

An Educated Activism

This spring semester Andrews got active about war and peace. In February, more than one hundred students crowded into a classroom for a student debate on the subject. Earlier, a twenty-member peace club organized with a thousand-dollar grant. By March, two hundred and twenty-six faculty and students signed a statement in *The Student Movement* in opposition to the war in Iraq. In addition, students dialogued in the *SM*, exchanging articles and letters to the editor. Faculty and students also attended protests in St. Joseph, Mich., Washington D.C., and Chicago.

Luckily, all of us lived through the experience. According to the Human Security Project, more than 3736 Iraqi civilians did not. Neither have 127 American soldiers and thousands of Iraqi soldiers. All for what? So Halliburton can now run the oil for the Iraqi people? Recently the 75th Exploitation Task Force has stated that they haven't found any WMD at the fifteen most important sites and now they are packing up their bags and heading home. Sure, Saddam is gone—but who is next? And now we're shooting protestors.

This May I graduated and now I am reflecting back over my experience with Andrews and activism. Often higher education positions itself above the fray of politics and the fads of the masses. Pursuing truth, the academy stands alone. This is understandable, for certainly the issues are always more complex than the rhetoric. But also there is a certain smugness that comes with the learning. Why care, when everyone out there isn't really making any sense?

This spring I took a class in critical thinking from history professor Gary Land, an institution of higher learning himself. We learned about logical fallacies such as the dangerous post hoc ergo propter hoc (assuming that because one thing follows another it was caused by the other) and the ever-present "hasty generalization" (when the size of the sample is too small to support the conclusion). In addition we read political speeches and analyzed op-ed pieces from the newspaper—all this in the context of the war in Iraq. As the semester progressed, Dr. Land pointed out that imprecise logic permeates our discourse, even for many good things. What

was to be achieved by the class was not invariably perfect rationalism, but a self-awareness of how language is used and misused.

Humans are not machines and our language has evolved messily. We get our feelings and words caught up in issues before we get all the logic worked out. This cannot be avoided. Of course, by thinking clearly and doing good research on any subject one will make better decisions, but something always appears a priori. All too often, especially in the skeptical halls of academia, we refrain from acting. There is a

at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

As a sophomore I argued with friends, stating that because action taints ideals, it is far better to think than to do. No more. In fact, I now treat my beliefs as habits or tools for action. No longer wondering if my position corresponds to pure certainty, I ask what good it will do.

So, what motivated me to oppose the war on Iraq? Oscar Wilde once wrote: "As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its

fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar it will cease to be popular." I believe that suffering is the worst thing that people cause. I cannot prove it, although there is plenty of evidence for its horror, from land-mine-maimed children to the millions of painful deaths caused each year by tobacco corporations around the world. Human suffering—emotional, physical, spiritual—can be prevented by people working together. Fighting only breeds more violence.

I believe in the power of human solidarity—it is why I am an Adventist and it is how education happens. This semester I learned that action does matter because the same human connection that breeds violence from cruelty also creates change from concern.

In his Nobel Prize lecture, novelist Saul Bellow quotes Joseph Conrad, who appeals "to that part of our being which is a gift, not an acquisition, to the capacity for delight and wonder . . . our sense of pity and pain, to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the

subtle but invincible convection of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts . . . which binds together all humanity." Cultivating this sense of relation lies at the heart of an educated activism. Thinking to act. Because in failing to act, we lose the essential connection to our humanity.



Alex Carpenter and his father, David

I believe in the power of human solidarity—it is why I am an Adventist and it is how education happens.

feeling that since both sides are tainted, the scholar should not deign to join. But often behind this critical shroud lurk fears of discontinued appointments and professional rivalry. One cannot stand outside the debate, disinterestedly finding the truth. For the truth lies in the discourse—and only action reveals its character.

In his speech "Citizenship in a Republic" delivered at the Sorbonne in 1910, Theodore Roosevelt said:

"The credit belongs to the man...who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails,

~ Alex Carpenter graduated this May with a double major in English and religion. Before enrolling in graduate school, Alex will be living in Mumbai and exploring the Indian film industry.