

## Another Perfect Saturday

As hard as it is for me to believe, I know that there are people in Iowa City and Coralville who don't tailgate on UI home football Saturdays.

For me, last week's game against Florida International University was even better than usual. My pre-game routine involves wandering the streets around the stadium with four or five other UI alumni band members, playing the Big Three (you can guess) Iowa tunes for tipsy tailgaters.

One tipsy guy saw us coming and announced to his friends, "The Iowa Marching Band is here!" It didn't seem to bother him that the band members were all over age 40 or that there were so few of us until he looked around and said, "Where are the rest of you?"

"Budget cuts," we told him.

Connecting with a good tailgate party is pretty much critical to one's Fun Factor, and LuAnn and I are lucky to be regulars at Jeannie and Todd's van, "Big Blue," also inappropriately known as the "Ghetto Van." That's the non-PC nickname for their counterculture rusted out blue Chevy van that sits incongruously in the Kinnick Society lot, often between new Cadillac and Lexus SUVs.

It's not easy getting the same parking spot every time. Todd says his pre-game Fridays pretty much revolve around arranging to arrive at the entrance of the Kinnick lot precisely at 7 p.m. when it opens. Since waiting lines are not allowed, vans and RVs circle madly like sailboats at the beginning of a regatta, just before the starting gun.

Last year, there was a "gentleman's agreement" among the regulars to stay out of each others' usual spots, but this year (for some reason) all bets are off. NASCAR has nothing over the resulting chaos. One advantage of driving a beater van is that most new cars are reluctant to take you on.

The core group of tailgaters is comprised of dedicated bicyclists, some with thighs larger than my waist. The rest of the attendees are a cross-section of friends, relatives and passers-by who know a good party when they see one.

Music blasts from homemade speakers, tambourines are available for anyone who wants one, and you couldn't fit another cooler full of beer in the van. There is a pregame routine that involves specific songs coupled with specific activities, including the Mojito-in-a-coffee-can shake and the shotski – six shot glasses glued at even intervals to a downhill ski.

If you've never seen it, six people line up shoulder-to-shoulder and attempt to drink shots of what are very probably potent adult liquids, all at the same time. Until you get the hang of it, tall people tend to get drinks dumped on their chests, and short people get drinks dumped on their heads.

The football game itself is of secondary interest to me – I tend to focus on other aspects of the experience. For example, after each Iowa score, our cheerleaders wave huge lettered flags to lead each quadrant of the stadium in yelling I – O – W – A. I used to sit in the W section, so I continue to shout “W!” even though everyone around me is shouting “A!”

I was standing up after one score, loudly explaining to anyone who would listen that the “O's” had it the easiest because O is a pure vowel sound (oh), also known as a monophthong. Both “I” (ah-ee) and “A” (eh-ee) are diphthongs (gliding vowels) which actually require two monophthong sounds to produce, while “W” has three syllables and is therefore harder to pronounce with precision within a large crowd.

After listening carefully to my analysis, my brother Doug said, “Sit down.”

The people who sit near us this year are boringly normal. A guy who used to sit in front of us when we were in the W-shouting section continuously drank diet Pepsis laced with Captain Morgan rum throughout each game. He used his 10-year-old son as his “mule” to pack in the contraband – a

dozen airline-size bottles. You had to watch your step after the game – tiny bottles were scattered everywhere.

Back at the Ghetto Van after the football game, a dice game that we cleverly call “Dice” was underway. It has the distinct advantage of requiring no skill or sobriety to play – if you can throw dice, the people around you will assist you with the complexities.

We had a particularly competitive dice game last week, and after much tension, muscle-flexing and a certain number of push-ups (don’t ask), I came from behind to win for the very first time. “This is the best day of my life,” I practically wept to the woman next to me.

Oh - not that it mattered that much to me, but we also won the football game.