

## Reflections after surgery

**Life is Good**  
Rita Speer



Many of you know I had open heart surgery six weeks ago. I've been told everything went as anticipated during surgery and during the post-operative period. I don't remember much of the first 48 hours after I arrived in the Intensive Care Unit. By the time I was physically able to be transferred from ICU to the Progressive Care Unit, I was awake enough to know what was going on.

Before the surgery, I wrote to a friend whose daughter had open heart surgery about eight years ago and asked if her daughter had ever commented about feeling something unusual because a surgeon had held her heart in his hands. It seemed strange to me that my heart would be in another human being's hands and that he would make a surgical incision into my heart. When I finally was really alert, I was just grateful for the technology that allowed a very poorly functioning valve to be replaced with a bio-mechanical piece of equipment.

While I was in the hospital and since coming home I can feel that new valve do its job of opening to allow blood to go to the body. When lying on my side, I can feel it do what it is supposed to do. I've listened with a stethoscope, and it sounds much different than before surgery.

One of the things that has surprised me is how long it has taken me to get my energy back. I guess I thought I would be "fine" in just a few weeks, and it's turning into a much slower process than I anticipated. A friend reminded me I am several years older than when I had surgery the last time, and that this time I had my chest cracked!

All in all, I have progressed well. I have started cardiac rehabilitation, I am walking and I have been out and about. I am looking forward to being off the sternal restrictions which limited some of my activities.

Our daughter who lives in Georgia came home to be part of the "Speer home health team" and was here about two weeks. I was sad when she left. I missed her terribly, for she had been a wonderful companion, and I worried about her driving the 1200 miles to her home with only her dog as a companion. But she arrived safely, and I was able to put my loneliness aside and begin to do some of the handwork I had set up before the surgery.

I've had my post-op check-up and am doing well. On the x-ray I saw the new valve and the wires holding my ribs to my sternum. When my restrictions are lifted, I will be able to do most of the things I want to do, and I plan to return to my volunteer work in a couple of weeks.

I don't know how one could manage after this kind of surgery without a spouse or a live-in care-giver, as I have needed so much and been able to do so little. My husband has done so much cooking, cleaning, caring for me, and helping me physically. I am grateful to be alive, for the prayers offered on my behalf and that I am getting better day-by-day. It's been an interesting journey.

**Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:**  
e-mail [dpaxton@nwkansan.com](mailto:dpaxton@nwkansan.com)  
or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.

Letter to the editor,  
October 6-12 is National Physicians Assistants week and Hospice Services wants to extend our appreciation to all physicians' assistants serving our communities.



The physician assistant (PA) is often the first point of contact for many patients and plays a vital role in helping people understand their medical needs and empowering them to become effective advocates for themselves. PA's are valuable assets to the community, working side-by-side with physicians and nurse practitioners to enhance the delivery of high-quality health care for patients, often in medically underserved and rural areas.

Thank you for partnering with Hospice Services to serve those facing the end-of-life.

We encourage the community to join with us in recognizing PA's for the significant impact they have made and continue to make as critical members of our health-care teams.

For Hospice Services,  
Sandy Kuhlman, Executive Director

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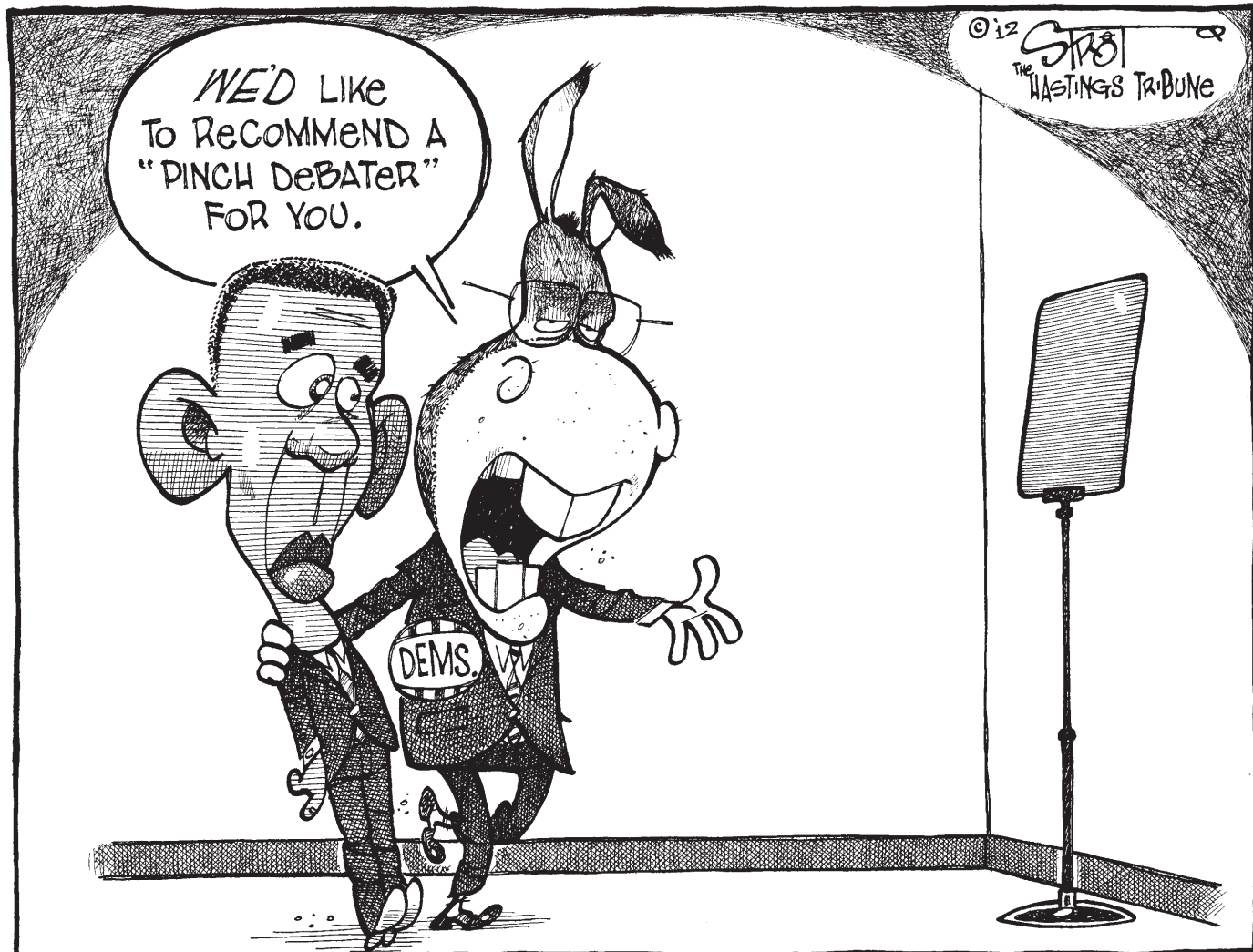
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## Never say never, the outcome may be great

Nineteen years ago I had been single for almost 10 years and I would have told you I was never getting married again. I lived alone and I liked it that way. My attitude was, "Men were just like the bus: there'll be another one along in five minutes." So when Jim Plotts strolled into my life he was just another "blip" on my radar screen. Boy! Was I wrong.

I had agreed to go out to dinner with him, but in my mind he was just going to be a sympathy date. When he came to the door he was holding a guitar. He came in, sat down and proceeded to sing a Merle Haggaard song. This was the first time a guy had ever serenaded me and I admit, I kinda liked it. However, my defenses were still up because all the way to dinner I kept saying stuff like, "I don't make commitments. I don't get involved. Just good friends."

All that changed when we pulled into the parking lot at the restaurant and Jim just sat there. Like he was in deep thought. I am one of those people who can't stand awkward silence and after 10 seconds said, "What?"

Still in a solemn attitude, he reached into the car's console, drew out a small

**Out Back**  
Carolyn Plotts



ring box, turned to me and very seriously said, "I know how you feel about commitments, but there's something I need to ask you."

My mind was racing as fast as my heart. "Oh, no," I thought, "What have you gotten yourself into and how are you going to get yourself out." If I could have found the door handle I would have bolted. But, I was paralyzed with fear.

Did I mention our first date was on April 1? Yes, April Fool's Day.

Jim opened the ring box to reveal a beautiful, marquis cut, genuine diamond simulant, solitaire ring. He looked me square in the eye and said, "April Fool."

I exhaled like a balloon stuck with a pin. I looked at him and as he looked at my ashen face, started laughing. Then I started laughing and quite honestly,

we've been laughing ever since. Two weeks later we decided to get married.

Don't get me wrong. Our marriage is not perfect. We have some "hum-dinger" fights. I've never thrown a dish at him, but I have slammed quite a few doors. He can be frustrating at times; he can be stubborn; he can be unreasonable; he can be intolerable. And that's on a good day.

Seriously, though. We've been through lots together. The death of my mom, both his parents, my brother, friends; weddings of our children; births of grandchildren; financial ups and downs; a house remodeled into a home; all the things that weave the fabric of our lives.

Through it all we've come to rely on each other with a deep and abiding love and trust. We agreed, early on, that Christ would be the center of our lives and our marriage. That's why we go to Mexico and go into prison. That's why we are who we are.

So for someone who was never going to re-marry, I've made a pretty good job of this one. We decided to try for another 18 years. It could happen. We both come from long-lived families.

## Programs that support our rural farming

**Insight**  
John Schlageck



direct payment program. Consequently, many crop growers are asking whether or not the funds currently invested in direct payments could be used to make the federal crop insurance program even better.

Today's farmer is using crop insurance as a risk management tool to deal with wide swings in the marketplace and a drought that has devastated many family farming operations. This valuable tool has helped provide some stability and allowed crop growers to project their revenue (or lack of) when they approach their lenders.

Crop insurance allows farmers to tailor their risk management to their individual situation and immediate needs. This tool returns an important part of the management decision back to farmers by providing a wide range of products, coverage and options.

This country needs stability in agriculture, especially during these troubled economic times. Few citizens of the United States have ever lived during a period of food insecurity. We've been blessed with an abundance of food at an affordable price.

Continuing to safeguard the interest of agriculture is in the best interest of all of us - farmers, stockmen, agribusiness and our customers. Safeguarding agriculture is critical because the contribution it makes to the health and prosperity of this country is beyond measure. Without agriculture, there is no way to ensure prosperity in our economy. Farmers will not be able to produce the food we take so much for granted.

With each new generation, more of this country's population becomes further removed from the farm. It's easy to understand why many people in this country have no concept where their food comes from. Many have forgotten, or may have never known, that individual producers supply staples for the U.S. diet. Some people believe there will never be a food shortage in our country - as long as the doors remain open on their neighborhood supermarket.

Today's farmer is a planning specialist. Producers understand marketing and using the incentives of free enterprise. This group of food producing folks also know the importance of incorporating government-sponsored programs in their individual operations.

Every year, this production machine made up of family operations comes under closer scrutiny and sometimes unfounded attacks. We've all read such articles in the New York Times, Washington Post and CNN. Social media is also rampant with such stories.

These exposés include the usual suspects and contain a story line that goes something like this: Federal money is going to supplement wealthy farmers who don't need it and who are ripping off the taxpayers. These payments should go instead to small and medium-sized farmers.

During the last few decades, farmers have relied on, and supported direct payments. These subsidies are based on the historic acreage and yield referred to as a farmer's "base." This base is