

## December 15 should be a day to celebrate

"I see that Bill of Rights Day is December 15th," a bored American yawns. "Ho, hum. That Constitution stuff is so dull and tedious that I never read it. Besides, no one can take my rights away from me."

Anyone who harbors this blasé attitude hasn't been paying attention. U.S. citizens have argued about, and fought for, some of these precious rights during this very year.

Freedom of the press is under attack. Journalists have been called "unpatriotic" because they reported the facts. Some try to bully or discredit the press by claiming it is too far "right" or too far "left" when they don't agree with reports.

While professional journalists try to deal only in facts, their critics ignore one thing. Even though members of the press are more unbiased than most Americans, they too have a right to state opinions ... just as you have a right to sit in the local cafe and regale your fellow coffee drinkers with your slant on the truth.

You probably would fight anyone who tried to stop you from speaking freely — to cuss the governor, or second-guess the coach — just as our free press fights for its right not to be bullied or curtailed.

Along with freedom of speech and freedom of the press, we Kansans hear arguments about freedom of religion. Right here in our home state, we argue over the role of religion in our schools; we debate the teaching of evolution; and some think that religion should be a part of the curriculum.

Just this year, we have witnessed an attack on another freedom crucial to our Bill of Rights — the right to a speedy and public trial. Some Americans want to water down the right of habeas corpus, which protects us from arbitrary imprisonment, gives us the right to face our accusers, and liberates illegally detained persons.

Probably you are hard-pressed to remember exactly what other rights you have. It's easy. Go to your computer and search for "Bill of Rights," then print your own copy and study it.

Or, if you prefer, here are a few highlights: You have the right to a trial by jury, and the right to bear arms (another of today's arguments). You are protected from unreasonable search and seizure (which brings to mind warrantless wiretapping), and the Bill of Rights outlaws excessive bail and fines, along with cruel and unusual punishment (another hot issue in the U.S. Congress). You don't have to incriminate yourself in a court of law, and you can't be tried twice for the same offense.

Say what you think, and write what you wish (as long as you don't libel or slander someone), but at the same time be thankful that our Founding Fathers were wise enough to guarantee those privileges in the Bill of Rights.

We should set off fireworks, play patriotic music, and dance in the streets to celebrate the ratification of our Bill of Rights on December 15, 1791. This event is just as significant as the Fourth of July, and deserves parades with marching bands.

That probably won't happen, but at least find a moment to cherish your freedoms. Then argue about them if you must, but be careful about tampering with them. They grew out of the Magna Carta, which limited the powers of English kings way back in the year 1215. These protections have served us well ever since they were adopted as amendments to the U.S. Constitution more than 200 years ago.

Most of all, don't take those rights for granted, because the world has too many people who would curtail your freedoms if they could. A British contemporary of our Founding Fathers, the statesman Edmund Burke, penned this warning: "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men to do nothing."

*This editorial was written by Darrel Miller, former owner and publisher of the Smith County Pioneer, Downs News and Times, Cawker City Ledger and Lebanon Times. He is a former president of the Kansas Press Association.*

Remember, Friday is 'Thumbs Up' day

e-mail [tomd@nwkansas.com](mailto:tomd@nwkansas.com), call 877-3361 or 877-6908, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave., or drop by the office



## Baking sparks the Christmas mood

So far this year I've had a bah-hum bug attitude about Christmas. Not about celebrating Christ's birth, but about the whole decorating, shopping, cooking part of it.

I wasn't even going to get a tree. We've been so swamped with house "stuff" that I couldn't see dragging out more "stuff" before we found places for our old "stuff."

But, nonetheless, Jim came home with a tree in the trunk of the car, and so, here I am, knee-deep in Christmas ornaments, tinsel and lights.

Now, Jim, on the other hand, has been in the spirit of things for a week or more. Actually, ever since we returned home from Thanksgiving in Texas, he has either been putting up lights or planning where he's going to put up lights since then.

He's got a real good start, but he says he won't quit until he runs out of lights or it's Christmas day — whichever comes first.

And, judging from the number of lights still on the living room floor, I would guess Dec. 25 will win the race.

## Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



As for me, I made a batch of almond cookies and dipped Christmas tree-shaped pretzels in white chocolate. If I could find the instant tea I would make almond tea.

A trip to the store today for butter, crispy rice cereal, powdered sugar, peanut butter and more dipping chocolate will yield "butterfinger balls." That is the one thing my daughter, Halley, has to have. I think she would be happy if that was all she received.

Oh, I better add raw peanuts to the shopping list. Jim's dad loves peanut brittle so I'll make him some. One year I substituted sunflower seeds and we liked it, too. I've seen brittle made with cash-

ews, almonds and pecans. So, I guess it's whatever you prefer.

While I'm in the nut section I might as well get some walnuts. I have this great recipe for minted walnuts. I already have pecans so I'll whip up a mess of "spicy, sugared nuts." Jim loves them and will eat them any time of year.

Whoa, I better stop. For someone who wasn't in the spirit of the season, I've just about talked myself into the mood.

That's what memories will do to a person. And, certain foods, (ones you only make at Christmas) will bring those memories back.

So, if you need a little "kick-start" to get in the Christmas spirit, drag out the cookbook and the recipe box. Sift through them until you find recipes of Christmases past. I guarantee you'll soon be making caramel corn, sugar cookies and chocolate fudge.

And, I'll say to you what I'm making a point to say to everyone, "Have a Merry Christmas."

## Family gatherings not always fun

During the holiday season, family images portrayed by the media focus on the happy family and perfect family gatherings. In reality, such get-togethers are often much less than perfect for a variety of reasons.

In recent years, the structure of the American family has changed a great deal. Divorce, remarriage, and/or single parenting add a different dimension to family dynamics, which sometimes contributes to difficulties this time of year. New family members, including stepchildren, require changes in family interaction.

For many families, deciding where to gather for a family event can be a decision that requires a great deal of planning, communication, and compromise. For families of divorce or remarriage, this can

## High Plains Mental Health

By Karen Schueler

become even more of a challenge, trying to satisfy the wants and needs of everyone involved.

Children often feel unfairly pulled back and forth between divorced parents, and their new households, and between several sets of grandparents. This becomes even more difficult when divorced parents have not maintained good communication in regards to their children.

Discussing holiday plans and expectations early in the year can help everyone

feel more comfortable and will help reduce last minute confusion and conflicts. Children will also feel better when they know where they will be, and when.

In addition, as families grow and change, so do holiday rituals and traditions. Such changes are not always welcomed by all members of the family and can result in bad feelings. It is a good idea to talk about family traditions with the goal of preserving past traditions that are special, as well as encouraging new ones.

The holiday season is considered a time of giving and forgiving. With good communication and planning ahead, family experiences can help strengthen all who are involved.

*This column was submitted by the High Plains Mental Health Center's "Plain Sense" series.*

## Congressman sees hope in Iraq Study Group report

### LETTER

To the Editor,  
Kansans are concerned about the ongoing situation in Iraq. I appreciate the work of the Iraq Study Group in providing an independent view of the conflict in Iraq and putting forth these recommendations. They rightfully report that the status quo is unacceptable.□

I am hopeful that the Administration and Congress will take a serious look at these proposals. They provide a good op-

portunity for Americans to come together and seek a new strategy for success.

The report correctly calls for the Iraqis to take more responsibility for their country's security so we can bring our U.S. servicemen and women home.□

A vital component that deserves high priority is the supporting role of U.S. military advisers embedded in Iraqi military and police units.□

Many of these adviser teams are trained in Kansas by the First Infantry Division at Fort Riley.□ Their work is critical to a Iraq that can govern itself.

Sincerely,

Congressmen Jerry Moran  
First District, Kansas

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