

Independent observer important at meetings

"Why don't you just publish the minutes of the meeting?" We've gotten this question several times, and the answer is usually something trite like, "It's not our policy," or, "they don't fit our format."

While that's true, that's not the whole reason we prefer to publish stories, written by reporters, who have attended the meeting in question. The real reason is to have an independent observer at meetings where public business is discussed and decided. The clerks do a great job. The minutes we have read from the county commission, Norton City Council and Norton School Board are accurate and to the point. However, the clerks are not independent observers. They work for the county, city and school district. They write the official — an important document, but not an independent, outside view.

If a commissioner, councilman or board member falls asleep during the meeting, you won't find it in the minutes. We at *The Telegram* feel that it is our job to keep an eye on government for our readers. That is, after all, our job as a newspaper. Scandals involving public officials, misuse of public funds or just plain stupidity in office are never found in the minutes because they are not "official."

We attended a meeting in another town and state long time ago where a city councilman came to the twice-monthly meeting drunk. He was incapable of rational thought and spent most of the meeting hitting on the reporter from the radio station.

Our paper ran the meeting story and the story that the councilman was drunk.

There was no way that the city clerk was going to put that in her minutes. It wasn't official. There was no motion, second, discussion or action taken on the problem. It was, however, something the public needed to know. The councilman's actions and failure to use good judgment was a reflection on his ability to do his job.

The competing paper ran the minutes. They didn't do their readers any favors.

Now, having said that, let us assure you that we have never seen any of our elected officials in Norton behave in any but the most exemplary manner. And we hope to never have to write that sort of story again.

Still, sometimes what isn't official is the most important thing that happens at a meeting, and we want to give that information to our readers — even if we get in hot water because the official or officials in question don't like having a spotlight on them all the time.

For those who want to read the minutes of a meeting, they are available.

For the county commission, County Clerk Robert Wyatt puts the minutes on the Internet each week. Just go to www.nortoncountyks.org, highlight county clerk and then commission minutes for the latest meeting. The minutes are also kept in a book in the commissioners room or you can get a copy from the clerk.

For Norton City Council minutes, just look at the bulletin board in the lobby of the city offices or ask for a copy from Clerk Darla Ellis.

For Norton School Board minutes, go to the school offices at 105 Waverly and there they are. You can ask Clerk Janice Russell for a copy.

All the minutes can be viewed free if you ask for them. If you want them mailed to you or want a copy on a regular basis, the clerks said that there would be a fee to cover postage and handling.

We would like to get to every public meeting in the county, but we are few and the meetings are many, so sometimes we have to rely on those minutes to get our stories to you. When we do, we always try to call and clarify any questions we have.

We think our job is to give you, the reader, an outside, independent view of every meeting we can get to. If you want the minutes, they are all open to the public — and if they're not, you should ask why.

— Cynthia Haynes



Visions of malts dance in her head

Last month I attended the funeral of an uncle in North Platte. Those occasions are sad and yet an opportunity to see and visit with family.

But my story today is the memories of North Platte.

My mother's parents with four of their children moved to North Platte from Norton County in about 1940. My grandfather worked as a carpenter for a contractor there for many years.

Our family usually went to visit at Christmas and my sister and I would spend two weeks each summer visiting our grandparents, aunts and uncles in North Platte.

When World War II started, one of my uncles went into the Army and the other joined the Navy but my aunts and their friends still saw that we had a good time each year, taking us to movies, the rodeo and other entertainment.

The rodeo was a highlight and sometimes they took us to an ice cream shop that sold malts. One of my favorites was the root beer malt, it must not be a favorite of many people because you do not hear of it often.

The other highlight was going to the North Platte Canteen, which was the Union Pacific Railroad station where the soldiers came on "troop trains".

One of my sons gave me a book last Christmas written by Bob Greene entitled

Memories Sonya Montgomery



"Once Upon a Town, The Miracle of the North Platte Canteen."

It brought many memories of those days. I was very young, but I remember going to the station with my grandmother and aunts (by this time there were three aunts since another one of my uncles had gone to the Navy and his wife went to stay with her parents for a while).

They handed out sandwiches, coffee, cakes and fruit to the soldiers. The soldiers would have only a few minutes off the train. I remember some of the soldiers did not get off and so the young women would take the food and magazines to the train as the soldiers leaned out the windows.

Mr. Greene tells that people from North Platte started this on Christmas Day 1941 and they, with help from neighboring communities continued for the soldiers every day until one year after the war was over.

He says in his book that the idea for the Canteen was the offspring of a mistake. Ten days after Pearl Harbor, family and

friends of the Nebraska National Guard Co. D heard a rumor that their boys would come through North Platte on a troop train on their way to the West Coast.

About 500 people came to the station with food, cigarettes, letters and love to give to the boys. Soldiers of Co. D of the Nebraska National Guard were not on board, instead troops from Co. D of the Kansas National Guard were on the train. From that time, people of North Platte decided to meet all troop trains.

Mr. Greene wrote that the station building was torn down in the winter of 1973 by the railroad. In my opinion that is a building that should have been made into a memorial of some kind to the people who furnished food, who met the trains and to the soldiers who traveled through North Platte.

One of the other things that I thought was interesting about North Platte as a child was the fact that one of my aunts wrote an article in high school about Buffalo Bill and interviewed an old lady who said she had known him personally.

North Platte still has many visitors because of Buffalo Bill, whose home, Scouts Rest, is near the city.

I probably could think of more things to talk about those vacations, but this story is about the memories of North Platte, the city and the people. They are sweet and memorable memories of this great town.

God bless Texas, there's no place like it

I got a lot of comments about my football advice column and since we just had the Super Bowl, I thought I might try to write something similar, but truthfully, pro football doesn't interest me much.

As we watched the game someone asked what city the Carolina Panthers represented and we then realized we did not even know if they were from North or South Carolina.

It's hard to write about something when you are so poorly informed. Although I have read a lot of sportswriters who do so anyway.

I am sort of a Patriot fan because that's where Steve Grogan played. He was at Kansas State when I was and I always wished him well. He always seemed like a classy guy, the type who would be in his own bed at 3 a.m. before a big bowl game.

Of course Kansas State didn't go to bowl games back then so who knows?

Being a Kansas State fan for that many years I also have an affinity for the underdog so I would have liked to have seen Carolina win. Personally I think Carolina might have done better if they had had a more manly color for their uniforms. Seriously, if you are going to have baby blue, why not pink, lilac or mint green?

The game did turn out to be exciting; we liked some of the commercials. The husband went channel surfing during half-time so didn't see that excitement.

My oldest daughter's boyfriend lives in Houston where the Super Bowl was held. He told us rain was predicted for the game. They closed the dome in case it did. He

Back Home Nancy Hagman



also reported that the traffic was awful and a lot of people don't know how to drive.

I have never been to Houston but from what I have heard that doesn't sound much different from normal traffic. It's pretty alarming when you consider that in Texas it is legal to carry a sidearm.

He has only lived in Texas for about a year and a half but I can see that it is easy to get a Texas attitude. Kate even comes home with it after a visit. There is just something about that state.

The last time she went to Texas was for New Year's Eve. On Jan. 2 they were watching the Kansas State Bowl game when the woman from across the hall knocked on the door and asked to use the telephone. She had left the door to her apartment open. Kate and Matt had no idea what she was saying on the phone because she did not speak English.

After she left, Matt commented that there was a lot of smoke in her apartment. Now I would say that it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that where there is smoke there is fire but, Matt holds a master of science in electrical engineering and he works at NASA, so he concluded that she must have burned something in the oven.

About 10 minutes later the woman returned with a man. They asked Kate and Matt to call 911 as the building was on fire! The building was a total loss but Matt was able to save a lot of his stuff with smoke and water damage.

The police told them the woman, who was home alone, allegedly set the fire because she was mad at the man. The first time she came to Matt's apartment she called the man to tell him what she had done. He came home and decided they had better tell someone — like the fire department!

I know Kate was relieved the Super Bowl excitement was all on the field.

Congratulations to the New England Patriots and God Bless Texas.

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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