

The Daily Tar Heel

97th year of editorial freedom

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Release the records

UNC must let public see police reports

Late last semester, The Daily Tar Heel asked Chancellor Paul Hardin to open campus police incident reports to public scrutiny, as is required of police departments by North Carolina's Open Records Law. Hardin's legal counsel, Susan Ehringhaus, requested guidance from the state attorney general's office on how to handle this request, and this week the answer came back: The records will stay closed. This is unacceptable. For the good of the campus and the safety of all students, faculty and staff, these records must become available.

UNC's police now release a "daily summary" of the police log, which gives only a few details of the calls to which the police respond. Granted, if the press has further questions about an entry in that summary, the police are generally willing to elaborate, but that is not the issue here. The open records law is supposed to make it possible for *anyone* to go to the police station and read the details of each incident. In Chapel Hill, residents may go to the town police station and find those details, but at UNC, this is not possible.

To keep the records closed, Ehringhaus and Deputy Attorney General Andrew Vanore rely on the "Buckley Amendment," part of the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which says a school may not release any "education record" that would identify an individual student. Administrators argue that because police records are often shared with the chancellor or other University divisions, they become part of an educational record and must be closed to public view. But the law is too vague to apply to police records and supersede state law; therefore, UNC should follow the Open Records Law.

At some universities, the restricted access has created such a severe problem that major crimes have gone unreported or released with the scantiest of details. At UNC, there is no proof that the police are withholding information. Then again, without access to the original records, there's no proof that they're not. John DeVitto, who took over late last semester as acting public safety director, argues that this is simply a matter of trust, but trust is difficult when one party keeps secrets. Trust is not the issue here — the law is.

DeVitto also said last semester that we need to trust the police to do what's in the

board opinion

best interest of the students. But that patronizing position suggests that everyone — from 18-year-old freshmen, who may think this campus is safer than it is to 42-year-old graduate students too old for such kid-glove treatment — needs to be protected from the details of campus crime. Clearly, that's precisely the sort of protection we *never* want from the police.

The University and police have little to gain by withholding information, especially considering how confidence has eroded following discrimination complaints against the police department. The ongoing stories about officers filing grievances against their superiors make the public nervous about how efficiently and effectively the department is operating. To keep from the public the details of those operations only further damages the department's credibility.

And this is not, by any stretch of the imagination, solely an issue of the press having access to these records. Students, employees, parents of students and prospective students and residents of Chapel Hill should be equally concerned with what the police do *not* tell them. We should all be angry with University administrators and with Vanore for their attempts only to make this campus look good and their lack of concern for our safety and our right to know. It's hard to understand how, at a university dedicated to teaching the ideals of America, this right cannot be upheld.

In time, bills that have been introduced in Congress making it clear that the amendment does not apply to campus police records may become law. The University and the state, so concerned with public relations, should realize how much better it will look if they stop stalling and open the records before a mandate comes down from the federal government.

An antagonistic relationship between the University, police and the public benefits no one. But the disdain the University shows for the public's right to know in withholding these records demands antagonism from the University community until administrators change their tune. The fear that many students have over the number of crimes on campus, especially rapes, makes opening these documents an absolute necessity. Chancellor Hardin, it's time for you and this state to stop hiding behind a law that doesn't apply anyway and open the records — *now*.

The perfect story

Media capitalizes on Boston tragedy

It was the kind of story you see on a movie of the week or read in a best-selling paperback. On Jan. 4, a tale of murder, greed and racism opened a new chapter when Charles Stuart threw himself into the cold waters of Boston's Mystic River. As the ripples of Stuart's crime continue to rock Boston, the media has seized the opportunity to cash in on tragedy.

Friends described the Stuarts as "the perfect couple," but the fairy tale ended on Oct. 23 when Charles Stuart made a frantic call from his car phone to the police reporting that he and his wife had been shot by a black assailant. Boston and the nation were shocked by this crime, which the media originally portrayed as another example of inner city violence.

While the public cried for justice and a police manhunt scoured black neighborhoods for a suspect, the media swallowed Stuart's role as the tragic victim and a model husband. Stuart's image as a martyred saint was tarnished when his younger brother confided to family members that there was more to the murder than a simple mugging turned nightmare. Police suspicion forced Stuart to take his own life, leaving a city in racial turmoil, a nation in shock and the media ready to feed on the tragic story.

From the beginning, the networks and reporters across the country played on the fear and prejudice caused by Charles Stuart's story to win ratings and sell newspapers. With Stuart's death, the sensationalism shows no signs of easing. CBS has purchased the film rights to the story for an upcoming mini-series, and book publishers are shouting for someone to put the tale to print. As the media scrambles to turn tragedy into big ratings and even bigger revenues, the real issues should not be trivialized for

Real issues should not be trivialized for the sake of commercial prime-time melodrama.

a white yuppie in an expensive suit. Finding an answer requires serious examination of ourselves and the society we have created — not a 15-minute segment on *A Current Affair* or a paperback tell-all novel.

When the police pulled Charles Stuart's body from the Mystic River, the media saw a golden opportunity. American society is fascinated by the misery of others and the Stuart story is a perfect combination of murder and tragedy. The temptation to win the public's eye was too great to pass up and a respectable media quickly degenerated to graphic depictions of violence. It is important that newspapers and the networks inform the public, but society is the loser and truth is the victim when sensational images and dollar signs determine the news. — Charles Brittain



A guide to growing old ignorantly



Ian Williams

Wednesday's Child

was singing "I'm — so — scared ... I can't find my cereal" over and over. Sing the song to yourself and you'll hear it.

Anyway, there is a whole race of people that I call *lyroneurotics*, an insufferable bunch of anally-retentive goggleboxes that live to correct people on song lyrics, whenever the subject doesn't agree with the verb, whenever it doesn't rhyme, or whenever the slightest deviation from the true lyric occurs. So there I am in the car in tenth grade singing "I'm — so — scared ... I can't find my cereal" when suddenly my best friend Hammy, a lyroneurotic of the highest order, bonks me over the head with the tape case and forces me to listen to a 20-minute dissertation on proper Police lyrics having to do with "subjugating the meek" and "the rhetoric of failure." Boy, was I embarrassed.

Milking the Masses — I always like to use the most descriptive words I possibly can in an essay; it spices up otherwise dreary subjects and makes our mother tongue so much more fun — but if you don't know what you're doing, you can look like a fool with little or no trouble. Due to some bizarre thesaurus mishap early in my writing career, I was left reasonably positive that the word "lactate" meant "to crush, thwart, or overthrow." So enamored of this word was I that I attempted to use it in every paper all the way until my freshman year in college. There I elaborated in a history paper, "France had its first real national heroine in Joan of Arc, who became immortal by lactating the English forces during the Battle of Orleans."

Just imagine my horror a few months later when I accidentally watched a PBS special on The Miracle of Life and discovered that "lactating" meant the time when a mother starts secreting milk. If you ask me, that made my Joan of Arc essay a little more sensual.

The Wearing of the Red — About every recessive gene capable of being reproduced ended up in my body — red hair, blue eyes, a blood type found only on remote islands in the

North Sea, and color blindness. My color blindness is only for red and green, thank god, but still an endless source of entertainment for friends with way too much free time. They hold red and green stuff in front of me until the sloths come home asking me what color they are, just for the unadulterated glee of seeing me get it wrong.

My mom, who was supposed to be my friend during grade school, decided she'd have a larf or two at my expense and made me an all-red costume to wear for the third-grade St. Patrick's Day party. It wasn't until many years and many abortive Irish party attempts later that I discovered my color-coded faux pas. Goofy mothers like mine turn innocent kids into Cuisinart serial murderers.

Ordering Chinese Food the E-Z Way — I suppose I can only explain this by saying I was dropped on my head as a baby or something, but I have *always* thought that "origami" was a kind of Chinese food, and not only that, but I ordered it regularly!

So there we were, me and my blind date after the cocktail at a Chinese restaurant, and I didn't even need to see the menu. I knew what I wanted.

"Yes, I'll have the origami." "Excuse me, sir?"

"I said I'll have the origami, please." My date tried to suppress her laugh. "Ian, do you know what origami is?"

"Not really — but whatever it is tastes really good."

"Ian," she giggled, "origami is that art form where you fold up paper to make little horses and stuff!"

So this is a word to the wise: the minute you start thinking you know all there is to know in this world and you feel frustrated with all the people you know so much more than, be careful — someday soon, you may accidentally write an essay about Joan of Arc's milking problems, accidentally sing the stupidest lyrics to a song ever invented or get a tutorial on grade school art from a girl whose diapers you are old enough to accidentally have changed.

Ian Williams is a music and psychology major from Los Angeles, Calif., who would like to try a cheesy reader mail column next week. Please submit any thoughts, questions or outright lies to the letters to the editor box outside the DTH office by Monday.

Readers' Forum

Involvement shows no regard for world

To the editor:
I'd like to take issue with Mark Pruett's vapid, biased critique of Dale McKinley ("American involvement is a complex issue," Jan. 22).

The "tired Third World view" of an "overbearing, deceitful U.S." may not be true, but it's the only side of us they ever get to see. The U.S. acts without consulting any other government or international organization, implying that "we can do whatever we want because we know what's good for you." If we had not initially supported either Somoza or Noreiga, Nicaragua and Panama would be in much better shape today. Good intentions are not enough if our leaders are narrow and blind.

Action is not enough either. We want to help, but only if we can make money at it, which is precisely why the Third World is in shambles. We must act by our ideals and allow those countries to formulate their own plans for improvement, instead of imposing archaic, alien and exploitative paths upon them.

We are no better than they are, but everything we do in the Third World contradicts that. Before the Panamanian invasion (obviously planned several weeks in advance),

the U.S. government could have done two things: call a close meeting of the United Nations Security Council to get feedback and support, or hold high level meetings with neighboring governments to justify our action. As it is, we just blustered in militarily and only considered world opinion as an afterthought. The Third World will never respect the United States as long as our policies consistently ignore opinion makers in other nations. Our platitudes about having "the people's support" are not enough in today's cynical world.

Mr. Pruett makes an important point about the terms of thousands of intelligent, hardworking, honorable men and women in our foreign service, but they are useless as long as our policy is guided by the few, rich, callous and power-hungry dinosaurs who continue to blight the image of the U.S. — just as they always have. Until we can elect competent leadership, we will not be the bright beacon of compassion and honor in the world, but rather the locus of hypocrisy.

NICHOLAS ACKERMAN
Senior
RTVMP

United effort forced bar to close for good

To the editor:
Well folks, the votes are in, and

On The Hill is out. For those of you who haven't followed the issue, On The Hill was a bar in Chapel Hill that began discriminating against homosexuals when the semester started. Employees were instructed to refuse admittance to anyone they thought might be a lesbian or gay by citing a dress code, charging a higher cover at the door or asking for two forms of identification.

Fortunately, these new policies didn't go down well with anyone in Chapel Hill. Students got mad; a meeting was called, negotiation teams were created and a boycott began. Flyers went up around town decrying On The Hill's bigoted rules. Representatives from the original meeting met time and time again with both of the bar's management teams during the controversy trying to get them to change their ways. Negotiation didn't work — the boycott continued.

In fact, it wasn't just lesbians and gays who were angered by the whole ordeal. The alternative crowd — those that wear black — had been refused admittance to On The Hill. Members of Greek organizations, most of whom had never even been to the bar, felt victimized because the discrimination had begun, according to the bar's manager, as a way to attract them. John Hopkins, the former owner of the bar, has apparently decided that one crowd needed to

be kicked out to bring in another; this didn't appeal to the Greeks at all.

Thus the boycott was carried out by a wide coalition of people who felt in their hearts that discrimination was wrong. Student Congress supported it, as did the Campus Y. So did the Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association, the Black Greek Council and the Panhellenic Council. Most importantly, hundreds of individual students made a conscious decision to take their partying dollars elsewhere. To all of these people and organizations I would like to extend a personal thank you. You have proven that a boycott can work, and you have sent a message to the entire Chapel Hill business community that discrimination will never help their profits. As a gay man, I am forced to live with oppression on a daily basis. I wouldn't trade being gay for anything, and your collective action has renewed my hopes for a better world. You can be sure that I will stick up for your rights if they are ever threatened. Hopkins has sold off On The Hill; here's to hoping the new bar in its place, and the rest of the bars in Chapel Hill, will make this kind of ordeal a thing of the past.

MARK BURNISTON
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