

DoreWays

A forum for exchanging ideas

From the Editor

Mailboxes

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED RECEIVING MAIL. WALKING TO THE MAILBOX—OR more often these days, left-clicking on the Outlook icon—brings a brief, but welcome, sense of anticipation. Whether electronic or fastened to poles along the street in front of our houses, mailboxes are a portal of sorts to other people. Bills and advertisements often find their way to me through my mailbox at home, and spam of all sorts floods my e-mail box at the office. But tucked between the invitations, the solicitations, and the otherwise unwanted pieces of correspondence are little treasures: unexpected news from friends, photos celebrating an event I was unable to attend and, here at the office, commentary from readers about *Vanderbilt Magazine*.

Since our redesign of *Vanderbilt Magazine* five issues ago, we've come to rely on correspondence to gauge who's reading. Or who, among those who are reading, cares about what we print. With the publication of our first issue of the new design, we received more than 200 cards, letters and e-mails. Our editorial content has been labeled too liberal; it's been labeled too conservative. Sometimes both for the same issue. Readers have asked to be taken off the mailing list; readers have asked for additional copies to share with friends and colleagues. Angry readers have suggested *Vanderbilt Magazine* might do better with a new editor; others have suggested giving the current editor a raise.

Our letters department, "DoreWays," has provided a forum for discussion about the literary legacy of the Fugitive Poets and Agrarian Writers—and the magazine's role in tarnishing that legacy or setting the record straight (depending on the letter writer). Readers have advocated for the right to bear arms, questioned the legitimacy of capital punishment, and alternately congratulated or condemned the University for remembering or abandoning its historical legacy—all in response to the contents of *Vanderbilt Magazine*.

This week, as I was putting some finishing touches on this issue, I opened a letter from Lt. Bradley Watson, a 2001 alumnus who is a rifle platoon commander in Iraq. What struck me most about his letter was that he took the time to write. That in the midst of all he is experiencing, he took the time to commend student Ellen Stormer for her courage in taking part in the smallpox vaccine trial here at Vanderbilt.

The work in which our faculty and students are engaged has global implications. Ellen's work is just one example. When we can tell their stories to our readers around the world, I feel like we're doing a pretty good job.

KEN SCHEXNAYDER



JIM HSIEH

From the Reader

Fair and Balanced?

I WOULD LIKE TO VOICE MY STRONG OBJECTION to the inclusion of the following quotation from author Al Franken in the Winter 2004 edition of *Vanderbilt Magazine* [p. 12]: "It's one thing for the president to lie about his sex life. ... It's another thing to lie about why we're sending young men and women into battle."



President Bush acted on the best intelligence information available to him. Leaders in Congress reviewed the same information and came to the same conclusion. The president believed that the intelligence was correct and so did members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans. For the president not to act on what appeared to be a real threat to the American people would have been negligence on his part. To act on the best intelligence available is not lying, even if the intelligence is found to be incorrect.

Surely, Mr. Franken said something far more intelligent that you could have included in the magazine than the quote you chose.

I applaud Chancellor Gee's efforts to bring NCAA sports back into line where athletes are real students and every effort is made to see that they get a good education. I would encourage him also to try to bring balance into the political teachings of the University. For every liberal speaker that is invited to the University, there also should be an equal number of conservative speakers invited. Although Vanderbilt is not as liberal as most elite universities, it is not balanced as it should be.

Vanderbilt Magazine also should seek to be politically fair and balanced.

CARL CONNER, BE'62, MS'64
Rockville, Md.

PERHAPS THE MOST DISINGENUOUS PHRASE IN all of publishing appears near the bottom of page 6 in your Winter 2004 issue: "Opinions expressed in *Vanderbilt Magazine* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views

Contributors to the Summer 2004 issue

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of the Magazine or the University administration.”

In my opinion, it is the height of intellectual dishonesty to make such a statement in a magazine with such an obvious liberal slant. To take the current issue as an example, I find the following as I flip through:

- A blurb (with picture and quote) about Al Franken’s “sold-out” appearance, p. 12;
- An article about removal of the word “Confederate” from one of [Vanderbilt’s] residence halls, p. 12;
- An article promoting the new Center for the Study of Religion and Culture, in which the final sentence implies a connection between “Christian fundamentalism in the Southern U.S., female shamans in Korea, [and] sexual consumerism in Thailand,” p. 16;
- An article promoting cloning, p. 25;
- A puff piece on Tipper Gore, p. 31; and
- A blatantly pro-gun-control article, p. 57.

Why not simply stand up and take responsibility for the views you are promulgating?

If I publish a magazine with articles by William F. Buckley, Thomas Sowell, Robert Bork, Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh, can I claim that my magazine is ideologically neutral simply because I didn’t write the articles myself? I think not. There is an apt metaphor for this type of pretense—fig leaf.

JONATHAN R. SMITH, JD’98

Dallas

Athletic Surprise

CHANCELLOR GEE HAS taken a brave and decisive position that affirms Vanderbilt’s position as a leader and one of America’s top universities [Winter 2004 issue, “Autumn Surprise,” p. 44].

Winning or losing on the field must be secondary to the complete Vanderbilt educational experience for its athletes. I far prefer hearing a sports commentator mention the success of

Vanderbilt’s athletes who have graduated in prior years than the current score. It will make any victory, big or small, frequent or rare, all the sweeter knowing that Vanderbilt participants are college students by traditional and honest definitions.

DR. BRENT BLUE, BA’72
*Athletic trainer and Vanderbilt basketball player, 1968–72
Wilson, Wyo.*

REPORT MY COMMENDATIONS TO CHANCELLOR Gee and his staff who are facing squarely the problems of college athletics. Also, three cheers for the Commodore basketball team. While they did not gain the Final Four, they did represent a university whose objective is educating a group of superior students rather than gaining sports fame.

Vanderbilt should remain what it is—a superb university that also sponsors athletic programs. To ameliorate sports nuts, try this: Collect and publish the easily available graduation rates of the 64 colleges [involved] in the recent March Madness.

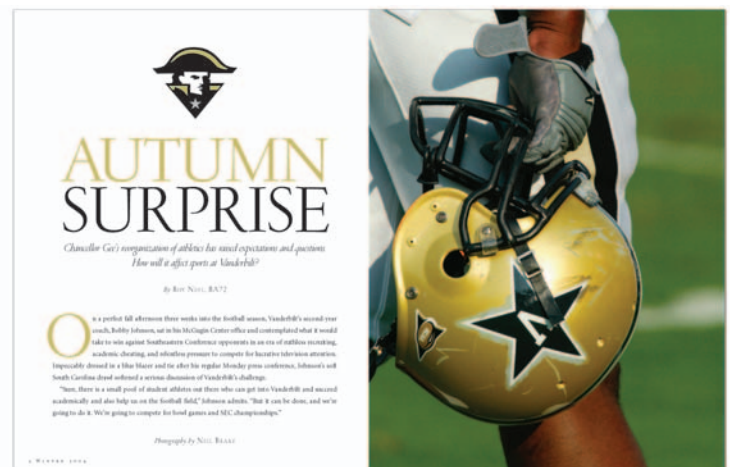
While I am an ancient graduate of Peabody College, I was aware of the standing of Vanderbilt, and to this day I brag whenever possible about Vanderbilt’s reputation.

LEO J. NEIFER, PHD’71

Hosmer, S.D.

I HAVE MOVED ABOUT THE COUNTRY A GREAT deal in recent years, and as a result have lost contact with my beloved Vanderbilt University.

That is, until yesterday: In my mailbox was your magazine. I can think of few articles of mail I have received in years that have provided me with such joy. The three years I spent earning my master of divinity degree at Vanderbilt were the best years of my life. The atmosphere at Vanderbilt, both at the Divinity School and the University at large, was a heady and lofty one, which validated and fulfilled me more than any experience of my life, save for my ordination to the ministry of



the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1990.

An education fulfills a person, makes a person complete—and it is not only the education, but the things that go with it, that brings that fulfillment and completion about. For me, Vanderbilt football was one of the things that provided most of my own personal fulfillment, which is why I was particularly interested in the article “Autumn Surprise,” about the state of Vanderbilt athletics.

{ Featured Letter }

Gunshot Wounds

THE ARTICLE "GSW" GAVE A COMPELLING ACCOUNT OF THE HIGH human and financial costs of guns to our society. Some undoubtedly will be persuaded that more gun control is the obvious solution. (Although not explicitly stated, that seemed to be the "drift" of the article to me.) Interestingly, the article said nothing positive at all about gun ownership by private citizens ... which begs the question: Why does about 40 percent of the U.S. adult population, including a fair representation of well educated and, presumably, well informed individuals, own at least one gun?

Fifteen national polls by reputable organizations including Gallup and the *Los Angeles Times* estimate that guns in the hands of private citizens are used 760,000 to 3.6 million times per year in defense against violent crime. That would mean the defensive use of guns outnumbers crimes committed with guns by at least a three-to-one margin. In the large majority (98 percent) of these instances, the mere presence of the firearm is enough to thwart the attack, and not a shot is fired. Thus, many thousands of times each year, guns are used by ordinary citizens to prevent crime and no one gets hurt. These incidents would, for obvious reasons, go completely unnoticed by the hospital trauma team. A similar case of selection bias occurs in the gun-related incidents reported to the public by the news media. Just as a crime prevented is no work for the trauma team, it is no news to the media markets either.



Criminal use and tragic accidents notwithstanding, I am convinced that the net effect of guns in the hands of law-abiding citizens is saved lives. That is why I and millions of other ordinary Americans will ignore the selective reporting, hold onto our guns, and give to the NRA!

DR. ROBERT H. WISE JR., MD'80
Valdosta, Ga.

I attended my first Vandy football game on Homecoming of 1985. The opponents were the Georgia Bulldogs. The expectation was that Georgia would roll into town, beat Vanderbilt by a lopsided score, and after the game, students and alums could go about their celebrations.

But the unexpected happened that day. ... Vandy tied Georgia 13–13.

There was a great deal of heroism at Dudley Field during Homecoming '85, but the biggest hero of all was a fine young Christian athlete named Alan Herline [BE'87, HO'94, who is today a surgeon]. Of the 13 points Vandy scored in that game, six were scored by Alan. With seconds to go in the game, and a tied score, Alan was called upon to attempt a third field goal. Unfortunately, the kick went wide.

I never had the good fortune of meeting Alan, but I did hear from a mutual friend that Alan was devastated over that missed field goal. There was no reason for Alan to feel bad. Were it not for his successful field goals, we would have lost. To me, as well I am sure to others, he was the undisputed MVP of that game.

Alan is a prime example of why I support Vanderbilt athletics and am proud to do so. Any time I have observed a Vanderbilt athletic contest, I have been aware that every athlete representing our University is an excellent scholar athlete. ... I am glad that Vanderbilt University has always insisted that its athletes perform as well in the

classroom as they do on the playing field. This insistence means that the athletes, when they graduate, can take their place in society as the utmost among well-rounded individuals.

Which, by the way, can only improve society.
THE REV. MICHAEL G. BADER, MDIV'87
Shawnee, Kan.

Gunshot Wounds

THE WINTER 2004 ISSUE FEATURED DR. RICHARD Miller in an article [Winter 2004 issue, "GSW," p. 56] about guns, bullets, ballistics, testosterone, human toll, homicides, suicides, how particular persons may be shot, the effects of gun violence, observed psychological effects on family members of gunshot persons, blast effect, projectile speed, hemorrhaging shock, tumbling characteristics, pediatric trauma, physicians charges for treatment of "victims," costs to TennCare, Medicare, private payers, workers' compensation, nurses' broken hearts and wasted resources on senseless violence. Miller failed to mention the latest invention—exploding bullets.

This is presented with no conclusions. Could there be some hidden agenda?

Incidentally, in the case of the lovely and unfortunate Ms. Stephanie Styles: In every firearm safety class I have attended over the last 50 years, I was taught never to put my finger on the trigger until I was ready to fire, and to point the firearm in a

place to do no harm, unless I intended to do harm.

Bullets are nondiscriminatory. They go where pointed. Likewise, so do automobiles at 70 miles per hour, airplanes falling out of control at 500-plus miles per hour, 90-foot hemlocks felled by miscalculation in the forest, collapsed supports in coal mines, steam-pipe eruptions due to extremes in pressure, railway locomotives wrecked due to tracks eroded by rain water, sudden atmospheric downdrafts ...

RICHARD W.J. TIPPENS, BA'61
Knoxville, Tenn.

JOHN HOWSER'S ARTICLE ON THE DEVASTATING effects of gunshot wounds was interesting until I read the "Dollars and Death" sidebar [p. 59]. Once again the typical liberal diatribe against guns and gun ownership shone through. I guess I am just a dumb old engineer, but I can read and understand what the U.S. Constitution says—something that most liberals and politicians either cannot or choose not to do. [Howser] mentions that the U.S. does not have a firearms licensing system. The Second Amendment to the Constitution gives me the right to keep and bear arms (those who argue that it is for arming the National Guard conveniently forget that the Guard as we know it today was not formed until 1903, some 112 years after the first 10 Amendments to the Constitution were adopted). If I am licensed, then I can own a firearm only with permission of the government, which means

firearm ownership is no longer a right but a privilege. I would guess you First Amendment folks would not stand for asking the government for permission to print an article, because that would violate your rights—so why should my stance against firearms registration be held so contemptible? Besides, history has shown that registration has led to confiscation—even here in the United States!

John also mentions that one-third of firearms sales are “excluded from federal law on background checks.” Again, the Constitution permits Congress to write laws governing sales across state lines but not within state lines. If states want to require background checks for those cases “excluded from federal law,” they have the authority to do so. In fact, some have.

Maybe John could revisit Vanderbilt Hospital and do another story on the devastation caused by drunken drivers. He could investigate why it is that one does not have to have a driver’s license to buy a car, or why a simple background check is not performed whenever alcohol is purchased (to ensure that convicted drunk drivers are prevented from purchasing alcohol for the period of their sentence). Oh, I am probably stepping on John’s toes here, but he probably likes to have a glass of wine every now and then, and he would not tolerate being treated like a criminal (performance of a background check) even though he has done nothing wrong. But, you know, that’s how I feel when a background check is conducted on me when I buy a firearm.

TOM PARRISH, BE’75, MS’77
Tullahoma, Tenn.

Accurate Representation?

AS AN ALUMNA (MS’98) AND FORMER EMPLOYEE of Middle Tennessee State University, I felt the need to respond to Frye Gaillard’s description of MTSU as a “blue-collar institution tucked away in the hills” [Winter 2004 issue, “Tipper Gore Remembers,” p. 30]. Upon reading this, I said to myself, “Tucked away in the hills ... of Murfreesboro?” I am not sure how the land was used prior to the establishment of the university, but I would guess it was either a pasture or farmland. The university is also not exactly “tucked away.” It’s situated in the thriving community of Murfreesboro, which is the fastest-growing city in the state. Furthermore, MTSU is a diverse and vibrant campus serving more than 20,000 students from Middle Tennessee, from across the country, and from around the world. Academic standards have been raised during recent years, and the university does attract students from “white-collar” families to

prepare them for “white-collar” aerospace, business or recording-industry jobs, among others.

In addition to being inaccurate, I felt Gaillard’s description of MTSU was condescending. He referenced MTSU while discussing Al Gore’s decision to teach at the university following his defeat in the election. As Gaillard described, he “could have taught at any school in the country. But he had chosen Middle Tennessee State University.” He neglected to mention that Gore actually taught at four universities in the country that year, including UCLA, Columbia and Fisk. In addition, his father was one of MTSU’s most notable alumni, which may have made MTSU the sentimental choice. Nevertheless, Gore’s presence at MTSU was an incredible asset, and I was proud to consider him a colleague for a year (even though I never met him or saw him at any faculty functions) at a school that is really not tucked away in the hills.

KELLI STAPLES BURNS, BA’92
Jamestown, N.C.

Another Patriot

THE STUDENT POINT OF VIEW ARTICLE TITLED



“Scabs and Scars” [Winter 2004 issue, p. 66] reassured me that Americans at home are resolute in their support of our struggle against terrorism. Ellen Stormer is as much a patriot for her service as anyone in the armed forces. Her courage and dedica-

tion are on par with any I’ve seen in combat here in Iraq.

Semper Fi.
LT. BRADLEY WATSON, BA’01
*3rd Battalion, 7th Marines
Al Qa’im, Iraq*

Old South/New South

LARRY GRIFFIN AND ASHLEY THOMPSON’S article [Winter 2004 issue], “Enough About the Disappearing South—What About the Disappearing Southerner?” is, at least to this reader (only a freshman-year alumnus of long ago, but the father of a modern-day rising Vanderbilt senior), off the mark.

The South today, as well as the core Southerner, epitomize, at least to me, the very best in our United States society: a strong family identity; a very strong sense of religion; a very obvious personal and general community and institutional

courtesy not typically found elsewhere; and a great interest in both politics and sports, which the rest of the nation tells us as Southerners is very pronounced “down South,” versus the political and sports attitudes elsewhere in our nation. Notice both major political parties stating that the winner “must carry the South” in the 2004 presidential election?

The New South struggles to improve public education, but so does our entire nation. In fact, public education across the South may be getting better per-student results than all other regions of the U.S. The New South gets most new international industries that locate within the United States (I include Kentucky in this broad-brush statement).

Also, some of our nation’s best fiction and non-fiction writers today are Southerners, including (no kin to me that I know of) George Singleton of South Carolina, author of *The Half-Mammals of Dixie*, and adopted Southerner Pat Conroy, whose recent book *My Losing Season* is worthy of conversion to a movie one of these days. (Conroy is married to a former Alabama librarian and is seen here in Hoover almost every year at our public library’s “Southern Voices” authors’ conference.)

Mr. Griffin and Ms. Thompson are good incorporators of other events that epitomize the South regionally today. What they may have overlooked is the fact that as Vanderbilt is both a regionally and internationally recognized major university, the same is “only” true today of Harvard, Princeton and Yale.

Graduates of these venerable “Eastern” universities today are no more “venerable” than today’s New South graduate of Vanderbilt University.

COL. GEORGE LIGHTFOOT SINGLETON,
USAF, RET.
*Peabody College, 1958–59
Hoover, Ala.*

Letters are always welcome

in response to contents of the magazine. We reserve the right to edit for length, style and clarity. Send signed letters to the Editor, VANDERBILT MAGAZINE, VU Station B 357703, 2301 Vanderbilt Place, Nashville, TN 37235-7703, or e-mail: ken.schexnayder@vanderbilt.edu.