

# The Growl -- May 2000

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The Monthly Newsletter For The Humphreys College Huskies, Stockton Campus



## *Who's Running The Show?*

Professor Rowena M. Walker

Some days I really cannot believe that I am sitting in front of a computer--and using it. Not only do I know how to use the most basic Microsoft Word, but I can even find things on the Internet! So, you say, what's new? It's a new millennium. Right?

But listen, you're reading the words of someone who did not sit in front of a television until age 20, because there was only one in town, and it wasn't ours! The telephone at home was a large black box on our kitchen wall--when we finally got one. I was close to 20 then too. And in college I suffered from sleep deprivation because I had to sleep on large rollers in my hair if I wanted to look good the next day. Alas, there weren't any hair dryers when I was 20. And on and on. By now I hope you get the picture. We're talking about change. Big change. For the better? Well, yes and no. Here's the way I see it.

I want to recommend the inventor of word processing for sainthood. The only reason I would hope my recommendation would be turned down is because sometimes WORD thinks it can control my life. It thinks it doesn't have to acknowledge that I often change my mind--right in the middle of a profound thought in the middle of a page. It makes me bow and scrape before it lets me stop doing what I've been doing, IF it lets me do it in the first place. Take underlining, for example. Heaven forbid if I don't want the entire essay underlined. The computer does, and that's all that matters! But even after relinquishing my self-respect to a machine, I must say that I am willing to do that if I never have to see another piece of carbon paper, another bottle of white-out, another eraser, or even another typewriter--those things that eventually became as mysterious to operate as spaceships. I vote for WORD.

Now, let's talk about the world out there that cannot function any longer without the computer. First, kids don't have to learn how to make change at McDonald's. Guess who does it. The sales

clerks at Macy's have to call the manager if they forget a code. A code for guess what. You can go to the post office to buy stamps, go to the bank to get cash, and go home to check your e-mail--all without ever seeing a human or hearing a human voice. Made possible by guess what. And the telephone. Oh my. A machine tells us not to hang up because our call is important to THEM. Funny, I was calling because it was pretty important to ME. The computer again. It doesn't care.

Well, I have left the best to the last: THE INTERNET, that magical fountain of knowledge that people whisper about in cathedral-like tones. It is as though God and all His wisdom is finally being revealed. Never mind that there is much information that is incorrect. It must be special because it is from the computer! And on THE INTERNET. Wow!

It's easy to see the pattern here. We have abdicated our human throne and handed it over to a machine. (I wonder if the computer is going to be offended by my calling it a "machine". I'll probably get an ugly message on my screen tomorrow.) But, what is interesting is that we humans, who will fight to the death if our government or another individual tries to deprive us of our rights, are willing to smile sheepishly and gratefully and accept whatever it orders us to do.

So, what am I saying? Get rid of the computers? Carry protest signs against the computer age? Have it outlawed? No. No. No. I have too much appreciation of history for that--and too much common sense. Believe me, I don't want to go back to the low-tech, horse-and-buggy days. I don't think they were all that great. But, I do wish we would reflect once in awhile on just exactly what we're doing and make sure that we really want everything we're getting. Anybody ever read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?

Now, that'll make you think! See, I can't turn off this underline!!!! Oh well.



There once was a lady from Esser  
Whose knowledge grew lesser and lesser,  
It, at last, grew so small  
She knew nothing at all,  
And now she's a college professor.  
-- S.C. Mead --

*The following article first "appeared" as a term paper for Advanced Written Communications last winter. Deborah's paper clearly communicates that, no matter how busy we are, we can still involve ourselves in a little community service and activism.*



## *Volunteering*

Deborah Harris, student

The other day I spent a few hours on the Internet researching the clear-cutting of old growth forests. I read articles that detailed the destruction of wildlife habitat, how 90% of coastal redwoods are gone, and how CEO's of logging companies give out seemingly arbitrary orders to cut down entire forests of ancient redwoods.

Researching this topic left me feeling helpless and depressed, which is just the type of emotions my too-tired and burned-out colleagues are trying to avoid. The main defense against clear-cutting is strategic lawsuits, citizen advocacy, and direct action in the woods (Bundy, Slotzman). This type of activism requires a lot of time and dedication, and realistically speaking, I don't personally know of anybody who has the time to jump into the car and drive hundreds of miles to protest.

I'm so busy that I'm hardly aware of what is going on around me. Work and school take up about 70 hours a week, and I barely have time to watch the news on television, much less read the newspaper. By the time my day is done, I have only a couple of hours to myself before I go to bed then get up and start all over again.

Many people feel guilty because they can't spare the time to volunteer for a good cause, and many people don't have enough money to donate. So what should we do? Every one of us should be doing something to help someone less fortunate than we are, but where do we start?

I would suggest that we start with small efforts that don't put too much of a demand on our schedule. For instance, I used to sit on the front steps of our house in the morning and drink coffee. A few times a week a "dumpster-diver" would drive by on his bicycle on his way to the apartment complex down the street. A few hours later, he would drive past again with his bike piled high with a garbage bag full of cans.

I often wondered about his lifestyle. He appeared to be healthy enough, but seemed tired and dirty. I imagined a day spent rummaging around in dirty dumpsters and garbage cans then returning to a cardboard home underneath an overpass. I began to feel sorry for him and decided that I would contribute to his effort by giving him all of our aluminum cans.

I thought of all the barbecues we had given or attended, and all of those Pepsi and beer cans that we just threw into the garbage. So for our next barbecue, I placed a 35-gallon garbage can in the middle of the back yard with a large ALUMINUM sign on it. The next morning I put the bag full of cans and aluminum foil on the curb in front of the house, and the next time the dumpster diver drove by I told him to take the bag and any others that I might leave on the curb.

Some people might think that it's somewhat foolish and dangerous to try to help dumpster-divers, but I'm actually more afraid of being shot while commuting on the freeway because somebody doesn't like the way I drive.

Today, I live in an apartment complex, and once a week I put a bag of cans next to the dumpster. Everyone benefits--with a minimum amount of time invested or hassle, I have done my part for the environment, and the poor dumpster diver doesn't have to work so hard to make a living.

If helping homeless dumpster-divers isn't your cup of tea, then think of how recycling cans benefits the environment. The average aluminum can contains more than 50 percent post-consumer recycled content. Recycling for profit brings in only 95 cents a pound, but the energy saved from one recycled aluminum can will operate a television set for three hours (Why).

If there's a clothing drive that is being sponsored by your work or school, go through your closets and donate everything you can. I'm always amazed at how people throw away perfectly good clothes only because they're sick of wearing them.

If possible, take your donated goods to the actual charity or shelter. This is more pro-active and will allow you to see who is benefiting from your volunteer efforts.

If you see someone in a parking lot with a dead battery, go over to them and see if you can at least see if they need a jump. Many of us know that we should lend a helping hand but we just walk on by. We deflect our guilt by looking away. After all, the guilt caused by avoiding a situation is much easier to deal with than making an effort to assist someone; but there's always that lingering, dark thought in my mind that says "I should have helped. It wouldn't have killed me to lend her my cell phone to call a tow truck." Five minutes of helping out could save several hours of guilty angst.

Getting back to the big issues such as old-growth forests, we could at least write our congressman. My political science teacher told us that The National Rifle Association members can have 10,000 handwritten letters at the White House in 24 hours. He said that one letter represents the opinion of 500 people who don't write in, so that amounts to 5,000,000 opinions. Now, that's power.

A person doesn't have to write a long, detailed letter. The people at the White House who read these letters are interested in which side of the fence you're on, not how well you can write. They're counting up the yeas and nays.

A one-sentence letter could be written stating, "I will not vote for you again if you support (or don't support) gun control." The message has been delivered. The President doesn't care about

the writing skill of the author; the bottom line is that he wants to know how the author will vote for him in the next election.

If you want to write our congressman, here are his addresses and phone numbers:

***The Honorable Richard Pombo, 2495 West March Lane, Ste. 104, Stockton, CA 95207***  
***Ph: (209) 951-3091 / Fax: (209) 951-1910 / Email: [pombo@house.gov](mailto:pombo@house.gov)***

Many of us would like to take a more active role than writing our congressman or leaving cans for the anonymous dumpster diver, but with so many restrictions on our time, many people don't even try. But there are many volunteer organizations that would only require a few hours of your time a couple of times a month.

Make sure the volunteer hours you want to give fit into your hectic life so that you don't take on more than you can handle. It might be better to start out with something temporary, such as helping to serve food at a homeless center during Thanksgiving or Christmas. If you don't want to serve food, ask to be put in the kitchen where they need help preparing food or washing dishes. This type of one-time volunteering can give an idea of what is expected and how good it feels to donate to the less fortunate. The St. Mary's Dining Room on Sonoma Street in Stockton welcomes volunteers. Their phone number is (209) 467-0703.

If this motivates you to want to give a little more time, then try an organization like Meals On Wheels. This organization may be ideal for students because it requires only about 90 minutes whenever you are able to afford the time. Volunteers deliver meals to people who are shut in and unable to do their own shopping. They could be people who are too ill or disabled to cook for themselves, and the volunteer may be the only person that the shut-in person sees all day. All that is required is a drivers license and 90 minutes of time whenever you can spare it (Meals).

Food banks also enable the volunteer to contribute in a number of ways. Virtually all of the food donated is provided by the food industry. These items include surplus supermarket items, unsold breads, and mislabeled goods. All are edible. Food banks need people with trucks who can donate four hours of time once or twice a month on weekends to pick up food from local food companies then distribute it where needed (What)

If none of these examples appeals to your interests, then inquire at work, or at your church, or check the Internet. People who have much busier lives make time to volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some volunteer to add meaning to their lives and because they care. Many have special skills such as organizational or clerical skill. Volunteering can be a great way to make business connections, expose yourself to new opportunities, to get to know your community.

Think about how much personal satisfaction you can receive and consider how much time you have to offer. Make sure the volunteer hours you want to give can fit into your schedule so you won't burn out and shortchange the organization you're trying to help.

Consider something temporary at first so you can get a feel for how volunteering works, then add more time as you can. If you don't feel comfortable with an organization, then quit and don't be discouraged. You may have to try a few different organizations before you can feel comfortable.

Consider what skills you might have to offer. You could type a term paper for a disabled person, or if you enjoy working outdoors and love children, you could coach a baseball team. City of Stockton has information about coaching on it's web site at [www.stockton.gov.com](http://www.stockton.gov.com) (Police).

Perhaps you would like to contribute the skills that you feel really comfortable with. If you're in the construction trade, you could volunteer at Habitat for Humanity. This organization builds houses for low income people who then make affordable payments that provide funding for the other houses to be built. In this area, you can contact Habitat for Humanity of San Joaquin County at (209) 565-5949.

You can see from all of these examples that there is a wide variety of volunteering opportunities that don't eat up all of your spare time. Some take a few hours a week or a few hours a month. You may have special reasons of your own; for instance, joining a neighborhood crime watch will help you protect your home as well as your neighbors (Why).

Think seriously about volunteering. Get off the couch, get out of your rut and help your community. You will meet new people, improve your self esteem, and end up with a feeling of accomplishment—so get up and do something.

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