

Thursday, Sept. 12, 1991]

My Opinion

Viewing society through the choice of footwear

I have a foot fetish. I know that's something usually reserved for men, but I have one.

However, not just any ordinary foot can send me into a frenzied state. My "dream" feet, the feet that have the power to "move" me and the guy attached to them, have to be in a pair of Birkenstocks.

I love Birkenstocks, but not just because it seems a fair number of cute guys wear them. There are other reasons. To me, they symbolize individuality and freedom from society's narrow definition of what is normal (even for shoes).

First introduced to the U.S. in 1967, Birkenstocks became the official shoe for the Age of Aquarius. Today, people from all walks of life enjoy the unbelievable comfort of these cork-soled sandals, despite wisecracks from conservative shoe wearers who can't accept an alternative to confining footwear. In fact, sales are expected to reach 1.4 million pairs this year.

I feel a bond with others who wear Birkenstocks. At the risk of making a generalization, I would have to say we are a friendly people. I have received smiles from others, somehow acknowledging the fact that we are smart people. We care about comfort. We care about our feet.

We are happy people and there's one simple reason why. When your feet are happy, you are happy. Haven't you heard about good things starting from the bottom up?

Everyone stresses the need for a good foundation and the foundation for the human body are the feet. The worst things to deal with in a mobile society like ours are blisters.

I am aware of the opposition to these sandals -- anyone from strangers to members of my own family have criticized my footwear.

This summer I went to the Philadelphia Art Museum with a friend and a female employee asked me where I got my shoes. Being the friendly person I am, eager to share my knowledge about Birkenstocks, I told her that I got them in a health food store.

She said that she had seen a lot of people wearing them lately, all of whom agreed on the shoe's comfort. As I, too, was agreeing, about to go into my long-winded speech on how these shoes have changed my outlook and perception of life and the world, she interrupted me by saying, "But you gotta admit those things are ugly."

Last May, when I was in downtown Pittsburgh observing some architecture for an art class, I was confronted by two men. Of course, I ignored them in the hope that they weren't actually talking to me.

As I walked away in my forest green Arizona style sandal, I heard in the distance, "Hey you, the girl with them funny shoes, we're talking to you." Then, somehow I knew it was me that they wanted to bother.

These experiences make me wonder. Why do we think that what makes our feet comfortable is ugly or funny-looking (especially when worn by a woman)? As a woman who wears Birkenstocks, I feel liberated from the monstrous instrument of torture, cleverly disguised as fashion, the high-heeled shoe.

I admire, even respect, any woman who goes against this prescribed form of foot imprisonment by wearing a pair of sandals or clogs. I have seen my fair share of women walking barefoot, carrying the culprit, a pair of shoes pointed at the toes with a width of no more than three inches.

The last time I checked, the human foot did not come to a point at the toes. In reality, if you would trace your foot on a piece of paper you would see that by nature's design the foot is narrower at the heel not at the toes, just the opposite of the way women's (not men's) shoes are designed. This leads me to wonder why anyone designed shoes for women in the way they have.

I believe that one reason may be the foot fetish of men that dates back to the 11th century Chinese tradition of foot-binding. You might think that I am way off, but there are more similarities between foot-binding and high-heeled shoes than you might imagine.

Both have worked to keep women in their place. A Chinese woman with a foot measuring no more than three inches in length is hardly mobile. A woman wearing three inch spikes can't run very easily either. A woman in heels, without her feet solidly on the ground, is left "tip-toeing" around men. Although small feet and pointed shoes may be sexually stimulating for some men, they only cause pain and discomfort for women.

So, despite the fact that some men in the past, and even today, have foot fetishes that require a woman to somehow shrink the size of her feet, my personal fetish requires only that a man allow his feet to be free.

I don't know if I'll ever understand my fascination for a man's feet in a Birkenstock footbed. Maybe it is more than just the shoe, but what it gives to the person wearing it -- comfort, support and freedom. What else could you want for your feet? What else could you want in a relationship?

Thursday, Sept. 26, 1991]

My Opinion

Parenthood vs. profession, why should women do it all?

This week on the television show "Murphy Brown," the lead character, Murphy, a successful reporter on a Washington D.C. news program was almost fired. Why? Because she is pregnant and unmarried.

Has feminism failed? Here is a woman who beat all the odds to become one of the top professionals in her field, yet still her job is in jeopardy because of pregnancy.

Murphy Brown won't be alone in supporting a child on her own. One quarter of the 65 percent of all mothers who work are single parents. Unfortunately, many of them will run into the same problems with their employers.

Despite the rumors that women have achieved equality, statistics tell a different story. Discrimination in the workplace has not magically disappeared in 1991. A full time working woman makes only 64 cents to a man's dollar. The number of pregnancy-related discrimination suits filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission between 1986 and 1989 have increased by 200 percent.

Only 5,600 companies nationwide give parents any kind of help. Sixty percent of all working women receive no maternity leave. It isn't easy being a working mother in the United States. We are one of only two industrialized nations without any guaranteed maternity leave.

In comparison, Sweden offers parents 15 months paid leave which can be shared between the mother and father. German mothers are guaranteed 14 weeks paid leave. In Italy, a mother gets six months leave at 80 percent salary. In addition, either parent can take one year off without pay, but with job security.

The only attempt at a nationwide parental leave policy in the United States was vetoed by President Bush last year. The Family and Medical Leave Act would have guaranteed that women and men working in firms of more than 50 employees could take at least 12 weeks off -- without pay, but with health insurance and job security -- to care for an infant or ill family member. The act is being reintroduced into Congress this year, however if passed it will probably be vetoed.

So where does all of this leave college-aged women? In the 1950s the ideal woman was dedicated to the family. In the 1970s she was dedicated to her career. In the 1990s we are expected to combine career and family. The fact is that women are left in a no-win situation.

If a woman is dedicated exclusively to her career, the anti-feminist backlash will tell her that she will suffer loneliness and executive burn-out. "Equality" has ruined her life, leaving her childless and without a man.

If she decides to by-pass a career to be a full-time homemaker and mother, she is criticized for not having a "real" job. She is told that she is wasting her time and will be missing out.

If a woman decides to "have it all," she runs into even more dilemmas. If she takes time off from her career to raise her children, she is criticized for being less committed to her work. She will be put on the "mommy track" to assure that she never gets too far in the workplace. If she is lucky her job will be waiting when she returns, but she will never catch up to a male counterpart.

But if she decides to go back to work after the six weeks of maternity leave that her employer graciously gives her, she is criticized for putting her children into low-quality child care. The decay of the American family is placed on her shoulders, leaving her feeling guilty for not spending enough time with her children.

What does society expect from us? What should we expect from ourselves? Why do we have to "have it all" when having it all means having all the headaches and all the responsibility?

Or if we decide to exclusively dedicate ourselves to either a career or a family, why do we have to feel as though we are giving something up? The strong and independent career woman isn't maternal. A homemaker will never be qualified for a job in the "real world."

Women of our generation are expected to "have it all." However, if we are unable to manage we have only ourselves to blame, not the patriarchal society of which we are the victims, not business and government, who give us no support.

We need to stop seeing the family as a private issue of which women are exclusively responsible. Feminists believe that "the personal is political." The balancing act of combining work and family must be viewed as a political issue not just a woman's problem.

We are in a time of tremendous change. The rules need to be revised and we must be involved in the process. If it is possible to balance a career and family it can not be done without help from the government and business. We must demand that our future employers meet the needs of the two-career and single-parent family.

Some companies already are meeting the challenge and are making the change. IBM offers their employees up to three years unpaid leave with job security and benefits plus child care referrals. This company policy needs to become the norm and not the exception.

Parental leave, affordable child care, flex-time, job-sharing and compressed schedules are alternatives that need to be explored. It is time we stop expecting women to "have it all" and to do it all without any help.

I consider myself a feminist and I am not afraid to say that when I have children they will be my top priority for at least the first three years of their lives. I respect parenthood and I don't believe that it is something to be devalued.

People blame feminism for devaluing motherhood. That isn't true. Companies that discourage mothers from staying home by not offering parental leave or securing their jobs are the ones responsible. The government that doesn't pass legislation guaranteeing parental leave or regulating child care is responsible.

I want to see a society where employers and legislators support women and men who make the choice to stay home and take care of their children.

Thursday, Oct. 10, 1991]

My Opinion

Trees and clean air give Penn State edge over rival Pitt

I guess I should probably just come out with it. You will probably find out anyway. Yes, it is true. I did spend two years at the University of Pittsburgh. And now I am here.

Most people tell me that I got smart. Well, maybe I did, maybe I didn't. I've only been here for four months, hardly enough time to know if my life has vastly improved by being in Happy Valley. However, it is enough time to feel qualified to compare these rival schools.

When I tell people about my past affiliation with Pitt, everyone asks me why I transferred. That seems like a simple enough question. However, I have yet to come up with a clever and witty reply. "I needed a change of pace. I can't imagine staying in one place for more than two years. And yeah, there are more classes that I want to take here."

Maybe next time I should use something like, "Well, actually, if you want to know the truth. On Jan. 19, 1991 I had a vision from God and She told me to come to Penn State." Although I'm sure my brother-in-law would like me to say I came here because we have a better football team.

I suppose all of this began when I was a senior in college. I applied to two colleges -- Penn State and the University of Pittsburgh. I never really wanted to come here. To be honest, I got scared about being in the middle of the state. Originally from Reading, I felt safe living relatively close to the border just in case the Pennsylvania legislature got too conservative.

So when it came time to visit colleges, I went straight past State College on my way to the beautiful city of Pittsburgh (located close to both the Ohio and West Virginia borders). Actually, contrary to popular belief, Pittsburgh isn't really a city. Go downtown on a Sunday afternoon and you will see why. The place closes down on the weekends.

I walked through the streets one Sunday afternoon and I could have sworn that there was a nuclear war and I and about three other people were the only survivors. It is just downright weird.

I went to visit Pitt's Oakland campus. I was so impressed. How many universities have a Cathedral of Learning (the second largest academic building in the world)? I decided on the spot that this was the place for me.

The thrill of urban college life wore off after about a year and a half. Sure there was "culture," but how many times had I actually gone out to experience it? And, how safe was it to do so?

I knew there was a problem with crime and violence in Oakland when my roommate started to carry mace. Or after I realized that my roommates and I would only go to 7-Eleven in groups of three even though it was just down the street.

So far the scariest place I have encountered in State College are the stacks in Pattee.

Despite the crime and constant barrage of sirens and hospital helicopters, there is one thing I will miss at Pitt. With numerous clinics around campus there was one great opportunity for those who were brave. Researchers were always looking for some poor, college-aged guinea pig to be in their experiments.

My last year at Pitt I became a professional study participant. I checked the want-ads everyday in search of another out of the ordinary way to earn money. "Tilt-table testing"-- hmmm. . .that couldn't be that bad. I have to lay on a table that will be raised and lowered to see if I become faint or nauseous? How much do I get paid? Fifty dollars? Sure, I'll do it.

My friends thought I was strange, but, hey, I liked living on the edge, helping out the medical and psychological fields in any way I could, and making anywhere from \$5 to \$15 an hour.

However, the culture and experiments weren't enough to keep me in Oakland. I needed to move on. I came here.

The best thing about Penn State is the atmosphere -- literally and figuratively. I can actually breathe here! The air, as long as you don't stand behind a bus, is relatively clean. The only place where you can breath in Oakland without becoming dizzy is in an enclosed room with central air.

However, it's more than just the high air quality that gives Penn State it's appealing and unique atmosphere. The multitudes of trees and people help out too. Walking around campus is enjoyable. In sharp contrast to Oakland, where walking is an obstacle course in which one tries to avoid trash, harrassing comments from people on the street, and people peddling anything from flowers to love beads to communist literature.

I cannot deny that there are some disadvantages. One is the \$3 price of on-campus movies. At Pitt we could experience the magic of Hollywood for a mere dollar. Although that is pretty much dirt cheap, technical difficulties interrupting the picture would, on occassion, cause thrifty students to chant, "I want my buck back."

On a serious note, I did develop one major problem. I became addicted to the telephone registration system. It just seemed so amazing. I can add/drop without standing in line? Wow. Unfortunately, once I got started, I couldn't stop. It was like the lottery. O.K., let's see if 850555 is going to be my lucky number. "All sections of . . .are filled." Damn. But, just getting through the busy phone lines during the first week of classes became a thrill.

Overall, I must say that I think I made the right decision by coming here. The best thing about transferring here is meeting new people and new challenges -- like learning how to pronounce weird street names like Pugh or trying different flavor ice cream at the Creamery.

I suppose my only regret is that I will only spend two years here. That is if I graduate on time. Hmm. Maybe spending more than two years in one place isn't so bad after all, especially if the place is State College.

Thursday, Oct. 24, 1991]

My Opinion

Life as a twin rewarding, despite the occasional confusion

As the weeks go by, more people are beginning to recognize me from my columns. Unfortunately, I haven't actually talked to all of these people because some of them have recognized my twin sister -- not me.

So, I decided to let everyone know that there is a person out there who resembles me. To be honest, it is more like a warning --I don't think I can be responsible for the actions of my twin sister, Mindy. She might not be so nice, friendly and understanding to the next person who calls her Leah.

But who could blame her? Wouldn't you begin to get a little upset and/or have an identity crisis if people who even had classes with you don't remember you as Mindy, but instead ask, "Hey, don't you write for the Collegian?"

Personally, I enjoy being a twin. It's usually the first thing I tell people about myself. I figure it is a good conversation starter. If my twin isn't there by my side when I first meet someone, most people ask if we are identical. Here is where I sort of get stuck.

There's this genetic thing that I'm not quite sure about so I end up sounding like a complete idiot.

"Well, most people think we look alike but, to tell you the truth, I'm not quite sure if the egg split or if there were, in fact, two eggs. I'll have to get back to you on that one."

As it is common for those children who aren't the first born, Mindy and I have considerably fewer baby pictures than my older sister Heather. The excuse my parents gave me for this lack of a pictorial history is that they were too busy trying to keep both of us fed and dry. They didn't always have the time to capture the moment with Kodak.

Yeah, sure. It wouldn't be so bad if the few photos we do have weren't, well, how should I put this, somewhat ambiguous. The problem is we aren't actually sure who is who. It's always fun having my friends try to guess which baby or toddler is me. However, they are a little disappointed when they expect a definite answer and I regretfully inform them that their guess is as good as mine.

But, I shouldn't be so hard on my parents. Mindy and I have had the same problem. Last month, we were looking through some recent pictures and Mindy said, "That's a really good picture of you." At first I agreed with her, but a minute or two later (after realizing that I had never worn that outfit) I said, "Hey Mindy, that's not me, it's YOU!" It was a scary moment.

People often ask if we ever dressed alike. When we were little all of our relatives would give us identical outfits. It was always a thrill when we got matching outfits in different colors and had to fight over who got which color. However, as we got older we realized that we would have twice the wardrobe potential if we had different clothes. I must stress the word potential because it's not always feasible to borrow a sweater from your sister when you are having an argument.

Finally, most people want to know if I like being a twin. For the most part, it's great. But, this mistaken identity thing, although it is amusing, can get on my nerves. Sometimes it's not worth trying to explain to someone that I am not who they think I am. I just smile and go on my merry way. Other times people will go on talking to me without giving me the chance to say, "Hey, wait a minute, I am NOT Mindy, leave me alone."

My freshman year at Pitt I lived with six people and I didn't have the chance to let them all know about Mindy. So for the first few weeks I got the reputation of being unfriendly because I (in reality, Mindy) didn't say hello to them on the street. Therefore, I have been conditioned to say "hi" to people I don't even know just because I don't want them to think that my sister is rude.

The most memorable experience of mistaken identity here at Penn State was during the summer at Ritenour. Mindy and I ended up being there at the same time. Mistake.

The nurse kindly showed me to the doctor's office. As I nervously sat there I heard all sorts of commotion outside. Then, the nurse came back and said, "Didn't I tell you to go to the room across the hall?" I said no.

And then it hit me, she doesn't know who I am. After about fifteen minutes and a mini-conference among the nurse, doctor and a few other people, we got the whole thing straightened out. Ever since then, Mindy and I make sure to schedule appointments on different days.

Despite the occasional identity crisis and having to share a birthday, I never regret being a twin. Although even if I did, there really isn't anything I could do about it.

Not all twins get along, but Mindy is my best friend. She really understands me and not just because in the eyes of some people she has actually been me. We have a special connection. Therefore, in the hope of keeping my sister's sanity in check (not to mention for other people's safety) I'll give you some tips on telling us apart.

If you see "me" carrying an art portfolio, it's Mindy. She's the artist. If you see me in the computer lab, feel free to say "hi" and compliment me on my column. If you see "me" working in The Gap, it's really Mindy. If I'm working in the HUB Eateries, again feel free to say "hi."

If, despite these guidelines, you still happen to say "Hi Leah, I like your column," to my sister and she lets you have it, please don't let that stop you from reading my next column.

Thursday, Nov. 7, 1991]

My Opinion

The death penalty: causing the United States to go blind?

When I was in high school I read a short story called "The Lottery." Every summer, in a small New England farm town, the people would gather for a ritual that ended with one of them being stoned to death. The people supported the ritual without knowing the meaning behind it or the consequences that could result.

In the United States today we have a similar lottery. It is called the death penalty.

Many people support the death penalty without knowing the facts or the consequences. We can no longer condone this human rights abuse. It is time we learn the truth.

Myth 1 -- *The death penalty is humane.* The death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment. In a 1983 execution it took three charges of 1900 volts over a period of 14 minutes to kill the prisoner. After the second charge, smoke and flame erupted from his left temple and leg.

Myth 2 -- *The death penalty deters crime.* The U.S. Supreme Court and The United Nations agreed there is no conclusive evidence that the death penalty deters violent crime.

Myth 3 -- *The death penalty saves taxpayers money.* In reality, the death penalty costs more than life imprisonment as a result of high legal costs during the appeals process.

Myth 4 -- *The death penalty is not biased.* Studies have shown the death penalty to be racially biased. In Florida, a black man convicted of killing a white man is five times more likely to receive a death sentence than a white man convicted of killing another white man.

Many people approve of the death penalty because they feel that murderers "deserve to die." Every human being is born with certain universal human rights including the right to life. These rights are guaranteed. They are not rewards for good behavior and they cannot be taken away for bad behavior. No one deserves to die and the idea of "an eye for an eye" is no excuse. As Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

However, it isn't the whole world that is going blind, but the United States. There are approximately 60 countries in the world with the death penalty, but the United States is the only Western industrialized nation that still executes. In addition, the United States is one of only seven countries which allows the execution of juvenile offenders. In fact, the United States has more juveniles on death row than any other country.

Since 1975, one country every year has abolished the death penalty. Despite this worldwide trend towards abolition, politicians in the United States want to institute the death penalty for an even wider range of crimes.

In the recent U.S. Senate race, both candidates declared their support for the death penalty for additional crimes including drug-related offenses. One Harris Wofford commercial stated that he voted for the death penalty for 51 crimes.

It seems as though every politician wants to appear "tough on crime." What better way to do so than to say, "Let's kill all the criminals."

Unfortunately, this leaves the American public with a false sense of security. The death penalty does not protect us. It prevents us from looking for real solutions to violent crime.

The death penalty is a lottery, plain and simple. Not every murderer is sentenced to death. Who gets sentenced and who doesn't?

People would like to believe that it is solely based on the severity of the crime. However, other factors that are just as influential include the state where the crime was committed and the quality of the defense.

According to Stephen Bright, director of the Southern Center for Human Rights, "People are not sentenced to death for committing the worst crime -- they are sentenced to death for having the worst lawyer."

Poor people who can't afford their own legal representation often get inexperienced, court-appointed lawyers. Ultimately, this can mean the difference between life and death.

Even more disturbing is the thought that insane criminals will be given drugs so that they can be executed.

In Louisiana, a district judge has ordered that an inmate receive an anti-psychotic drug to make him sane enough to execute. Who really is the insane person on this situation -- the criminal or the judge? It is incredible to think that someone will be "cured" so that they can be killed.

We can no longer ignore the fact that the death penalty is irreversible. Mistakes can be made. However, you can't release a wrongly accused person who has already been killed.

Since 1900, there have been 23 documented cases of innocent people being executed. Is this acceptable? Are these people just sacrifices to the justice system? Luckily, the appeals process has prevented even more people from being wrongly executed.

Joseph Richardson spent 21 years on death row for murders he didn't commit. He had come within 24 hours of being executed before he was finally released in April 1989.

What are the consequences of the death penalty on our society? First we must ask ourselves, "Why do we kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?" It makes no sense.

The death penalty doesn't solve violent crime; it breeds violence. The death penalty doesn't create a safer society; it prevents us from having one. The death penalty is not a fair and humane punishment; it is biased and cruel.

According to Coretta Scott King, "Justice is never advanced in the taking of a human life. Morality is never upheld by legalized murder."

The United States is going blind. Revenge is not the answer. We are fooling ourselves if we continue to believe that the death penalty deters crime, saves money or protects us from the most dangerous "elements" in our society. The "worst-sinning" criminals aren't the ones being executed -- the poor, minorities, and juveniles are the ones being killed.

Living in the wrong state or having the wrong lawyer has more to do with getting the death penalty than the severity of the crime. We must open our eyes to the truth. We cannot believe the rhetoric of the politicians who tell us that the death penalty is the solution to violent crime. We must respect life. We must abolish the death penalty.

Thursday, Nov. 21, 1991]

My Opinion

Surviving 'Turkey Day' as a vegetarian: Pass the tofu

Thanksgiving is only a week away. While most people are excited about this American tradition, I am afraid. I don't think I can handle another holiday dinner with a dead turkey. I'm not sure if I can deal with the temptation of taking a bite of that juicy carcass.

Every year at this time I ask myself, "Should I forgo being a vegetarian for a day?" It's tough. Being a vegetarian for over six years isn't easy and it never gets any easier. Ever since I was a little kid I've been conditioned to believe that Thanksgiving means "Turkey Day."

For a few years I would bring my own turkey to the dinner table. However, my turkey was stuffed with foam, not bread and would gobble when you opened its mouth. It had a two-fold purpose -- to remind me that the meat that smelled so good was actually an animal, and to make the rest of my family feel guilty for taking part in this American tradition. Of course, they still ate their turkey but it was my own form of protest.

Interestingly, I can't seem to find that turkey. At first, I thought I just misplaced it, but now I suspect there's some "fowl" play involved.

The first Thanksgiving after my sister and I became vegetarians we were determined to come up with an alternative that would be just as tasty as turkey.

We went to the natural health food store and bought a package of tofu burger mix. The picture on the box looked appealing enough. However, something went very wrong when the product went from the box to the plate. What we created in our kitchen that fateful Thursday was just plain gross.

We ate it with smiles on our faces, though, because we didn't want the rest of the family to gloat. They didn't believe that we would actually give up the turkey for the mysterious tofu mixture. Well, we showed them and suffered the consequences.

Since that unfortunate incident I have come to appreciate the versatility of bean curd. However, my friends and family are still afraid of it. When I offer tofu to people, they act as if I just asked them to eat nuclear waste. So now, I slip some tofu into other Thanksgiving dishes such as banana bread. After someone compliments me on my culinary masterpiece I inform them, "Ha, ha. You just ate bean curd and liked it!"

Although I have learned the proper place for tofu in the Thanksgiving meal I'm still debating whether or not I should eat turkey. As I sit there at the dining room table with a plate full of potatoes and vegetable stuffing, half of me -- the evil, carnivorous half -- rationalizes, "Well, Leah, the turkey's already dead. What's the harm in eating it now. Why suffer when it's within

arms reach? Besides, turkeys are stupid. It's not as bad as eating a hamburger. No rainforests were destroyed. Remember you only live once -- this may be the last chance you will be able to indulge."

The other half of me, the moralistic herbivore, preaches, "The poor turkey has nothing to be thankful for. How can you condone this needless killing? There's plenty of other things to eat. You can't pick and choose the days when it's convenient to be a vegetarian. If you eat the turkey now why be a vegetarian at all?"

At this point I have to remind myself why I am a vegetarian. Although vegetarians are stereotyped as peace-loving, wannabe hippies, we are as diverse as meat-eaters. Personally, I don't eat meat, poultry or fish because it just isn't healthy. As a vegetarian, I have a lower rate of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity, and high blood pressure.

Besides protecting my health, I am a vegetarian for environmental reasons. John Robbins, author of *Diet for a New America*, writes, "A reduction in meat consumption is the most potent single act you can take to halt the destruction of our environment and preserve our precious natural resources." Meat production wastes grain, destroys topsoil, groundwater supplies and forests. Production of food for animals uses 90 percent of agricultural resources.

Accordingly, most of my reasons for being a vegetarian are related to beef production, not poultry. So why don't I eat the turkey? Some people assume that vegetarians do eat turkey or chicken. I think we need a refresher course in biology. Chickens and turkeys are not vegetables, they are animals. You don't find them in the produce aisle.

Although meat production is much more wasteful of natural resources, poultry production still is not a good alternative. For example, it takes four pounds of grain and soybeans and over 800 gallons of water to produce one pound of edible turkey. In comparison, one pound of tomatoes, potatoes or wheat requires less than 25 gallons of water.

The conditions under which poultry is produced in this country are horrendous causing suffering for the animals and potential health hazards for people. In fact, 60 of 84 federal chicken inspectors interviewed for an article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* said that based on what they observed, they no longer eat chicken. I'm sure the same thing could be said about turkeys since the same methods of factory production for chicken are used for turkeys.

When we have a piece of turkey on our plates we forget how it got there. We forget that the turkeys are debeaked, stuffed in wire cages and fed chemicals, drugs and antibiotics. When I think about it that way, it doesn't seem so appetizing after all.

I'm not trying to tell you not to eat turkey for Thanksgiving. Some of my best friends are omnivores. I just think we should re-examine the true meaning of this holiday. It's not about the mass slaughter of turkeys for a special dinner. It's about giving thanks.

As George Bernard Shaw once said, "Custom will reconcile people to any atrocity." Personally, the small sacrifice of not eating a little turkey, is much easier to live with than causing the suffering of a helpless animal.

Sure the turkey smells good and from what I can remember it tastes good too, but I've made it this long, what's another year.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Thursday, Dec. 5, 1991]

My Opinion

Women's studies not a lesson in homemaking, child-rearing

This past weekend during my yearly eye examination my doctor attempted to make small talk by asking where I was going to school. Then came the inevitable question. The question I have begun to dread: "What is your major?"

While sitting there rather defenseless, I wasn't sure what to do. I could have just lied and said I'm in liberal studies. That's not too controversial. From past experience I knew what would happen if I told the truth.

I finally answered, somewhat hesitantly, "women's studies."

Silence. At least five painful seconds of silence. I've come to expect this. Most people are surprised about this atypical major. Either they have no idea what it is or they can't understand why it would be a major.

I sat there waiting for his verbal reaction. By this time I had already noticed the bewildered look on his face. I'm not quite sure of his exact words, but it was definitely the "What are you going to do with that?" reaction.

I could tell he was wondering why I would 'waste' my parents' money and four years of my time for a degree in a pseudo major. I told him that I planned on going law school. He said, "Oh, so you're a feminist . . . Anita Hill . . . sexual harassment." Then he added, "Well, no doubt it is a growing field."

My only response was a nod. Although in my mind I thought, yes, unfortunately it is a growing field. Annual charges of sexual harassment have doubled between 1981 and 1988. It would be nice if there wasn't such a need for lawyers to take on these cases.

I wanted to tell him that women's studies is far from trivial, with a history of over twenty years. There are over 621 women's studies programs at universities and colleges all over the country, 425 offering minors and 187 offering majors.

Most people don't know how to react to my major because they aren't sure what women's studies is or what it means. There are numerous misconceptions.

Last winter, my mother was talking with a friend who asked what I was studying. When she told him that I wanted to go into women's studies he responded, "Oh, so she wants to learn about day care and stuff like that?" What amazed me about this remark was that it came from the mouth of an intelligent man, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania.

Although I had to laugh when I heard this story, I must admit I was a bit offended. I wasn't bothered that someone would think that I was interested in child care, but that he would automatically associate women's studies with the traditional female responsibility of child rearing.

Women's studies is not about learning how to be a homemaker, but an exploration of women's experiences from an interdisciplinary perspective. I've taken courses in areas as diverse as politics, religion and sociology. My classes aren't male-bashing sessions. We have more important things to do.

Some men say, "Women's studies? Are you kidding? When are we getting a men's studies program?" Well, first of all, most education is "men's" studies -- the subjects are men or men's issues told from a male perspective using male authors. The female point of view and female voice are often lost in traditional education.

Secondly, there are men's studies programs at some colleges facilitated by pro-feminist men who support women's struggle against male violence and women's demands for equal opportunity, political participation, sexual autonomy and family reforms.

Most of the misconceptions about women's studies result from the stigma attached to feminism. For many, feminism is the new "F" word. Although one of the goals of feminism has been to eradicate stereotypes, feminists have been targetted with an extremely negative stereotype.

When most people see the word "feminist" they think "bra-burning, man-hater, male-basher, want-to-be-a-man, hairy-legged radical." However, few, if any, feminists fit this stereotype.

Anyone who still believes there were major bra-burning protests in the 1970s is wrong. It never happened. That's just an example of how the media has promoted negative images of feminists.

I am a feminist. Standing up for the rights of women does not mean that I hate men. I don't consider men the enemy. Being a feminist does not mean giving up my femininity. I have no desire to be a man.

I admit that I do have anger. There is a great deal to be angry about. Women's reproductive rights are slowly being taken away. In increasing numbers, women are the victims of violence and rape. Although we are 51 percent of the population, we are just 2 percent of the U.S. Senate. And, we still make less than 60 cents to a man's dollar.

The film *Thelma and Louise* is one popular example of how women deal with the anger about their victimization. Some see them as man-haters, others as heroines. Personally, I try to use my anger to fuel my fight for change instead of bringing me down. My sister, Heather, always says, "Don't bitch without action." I try to follow that simple philosophy.

Feminism is the demand for equal rights (political, economic, and social) for women as granted to men. The problem is that many think equality means sameness. People believe that feminists want a genderless society. My goal is not to have a world of people like Pat from the popular

"Saturday Night Live" skit. The differences between women and men shouldn't disappear, but the power -- or lack of power -- that go along with the differences should.

Some women fear that "equality" means the loss of special privileges. For example, many women like it when a man opens the door for them. I am not saying that is wrong. However, my view is that when a woman wants a job in a male-dominated field, the same door that was so kindly opened before will most likely be slammed in her face. The doors that I want opened for me are the doors of opportunity.

I want the empowerment of women on their own terms, respecting women's accomplishments and choices. Feminism is not about getting rid of differences, but about talking about them, questioning them, being aware. Women's studies encourages this discussion of gender issues.

Women's studies has given me a deeper understanding of myself, the world and my place in it. I've learned not to accept everything that I read as fact. I ask questions and think critically. Learning about the history of women, both the good and the bad, has given me a foundation from which I can work for change.

I encourage everyone to take a course in women's studies. This university offers over 40 courses cross-listed with the arts or humanities and natural or social sciences. You don't need to be a woman or a feminist to take a course in women's studies. The only requirement is an open mind.

Ignorance and fear about feminism and women's studies allow discrimination and inequality to continue. Education and open, honest communication must be the foundation for equality.