

Stargazing raises life's big questions

For believers, the truth is up there.

I sit here on the balcony of Reynolda Hall just staring at Wait Chapel, kind of lost in thought. So for those of you who read this column on a semi-regular basis (i.e. my friends and editors) you will excuse the pattern I've developed of long and rambling thoughts that

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may or may not flow together. I lose sight of transitions and proper grammar because somehow I think these things were invented by people who had some evil desire to repress thought through words and speech. Insert transition here.

I'm constantly asking people what they think and believe, what's running through their minds and how that relates to the distant look in their eyes. But I have that look in my eye no less than 16 hours a day, and the thoughts running through my head are so jumbled that I can't really express them. A friend said this week that, if you want to know anything about me, you're going to have to read my column because I don't share what I'm thinking. Truth is, half the time I don't even *know* what I'm

thinking. Catch me on a nice day when the sun is warm, the sky is blue and the grass is green, and I may be able to tell you what a beautiful day it is.

As a writer, I wonder whether Ernest Hemingway ever reached the point where he decided that it was almost too close to futile to try to express his soul in words. I wonder whether so many of the musicians I love ever wonder whether their instruments are too feeble to make the sound their souls make. I wonder whether the architect who designed Wait Chapel intended it to look as if were reaching into the sky to try to touch something so much higher than brick and mortar and steeple could ever be. I could write these words until I die, and still you would never read the words that I heard and that I know.

See, there is this sky above us. There is this huge sky, and I think a part of each one of us wants to fly somewhere higher and go somewhere farther than we are able to go. In those blue nights when the sky fills up with wind and thunder and lightning, we are so silently fascinated because we feel that maybe the sky's reaching back. And we're here at the place where the sky and the earth meet wanting an absolution and praying that it's the one we hope in. And it's not something I could express, and that's probably why I sound like a moron right now. But if I am an idiot in your eyes right now, allow me to try to explain why.

See, I hear people say that they

won't believe anything they can't see and hear and feel and touch – their faith lies in what can be measured and studied. I've been called cowardly for being a man of faith.

But as I sit here and stare into these skies, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt a truth that no one can deny or fight or even understand, and that truth is that we weren't made to understand. Someone said to me two nights ago that there was a lot of "proof" for faith. Whatever that meant. I sit here cross-legged on a bench on the Reynolda balcony staring at Wait Chapel, and it is plain to me that my mind was not made big enough to wrap itself around the great questions of the universe. I can't figure it out. I don't know the answers and I can't come up with them on my own. But I know Someone who can.

As college students, we go running after knowledge, after training. At the end of four years we'll have a degree and who knows how much money we could all make having graduated from a school as prestigious as this. I know I have a huge amount of pride in my intellectual prowess – I could rattle off test scores and grades, books I've read and things I know.

But we have this problem, this dilemma we can't reconcile. We want to know more, we want to see more and go farther.

We feel so far away from who we were made to be because we never really know. I never could've figured it out on my own. Had you asked me 14 months ago what I was made to be I would've said something along the

lines of, "A ... journalist? I don't know." We never could've figured it out. But I know Someone who can.

See, there is this sky and the reason we spend so much time caught up between Earth and heaven is that we're too scared to look up to the sky for answers, and we're somehow trapped by the knowledge that all we do and what we are isn't going to last us much longer than it takes to get Social Security. Our dreams of a nice house and darling children or whatever lives we've planned for ourselves can't quite do it for us. But I know Someone who can.

I know life to the fullest. I know what I was made to do. Not to say I have these great plans for after college or I know some get-rich-quick scheme. I'm not in great shape and I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer. But I know life. I know what's behind that sky and what fills that hole. I know what resolves the dilemma of death and what we were all created to do.

And now I put the question to you, the reader: Do you know why you're here? I never would've known except I took an opportunity that all of us have to know the Author of life and the Answerer of questions. Ask me and I'll tell you the questions He's answered. Ask me and I'll tell you the pain He's healed.

Ask me and I'll tell you the wrongs He's forgiven. You don't even have to know me, just ask me. Ask me and I'll tell you what's behind that sky and how you can do what you've always wanted to do: fly into it.

Surviving the laptop labyrinth

Freshmen endure a surreal rite of passage.

With the goals set forth by the Plan for the Class of 2000 reaching fruition, an integral part of this plan, as well as campus life, has been the distribution of IBM ThinkPads in an "all men compute equally" endeavor. If successful, one will graduate with a 2-year-old laptop

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and a general knowledge of how to send an AOL Instant Message to the person who lives in the room next to you, even though it would be more practical to scream through the wall.

Thus, receiving a laptop upon arrival for all incoming freshmen has become more of a rite of passage than a mere distribution of computers. The times are arranged by dorm unit, announced and scheduled. Trams are chartered to transport the computer-less masses and their families to the Holy Land – the Information Systems building.

At this point, I'll begin by sparing you from adding another insight to the deluge of commentary that has descended upon the student body about the trams. Needless to say, these trams were quite humorous.

When we reached our destination, a woman greeted us. Her primary duty was to separate the freshmen from their families because, as with all coming-of-age rituals, one must face the gauntlet alone.

Upon entrance to the IS building, we were firmly directed to produce and display our student IDs as a veritable ticket of admission to the event. We were then corralled into a labyrinth of halls and rooms within the IS building. At first, it reminded me of the running of the bulls in Pamplona, with tables blocking every wrong way. However, we were more intelligent than brute beasts of burden – we were college students.

Instead, it was a test of skill and agility, with a set goal in sight. In fact, it was more like we were mice in some sort of laboratory experiment. Throughout the entire experience I wondered, "At what point do I receive my cheese?"

In my quest to find some sort of parallel to explain my surreal experience, I also considered comparing it to the Department of Motor Vehicles. At one point along my journey, I put my student ID in my pocket and one of the people manning the next station snapped at me, saying, "Where's your ID?" Fortunately, I didn't have to go to the end of the line and start over.

Then we reached a room where we were to divulge our passwords for the Wake Information Network. However, the florescent, white sterile lights and numerous people wearing identical white shirts seemed more reminiscent of an insane asylum.

Finally, I received my laptop and my printer and was permitted to leave. I took the tram back to my dorm, relating my experiences to those willing to hear.

Eager to try out my new equipment, I plugged in the computer.

However, every time I tried to log on to the network, it gave me an error message stating my password was incorrect. I couldn't understand this because I had picked out my password personally!

I called over the nearest resident technology adviser, who, after a series of tests, determined that a card in my computer was faulty.

Slightly irritated, I called up the support center, thinking I could just swap cards with them and that would be the end of it. However, my computer had to yet again endure the same battery of tests before they could again determine that my card was deficient.

The process was not yet over. I had to go to another office where they again tested my computer. However, this time they had the capability to replace my card. I'm not quite sure why they had to test my computer numerous times, as if I were trying to dupe them.

Why else would I waste two hours of my time at tech support? Plus, doesn't the honor code count for something?

Despite the red tape and the numerous precautions, I'm quite satisfied with my laptop. However, when I venture up to the IS building to get Chik-Fil-A, I sometimes see a mirage of that hot, summer afternoon when I, too, fulfilled my destiny.

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Courtesy of the USBIC Educational Foundation (800)767-2267.



A boy's life should be more than just Nintendo

Some people really must get out more.

I had a rare opportunity this weekend to witness a global phenomenon. In case you were wondering, I did not go to the coast and stand in the middle of Hurricane Dennis. Instead, I took a job doing a promotion for Nintendo in Charlotte.

To outside observers, this event

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may have appeared to be akin to tropical weather displacements.

However, it is called Pokemon. The computer-age version of the age-old classic rock-paper-scissors, in which kids from the ages of 3 to 30 (now just think about that guy's social life), train cute little animals to do battle with other beings for the title of "best trainer."

If you think this game does not sound complicated, let me assure you, I gave you the condensed version. To really know how the game is played, you must get a Game Boy and spend countless hours figuring out all of the ins and outs of this most recent global killer.

There are 150 of these little guys, and the object is to "catch 'em all."

After herding in some of the Pokemon, you can start to "train" them (what that really means, of course, is to make them stronger so they can beat other Pokemon into submission).

Once the training has begun, there are unlimited levels as to how powerful these things can get, so it takes somewhere in the neighborhood of 75-100 hours playing the game to get your particular creatures up to a respectable level that would allow you to compete in a tournament. Wow, that was a mouthful.

I guess you're waiting to find some kind of a point to this story. I think there is one, so check back in a paragraph or so. The thing that astonished me the most was how many people are completely enthralled with this thing. I mean, there were something like 15,000 kids over two days at the Carolina Place Mall to take part in not only the Game Boy tournament, but also in card trading as well as the board game version.

Oh, by the way, for you serious music fans out there, a Pokemon CD is available. It contains such classics as "What kind of Pokemon are you?" and the "Poke Rap." As you may have already guessed, yes, there is a TV show, as well as thousands upon thousands of little plush toys for everyone who loves these tiny creatures.

Let me tell you, some of these children are mind-boggling with their knowledge of this and other video games.

Although it is great that kids love these things (I actually am quite fond of these little animals as well), there should be some sort of governing body like, I don't know, parents maybe, who give their children ... oh, lets just say limits as to how long or how much something can be done.

There was even one 8-year-old boy who had figured out a way to raise the strength of his Pokemon to the highest levels possible without using the much-maligned "Game Shark." For those who are video game impaired, a "Game Shark" is a device that attaches to a game cartridge and allows the player to do basically what ever he wants in the game; these are illegal in the Pokemon tournament.

The professionals from Nintendo did not believe him, and swore that he used the shark. He fought back and said no, and when they still did not believe him, he performed the function in front of all his questioners and, guess what ... it worked! The reason it worked, however, was not because the code he used performed that function – he had written his own code to perform this function. Wow (keep in mind, he's 8!).

I guess what I am trying to say is that the young people in this country could be using their time a little more wisely than spending four hours in

front of a video game every day. OK, before you get your panties in a bunch, I was and still am guilty of this very thing from time to time. When Nintendo first came out in 1985, I played Gyromite, Super Mario Bros and The Legend Of Zelda for hours on end. But even with all the time I have spent in arcades playing After Burner or sitting in front of Mario and Luigi, after I lost I either went and played ski ball or turned the game off and went outside.

The phenomenon I witnessed this weekend was one of constant playing of the same game for 12 hours straight in some cases.

Then, when finally taking a break to pack on a few more pounds to their already immensely overweight frames, they went searching for tips to help their particular Pokemon become the strongest of the tournament. Oh, and here is a huge shock ... after this seemingly unfathomable 15-minute hiatus, out came the Game Boys and they are right back at it again.

Just one tiny suggestion: Although it is great that kids love these things (I actually am quite fond of these little animals as well), there should be some sort of governing body like, I don't know, parents maybe, who give their children ... oh, lets just say limits as to how long or how much something can be done. Don't think I am singling anything out here; this goes for everything. I mean, even too much reading is bad for the soul. Just a healthy balance would be better.