke warm passion for football may have something to do with it, but I feel that they make it so difficult to enjoy yourself once in the stadium.

The experience of tailgating at SMU is unparalleled, and this past weekend was no exception. The weather was amazing, sprits were high, and we could not have asked for better day.

Now I really don't follow football. I actually think that this past game was my first this semester; and in reality I probably only went because my roommate was competing for homecoming queen. I got separated from my friends in the crowd, so I went looking. Finally I saw them, and I started to walk down to go sit with them, where I was stopped. Stadium security yelled at me to go to my ticketed section. So I walked down to the next section and tried to go down there and walk over, but this usher wasn't having it either. I then found a person with a ticket to the section I wanted, so I borrowed it from them, and entered the section. That finally worked. But at this point I had lost the people that I entered this section looking for. I found another friend and ended up standing with a lot of people I didn't know. I don't like football, I could be having a lot more fun out on the boulevard. The only way you are getting me into the stadium is under the assumption that I will be able to sit with my friends. The company makes it worth it, and under these conditions I will probably even watch a little of the game.

I then see the same security man refuse to let a girl out of the section to go to the bathroom. People are not coming in or going out without a ticket. I felt like I was in East Berlin everyone asking for papers (tickets). I spent more of my time there watching students drunk and sober alike attempting to circumvent the stadium security. He was reasoned with, he was yelled at, people tried to trick him, jump over the fence, do everything, but he was not giving in.

I ended up leaving at halftime. You can judge me, call me a far weather fan, call me what ever you like, but I'll maintain that you were lucky to get me to the game at all, and until I am assured that I don't have to be treated like a prisoner at a game, I doubt that I'll be attending any others. See you on the boulevard.

Janet Arnold is a junior marketing major.

## Are you boring?

(if so, ignore this ad)

We're always looking for interesting submissions.

Send your commentary, proposal, letter, editorial or cartoon to [hilltopics@hotmail.com](mailto:hilltopics@hotmail.com).

All pieces become property of Hilltopics upon submission.

## Todd Baty presents number 4 of the top 10 things I love about SMU. This week: the student body

by Todd Baty

### #4: The SMU Student Body

This week's topic is deeply personal to not only me, but most likely, you (if you are a student), for today's topic is none other than the SMU Student Body. And obviously, there are many things to "love" about my fellow students. Many of you are my friends, and I truly love those relationships, as do I cherish the communal bond of alma mater that I share with every past or present SMU student.

I am also appreciative of the fun-loving nature that seems to be embodied by the typical SMU student. In a world that seems to be more concerned with one-upping its competition or building a resume, SMU students take the difficulties of "growing-up" in stride, always understanding that all work and no play leaves Jack (or Jill) a very dull person. In fact, just last night I enjoyed the company of friends at a party, and for those few hours, the pressures of school and work seemed to evaporate.

However, as enjoyable as a fun evening can be, too many fun evenings make Jack (or Jill) an intellectually dull person, and from my observations over the past two-and-a-half years, many (if not most) SMU students might need to reevaluate their personal balance of work and play. Essentially, I write to you, students of SMU, and ask you a simple question: why are you here? I ask not why you are at SMU as opposed to another campus; I want to know why you have chosen to attend college at all.

Are you here because it is expected of you by your parents and family? Perhaps you are here because the majority of your high school friends were planning to go to college, and it seemed like the logical thing to do. Or maybe you decided to attend college because you didn't want to enter the "real world" until absolutely necessary—four years of "learning" seemed like the easiest way to slow down the wave of re-

sponsibility that accompanied graduating from high school. And lastly, I imagine that some of you are today SMU Mustangs because you have a genuine desire to learn and grow intellectually, to transform yourselves into articulate, professional scholars of your fields of choice.

Thus, I write to you with a message that might seem elitist, judgmental, and even a little egg-headed: students of SMU, discover why you are here! I charge you to circumvent the normal college missteps (in which one's knowledge and understanding of alcohol and bar culture is often paramount to any real studies) and to take ownership of your education. Do not spend your precious four years consumed by pretentious social acts and parties; view this time as a period of unadulterated learning, one of the few moments in your life in which education is paramount. SMU was not founded to become a "finishing school" or a place for mere social activity and a rubberstamped diploma—this place is the dwelling of beautiful thoughts, the haven of magnificent ideas!

Obviously, I am not attempting to demonize socialization or organizations that are essentially social in purpose, but I am trying to make you reevaluate your priorities. Imagine the energy, excitement, and opportunities that would develop if every student re-approached his or her studies with an improved attitude. Imagine the learning that would take place outside of the classroom, as students began to openly discuss their ideas and studies with one another. Imagine an SMU in which the "intellectual life" was the "social life," a place where talking philosophy, politics, or religion over coffee was the activity of choice on a Thursday or Friday night.

So find something that excites your mind, and pursue it, students of SMU! Remember the blessing, privilege, and honor of the education at your fingertips and consecrate your decision to be "here" with a commitment to challenge your mind. You are all my compatriots in this venture, and therefore this message is one of shared love for SMU and one another; let us go and make the most of our education and exhibit to the world the true purpose of our college experience.

**Next week.....3: SMU Faculty and Staff**

*Todd Baty is a junior music and history major.*



### Hilltopics Staff

Douglas Hill: Editor-in-Chief  
 Mark McDowell: Managing Editor  
 Todd Baty: Business Manager  
 Jenny Simon: Submissions Manager  
 Sterling Morriss: Distribution Manager  
 Monica Chavez: Copy Editor  
 Clare Taylor: Copy Editor  
 Amanda Wall: Copy Editor  
 Janet Arnold: Graphics Editor  
 Carter Twitty: Senior Writer

Hilltopics is published each Monday. It is sponsored by the University Honors Program and the Students' Association.

### Miss one of the other parts?

You can still check out the last three installments of Todd's "Things I Love About SMU" column online:  
[www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics](http://www.smu.edu/honors/hilltopics)