

Opinions

The Blue
Banner

Editorial

The microcosm is here

Seems as though our student government is a microcosm of the Federal government. People get intoxicated with power and completely lose sight of why they were elected in the first place.

Of course, getting intoxicated on the power of SGA at this university is like getting drunk on near-beer, but hey, who's noticing? The point is, there isn't much power evidenced in our student government, and what is there serves no logical or sensible purpose.

We have to be slightly cynical when candidates claim to have wonderful voting records, but in fact abstain on every vote taken at the meetings.

If these candidates have so many great ideas about how to change the school, how come we never see them in action; where do they go?

Our current government seems to have spent more time conniving ways to get more money, sooner than anything else. True, they did vote for a pay cut last week, so maybe there is hope, but we are now in the process of voting in new officers, so the whole thing starts all over again.

Another thing that bothers us is the way SGA has apparently taken it upon themselves to change their rules of operation in order to achieve their agenda. They voted to change a rule regarding when they could get paid, in order to get paid early. Wouldn't that be nice if everyone could do that.

Also in the category of "Wouldn't that be nice if..." the athletic department claims that by asking people to join the track teams for limited amounts of time, they are just carrying on a tradition that has existed for several years previous.

The excuse that it has happened before is no excuse at all. If there aren't enough "warm bodies" to compete at this level of play, shouldn't the question be whether or not it's worth it, and not whether or not it has happened before?

We see in both the situations the willingness to go along with the rules and the status quo, instead of questioning the rules in the first place. Once one gets acclimated to a place, the sense of belonging overshadows the sense of reality. That should not be. People in positions of authority should be honorable enough to stand on their convictions.

On another note, *The Blue Banner* received several letters from SGA candidates, and, not having room to print them all, we decided to print none. We think the best way to get an idea of a candidate is to attend the mixers. Good luck to all. The results will be available in next week's paper. --The Editor

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Letters must be typed, double-spaced, and must not exceed 300 words. Letters for publication must also contain the author's signature, classification, major or other relationship with UNCA.

The deadline for letters and classifieds is noon on Tuesday. If you have a submission, you can send it to:

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Asheville's future meets present in 'Blue Ridge Blues'

John Edwards

Columnist

"This past week has scared me to death," said Bill Branyon. He was referring to nuclear-power China intimidating Taiwan, "with the U.S. Seventh Fleet right there..."

In his recently published novel, "Blue Ridge Blues," Branyon's story is either indirectly or directly related to the fear of nuclear holocaust. Though the novel is involved with only four main characters, a pair of couples, it shifts back and forth from the past to the present to the future in an unusual but interesting and sometimes chilling way. It's fiction wrapped tightly in fact with a science-fiction twist. The tongue-in-cheek humor is reminiscent of Kurt Vonnegut.

The setting is Western North Carolina. Mount Pisgah, to the southwest of the UNCA campus, is a setting early in the book, and significant symbolically "because it's named after the mountain where Moses stood when he saw the Promised Land," Branyon explained. And this is where he gets the name "The Promised Land Pub," where the book's protagonists sometimes meet.

A native of Alabama, Branyon is a secretary in UNCA's Enrollment Services office. He's also an editor with *Mountain Express*, a local news and entertainment publication. "But I've worked construction, assembly lines, all kinds of jobs," he said. The main character Jake works on an assembly line. "He wants to popularize anti-assembly-line beliefs," said Branyon.

The antagonists in Branyon's novel are either real

historical figures or invented characters based on real people, like Billy Graham, for instance. "He's the most popular preacher ever," said Branyon. "In 1956, he packed Madison Square Garden—on Saturday night, prime time, he was taking on Perry Como and Jackie Gleason..."

In "Blue Ridge Blues," Branyon demonstrates the ef-

fect of workers:

"I've met many people who are bored to death working in factories... However, I've met others who have accepted Christ and are tackling the same kind of tasks, and the day to day boredom has turned into meaningful existence. They now have the purpose of glorifying God... The plant that prays together stays together... In heaven... natural resources will

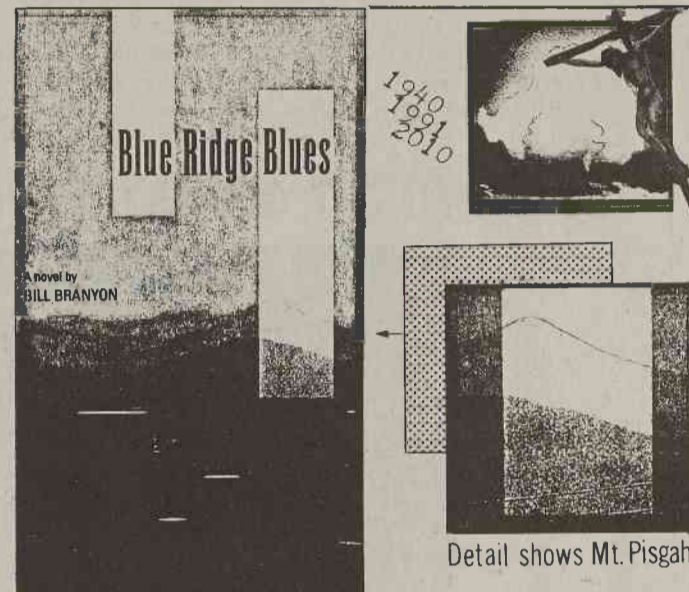
kind of virtual reality holograph device: "Back in bed, Jake and Emily shifted into high gear. The real Jake walked close and peered at his and Emily's faces. It looked like they might have a simultaneous orgasm! Jake's face varied between the generosity of Jesus, the happiness of a baby, and the greediness of a carpetbagger..."

But the main crux of Branyon's tale is nonviolence. The true heroes are Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr and A.J. Muste.

"They were such tremendous miracles," said Branyon. "They and their followers. The sincerity of these people to be beat within an inch of their lives, and never raise a hand... against their tormentors. I'm awed... I'm just in awe," said Branyon.

Branyon worked on the novel for three years. "It was the result of a thesis," he said. David Hopes, a professor with UNCA's literature department was Branyon's editor. "He helped quite a bit. He helped me create stronger characters," said Branyon. Hopes is quoted on the back cover: "Hilarious, delirious and serious. A 20th century history of American religion and a raging comedy whose plot encompasses the future of a small Southern town and the fate of the earth. You can go home to Asheville again, this time in A.D. 2010."

Branyon will be appearing at Malaprop's Bookstore/Cafe Saturday at 7 p.m. for a reading and book signing. For more information call 254-6734. "Blue Ridge Blues" is also available at the UNCA book store.



Cover: view from downtown Asheville

John Edwards graphic

fect of this kind of charismatic power. "His preaching was, in effect, a hoping for World War III," said Branyon. With the Cold War looming, the state of the world was often referred to as the beginning of the end. "Graham would talk about 'time collapsing,' or 'the impending judgement,'" said Branyon, who received his B.A. in history from Vanderbilt University. "He used the Cold War to convert people." But Graham also championed the economy of the assembly line, rejecting the idea of alienation

never be depleted, and there will be no competition over their distribution..."

There are allusions to real and serious events and places. The chapter "Chicken a la Auschwitz" is derived in part from a chicken plant fire in Hamlet, N.C. several years ago that killed 25 workers. "The Cove" is a part of the Billy Graham center of the same name east of Asheville.

But my favorite is "Sex, Drugs, and Rock of Ages." Some more of Branyon's humor occurs when Jake is viewing a spectrom, a

Would Jesus be an environmentalist wacko?

Stephen Schoof

Guest Columnist

In the battle to preserve his beloved Hetck-Hetchy Valley nearly ninety years ago, John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, described those who wanted to flood the area for a water supply: these temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar.

Muir's works never did save the valley, but his characterization of God seems a little out of place now that religion is frequently labeled a negative factor in our current ecological crises. Indeed, *Sierra*, the magazine of the club Muir founded, recently ran a poll entitled "Has Organized Religion Benefited or Harmed the Planet?" with close to half the published responses falling into the "Harmed" category.

In linking my environmental science major to my own

faith, I have often struggled with the idea that Christians in particular don't care about conservation.

Regrettably, the limited ecological awareness of many mainstream American churches makes the idea a valid one, but I don't think the Christian doctrine itself is really to blame. Arguments over faith and ecology usually center around the true meaning of Genesis 1:28, where God gives instructions to "replenish the earth and subdue it," but the debates seldom get into the Bible's other nature verses, and rarely is Christ's example of humble self-sacrifice taken to its logical conclusions.

I hesitate to quote more Scripture since many non-Christians find it either offensive or just plain annoying, but please bear with me to look at what else the Bible says about the earth.

Many of the Psalms (like 104, 147, and 148) describe all of God's creation, not just humans, giving praise to and being cared for by Him. It follows that we presumptuously diminish that praise whenever we hang fellow creatures' heads on our walls or cut another

interstate through their natural habitats. Maybe that's partly why Isaiah 5:8 says, "Shame on you! you who add house to house and join field to field until not an acre remains..." and later, in 24:5, "Earth itself is desecrated by the feet of those who live in it."

The book of Job is even more humbling, as the somewhat overconfident main character winds up "repenting in dust and ashes" when God extols the splendor and complexity of a universe that Job can't even begin to understand, let alone control (chapters 38-41).

The passages reinforce what Saint Paul states several hundred years later: God reveals His wisdom and His power through all that He has made (Romans 1:20). Although this is an idea organized religion has politely accepted for many years, (if the number of nature trails around Christian conference centers can be taken as a guide), efforts to protect the earth have been generally absent from church life. The real thrust is ministry to other people.

But doesn't our treatment of the environment affect other people in an alarmingly direct way? Consider that 98% of hu-

man bodily atoms are replaced annually, which means that in 1997 every living person will consist primarily of atoms he or she breathes, eats, and otherwise absorbs in the next year.

When the environment declines, so do human health and quality of life. We don't all suffer equally, either — toxic waste, water and air pollution, urban sprawl, and other nasties usually affect minorities and the poor more than the white middle class, simply because they have traditionally lacked the money and political clout to keep pollutants out of their neighborhoods.

And the urban poor, who possible have the most to escape from, are hardly in a position to head off into the wilderness for spiritual renewal. Theologian Sean McDonagh was right on track when he said, "The stance men and women take towards the earth is of a piece with their stance towards their fellow human beings."

The New Testament is all about our stance toward fellow human beings. Christ's com-

See JESUS, cont. p. 3.