

School Priority Number One: Not Student Safety

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Opinions Editor

Pennsylvania State University assistant coach Jerry Sandusky, accused of 52 accounts of child sex abuse over a 15-year period, was arrested just last year. Miramonte Elementary School teacher Mark Berndt, 61, was arrested early January despite a 5-year streak of lewd act reports. The media is littered with stories of cases like these: sexual predators served justice years too late, years after the victims understand that their cries mean nothing in the shadow of reputation.

Berndt, a third grade teacher, was a favorite among students and was known to reward his pupils with cookies. One day, two girls reported instances of fondling—the assaulter, Berndt. However, the investigation did not follow through because of lack of evidence. Two young girls had built up the courage to confess but were brushed away because their words were inefficient. Maybe there was a lack of evidence, but not taking their claims seriously shows that student safety is not a top priority—which it should be.

It's true that Miramonte has been receiving negative press attention for the past year, after

a teacher apparently committed suicide after reading his statistical teacher ratings published in the *Los Angeles Times*. In an already overcrowded and underfunded public school, how could administrators deal with the unflattering spotlight? Despite having test scores gradually increase over the years, Miramonte's success was dampened with this bit of press coverage. They did, after all, have reason to celebrate their staff rather than shame them.

Soon, the amount of parent complaints regarding Berndt's suspicious behavior in-

creased. As the pile of complaints grew, it became too difficult to keep all of it concealed.

It's admittedly difficult for a parent to understand the motives of a school attempting to protect its reputation rather than their children. The mother of the ten-year-old boy involved in the Penn State molestation case made the report herself, but still, it wasn't until that child saw his twentieth birthday last year that he was able to see the man responsible brought to justice. It was handled almost as if to remind the boy that his well-being was important, but not

as important as the career of an assistant coach of a major college football team.

It was when these cases and others recently and suddenly spilled out of their confines that the law took dramatic steps to show the nation that no one disturbs the safety of our children and gets away with it. But these steps taken were dramatic indeed: the entire Miramonte staff was replaced with a new one, to reinforce the fact that the old one was probably contaminated with Berndt's deviance. Quite the show, throwing away an entire staff to distract the mobs of angry parents, but it would have never been needed if the reports were handled properly the first time around, when those reports were made *seven years ago*.

The same goes with Penn State. If the word of the victim's mother did not go unheeded, the well-being of other children would not have been traded in for the well-being of a school's reputation. If the job was handled promptly, with regard for the safety of our children, there might not have been such a powerful reaction from everyone involved. No amount of positive public relations for the school can relieve these children from their trauma. And that is the tragedy of the problem—that acting too late really does result in too little.



Blog Away Your Awkwardness

JOHNNY HUYNH, Staff Writer

In ye olden days, writing in a journal was an intimate practice. It was a way to "vent" the joys and emotional pains of the day, as well as keep track of ongoings in life, within the fallible privacy that is between loose notebook covers. On a computer, plug in the Internet and access a social networking site, and you have the tech-savvy perk of today: blogging.

Blogging still fulfills all the therapeutic benefits of journal writing. It is still a means to do something personal, to make time and expressively contemplate in a stressful environment.

The publicity is the most pretentious product for the archetypal blogger. In essence, a blog draws attention and self-promotion.

Although blogging lacks the same kind of privacy, its publicity may be its most beneficial aspect. Sometimes, whatever could not be expressed in person may be done online, while neglecting the fact that everyone with Internet access can see the content. However its discoverers' reactions can be negative or positive. In an Israeli social study, socially awkward teenagers were able to use blogging as a stepping stone to building confidence and relieving anxiety.

One may find comfort in similar attitudes demonstrated by other bloggers.

Yet, there is a sense of connection and honesty that blogging brings to a crowd. The advantages are as numerous as the leniency that allows it more a multitude of purpose.

MOOR VS. MOOR: Should the Obama administration require Catholic institutions to provide contraception?

The Obama administration is now requiring all health care plans, including those of Catholic institutions, to include access to contraception. Contraception is discouraged in Catholicism.

Let's face it: America's culture is plagued by its profound use of sexual references. You hear about sex on the radio, in the latest television shows, in side conversations during class. There isn't anything wrong with being sexually active, but it is important to take the necessary precautions to prevent any unwanted pregnancies. This is why Obama's decision to federally mandate insurance for family planning services within the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations is only reasonable.

Of course, there is the argument that contraception and other preventative services are unnecessary because many of these religious organizations are strong believers of abstinence. However, although they would like to preserve their sexuality, they are human, and there are no guarantees that something is going to happen—

or not going to happen in this case. This bill does not only provide contraceptive coverage to the employees of these organizations in the event that there are any unwanted pregnancies, but it also comes at no cost to the churches as many insurance companies have accepted the solution. At the end of the day, the cost of paying for family planning is less than the overall cost of managing pregnancies.

Recently, the Obama administration's new health care law went into effect. Right away, there was strong opposition from religious organizations, especially the Roman Catholic Church, because the law mandates contraception as a part of health care, and this impinges upon their religious beliefs.

After some initial resistance, Obama created a compromise with the Roman Catholic Church, stating that religiously affiliated groups do not have to pay for coverage. If there are employees who want coverage, they can request it from insurance companies and the companies would provide it to them without raising the cost of their insurance. However, the Roman Catholic Church sees it as a narrow compromise since it only exempts religious organizations that have self-insured health plans.

The government is still requiring insurance companies to provide contraception. Religious organizations who do not have self-insured health plans must pay the insurance companies, therefore indirectly supporting contraception through their insurance policies. Also not exempt are private employers who oppose contraception based on their religious beliefs but must provide contraception through their insurance policies.



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CAT'S CRADLE

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Apparent Affection

Lately, my parents have been employing not-so-subtle tactics to sabotage my plans to attend college far, far away. Gesturing at the bright California sun, they say, "The weather on the East coast won't be this nice." They give me more chores, telling me that they're "preparing" me for college life without them, especially if I'll be far away. Unfortunately for them, I've seen through their subterfuge. I realized long ago that these are simply thinly veiled attempts to keep me closer to home. And honestly, who can blame them? But in all seriousness, my parents' ineffective persuasion is proof that they'll miss me next year. It's evidence of their love for me. And in an Asian household, this is as much of an "I love you" as I'll get.

Growing up, I never experienced the kind of love in family sitcoms. Hugs are rare and outright proclamations of love rarer. Yet, I have never doubted my parents' affection for me. Instead, I've learned to find evidence of their love in the most mundane things they do (and, yes, that includes their clumsy attempts to keep me within 50 miles of them for my entire life). It's in how my mom remembers to give me medicine at night when I'm sick, and how my dad pops into my room to offer well-meaning, often confusing advice. It's how even though they tell me how great my cousins or their friends' children are, they brag about me to others. I know my parents don't display affection, which is the case in many Asian families. It's simply not part of my culture. But family is, and lack of overt affection doesn't make our love less strong. After all, when I asked my parents if they would miss me next year, they gave up the pretense and admitted that yes, they will.

