Voodoo doll curses newsroom workers

My job relies solely on the powers of a little red doll. Most people who have worked with me can attest to the fact that I am fairly calm, in a stressful environment. However, there’s one extremely useful characteristic isn’t the fact that I am fairly calm; in a newsroom, I can live with my mood, I can live with the fact that I am often threatened by the thoughts of my own death. The reporter would come to me, look at me questionably then look at my smiling, unassuming face with confusion as they figure out why her story hadn’t been written yet. I am a pretty skilled writer. Plus, it wasn’t that hard of a story to write: a basic preview of Homecoming weekend. I’d done all my interviews — all I had to do was write the story.

So, that Wednesday night, I went out. I went out and had some fun. The usual stops were at Madison’s for a little 2-for-1 and Mother’s Tavern for disco night. Besides, I was even meeting up with my editor. If she could do it, then so could I.

The night goes well, I’m dancing up a storm and maintaining my fun level with the occasional shot or drink. But I’m also drinking lots of water because I need to. It’s something in the way my stomach digests alcohol, but I haven’t quite figured it out. But I guess I didn’t drink enough water that night.

The next day begins, I woke up and I’m feeling slightly worse than just okay. I wasn’t hungry for breakfast and I couldn’t shake that gross feeling. I go to class and I begin to feel worse. But nothing yet — yet being the key word.

I head on over to the newsroom to write my story. As I relay my night to my other editor, I make an announcement, “I’m so hung over.” Those words triggered something in my stomach because not more than 15 minutes later, I politely excused myself to make a trip to the bathroom. I had to run. Fast.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t go home. I had a story to write. My editors needed me. I had to pull it together and crank out something that could be published.

So I make it back to the newsroom, and after taking a series of deep breaths, I focus on the task at hand. “Write, Trudy, write,” I tell myself. After a quick pep talk and lots of water, I manage to get my lead out. OK, one sentence down, only about 100 more to go.
Searching for the elusive mayor

Kat DeBakker

Managing Editor

MUSTANG DAILY

Item number: 110-100

It may surprise many people to learn that Mustang Daily is actually a real live class. We meet weekly in a classroom like everyone else, and we are graded on the traditional three-hour test.

However, since we are in the process of writing an entire well-written, self-corrected article in three hours, predictably this class has been known over the years to push people to the very edge of their sanity. This class was no exception.

It was almost 100 degrees that day. It wasn't quite hot, but it was whetting by the mind. The lab period before this assignment was to report on an ordinance that was to be discussed at the next meeting of the Los Altos City Council. It sounded simple enough, even though I knew that in order to get this story, I would require comments from an assortment of high-ranking government officials including, but not limited to: the mayor, the mayor's wife, the mayor's secretary, the mayor's aide, the mayor's dog, the police chief, the postmaster, the postmaster general's neighbor's uncle's best friend's cousin, Los Capps, George W. Bush and anyone else with ears and a mouth. My assignment claims to be knowledgable on the subject of ordinances. Armed with a phone book and a desk fan, I began my work.

"Hello, this is Kat DeBakker with Mustang Daily and I would like to ask you a few questions on the ordi­nance to be discussed at tomorrow's City Council meeting."

Government Official #1 (ignorant): "Hello, this is Kat DeBakker with Mustang Daily. I would like to ask you a few questions on the ordinance to be discussed at tomorrow's City Council meeting."

Government Official #2: "No comment. Why don't you call Government Official #1?"

"Hello, this is Kat DeBakker with Mustang Daily."

Government Official #3 (secretary): "Can you call back in two years?"

Two hours later, I realized that not only were there no numbers left in the phone book, but the time I had left to actually write the story was disappearing at an alarming rate. One woman told me that the mayor, who teaches a class on campus, would be arriving shortly and I may be able to catch him before his next class, which begins three minutes from now.

Belting out the door, I was hit with another blow. A phone call had caused me to immediately begin sweating profusely in my poor clothing choice of a polyester-blend shirt and pants. When I finally got to his office, he was in sweat. I realized that not only did I not know where his next class was, I had no idea what he looked like. I stood watch at the door, huffing and puffing, trying to get into his office for 15 minutes, searching in vain for anyone who looked really fat. I ran back to the lab, to sweat, only to be sent out again after my editor had searched the lab for me (the spider building, appropriately) and told me I was to continue working.

The class was already underway by the time I arrived, but it didn't stop me from walking in and making a dramatic gesture and sticking my sweaty head inside. After taking stock of the people in the room, I wondered how many people I had embarrassed myself in front of (I estimated about 100). I headed straight for the door and left to write an ordinance that, as far as I could tell, didn't exist.

I got back, and there was actually a message from a clerk who said that she knew a secretary who knew a government official who actually knew about this ordinance. I called her, explained my dilemma, and five minutes before deadline I got a phone call and a fax from the police chief himself. Of course, I had a midterm directly after my lab, so five minutes was literally all the time I had to write this 500-word article that was to be read by 10,000 people.

I wish I could say this story had a happy ending, but it didn't. It was terrible, and I won a Pulitzer Prize for my insight and dedication to the story, which I worked on for three minutes.

The story that I worked on was a story about holes and deadlines. All the time, our deadlines are getting longer and longer. It was something I had never seen before, at least not in the form I was writing it.

In words that were barely intelligible, I wrote the story. It was a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter, and after I answered her questions, she said: "Ah, I see. I'm just a reporter.

"Voodoo continued from page 1"

Oh, but wait, what's that, another trip needed to the bathroom? Yeah, I would have to settle for an article that was something like a master's thesis. Considering the fact that I had written a story, at that point, numerous stories, I decided to turn in the article for a grade. Besides, more than anything, I feared what that grade would bring me.

It was one thing to write a paper that only a teacher would read. It was another when several people will read it. I was only slightly embarrassed at what I produced, to say the least.

At this point, all I wanted was to crawl into my bed and sleep off the rest of the day. The day had sucked. But my editor told me that given the condition I had written it in, she was pretty satisfied with what I had turned in.

"Which made me think, "If I did an OK job at that time, is it possible that I could press my luck another time?" Which then made me think something else, "Did I really want to test that theory?"

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A flood of memories inspires reporter's return to glory days

The moment I arrived for the first interview, I knew this story was different.

I stood at the door of Cuesta College’s makeshift dance studio and tried to keep my thoughts focused, but they fought me hard.

"Just look for the director," I said to myself. "It's not that big a deal.

Memories interrupted me. I welded myself to stop them, but they would not stay blank, not this time.

This was not the emotional reaction I expected when I signed up earlier that week to write about the Cuesta Dance Company for Mustang Daily. I picked it at figuring 13 years of stretching, pointing and plieing at my own dance studio and high school performances made me a qualified reporter.

Writing about dance was a way to satisfy a thirst in me that only gets quenched line dancing at the Graduate or attending Occise performances. I thought about trying out for Cal Poly's dance team this year, but the time commitment was bigger than my classes, friends and life allowed.

Dance has been a huge part of my life, so I was happy to have the opportunity to write about something I was passionate about.

The pulse of feet pounding on Cuesta’s practice room floor stirred something inside me, though. Dancers walking through the choreography one last time before practice brought me back to a place I never seem to have time to go anymore.

I am 15, four years before I went to that first interview at Cuesta, and I was sitting with nine other dreamers in the practice room of Milpitas High School. We wipe rebellious strands of hair out of my mouth with sweaty hands.

My sighs fight to materialize, but I keep remarks about the drill sergeant antics of our coach tucked safely in my groggy head. Better to use the time to gulp as many breaths as possible before she hits play, I remind myself. Wait... "Cuesta be startin' somethin' bad.

"You're not tight," she says. "We have three hours left to go.

"Hello, Miss. I'm here for an interview," she said.

"Uh, I'm here for an interview," the voice of the auctioneer chimed in.

Dancers watching the auctioneer's seemingly stream-of-consciousness, unintelligible language of calls.

Dancers watching the auctioneer's seemingly stream-of-consciousness, unintelligible language of calls.

The auctioneer's seemingly stream-of-consciousness, unintelligible language of calls.

But 15 years later, I'm still here thinking about that first interview.

I ended up getting some cool shots of bulls being presented as members of the audience threw out their bids. I even did my best to get shots of a cute guy who was struggling to coax a bull away from the gate.

The worst time of the morning, I am pulling myself from deep to dance another time. "Cuesta be startin' somethin' bad.

The dance is covering me in a new dream, but this one's different. I am edgy but smooth and weightless and deep, but all at once. I am clear. I am dancing: a place where I escape the awkwardness of adolescence, the worries of high school overachiever. I am on the verge of something great at every turn.

This is what I've waited for: to be captured, so lost in movement that I'm free to forget myself. I am the dance, the grace, the beauty, the joy. I am in the moment.

The grace of dance is a power all its own.

You know? I think there's a bull auction. Hmmm, never thought I'd do that. Maybe that's why I'm here..."You know, I think there's a bull auction. Hmmm, never thought I'd do that. Maybe that's why I'm here...

...and gasping breaths.

...and gasping breaths.

...and gasping breaths.

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The grace of dance is a power all its own.
National Enquirer, Robert Downey, Jr. can bite me

Robert Downey, Jr. was to be released from a Corcoran State Prison. This I knew.

What I was not aware of that morning was, was that Downey's day of freedom would become my day of preparation for my afternoon shift.

I awoke to a knock on my door and a phone call that said a spare copy of the budget was needed. As quickly as possible, I got up and quickly scrawled hello into the receiver.

"Hi, Aaron, this is San Hilkim from the National Enquirer. I was wondering if you had the opportunity to write a budget story.

I passed the call off to a neighbor and continued on my way.

Immediately my mind went to what I had done the night before, fearing that somehow something I had was affecting my information processing. Did he just say the National Enquirer? We received your name from the Visual Times-Delta and were informed that we had a story for you. We really need you to go out to Corcoran and take photos of Robert Downey's release. After you get the shot, just mail it to me with your bill.

I quickly, I evaluated my ethical standards and decided that this was a job. Then the key phrase came into play, "with your bill.

Aaron Lambert is a public figure who has been convicted on drug charges many times. In no way could this job be justified.

So with a quick, "sure," and an exchange of numbers, I was off the phone and getting ready for my hour trek to Corcoran.

Having never driven to Corcoran before, I found that the journey takes an hour, assuming you have enough gas.

Let's get something straight, the ga-gauge in my 1976 Jeep doesn't work. The previous night, I let my sister borrow my Jeep on the assumption that she would go over to a friend's house and once there would get a ride. I found out later, that wasn't the case.

Thirty minutes into my journey, I find myself standing on the side of a one lane freeway, surrounded by fields, inventorying my own form of swearing while making projections to jinxing any cars passing by. The short cut given to me by the gas station attendant put me on a road that was about one car every 15 minutes. I suppose it was luck when I ended up in the bed of Jeff Judah Jolivette picking up, paying that the "Delivering" car in the cab would actually take me to a gas station, and not some woodsy area, yelling at me to speak like a pig.

While it seems I avoided this personal violation, I could not dodge the occasions I had to get off the cab from the back of the cab.

Driving at a gas station, I found myself looking around with the toothless station attendant asking let me borrow a gas can, I ended up paying $8 for the can and $5 for the gas and thumbing a ride back to my car.

An hour later, I found myself back at the station, unsuccessfully trying to convince the attendant to make me gas for returning the gas cans. Then, while emptying the $10 out of my wallet being violated by Joey and his partner, I had been bested over the counter at the gas station in Toehill.

It was 1:30 p.m. when I pulled up to the gas station in Toehill, which, at the time, was home to Charles Manson. Pulling up to the gas station, I quickly realized that I didn't say what I meant to say, so I didn't say anything.

"Other side of the complex," he replied.

Swallowing what little dignity I had left, I handed back and drove to join the crowd of photographers at the other side.

For the first time, that day, looking up as I saw photographs I knew I had snatched up a little too late.

Hours passed, but no Robert Downey. The only thing getting accomplished was the photos that were getting off work for the day, with questions about Downey. The question asked was by a local FOX affiliate.

"He said he was giving reading lessons inside.

The response from the guard, "I wouldn't take lessons from him, he couldn't even convince the jury he was innocent."

Another hour of 100 plus-degree weather passed before the public relations officer came out and informed us that Robert Downey, Jr. had left the complex.

On being asked how he got out, the officer said, "He left through the north entrance."

With a few more furiously sweary words, I walked around made to get the door to the corner before the engine shut off. Gasoline deprivation. Life lesson learned that day: never do a job for the 8th "Regal" National Enquirer again.
How would you like to spend all your waking hours within the confines of a cluttered room, staring at a computer screen and answering, 'the same your waking hours within the confines of Mustang Daily — a very intimidating place for a first-time reporter. I wanted to please them. I figured it was the least I could do. I mean, they were my first-choice assignments, weren’t casual, and always helped me navigate through the bureaucratic maze that was Cal Poly administration. I thought they were just being nice.

That’s where I went wrong. You see, by my second quarter at Mustang Daily, they had decided for me. If I would apply to be editor-in-chief, I, on the other hand, had no intention of doing anything of the sort. Daily I previously didn’t even know existed.

With the sound of their chants, I was immediately under their spells. They towered over me during these rituals in a ghost-like fashion, looking down at me with their hypnotic eyes. They got me. Not only did they flat out tell me to apply for the job, they got me believing I wanted to.

Applications for the job were due at the beginning of May and by the middle of April they had me pretty secure in my desire to take charge.

My rational thought process had me objecting to the notion not because I was upset with my experience at the paper, but because I just wanted to have a life. And, I wanted to have it off campus. Our ‘important discussions’ went on for weeks and became so frequent I barely broke the trance before it started again.

They generally followed a standard procedure. Andy would lead the way, I was next and Jax brought up the tail end. We entered the darkroom and the door was shut tightly behind me, closing off all light from the outside world. There we were, the three of us in the dark, cool room stung with the scent of year-old chemicals.

Andy would turn on the red light of the room, a light just bright enough to see my hand in front of me; but, no way could I see what was going on around me. Joe proceeded to cover my face with a sheet, making sure my eyes were covered, tapping out the faint red glow of the room. Then came the fire. All I could hear was the creak of some paper and the strike of a match. I still don’t know what was burned, but from the instant the first shaft of smoke penetrated the dark covering over my face, all anxiety I had drifted away.

With my disposition now in their favor, the coercion could begin. It always began like a story, or rather enjoyed their stories; they made me feel like a valiant knight in the bitter kingdom of Cal Poly.

Each of their stories was different, but I was always the hero. Although not totally cognizant of my condition, the stories made me happy. After all, I am a boy at heart so wouldn’t I like a grand role in which I do the fire-breathing Baker in order to save Cal Poly from his wrath?

After about 10 minutes of these hypnotic suggestions, all at once, the cloth was removed from my head, the fire was out and the lights were back on. The door was immediately opened and all I could recall was my ability to conquer anything.

But, one time it was different. That time, the lights did not come back on, and it was pushed back into reality without recuperation. As I left the room, I could still see myself dur­ing the mighty battle, hoping to regain dignity for the students.

I immediately went home to try to break free of these hallucinations, but to no avail. I got to my apartment only to fall into my couch in exhaustion. I was instantly put back into my social state with the ghastly being of my editor appearing before me. I closed my eyes, and they were there. I opened them, and they were there. My only hope was to drift to sleep, so I did. I woke up, but they didn’t leave.

Still in my mind were Andy and Joe.

And, that was it. My mind was made up.

If they could get into my own subconscious, if their editorial power was so great that they could control my thoughts and desires, I had to have that job. I had to know their kind of mind control.

And, well the rest may not be histor­ically accurate, but it is 140 issues.
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Mustang Daily, Building 2A, Room 226

All application materials are due by noon, May 30, 2001

Mustang Daily reporter Michele Hattiejo enjoys UCSB’s Thunderdome.

RECORD
continued from page 8

allowed into the box, which is was too close to the game and players that enjoy trying out of bounds. I also had the honor of sitting on the very right of press row. This allowed me to hear every exasperatingly loud word the Cal Poly coach yelled through my ear to his players.

The sports information director was kind enough to hold my hand through the rest of the night. It was my first time covering a sports game.

The best proof of this was the fact that I took notes about every point scored, who scored it and when they scored it when Sports Info Man printed these stats for me every few minutes. I also had to be told not to clap for the Mustangs during player introductions so as to retain complete objectivity (Sports Info Man told me to clap under the table).

I made it a point to keep tabs on Bjorklund and his point total. By halftime, it was obvious that he wasn’t going to make it. Santa Barbara was double- and triple-teaming him the whole night. I was held to nine points the entire game. It was apparent he had to get the record next time.

After the 95-88 Mustang loss, I headed back to the press room where a “press conference” was held. Sports Info Man brought out the Mustang guard and said (these guys are tall)! As we all waited to start, I learned I was the only female in the room. No big deal, I just felt that I was in over my head being that it was my first time (covering a basketball game!).

Reporter after reporter asked questions about defense and lack of scoring. (“Aren’t they tired of asking these same questions?” I thought to myself.) I just sat uncomfortably in my chair scribbling notes of what was being asked and answered.

As Dan and I headed out toward the exit, I wondered why no one had asked Bjorklund missing his record. So as Bjorklund shook hands and accepted condolences from friends and family, I hovered behind him waiting to catch his attention. I referenced how to introduce myself as a Mustang Daily reporter and not look like an amateuer. When I finally caught his attention, I shook his hand and fumbled my first words like an idiot. I asked him about his lack of scoring and he gave me a few quotes for my story.

As Dan and I left the all mighty Thunderdome, I felt relieved that it was all over.

It was on to bigger and better things for Dan. I told him to enjoy flying out of hounds. I headed back to my car and answered.

“My name isbrains of what was being asked
and answered.
and he gave me a few quotes for my
story.

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Mustang Daily reporter Michele Hattiejo enjoys UCSB’s Thunderdome.

DANIEL GONZALEZ/MUSTANG DAILY

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Confessions of a beat writer

Matt Sterling

I opened up my backpack to double-check that I had everything I needed. Two boxes of cigarettes, a pack of chewing gum, a phone, pen and tape recorder. Check.

I was about to embark on a journey to Hughes Stadium, and I had to be prepared. Ryan Ballard

I would be my greatest test of endurance since completing the Los Angeles Marathon in March. It was April 6 and I was heading out to the baseball field to interview players and coaches before their series against Cal State Northridge. I was new to the baseball beat and hoped the team wouldn’t sense my anxiety.

To be honest, I hadn’t seen a baseball game in person in about eight years. I had more than a cursory knowledge of the game, but was by no means an expert. After arriving at the stadium, I set up camp outside the locker room. I pulled a folded piece of paper out of the pocket of my shorts, opened it up and began scanning the names and uniform numbers of the players. Out walked No. 20. Hmm. Doesn’t look like he ever plays. Probably not a good interview. Ah, here comes a starter. Now it’s time to pretend I know something about baseball.

This was to be the first of many adventures. I would have covering the baseball team in the last two months. Along the way, I’ve discovered important things about reporting and interviewing specifically.

Not all athletes are dumber. Some, however, should be thankful they can swing a bat or throw a baseball, because a career in public speaking is out of the question.

I also learned to master the art of the non-question. For example, instead of saying, “What did you think of your team’s pitching today?” and receiving a pulled up PR quote about how they did the best they could and will try harder next time, I say, “Your team pitched really terrible today” and stare at the interviewer until he’s forced to respond.

The possibility of death or mutilation is a hazard of interviewing that must be dealt with. I’ve stood firm, or as is often the case, asking different questions on the same answers. Yes, I know to win a baseball game you have to pitch well, hit well and play good defense. Please, oh please, tell me something I don’t know.

Pointing out statistics, checking the Big West standings weekly to see if Cal Poly will make the playoffs and sitting in the press box wishing my peers would win has taken its toll. But in the words of Garth Brooks, “I could have missed the pain, but I’d have missed the joy.”

How a press release can ruin an otherwise good day at work

It was 4:45 p.m. when everything hit the fan.

At 4:40 p.m., the day was wrapping up. The next day’s pages were almost complete, with just a few adjustments needed. A n d s o I was about to leave. Then it came - the press release. The gist of the document that ruined my night was that Cal Poly fired another coach.

I had seen quite a few in these my three years, so it was nothing new. But there were a few details about this release that weren’t common.

For one, the season wasn’t yet over, and there was no replacement named. So the school, planned to have a lame duck coach for the rest of the season. Not only would the players have nothing to play for, the coach would join them. Also, the release stated the news conference was in 10 minutes.

I looked around the office for a reporter I could send. Suddenly, the room seemed as barren as Mustang Stadium during a late-season football game, and I realized I was nobody to do the story besides me.

After calling a few players to determine their reaction to the dismissal, I abandoned my compatriot and some people where I was going and took off down the hill. When I got there, TV cameras and reporters had already filled the office, which was roughly the size of my closet.

The rest of the reporters didn’t want to be there. I didn’t want to be there. We peppered the soon-to-be ex-coach with questions he didn’t know how to avoid. We talked about how he broke the news to his players, what his future plans were and where he thought the program would go.

It was a mind-numbing interview. Everyone knew he was going to get fired, so there was no surprise element. The only surprise was that it happened before the season was over. Little did I know, this trend would continue all the way to basketball season.

The classic statement was given for the dismissal: “The program was going in a different direction.” Why not be honest and say the coach was terrible? Six wins in three years is not good. Any way you package it, he wasn’t to fire him, and Cal Poly cut him.

It had been rumored he would have been fired before the season started. Any time I called him on the phone he would always say which is contrary to nearly every other coach I’ve dealt with. Meetings and practices didn’t detract from his ability to answer the phone. My theory is that he spent his time playing solitaire on the computer and let his playbook grow dusty on the desk next to him.

He would always seem prepared during the week when talking about the upcoming opponent, but for the rest of the team would get waxed by 30.

So I went back to the office and wrote the story and worked with my editor on re-designing my once-pristine page to accommodate the firing.

The story took way too long to do, but at least it wasn’t an ongoing story that escaped me. Perhaps it was because I realized I missed dinner and the appointment I had for that night in order to write a story about the coach getting fired who I cared next to nothing about.

But not caring about the subject was nothing new, so there was probably another reason.

Waiting for a record at UC Santa Barbara

As I drove south on 101, I couldn’t shake the feeling that I was not only going to be Cal Poly’s basketball history that night, but I was going to bring the history to the reporters by the program. I’ve been a journalist for three months. Along the way, I’ve discovered, I was developing new angles to see things. I was tired of asking the same questions and getting the same responses, or as is often the case, asking different questions on the same answers. Yes, I know to win a baseball game you have to pitch well, hit well and play good defense. Please, oh please, tell me something I don’t know.

Pointing out statistics, checking the Big West standings weekly to see if Cal Poly will make the playoffs and sitting in the press box wishing my peers would win has taken its toll. But in the words of Garth Brooks, “I could have missed the pain, but I’d have missed the joy.”

I was intent on not letting Dan know about my past work at a small-town newspaper until our second road trip, but his kind and mysterious way drove me right out of me (plus, we had 90 minutes of time to fill). I opened up and admitted the horrible stories I was forced to do as I started my career at the Free Lance in Hollister (GO HAY-BALERS!).

I admitted to having to do a story on a baby buffalo birth at the local petting zoo, how I had to cover a D.A.R.E. graduation ceremony at a local elementary school, how I dropped so low that I had to report on the San Benito County Rodeo Horse Parade Parade Parade Parade and laughed at me, not with me.

Once into the snobby city of Santa Barbara, we had to navigate our way to the Thunderdome. It was tough since the university is not actually in Santa Barbara (don’t ask, because I don’t know). By 6:45 p.m., Dan and I were pretty hungry, so before I checked in to the media row, we beheaded back to the pressroom to take advantage of the media perks - free food. But, by the time we got to the room, there were only two soda left.

As I solemnly walked to my seat in the “press box,” I showed my makeshift press badge and was see RECORD, page 7