

Acknowledging someone's grief

Life is Good

Rita Speer



I am an inveterate "people-watcher." I have noticed the large number of people who have expressions of sadness or unhappiness. Some of these people respond to a smile with a smile, and their faces change; it is almost as though someone has given them a gift. Other folks make no response to the offered smile; their countenance does not change.

I would suggest that many perhaps most of the latter group are carrying around a large amount of pain. And the cause of that pain is grief. You may ask how that can be, and I want to share some of my observations.

Several weeks ago my husband and I were guests at a function. One of the women came up to us and commented on this column, said something about my being a cancer survivor and then told us about the death of a very close friend from cancer. She cried as she shared her story. I can only hope she felt better after telling her story.

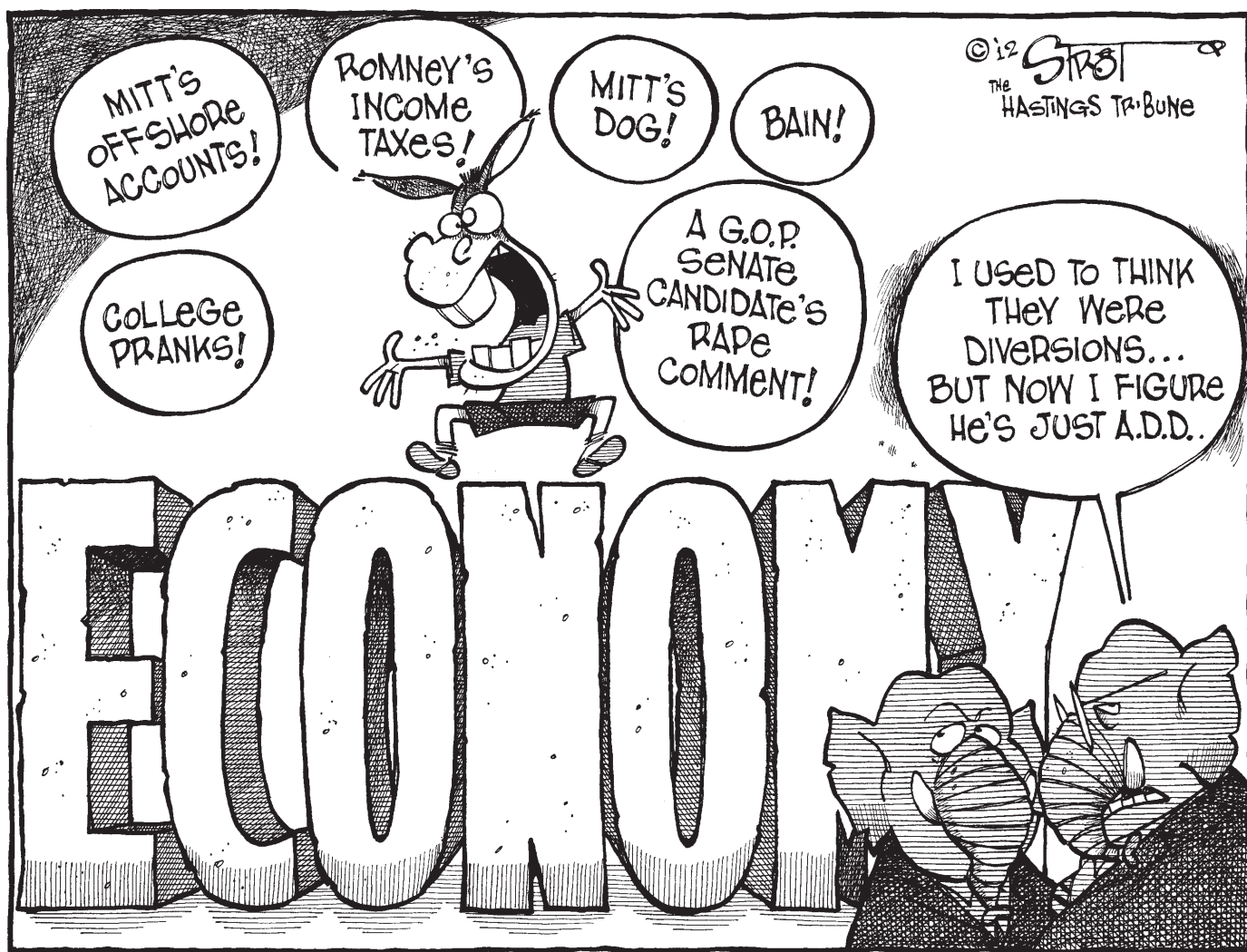
I began to consider whether many of our feelings of sadness are related to grief. Grief is the sad feeling we experience when we encounter a loss. Life is full of losses, and we often don't take the time to work through those feelings when we meet a loss face-to-face.

Consider, if you will, life's fairly common losses. Starting school is one of them; we lose the freedom we had during the summer months. If we are parents, the beginning of school is a sign that our children are growing up and don't need us as much. So many comments on facebook refer to how quickly children grow up. When these children graduate, there is another loss; they leave home to attend college, enter the work force, perhaps get married or join the military but they leave home. It is a loss not only for parents, but for the young adults, too. I remember tears running down my cheeks when our youngest left for college; things would never be the same.

Throughout life we lose pets, friends, homes, jobs. Most of us have dealt with the loss of pets from a goldfish to a long-time canine companion. Friends move away, both geographically and emotionally. We build bigger houses and then make a discovery that those houses are empty, and we seek meaning in "downsizing." I know people for whom their jobs are their identity, and when it comes time to retire or at least step down, there is a panicky feeling that they have lost their value as human beings.

Death of someone we love is by no means the only loss we experience; our lives are filled with losses. Some of the losses may be things, and we try to tell ourselves we shouldn't feel sad about that.

I truly believe we need to give ourselves the opportunity to grieve when we experience a loss. It is acceptable to be sad, and how freeing it is to acknowledge that if someone inquires how we are doing. For me, in a moment of serendipity when another answers my question, "How are you?" with an honest answer. Some of the neatest encounters have occurred because another person took the risk to answer me honestly.



Never admitting defeat in the kitchen

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



My husband has a hard time understanding a woman's need to have more kitchen gadgets.

I try to tell him they are my tools. Sometimes they are "power" tools like a blender; sometimes not, in the case of a garlic press or a zester. He wants to know what the heck is a "zester." I tell him, "You know that lemon meringue dessert you love so much? Well, the zester is what makes it so lemony."

When I told him I wanted to buy a new microwave steamer, he wasn't sure I needed it. When I told him how much it cost he was sure I didn't need it. This super-deluxe cooking device was being demonstrated at the county fair in one of the business booths and I knew it would revolutionize how I baked cakes, steamed vegetables and broiled chicken. With this handy unit I knew I would save hours every day by not slaving away over a hot stove. With all the time I would save I could begin spinning thread, weaving fabric and making all our clothes. Perhaps that's a little extreme, but you get the idea of how hard I was selling the idea.

I'm not sure what I promised, but the bottom line is I walked home with a new microwave steamer/cooker/baker/broiler. Really. I walked home. Jim

said if I bought it we couldn't afford the gas anymore.

After I found the English section of the Owner's Manual I was ready to begin. The first thing I tried to cook was rice. After 20 minutes the rice was still as hard as BBs. If I had actually read the instructions I would have learned there is a right way and a wrong way to put the lid on the cooker. Apparently, I had put it on the wrong way, allowing all the steam to escape, thus leaving the rice uncooked.

Next, I wanted to bake a cake. Easy enough: place the baking cone in the center of the bottom container, pour the cake batter around it; place proper lid (there are two choices) on top and bake 17 minutes.

Perfection! It was beautiful. I turned the cake out onto a plate, spread the icing and took off to share my masterpiece with friends. After offering

samples all around I plunged the knife into the cake. Sort of. The knife got stuck and it was only after using lots of pressure and a back and forth sawing motion that I was able to remove a piece of cake. Perhaps I shouldn't call it cake. Chocolate flavored styrofoam would be more appropriate. Back to the directions. Again.

None of this would have been a big deal except for one little detail. During all my experiments I ruined my old, favorite, tried-and-true microwave steamer that I'd had for years. That old steamer cooked carrots, cauliflower, broccoli and potatoes perfectly. There were only three pieces and it was impossible to mess it up. Unless you do what I did.

I still wanted to cook rice and kept hitting more and more time when I noticed a peculiar odor coming from my microwave; then smoke. I had literally melted the bottom out of my old steamer. Ruined the rice, too.

That was three weeks ago and the microwave still stinks when I use it. Someday I will master the new steamer and cook complete meals just like the brochure says I can.

Admit defeat? Never!

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Light it up for farm equipment road safety

With every passing year, farm machinery becomes larger and larger. Some of this new equipment is so large it extends into the oncoming traffic lane and far beyond the tractor pulling it.

Farms are also larger today than in the past and farm operators are forced to travel longer distances on the highways between fields. Fewer people have farm backgrounds. Many do not recognize that caution must be exercised when approaching farm equipment on the roadway.

There is also more and more traffic on today's roadways. Farm equipment without side markings may not be seen, especially in low-light conditions. That's why colored, fluorescent film is the latest innovation to help make rural life safer. Properly placed on farm equipment these vibrant-colored, acrylic safety devices immediately attract the attention of approaching motorists.

Sometimes referred to as "perimeter marking materials," the micro prism used with fluorescent films use up to 75 percent of its surface to reflect incoming light. Some of the glass bead reflective elements use only about 25 percent of the surface to return light.

"These new, long-lasting safety strips were not designed to replace slow-moving-vehicle emblems," says Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety and health programs director. "Our farmers, ranchers and rural people could use them for their own

Insight

John Schlageck



protection and for those who may be traveling near them."

Higgins notes approximately 50 percent of all accidents with farm equipment are sideswipes. The longer lasting reflective tape can provide greater safety by increasing visibility when approaching slow moving farm equipment from behind.

"The ideal scenario is to use yellow reflectors on the side and front of the equipment while red and orange strips should be placed on both sides of the back with the slow-moving-vehicle emblem in the middle," Higgins says.

Until recently, most fluorescent materials used outdoors faded quickly – in a matter of months. Some of the new products on the market today will last a minimum of two years and as long as three to five years, depending on weather conditions.

The most critical time to provide high visibility for slow-moving farm machinery is in poor lighting conditions, including twilight, and in inclement weather such as snow, rain or fog, Higgins says. During such conditions, headlights are not always

turned on promptly because they do not help to improve visibility.

Bright colors depend on direct sunlight and lose their attracting attention in marginal lighting conditions, the Farm Bureau safety coordinator says. The new fluorescent films continue to provide a high level of visibility during all lighting conditions.

The sooner you recognize a slow moving vehicle on the roadways, the better your chances are for avoiding an equipment collision, Higgins says. In Kansas during the last two years there have been 11 reports of crashes involving farm machinery on roadways.

For example, a motorist traveling 65 miles per hour will need 4.5 seconds to perceive, react and slow down when approaching a tractor traveling 15 miles per hour.

That's why this new technology is important to adapt and use, Higgins says.

"When your life and that of your loved ones is concerned, it's important to utilize every edge you can," the Farm Bureau safety specialist says. "Using fluorescent films can give you one advantage that will help protect you and those traveling around you."

While law in Kansas does not require these reflective strips, it makes good sense to use them. Install these fluorescent strips and drive more safely today.