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Powder and cream at New Year's

By JOE KEO
The Tattoo

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — This year's New Year celebrations are old news, but the New Year just started for Asian Buddhists.

As their fellow Buddhists did around the world, hundreds of Cambodians, Thailanders, and Laotians gathered this month to mark the New Year with celebrations and ceremonies at their nearest temple.

The holy celebration in Providence began somberly with prayers but evolved into a festive atmosphere.

Hoping for blessings, young people brought gifts of medicine and candles for their elders. Families bring their own home-cooked meals to eat and to give to monks as a show of respect.

Teenagers lined up at a nearby booth to receive their fortunes from elders while monks sat, prayed and recited holy words to bring in the Buddhist New Year.

New Year for some Southeast Asian countries is celebrated according to the Buddhist calendar and falls in April. This year, the three-day celebration ran from April 13-15.

While here in America people freeze their butts off in January, Asians have it good with their springtime New Year.

On a small urban street of Providence is a Cambodian Buddhist temple. It's something like a shack, since there's not a lot of city support or funds to help build a real one.

At the celebration this month, masses of people gathered into the gates of the temple's front area early in the morning. Incense filled the air while kids and teens roamed around in and out of the temple vicinity.

Morning was a time of prayers for the adults, but kids seemed bored.

The mood changed after the clock struck evening time. People feasted on rice, noodles, and soup. Kids started to have their own childish celebrations. A white cloud of baby powder appeared out of nowhere.

Then, tradition struck.

A kid ran full speed ahead with a handful of shaving cream.

The infamous powder and cream fight is a modern New Year's tradition for Cambodian, Thai and Laotian-Americans. Kids run



Joe Keo / The Tattoo

Kids revel in shaving cream and talcum powder as they celebrate the Buddhist New Year this month.

around chasing each other and covering everybody, including the adults, in baby powder and shaving cream.

This all started one year when a bunch of bored kids decided they were being left out of the very extravagant New Year's celebrations their counterparts had back in Asia. They decided to have some fun of their own, so they got some powder and shaving cream and started a trend.

Young Larry Loch, who came just for the powder and cream fight, was covered from head to toe in white powder.

"I think it's cool," Loch said.

Enthusiastic fifth-grader Amanda Mariano, just getting ready to experience her first-ever powder and cream fight, said spunkily, "I'm gonna put some shaving cream on people!"

Julienna Som, Mariano's partner in crime, dashed by with shaving cream on the strands of her hair.

"It's fun getting messy!" Som squealed.

The two girls then ganged up on a small boy who had previously dumped a whole container of baby talcum all over Som's friends. The poor little boy was soon engulfed in white powder.

The cloud of baby powder and splatter of shaving cream ended as it got late.

Families and friends headed back home to revel in their own New Year's celebrations, some in cars and others on foot.

A Cambodian flag fluttered from the top of one departing car. "Khmer (Cambodian) Pride," the driver yelled out, his flag waving in the wind as the New Year cheer faded away.

New rule: late to class is same as skipping

By SARA GREENE
The Tattoo

Students who are five minutes late to a class next year will get the same penalty as those who skip it completely under a proposed change in the attendance policy at Bristol Eastern High School.

The new policy, still to be approved by the Board of Education, would mandate a five-point penalty from that quarter's grade for any student who is five minutes late or more, according to Principal V. Everett Lyons.

The school's current attendance policy deducts points every time a student skips class, is tardy, has an unexcused absence or doesn't hand in make-up work. The points vary from one point for a tardy and two points for an unexcused absence to five points for skipping.

The points are deducted by each teacher per quarter from the student's grade, but not all teachers follow the policy as written. Some teachers use detention as a punishment instead of docking points from a student's grades.

A committee of teachers, the Student Governance Council and Lyons worked to put the new policy together.

Math teacher Michael Beaudoin, a member of the teacher council reviewing the new policy, spoke to his classes about some of the upcoming changes.

Beaudoin said he hoped the new attendance rule would help students develop a work ethic for the future.

One of the biggest problems with the current policy is how much time should be given before a student is marked tardy.

"I believe a lot of teachers are too strict with being a minute late and giving a detention," said freshman Matthew Fox. "Then there are others who don't care and let students show up more than 10 minutes late without a detention."

The new attendance policy will change the way students are marked tardy. During second, third and fourth periods, students will be given five minutes to get to class after the bell or they will be marked as skipping class.

Lyons said he hopes the new attendance policy will encourage students to get to class on time.

The proposed change is apparently part of a campaign to improve attendance problems at the school.

In a letter to parents earlier this school year, administrators stressed the district's goal of 95 percent attendance for 95 percent of the student body. To achieve that, students cannot miss more than nine days of school in a year.

Students who maintain perfect attendance are rewarded with certificates and free gifts, while students are punished for bad attendance through the points deducted off their grades.

In the end, the decision on the proposed change won't be made at Eastern.

"The decision of the faculty will have to pass through the Board of Education," Lyons said.

But even for conscientious students, will this five-minute block be enough time to hustle from one class to the next? Sprinting from one side of the building to the other — and stopping at a locker to get a book midway — may prove too much of a hurdle.

German shooting hits close to home

By MIKE NGUYEN
The Tattoo

Just when school security was starting to seem safe and normal, a massacre at a German high school last week reminds everyone how much the safety of children is still threatened.

I have a hard time even writing down my opinion. It happened again, is there much more to say?

Has anything changed or is there something different with this incident that's even worth repeating?

A German student, angered by his expulsion from school, opened fire on his teachers, classmates and police — leaving 18 people, including the killer, dead.

An event thousands of miles away seems so close, however, because it is painfully similar to past shootings: a troubled kid, in school and life, gets possession of dangerous arms (in this case, legally) and, angered by a trigger event, plans for months and then engages in mass murder in the classroom.

Finished with his deadly work, he kills himself, leaving his community shocked and confused.

I'm left to wonder what will happen when this generation, whose lives are filled with violence, will do when it's released to the outside world.

Will there be extreme violence on the job? If failing an exit exam, the German

School violence strikes overseas My view

shooter's problem, is enough reason to murder, what will a layoff from work do?

The pressures and stresses of the real world are gigantic compared to high school, adults tell me, although I sometimes beg to differ.

Ridicule doesn't end after school. Your screaming and forever cranky teachers only become your screaming and forever cranky supervisors.

What's the solution? If we knew, we wouldn't have this problem. But communication helps.

Telling an adult of someone's plan of a school shooting is far from tattling. Yet many people are afraid to speak up.

I find it selfish that classmates' lives are in danger and the only person who can stop the school violence immediate-

ly, the shooter's friend or confidante, is too scared or worried to leak information to the principal or police. It's disgusting.

In the long term, troubled teens can't be left to themselves. They're already alone. How else can they kill without anything to hold them back?

Teens who have friends and mentors to talk with and get advice from are not suspects in school violence, no matter how dark they dress or what color their hair is or if there are guns in the home.

Schools that are well protected from violence are not the ones with surveillance cameras and metal detectors. The safe ones have guidance counselors who can give good advice, approachable principals and teachers who can teach more than just a subject.

Unfortunately, teenagers are teenagers. They're sometimes cruel, immature and totally self-absorbed.

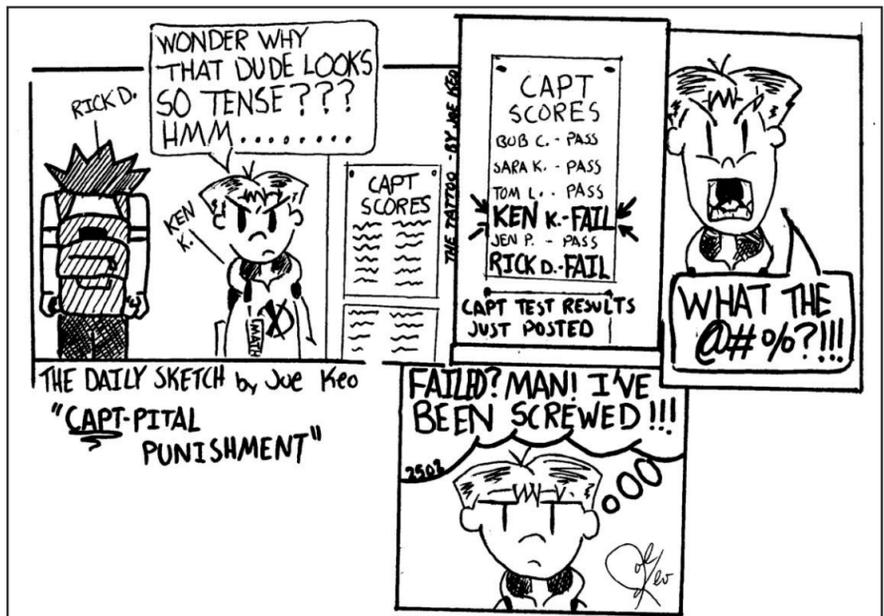
But in their twisted and unforgiving social circles, they know friendship and comradery will keep them sane.

Though the issue of campus security hasn't been solved yet, it's reassuring to know that the United States hasn't had another

terrible school shooting since Columbine. Something's been done right so far.

Yet as long as there are schools with troubled kids with little direction, there's going to be school violence.

It's the sad reality teens must live with.



Joe Keo / The Tattoo

No religion means deeds, not beliefs, matter

By KATIE JORDAN
The Tattoo

Chances are pretty good that I don't believe in the same religion as you do.

I am not a Christian, or a Catholic, or anything else, for that matter.

I don't really have a religion — that wasn't the way I was raised. In fact, until I started going to school and mingling with other kids, I had never really heard of religion.

But since then, boy, have I been hearing a lot about it.

The first person I remember talking to me about God was some girl in my elementary school, who felt she ought to try to convert me.

"Do you believe in God?"

Now, I know my parents must have explained to me a bit about what religion and God were by then, because I remember knowing perfectly clearly that my family didn't believe in God and I wasn't ashamed to admit it.

Apparently I should have been — at least I guessed that was what the girl thought. She seemed pretty shocked, and then promptly told me I should believe in Him.

"Why?" I countered.

I'm not sure exactly what she said, but I remember something to the effect of, "Because if you die, God can save you."

Of course she was young, and ignorant, but now that I'm older I still find this disturbing. It scares me because, even though I know she was just a little girl and probably had a very dim understanding of spirituality, in my opinion there are some adults out there who don't seem to get it.

I won't pretend that I'm an expert on the subject; I am undoubtedly not. But from what I have heard about religion, I always thought it was supposed to involve love and caring for the human race, being a good person and doing what is right.

But over the years it's become increasingly obvious that many people aren't as concerned with those things as they are with other things — like assurance of getting a nice, cushy place in Heaven if they should happen to die.

It also seems to me that the image of being religious is far too important to some people — more important than being good and kind, for instance.

I remember one occasion recently

when a group of classmates and I were having a discussion of some topic related to religion. I said something to one kid — I think maybe I asked whether or not he went to church.

It must have offended him that I, an atheist, would have the gall to ask him such a question, because he said in a very huffy tone, "Well, at least I believe in something."

Apparently that something didn't include accepting what other people believe — or do not believe.

There have also been several people who have tried to convert me, or at least convince me that my beliefs are wrong.

"Do you celebrate Christmas?" is the question they most commonly ask when they discover I am not religious.

"Yes." I respond, knowing what will come next.

"Well, Christmas is a Christian holiday."

At this point I'd like to point out to them the similarities of Christmas and the Winter Solstice, and the many pagan aspects of the holiday. But usually they don't want to listen, so it isn't any use anyway.

Instead I explain that my family

doesn't celebrate Christmas because of the birth of Christ, but that it's more of a celebration of family togetherness and love.

What I say

They usually don't accept my explanation. To them, Christmas is about the Lord and Savior. Obviously, He is the only reason they celebrate the holiday — it has nothing whatsoever to do with family and love. See — it's all about the image.

And they aren't just worried about people who don't practice a religion — people with different religions also bother them.

My history teacher told us the other day that he'd had a class who actually said they did not want to learn about the religion of Islam. And these were not ignorant little elementary school children — they were ignorant little high school children.

I can understand these students made the mistake of assuming the worst about the religion after September 11th. But that is what it

was — a mistake.

The events of that horrible day have nothing to do with the Islamic religion. These people would know that if they had chosen to learn about it rather than to remain ignorant. It had everything to do with hatred and bigotry — which is exactly what those students sitting in the history classroom that afternoon displayed.

Now please don't read this and think I am an anti-religious person. The truth is that there are many religious people who are good and kind and truly believe in their religion.

There are plenty of religious people who are perfectly accepting of other people's beliefs.

And to all those who fit that description, I'd like to say this: thank you.

But, unfortunately, it is equally true that there are many people — of all races, all religions, and all backgrounds — who are bigoted, hateful, and ignorant.

They may hide under white masks and robes, they may plan attacks on your country — or they may just be sitting in your classroom.

They may be anywhere, and everywhere.

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