

Plain Sense

"The Psychological Benefits of Voting"

Election Day is Nov. 4, and based upon past voting analysis, less than six out of every 10 eligible voters will choose to cast their vote. The voting turnout for the last Presidential Election in 2004 was 56.7 percent, which was the highest rate since the 1968 election. According to experts who study voting trends, there are roughly three general attitudes that determine how a person views the importance of voting. The first category is dominated by the feelings of obligation and duty. Individuals in this category believe it is their patriotic duty to vote. They believe that by exercising their right to vote, they are honoring the service men and women who paid the ultimate price for our nation. The second category is dominated more by a sense of convenience; individuals will vote if they are able to make it to a polling station before it closes. They view voting as important but not mandatory; it is just one more responsibility that should get done by the end of the day. Finally, there are a number of individuals who choose not to cast a vote because they do not believe their vote matters and nothing of substance will ever change. This attitude may partially explain why close to 30% of eligible American voters do not even bother to register.

Regardless of these views, there are some basic psychological benefits that can result from exercising your right to vote. First, when faced by any kind of challenge, it is important to take action. Even when an individual cannot fix

large and complex problems such as the nation's financial crisis, the rising cost of living, or the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it feels better to take action than to simply believe that all of this is beyond our control. By taking a stand and voting, a person may feel less helpless in the face of these challenges, and may feel somewhat more optimistic just by actively contributing through the election process. Another benefit from voting is the inherent participation in something bigger than us. By casting your vote, you become an active part of your community, state, and country. Numerous studies have shown that people who are involved in organizations, communities, or social causes tend to be more optimistic and content than those people who are uninvolved.

Yes, it is possible that your candidate may not win, and you will feel your efforts were in vain. But then additional psychological benefits of voting come into effect, through those of acceptance and learning to compromise.

Contributed by Ken Loos, MS, LMLP, LCP Prevention, Education, and Outreach Dept. The views expressed here are those of the individual writer and should not be considered

A replacement for seeking professional help. Mail questions to: High Plains Mental Health Center, Plain Sense, Prevention, Education, and Outreach Department (PEO) 208 East 7th, Hays, KS 67601

Book Reviews

Book review from
St. Francis Public Library

Sailing To Capri

By Elizabeth Adler

When English tycoon Sir Robert Waldo Hardwick dies mysteriously in a car accident, he leaves behind a note naming six people he suspects might have wanted him dead. Dairy Keane and P.I. Harry Montana team up to take the suspects - and also six "red herrings" - on a fabulous Mediterranean cruise, all expenses paid by the late Sir Robert. As they call at Monte

Carlo, Saint-Tropez, and Sorrento, the mystery deepens. And the unexpected twists are just the beginning.

Finally, they arrive at the beautiful Villa Belkiss on Capri, where Sir Robert's will is to be read...and the killer unmasked. With the beauty of the Yorkshire countryside, the Mediterranean resorts, and the magnificent cruise ship, plus the intense attraction between loner Montana and wary Dairy, passions flare and the beauty of the Villa Belkiss enchants.

Book review from
St. Francis Public Library

The Gambling Man

By Kent Conwell

"You got a choice. Hang as a horse thief or teach our school kids."

That was the decision facing Mage Casebolt, a decision that made him wish he had never disembarked the riverboat at New Orleans.

Bound for San Francisco to join his brothers in a gambling emporium, Mage's journey halts abruptly in Valley Springs when he is framed for horse stealing.

The teaching job is unpleasant enough, but then a cholera epidemic quarantines the town, saddling him with an old freed slave, twelve boisterous schoolchildren who make a practice of running teachers out of town, and the local postmistress who detests the idea of a gambler playing the part of

schoolmaster.

Then the rustlers hit, and Mage faces the task of reining them in with his little contingent of misfits. He quickly realizes that mixing kids, guns, dynamite, and rattlesnakes can make life mighty exciting, and uncertain.



WHEAT DRILLING in the county is winding down, however there is still a few farmers planting.

Herald staff photo by Linda Schneider

Blended family cards are available

By Sharon Corcoran

slcorcoran@nwkansas.com

Been looking for the perfect greeting card for your wicked stepmom? Having trouble blending your own little "Brady Bunch"? Then a Goodland woman has created the perfect solution.

Brenda McCants, retired director of marketing and volunteer services from Goodland Regional Medical Center, and wife of First National Bank President Larry McCants kept a journal of comments and experiences from their blended family to springboard a line of greeting cards to help others in the same situation.

Statistics show blended families are common, she said, actually making up one half of families in America. A lot of people are dealing with the emotions and stresses that come with blending families, she said, with one in three Americans being in some type of blended families.

By 2010, she said, blended families are projected to be the predominant family form in the United States, McCants said — about 1,300 new stepfamilies are formed every day in this country.

Her Blending Moments cards include greetings to "Wicked Step-mom" and "Wicked Step-dad," the "Broccoli Bunch" and "It's okay to have a tearful moment. . . blending isn't easy!"

Brenda McCants said the cards depict things her kids said, such as "You're not my mom!"

"I'm an adoptive mom as well as a step-mom," she said, "so that has special meaning for me."

She said her reply was often, "I'm

sorry — your kids don't come with a manual. Excuse me — I'm a parent in training."

When she and Larry married, she brought a son and a daughter to the family and he two sons. The kids were 6, 8, 10 and 12 at the time, and besides getting used to a new "parent," they had to get used to a whole different way of life.

Mrs. McCants' children had only known the metropolis life in Charlotte, N.C., and had to get used to rural life in Goodland.

She said her daughter asked, "Where's the mall?" and she had to tell her the tallest building here is a grain elevator. That didn't sit well with a 10-year-old girl, McCants said.

Humor helped the family get through the tough times, she said, adding that she kept a journal in the hopes she could someday help others with blended families. "Wicked Step-mom" is intended in a humorous way, she said; step-mothers have had a negative connotation since Cinderella.

McCants said she and Larry's sons have been able to joke about that — as a matter of fact, when she calls and they're not home, she leaves a message starting with, "This is your wicked step-mom calling."

Building a blended family feels like an uphill battle, she said — you can't expect a blended family to blend instantly. Parenting is so rewarding, she said, but any parent will have challenges, and blending two families adds a few more.

Like on the cards, she uses food and cooking metaphors to describe blended family situations, saying

they fit. It's like baking a cake, she said — it doesn't happen fast, and you have to have all the ingredients. Patience is a key ingredient, she added.

"There were times we tried too hard to make it work," McCants said. "We wanted everyone to like each other, but it took time to get along."

It's important to show respect and keep the lines of communication open, she said; you're bringing different values together and different ways of doing things.

Using animated characters to depict the situations takes the person out of the situation, McCants says, and focuses on the issue, something that is important for smoothing over emotions and hurt feelings.

McCants' business partner and friend Tammy Neal, vice president of Creative Consulting and sales for Blending Moments Greeting Cards, became involved in the venture after seeing the cards.

"She came over and saw the cards," McCants said, "and got really excited. She offered to work with me."

Neal related to the situations in the cards, McCants said, even though she didn't grow up in a blended family because after her dad died when she was an adult and her mom remarried, she always found it hard to send her step-dad a card, not because she doesn't like him, but because she was close to her dad and doesn't want to feel like she's replacing him.

McCants says she grew up in an "Ozzie and Harriet" environment,

and her parents are going on their 60th anniversary. Divorce wasn't an option, she said.

And it wasn't planned for her life, but it happened. It is what it is, she said.

In bringing McCants' words to life, she gets help from Illustrator Erin Terry from Colorado Springs. She works with Danker and Danker Public Relations out of Brentwood, Tenn., and Blending Moments is a member of the Greeting Card Association, a trade organization that represents greeting card and stationary publishers and allied members of the industry.

She unveiled the cards at a trade show in Greensboro, S.C., where she has family, and sells the cards at the Almond Tree in Goodland, Donna's Gift Palace in St. Francis, Buds and Blooms in Burlington and at www.blendingmoments.com.

She puts Goodland, Kan., on the back of each card and says she is proud to say the company is from here and to say the cards can be bought at the Almond Tree in Goodland.

"I think it's good to promote our community," she said.

She has been interviewed on WIBW-TV in Topeka, on KWGN-TV in Denver and on radio talk shows. She looks forward to being recognized as a newcomer at the Greeting Card Association's annual convention in La Jolla, Calif.

McCants said she has had a lot of help from friends in launching the cards, and she credits divine intervention for her success.

"God has been good to me," she said.

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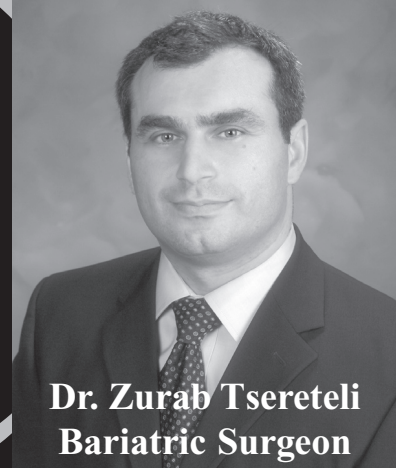
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