

Remembering the days that have gone by

There were these five "older" guys sitting around a table in a place called Mickey's, talking up a storm and laughing up an even bigger storm. They had stories to tell and each was anxious for his turn.

There was a rather short built guy, who needed a small ladder to get into his pickup and who had glasses perched on the end of his nose; another had gray hair sort of combed like the comb missed its target; another had neatly groomed gray hair and smacked of perfection; one was nearly bald; and one had hair that was just...well, hair.

They spent more than an hour talking and eating. Mickey's is a well known and much preferred place to eat, with helpings that would draw applause from even the dieting bunch. Hamburgers were the size of small pancakes.

They all must have been from Kansas at one time or another, judging from their windy conversations. And isn't Kansas among the top 10 windiest states? They mentioned the name "Hays" time and again. Five old guys having the time of their lives, sharing the past. Wow!

Ok, I was one of those five "old" guys. We were all graduates of St. Joseph's Military Academy, Class of 1953 and LeRoy Rome, Richard Deen, Ernie Leiker and Tom Olson held this little luncheon to officially welcome me to Colorado. They have lived in the Denver Metro area for many, many years. Coming from a graduating class of only 47 we had an advantage those graduating from much larger classes never enjoy - oneness, and it showed again at this luncheon.

I wondered, prior to the luncheon, just what to expect considering the fact it's been many years since I've seen a couple of these guys. But that was no problem, and just seconds into the initial hand shakes and brotherly hugs my brain took me back 57 years to our graduation and it was as though we were never separated.

When we were talking about our education and the various directions we took individually, LeRoy mentioned that I was probably the only one who stayed with his chosen field - journalism. I was on the staff of the school newspaper, The Cadet Journal and was editor-in-chief of the school's yearbook, On Parade. That's where I got my taste and love for journalism, thanks to our teacher Fr. Ludger.

During the time we were lunching together at Mickey's, never once was the word "politics" mentioned. There were just too many other things to talk about. I don't know what party LeRoy or Rich or Ernie or Tom belong to. This wasn't the time, nor was it the place. I was thankful for that, and I'm sure the others had similar feelings.

Then it was time to depart. That quick hour or so seemed like just minutes. But I think each of us was thankful for the opportunity to sit down and re-connect. I can't tell you where Mickey's is but I do know that it's around 32 miles from my place and Ernie mentioned a time or two that we were still within the Denver city limits. Now that's big! (Ernie, incidentally, picked me up inasmuch as I no longer drive).

It was a great time with some great classmates from a great school now carrying a different name: Thomas More Prep-Marian High School.

As a military institution, the academy - when we attended - had six military instructors; 15 priests; and six lay faculty members. The Class of 1953 dedicated its yearbook to the six lay faculty members: Mr. Alvin Billinger, Mr. Frank Windholz, Mr. George Gatschet, Mr. Thomas Gatschet, Mr. Sylvester Palmer and Mr. Clarence Cunningham.

We were known proudly back then as the Hays Cadets.

And now it's 35 years. Yes, the passing of my wife Jeanie occurred on Dec. 15, 1975 in St. Joseph Hospital, Denver. The culprit was leukemia. From the date of diagnosis, April 15, 1975 to the date of passing, Dec. 15, 1975, she was in and out of the hospitals in either Goodland or Denver. It was a struggle, a painful struggle.

There were times, thanks to the pain, that her grasp of my hand nearly caused me to also vocally react, but she never complained. She would bite her upper lip, squeeze my hand, open and close her eyes when the pain hit. Nine months of this. Nine long months.

During the early morning hours of Dec. 15, 1975, her pain left. For good. Her hand in mine. Just as it always was. I cried over the loss but also cried for the peace she so dearly sought and finally realized.

My challenge then was to tell two little boys, ages 3 and 5, back home in Goodland, that Mom wouldn't be home for Christmas. Then try to explain it in words they would understand. They are now 38 and 40 with children of their own. And daughter Denise, 16 at the time, knew the seriousness of her mother's condition, but when the end came it was still a tough pill to swallow. But I am certain Dec. 15 still has special meaning to all three. And the brightest star in the sky is still there, looking down on them and on their children - her grandchildren. How proud she would be!

Jeanie was only 37 years old.

My thanks once again to those who respond to the columns I provide. Not every reader is a supporter, but it is the dialogue that matters. It's an ongoing learning experience for me. Keep it going. My e-mail address is: <mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com> <mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com>

Take care, and a Merry Christmas to you all!

- Tom Dreiling



Thumbs up to Jeff from the crosswalk gang for the hot chocolate. It hit the spot. Called in.

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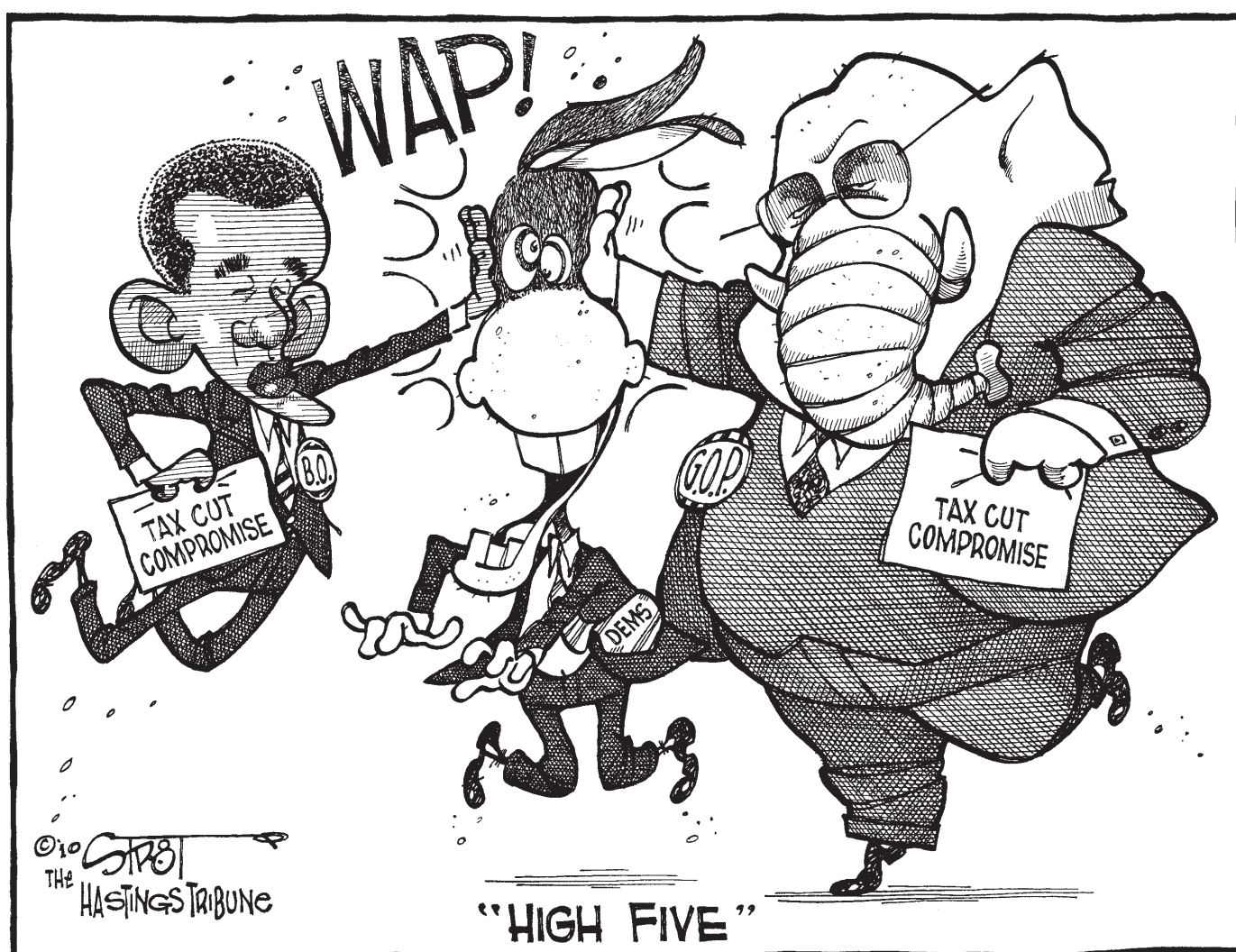
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We can always expect the unexpected

Even if I tried, I could never begin to make up a story like the one we lived over the past weekend. Truth IS stranger than fiction.

It all began Friday morning when I received a call from my youngest daughter, Kara, saying my oldest daughter, Halley, was in the hospital. A gall bladder attack was suspected and she would keep me posted. A short time later the suspicions were confirmed and Halley was scheduled for surgery later that afternoon. Air travel proved to be too expensive and even though I could get a ride halfway to Dallas it wouldn't be feasible for Kara to come get me. So, the decision was made that I would drive to Dallas the following day.

In fact, Jim and I were in the van discussing my travel plans and how he would only let me leave if I promised to have a tire looked at on the way. That was right before we hit the deer. Another vehicle had already hit a deer and it was lying in the roadway. Even though the other driver had turned around and tried to warn us by blinking their lights, we didn't see the animal until it was too late to avoid hitting it. The van sort of "ski-jumped" over it and, at first, we didn't think there

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



was any damage. We were wrong. In a very short distance the van began to make a wierd noise and the temperature gauge "pegged out". We were done. As it happened, son James and his new bride had just left that afternoon on their honeymoon so we had his pickup to drive.

But, wait. There's more. Sunday afternoon, a friend, in tears, met me in the parking lot outside of church. A turkey had flown out of the ditch and hit her windshield, shattering it. She and her daughter had to get back to their home near Wichita and there was no way to make the repairs soon enough. Jim said, "Let's put it on a trailer and get you home."

So, that's the story of our life: always expect the unexpected.

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The rest of Halley's story is: the surgery was a success. She is recuperating nicely at her sister's house and will be off work about a week. She said all she has done is sleep which I say is the best medicine; right after laughter.

Halley always manages to find the humor in everything. A text message to me right before she went into surgery read, "Best inventions: electricity; air conditioning; demoral; and running water. In that order."

Halley said she will be glad when 2010 is over. For a girl who has rarely been ill, this has been a year for the record books. Two major surgeries in less than 10 months. I know the gall bladder was laproscopic but, anytime you go under general anesthesia, it is major surgery.

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I have big plans to do a lot of Christmas candy making and cookie baking. All the ingredients are stacked, in readiness, on the kitchen counter. But, I'm afraid it will have to wait until the van is fixed. Oh well, all in good time. It will still be Christmas without one more batch of caramel corn or peanut brittle.

Board of Trade to make changes to help farmers

Insight

John Schlageck

Farmers who rely upon the futures market have long been frustrated by the gap between the cash price for a bushel of hard red winter wheat and the futures price at contract expiration.

In an attempt to resolve a lack of convergence between cash and futures prices, Kansas City Board of Trade (KCBT) members recently voted and approved three changes.

First, KCBT decided to increase seasonal storage rates for written warehouse receipts used for delivery on wheat futures' contracts. Second, a minimum of 11-percent protein will be called for on their contracts. Third, there will be a tightening of the vomitoxin levels.

"We should all be encouraged the Kansas City Board of Trade recognizes there's a problem and they're trying to fix it," says Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau economist.

Unfortunately, change comes slowly and will not be felt until late next year and producers will have to exercise patience. The KCBT plan will not take affect until next September, pending CFTC approval.

Will these changes impact wheat producers?

"It's hard to say what the end result will be, but we need to sit back and give all these measures a chance to work," Nelson says. "I think we're all happy that something has finally happened."

Nelson says there may well be challenges down the road in spite of the KCBT changes. He still sees some basis issues as long as wheat storage capacity remains in tight supply.

The protein requirements may also be a concern for wheat producers. This could start showing up as more elevators implement a more regimented protein scale, according to Nelson.

If that's the case, this will afford opportunities for wheat growers to bring in wheat with higher protein, the KFB economist says. It will also encourage them to store their wheat and market it as a higher-quality product.

"We have more wheat in wheat country than we know what to do with," Nelson says. "Over time I believe this situation will improve, but time will be the real test."

Wheat farmers who belong to Farm Bureau in Kansas and other farm and commodity organizations met with Commodity Futures Trading Commission Chairman Gary Gensler, just after wheat harvest, in Kansas City. At this meeting, Kansas grain producers told Gensler the wheat contracting system (futures market) was not working and asked for his help.

"I can assure you he listened and our message was received loud and clear," Nelson says. "The CFTC chairman understands there's a problem and he also understands there must be convergence in the wheat market."

Farm organizations and commodity groups will remain vigilant and monitor how well these changes by KCBT work during the upcoming wheat cropping year. All are committed to see this convergence issue resolved.

To the Editor:
Earlier this year, Norton City/County Economic Development was the lucky recipient of a \$2,500 donation through the Monsanto Fund's America's Farmers Grow Communities SM program. This money will be used to renovate the Chamber of Commerce building into a business incubator. On behalf of Norton City/County Economic Development, I want to make farmers in Norton County aware of the continued program and ask them to tell others about it. One farmer will win the opportunity to designate a nonprofit organization to receive the \$2,500 donation. Farmers can enter now through December 31st.

Norton County is fortunate to have many projects underway that would qualify, such as the Almena Community Center or the Norton County Community Foundation's restoration work in downtown Norton. To qualify, the farmer must be at least 21 years old and actively engaged in farming at least 250 acres of corn, soybeans and/or cotton.

And another reason to sign up is the Monsanto Fund will donate \$1 per entry to the local United Way. In any case, we all win. For more information, go to www.growcommunities.com or call 1-877-267-3332. It only takes a few minutes!

Sincerely,
Scott Sproul, Executive Director Norton City/County Economic Development