COMMENTARY

Comrade or enemy?

Once we hugged and danced. Now we're dropping bombs on them.

By Jack Cobbs

We're bombing the Serbs? How in God's name did it get to this?

I remember rollicking through the streets of Sarajevo not so long ago, being almost hugged to death by dozens of men and women as we danced and kissed and toasted each other with fiery shots of plum brandy, promising to be comrades forever.

Not long ago? Well, actually a third of a century ago and under very special circumstances. At that time, exactly half a century had passed since a Serb assassin in those same streets had fired the shots that killed the crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which lit the fuse that launched the First World War. Out of that war there came, among many other results, the country of Yugoslavia — or, as my spontaneous Serb friends that night explained to me, Greater Serbia. The day of the assassination is still celebrated as the "true" Yugoslav independence day.

My college roommate and I, with sophomoric American disregard of time and place, stumbled into Sarajevo in the middle of the night expecting another typical Yugoslav town. When we hit the summit above Sarajevo, we saw the gaudy glow against the ridge; then suddenly, set in a bowl of hills, below us the town pulsed with lights, and the racket from the celebration rose five miles up the mountain. In the suburbs, people began to appear. A few staggered alone or slumped against walls, benches or lampposts. Most were together — leaning out of windows, frolicking with their arms around each other, and especially dancing.

We never got downtown. I pulled up at the first red light in 200 miles, and three enormous Serbs lumbered out of the shadows and draped themselves across the VW. They looked like the defensive line for the Minnesota Vikings, and I was trying to roll up the window when one stuck a bottle of 150-proof brandy in my face and bellowed a Serb "Salut!"

It was hopeless to stay in the car. We pushed our way out, and the Serbs threw great bear paws around us. From all over, we could hear the music — maybe polka, maybe rock, maybe folk; who could tell? Over and over, the huge men rumbled, "You American, no? American, yes!" and then, "Friends! Friends!"

Finally, with a couple of toasts, the group let us drive on. At the next intersection, it was the same. There, in broken English, a man explained. "It is this day," he said, handing me the obligatory brandy bottle, "this noble day, which makes us free."

The rest is a blur. I remember dancing and toasting and orating. I remember stumbling down the streets in great blocks of people, our arms wrapped around each other. They made us feel like honored guests. As Americans, they said, we knew what it meant to be free. Our revolution, our Civil War, the Constitution, fighting the Germans, the Russians — anybody — it all made us friends of Serbia and deserving of another toast. As Wordsworth said of the early days in the French Revolution, "What bliss it was that dawn to be alive!"

For decades after, the memory of that warm, supercharged sense of friendship and celebration and of finding people so instantaneously accessible as human beings has lingered with me as my image of Serbia.

And now this Kosovo mess, so hard to reconcile with the comradeship of that summer night 35 years ago.

Well, maybe not so hard to understand when I think after the fact of what that Serbian "independence day" stood for. I remember telling my father, who had seen a bit more history, about that night — the wonderful Serbs and their celebration of the event that brought them their Greater Serbia. My father said, "I don't suppose it bothers them that the price of their 'independence day' was a war that killed 20 million people."

No, the price of Greater Serbia didn't bother them then, and it obviously doesn't bother them now. As the bombs fall this week, the subhead of a front-page article in The Inquirer declares that the current Serbian dictator "grabbed the reins of nationalism" at what the text describes as "a moment of nationalist passion." I was lucky, I guess, to have shared such a moment with the Serbs, but I wouldn't want to have been there if I hadn't qualified for being hugged and called "Friend!"

Lots of people aren't so lucky. Which is why we're bombing these wonderful, warm Serbs who still don't care who happens to be in their way.

Jack Cobbs lives in Trappe.



BARRIE MAGUIRE

How a happy little bug failed to worm its way into my heart

By Loriee D. Evans

I sent an editor a computer virus today. Do you think he'll still publish me? Well, technically, it was a "worm." My husband generously e-mailed it to me yesterday, in the form of a "happy99" executable file.

I paused before I opened it, knowing that executable files sometimes harbor dark, slithery things that can make my computer bleed, but I opened it anyway. Just some animated fireworks. Boring.

I discovered the resulting injury an hour later when my e-mail program repeatedly crashed as I tried to send the editor a manuscript we had discussed. Now highly suspicious, I tried to send myself the e-mail.

What did I get?

happy99.exe

Once opened, the little stowaway file secretly sends a copy of itself out to your friends (and editors) every time you send them an e-mail, leaving no record.

I spent the next two hours calling my husband and the editor, backing up my hard drive, downloading virus software updates, running viral scans and disk doctors, and thinking really nasty thoughts about what I would do to the happy99.exe writer should he (or she) ever stumble into my clutches. I allowed panic to destroy my productivity, and I lost the rest of the workday to disgust and frustration.

My husband, who had e-mailed not only me, but also his students, a colleague and my father, spent several hours frantically re-e-mailing and calling hither and yon to stop the exponentially expanding life cycle of the worm.

Finally, I checked out a Web page that hosts a library of information about viruses. Though exceedingly annoying, known versions of the "happy" worm, I learned, carry no "damaging payload." I'm not sweating any more. But I am mad. I want those lost hours back. I want the publishing job back. And I want to hurt somebody.

Recently, the "Melissa" virus is making the rounds in a similar manner. Police say they have a suspect, a fellow who lives in New Jersey.

Just think of the lost productivity, not to mention the ulcers, these virus writers provoke. My husband sent the happy99 worm to five people. Let's say it was born on Jan. 1, at which point Happy Writer sent it to five people. And the next day, those five people sent it out in five more e-mails, and so on. How many millions of times might the virus have gone out over the cyberwaves by now?



JOHN OVERMYER

Happy Writer wishes he created that much havoc. But even if a tiny fraction of that number of people had days like mine, that's thousands of work hours squandered to the vagaries of the demon virus.

What is the motivation?

Do viral instigators receive financial benefits? No.

Do they get the cover of Time magazine? Not usually.

Do they gain valuable job skills they can list on a resume? No.

Do they get the love and adulation of millions of people around the world? No.

Do they get absolutely anything that I can imagine wanting? No.

I think it's about two things: some warped desire for power and an even more warped desire to flip off society. Maybe virus creators are people who have failed miserably in off-line society. Maybe they're dweebs who can't engineer anything resembling socially acceptable success. Heck, they could be kids for whom connectivity has given whole new meanings to *teenage rebellion* and *vandalism*.

These people can't be so stupid as to be unaware of the costs they place on others when they unleash the viruses into our little cyberworlds. I bet they know the costs better than I, their victim, do. But maybe that's all they're capable of: exacting costs. They don't know how to contribute productively. So they make the rest of us pay. It's a high-tech form of hate crime.

A friend, a computer programmer, believes that virus handlers should pay the costs of what they do. He says they should get the death penalty. He's kidding, right? (He's not smiling.)

Happy Writer, in addition to the time and potential income you cost me, the nasty energies of your little gift gave me a vivid image of yourself. I envision you in the musty basement of your parents' house, surrounded by crumpled soda cans, Cheeto crumbs and cockroaches, Rolling Stones T-shirt bearing yesterday's hot dog mustard, greasy locks flopping over your crusty glasses, as you spend your 14th straight hour typing into your hollow little box of a computer. Your only true friend.

Maybe I'm way off base. But I just thought I'd let you know how you present yourself to the world. As a real loser. Make you happy?

Loriee D. Evans lives and writes in St. Louis.

Tomorrow: "Urban Perspective" with Acel Moore; Voters in Missouri speak out on concealed weapons.

A pair who reshaped economic thought

By Alvin S. Felzenberg

Early in 1971, President Richard Nixon told a reporter that he was "now a Keynesian in economics." Many took his confession to mean that Nixon, once a fiscal conservative, shared British economist John Maynard Keynes' belief that government intervention into economic affairs was both necessary and desirable. "We are all Keynesians now" became the latest Nixon cliche to enter the language.

Nixon was boarding a sinking ship. Even as he spoke, Keynes was falling out of favor. Leading the charge against Keynes' theories was University of Chicago professor Milton Friedman. Together with his wife, collaborator and fellow economist, Rose, Friedman restored public faith in capitalism and free markets.

Milton Friedman called Keynes' assumptions and prescriptions into question when he demonstrated (with Anna J. Schwartz in *A Monetary History of the United States: 1867-1960*) that government action rather than failures of capitalism turned an economic slowdown into the great depression. The Federal Reserve restricted the money supply when it should have expanded it, he maintained. His is now the accepted version of what happened.

Milton and Rose Friedman were among the first to observe that all was not right in the modern welfare state. They saw that as government intervention grew, economic growth slowed, tax avoidance rose, and personal freedom diminished.

The two identified a number of instances in which government-imposed solutions exacerbated problems they were intended to solve. This they attributed to the propensity of bureaucrats to further their own interest rather than the public's. That simple, commonsense notion spawned a new school in economics: public-choice theory.

The more idealistic half of the couple, Milton believed he could, through the logic of argument, persuade his colleagues to abandon faulty premises. Rose sensed that academic prejudices would die hard. Thus, they began their "long march" to make their thoughts accessible to the thinking public.

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher were among their many acolytes. The Friedmans' collaboration, *Capitalism and Freedom*, sold more than 400,000 hardcover copies. Their books *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* and *Tyranny of the Status Quo* accompanied two widely praised PBS series. Milton was their narrator; Rose, the associate producer.

In their joint autobiography, *Two Lucky People*, they recounted the story of the longest-running partnership in the history of economics. The offspring of Jewish immigrants of modest means, Milton and Rose met in graduate school. They wed in 1938.

Rose's brother, also an economist, said Milton would make a worthy addition to the family in spite of the New Deal sympathies he then held. (Milton has spent much of his time atoning for such youthful indiscretions.)

Like Adam Smith, the Friedmans insist that the most successful economies are those organized around voluntary associations among people. Economies that create the greatest opportunities for individuals to create wealth and allow people to decide how to use their assets provide the greatest personal freedom, they argued.

Their ideas have found allies and converts across the political spectrum. Many liberals now inveigh against "bureaucratic indifference." New-left writer Theodore Lowi decried "captive agencies" in *The End of Liberalism*. Increased home ownership, tenant management of public housing, decentralization in delivering social services and competition in education and health care are now mainstays in economic thought and policy analysis.

Couples

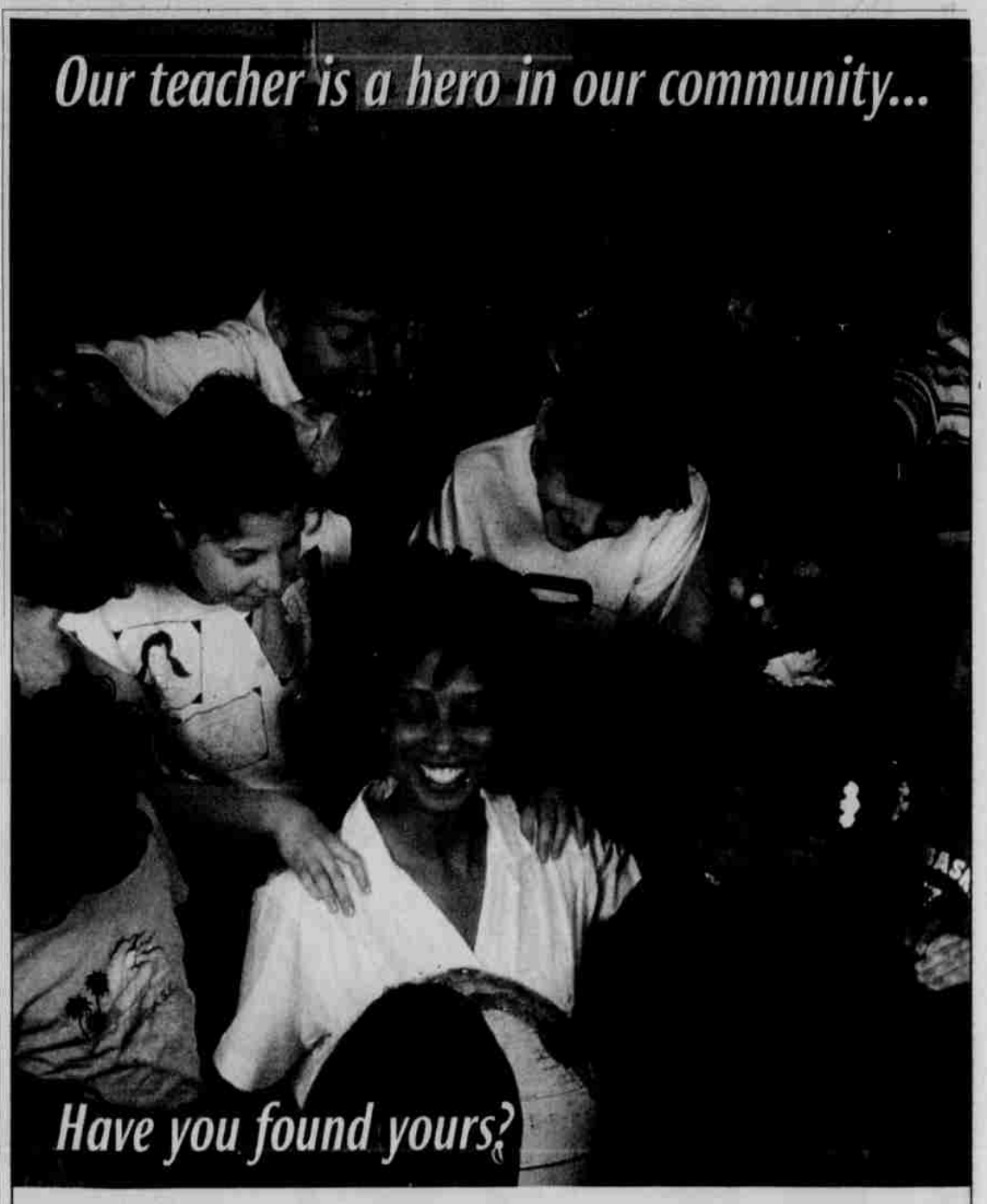
Standout pairs who embodied the 20th century

Milton Friedman won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1976. What he and his wife began as a challenge to Keynesianism has become the new consensus. Their influence abounds among fiscal conservatives, supply-siders, New Democrats, New Labour (Britain), Asian finance ministers, leaders of new democracies in Russia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, and Labor Parties in Australia and New Zealand.

Recommendations of theirs have become policy in many places: the negative income tax, welfare reform, school choice, portable college scholarships, volunteer militaries, deregulation, privatization, the flat tax, free trade, curbing corporate welfare, abandoning rent control, privatizing Social Security and the balanced-budget amendment.

Milton and Rose Friedman are quintessential examples of thinkers who gained entry into the American conversation through the force of their ideas.

Alvin S. Felzenberg writes and lectures about the American presidency.



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