

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opening a new door may bring in something beautiful

Dear Editor:

Ever wonder about the other side of Valentine's Day?

The dichotomy of a day which on the one hand seems designed for love, a thing which would never be thought to cause anguish for anyone, yet on the other hand seems to exude a sense of exclusion to those who cannot share in its celebration leaves many confused. If you have ever not had a date for Cupid's day of honor, you may understand what I am talking about.

It's kind of a scary thing, really. A day that is set-up for couples and has no use or sympathy for single folks doesn't leave a lot of leeway. You can either participate in the revelry, or you can't. You don't find a lot of Valentine's Day specials in restaurants for the solitary diner, nor is there a large market share for "One Person Boxes" at See's candies. V-Day is an intimidating idea which seems to assume one very large thing—that because humans have been courting and mating for so long, we must know how to do it by now. Look back at your teenage years of dating (which many of us have not yet left), and see if you were the all-knowing product of millenia of evolution.

What is this thing called dating? Relationships? Marriage? There are books longer than the tax code which contain more theories than O.J.'s defense team about these things, and God knows I don't know them all. But I do know what I see and feel when the 14th of February rolls around,

and I think that we all know what these sights and feelings are.

Who is that girlfriend? That boyfriend? Someone to share a movie with? The person who leaves you flowers because he knows you love roses? The girl you want to break up with? The one who you can talk to who will understand when your dad makes you feel unsuccessful or when your mother wishes you were more like her? The one who makes you feel as if you will be a young man forever? The one who makes you cry?

How do you fall in love? Is it across a crowded seminar hall? The quad? A long series of dates which finally result in love? Someone in band with you, someone you know for years and finally get to really know? Your lab partner, your roommate's sister, a stranger at a party? But those are all what did happen, the things we all know about. How about the almos, the not quites? The guy you never met? The girl who passed by that day, because you were in a hurry and didn't have time to talk? The date that you never gave a chance?

It seems to me (in all my ignorance) that love is more than just a date for the prom. It means more than a constant study partner, and even more than just a physical pleasure. It envelopes a mystery of our lives, the desire we all have not to be alone, to share some of our heart and our soul with another who wants only to do the same with us. It is totally

selfless in our love for the other, and it is totally selfish in our desire not to be lonely and to have someone care for us.

We all want it in some sense, and yet it seems that we sense its power and fear it as well. We all claim that we can't find a boy/girlfriend, yet we all seem

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to make what can be a critical misstep in the search for a partner—when faced with the most important instant in a relationship—the first time you meet—we back away. We have the most stringent rules imaginable about people we don't know well; we don't talk to them. You don't talk to someone you didn't come to the party with, you avoid that admiring look from the next table in South, and, to the lament of both sexes (how many times have we heard this), you didn't call.

Doesn't the most crucial time in finding your best friend, your future spouse, or your archenemy come in the first words that

you say to him/her? Doesn't much of the world come down to the meeting, the nod of the head, the polite smile of greeting, the exchanging of the first few empty words about how cool the party is?

Maybe those first few words shouldn't be so empty. Maybe the oh-so-polite-yet-impenetrable veneer with which we keep the world at bay isn't the way. It maybe, however, that playing things a little closer to the heart might make sense. Allowing ourselves to follow what might be a dream, a notion, a whim, an attraction because we feel curious might lead us to a few more successes. A few more defeats, also? A few more heartaches and troubles? Probably. Who can deny that?

But doesn't the chance for something greater than what is now inspire us to make the leap—ask for the date, try for a promotion, offer the ring? If yes to all of that, with all that it could mean both good and bad, why not yes to the easiest of things, the most simple of commitments—a few moments of conversation in a hallway or a deep discussion of ER or FRIENDS over a Spamburger. Love reveals itself in many different ways—we should be opening the doors for it—not just leaving some open and closing the rest.

Does any of this answer any questions? Ask any? Maybe maybe not. Part of it could be seen simply as, oh, I don't know, the ramblings of one student who's feeling kinda lonely tonight and never quite figured out the whole dating thing. Or,

this could be seen to be highly relevant in today's talk of dorm spirit, co-residentiality and representation. Like everything else, it depends on you.

But then maybe more of us are romantics than we care to admit. Maybe other people think the same things, feel the same way. The person you don't have the courage to approach may not have the courage to approach you.

Maybe we should all find the courage not just to approach that heretofore unapproachable person (we see at any party that a few beers can give lots and lots of courage), but maybe we can find the courage to be approached, to have our privacy threatened, to lose some of the safety of our walls for a minute.

If we can find the time and willingness for the discussion, the chat, maybe even just the shared glance, maybe a lot more things could happen, both good and bad, I suppose. Is this a call to abandon logic and thought and values? No. We must always keep a hold on what we know is right. But that doesn't mean we should lose the ability to be spontaneous in the simplest of ways—being friendly, being open—in the hope and desire of what might come through that newly opened door.

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AND IN THIS CORNER

Telecommunications Act amounts to censorship

Last Friday, I joined much of the Internet by Painting my pages Black. Here's why:

Thursday, President Clinton signed into law the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The majority of this bill is awash with congressional-speak, a language no sane man nor woman can understand, concerned with corporate merg-

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ers and deregulating the cable industry. The subject of controversy were two small articles tacked on by avid censorship fans on Capitol Hill: one article dictates the addition of the special "V-chip" into all new television sets produced in the U.S., the other calls itself the "Communications Decency Act" and bans from electronic transmission all "indecent" images and words.

The avowed intent of both additional provisions is to prevent children from witnessing acts of violence and depravity through the media, as if they do not witness enough of them in person (or are the victims of them) each day in this country.

The American Civil Liberties Union has already sought a restraining order and promises to bring the law before the Supreme Court to challenge its constitutionality. The government has until Wednesday, February 14th, to file written arguments before U. S. District Judge Ronald Blackwater rules on the

case. Until a court case decides the outcome of the law, everyone who "breaks" the law is subject to prosecution, which in this case means the government will attempt to fine the originators of "indecent" material \$250,000 and send them to prison for two years.

Internet users protested by blacking out their page backgrounds all day Friday and Saturday, and numerous anti-censorship websites sprang up instantly, with more arriving by the hour. Some sites, such as Penthouse, have already taken down their pages in anticipation.

The major problem here is that lawmakers haven't the foggiest notion about the nature of the world wide web. It is not a form of medium that one single country can regulate. Webusers can use anonymous servers, or bounce their email literally across the globe as many times as they want. They can access any site from any country in the world within seconds, and each country has its own "obscenity" laws. There is practically no way the U.S. government can enforce this law.

Frankly, I'm not yet ready to declare this law a complete and total travesty of justice. With the wording altered it might work. As it stands, under the definitions of "indecent," "suggestive," "lewd," and any number of other words which art-lover Jesse Helms has a great tendency to use, the Venus de Milo and Michaelangelo's David and many other great Classical and Renaissance works are banned from the internet.

Any and all sites which discuss sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases are banned. Abortion sites are likewise banned, whether it be information on how to get or merely infor-

mation on what it is. All sites about safe sex are banned. Basically, any site with the word "sex" or other indecent words or naked human figures in it is subject to censorship.

The reasoning responsible for this internet censorship is also responsible for the "V-chip" idea. There's a way to prevent your kids from watching violent programming on TV — it's called the "off" button. You just press it, and, zooooo, there goes the nasty, bad images. If this calls for a little more parental supervision while children watch TV, well, isn't it about time that parents started paying attention to their kids instead of buying them toys and pretending that means love?

Parents buy their kids their own computers and stick the things in the kids' bedrooms. Many parents haven't got a clue how to operate a computer or what the internet can do; the kids know more than their parents because they're willing to learn, and the parents do nothing because they're too scared by something new.

Parents don't realize that programs exist which will block out certain sites to kids, or that one can even lock a computer using either a password or a simple key on the hard drive. But I guess most parents are too scared to admit they don't know as much as their kids, so they react the only way they think they can — by illegally seizing control.

In a March 1995 interview on PBS, Newt Gingrich himself admitted that this act was "probably illegal under our Constitution." According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through

any media and regardless of frontiers."

It is fairly obvious to anyone, including the Tipper Gores and Jesse Helms of Congress, that the Communications Decency Act of 1996, by issue of its poorly-worded definitions, constitutes censorship and violation of both the Bill of Rights and the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

It should also be clear to Internet users that simply turning our pages black will do nothing. What we need to do is flood our congressmen and congresswomen with tons and tons of mail, preferably all sent by email to be ironic. Now is the time to act, not to overreact — that time comes later, in the worst-case scenario. Hopefully, if we give the ACLU the supports it needs, there need be no worst-case scenario.

In deference to the free-thinking spirit of the CDA, I have reserved a special Anti-Censorship page on my own homepage. Be warned: this page will contain a few graphic images and song lyrics which some may consider "vulgar" or simply "uncouth" and most definitely "unPC." I do this not because I particularly approve of juvenile pantings over naked women and men, but because I can do it. It is my right, as a U.S. citizen and as a human being.

In the meantime, I shall continue sending emails to my friends using whatever foul profane language I so choose, and I urge you all to do the same. It's nobody's damn business what we talk about to our friends and colleagues, whether by phone, in public, in private or by email.

Contact Matthew Apple, a creative writing grad student at Notre Dame, at matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu. Visit his webpage at <http://www.nd.edu/~maple>. Protest and survive.