

Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Hospice: a tremendous help

To The Free Press:

A number of recent events related to September 11 have revealed for us the importance of rituals in our lives. Our society is comprised of people with religions and beliefs from all over the world, and so we lack a consistent way of responding to death. One thing we all have in common, however, is ritual and grief. Rituals are milestones on the path of life, marking happy or sad occasions.

A national moment of silence at 8:46 (Eastern Time) on the morning of September 11 was a poignant ritual for Americans to join together in grief and remembrance. But it is not the end of our grief. Grief continues with us in some form always throughout the course of our lives. How we deal with it — individually and as a society — is what's important.

In our society we are urged to hurry everything, including grief. We get three days of bereavement leave from work and are expected to resume life without disruption. Most of us are uncomfortable being around someone feeling the pain of grief, as if it were contagious. We want them to just get over it and move on — often so we don't have to feel our own pain from losses we have avoided acknowledging.

The terrible tragedy of September 11 is a collective opportunity for us to develop a deeper awareness and compassion surrounding death and loss. The crash site memorial service in Pennsylvania followed by Rudolph Guiliani's high school commencement speech, the ceremony recognizing the completion of the cleanup of ground zero, the pillars of light, the time capsule in the last stone, the many services to commemorate the first anniversary.

For most of the families of those who died on September 11, grief is compounded by the lack of a body to see and touch. There is something profoundly important about seeing the body of a person who has died. Without it our minds find it hard to believe that death has really occurred. We cling to hopes and fantasies that somehow there was a mistake and our loved one is just lost, unable to contact us.

Life continues for all of us, and we all are bereaved. Those we have known and those we have loved continue to live on in our lives in new ways. We carry them with us and there are times when their absence hurts deeply, other times when the memories are sweet. The best we can do for each other is to let each of us grieve in our own way and to let that be all right. To encourage our own personal and collective rituals that honor important people in our lives who have died. To understand grieving is part of what it means to be human.

Hospice Services, Inc. offers a variety of materials or guides that may help in better understanding grief in our personal lives and at work. To find out more, please call us at (785) 543-2900 or 800-315-5122.

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(Letter #131)

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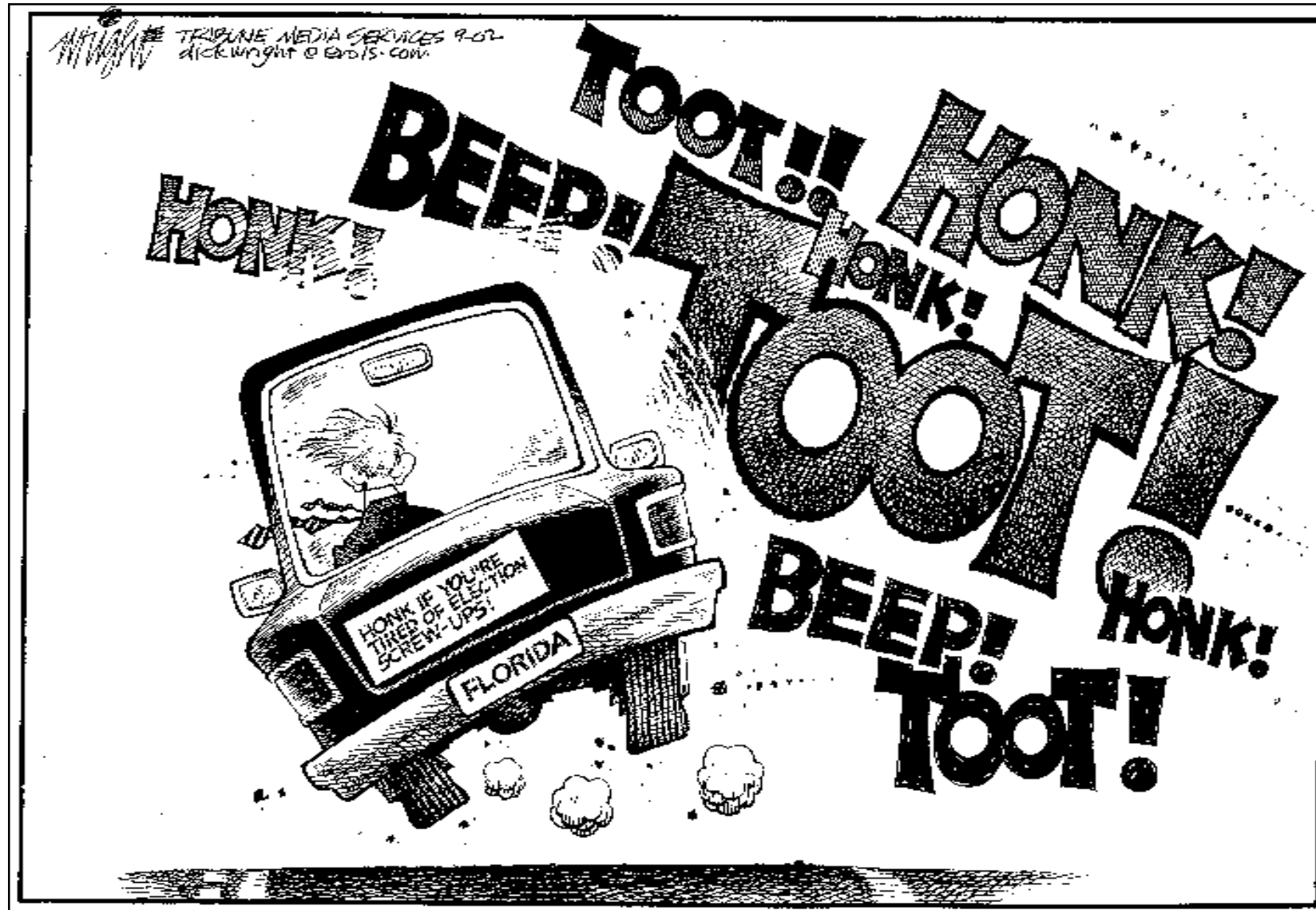
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Some things are hard to swallow

I NOW know how some stepchildren feel. I've been put in that position, in an unlikely manner.

A couple of phone calls to my home last night and to the office this morning were from readers wondering why the Colby Free Press didn't have a story in last night's paper on the latest action the Citizens Medical Center is taking as it relates to its relationship with Dr. Victor Hildyard III.

It was pointed out to me that there was no excuse for the story not appearing in Wednesday night's paper, because, "for heaven's sake it was in last night's Hays Daily News, unless the Free Press is trying to protect Dr. Hildyard."

What trashy talk!

It might surprise readers to know that the Colby Free Press in the name of its publisher, received a copy of the 31-page document, per delivery by Vern Schwanke, hospital board president, at 3 p.m. Wednesday, far beyond our press time for that day's paper.

Then, you ask, "How come the Hays paper had a story in its issue last night?"



Tom Dreiling

- My Turn

Good question. They were apparently made privy of the document on Tuesday. It gave this competing newspaper from another town a full day's drop on your own newspaper. Because the paperwork was filed at 1:57 Tuesday afternoon, the Hays newspaper had to have known beforehand of the filing, or was able to obtain a copy of the filing in enough time to prepare a story for its next day's issue.

Mr. Schwanke did say when he delivered the copy of the paperwork to me Wednesday afternoon that "we are also distributing this to other area media." I cannot ascertain if that statement meant they had already

delivered it or were delivering it at the same time the Free Press was receiving it.

Who knows.

Newspapering is very competitive. We are a small daily newspaper by any standard. Many papers with our circulation figures struggle to keep a weekly going. But we manage to maintain a daily presence, thanks to advertising and reader support. I am not in any way angry with the Hays paper — heck, I was that newspaper's city editor some years ago. But there are times when you are certain that if something is about to break, newswise in your own town, that those connected with that news would alert you first before branching out across the area. How foolish I think.

It all sort of goes hand-in-hand with doing business at home, which I practice much like my religion.

Some stepchildren get angry at their treatment. They pout. Sometimes they just simply sit on their hands. I now know the feeling.

I am on page 18 of the 31 pages.

Have a good evening.

Cough — the air is getting worse

Now that the kids are back to school and crisp fall air returns, it's hard to remember just how bad the air felt this August.

In fact, it has been well over a decade since the East Coast suffered the kind of sustained, unhealthy air we had last month. Air pollution readings from Washington to New York to Hartford were at historic highs — 40 percent higher than federally set health limits in some cases. And it wasn't just the cities. Seemingly pristine areas such as coastal Maine and the White Mountains of New Hampshire were bathed in hazy, smoggy air.

This pollution episode did more than make some of us uncomfortable — it had severe and probably long term health effects. Smog — a deadly stew of ground-level ozone and fine particles — sent many people to the emergency rooms and some to the morgue. Ozone damages kids' lung growth; causes asthma attacks and respiratory hospitalizations; and causes respiratory diseases like emphysema. Fine particles can cause premature cardiac death, respiratory disease, and asthma attacks.

Interestingly, also last month, the United Nations released a seven-year scientific study detailing the effects of a similar two-mile-thick "brown cloud" over South Asia. The effects: as many as 37,000 deaths each year in just seven Indian cities, reduction in rainfall of up to 40 percent in some areas and coastal flooding in others, and a 10 percent reduction in India's rice harvest. Last month also brought record flooding in Europe, submerging parts of Prague and Dresden — erratic storm behavior consistent with predictions of the impacts of global warming.

What accounts for last month's problem, and how

is it connected to events abroad?

- Another Viewpoint

On the pollution side, ozone smog is formed in the atmosphere when emissions from power plants, trucks, cars and other sources bake in sunlight and heat. Last month, due to a sustained "Bermuda high," the air remained stagnant, trapping the pollution.

But haven't things gotten cleaner since 1988, making pollution events like last month's less likely? The answer is yes and no. Despite some reductions in the last ten years in the rate of emissions per vehicle and unit of electricity in the region, overall emission levels have remained about the same or gotten worse due to more electric demand, more traffic and insufficient pollution strategies.

Furthermore, research indicates that the first half of 2002 has been the hottest half-year on record in the Northern Hemisphere and could be the warmest globally by the end of 2002. This could mean that sustained heat waves like this summer's could become more frequent in the future.

Similar trends are at work in Asia and Europe. Power demand, traffic, and industrial growth have been steadily on the rise, along with smog, soot and surface warming.

The good news is that we can reverse these air pollution trends.

For example, at the state level, we can:

- Reduce smog-related power plant emissions, especially at coal and oil plants, replacing them with cleaner burning natural gas and renewable fuels.

- Install ozone and fine particle emission controls on diesel vehicles, such as city and school buses and construction equipment.

- Accelerate requirements for automakers to produce cleaner vehicles and create incentives for the purchase of efficient and ultra clean passenger vehicles.

At the federal level, we need to:

- Pass legislation to substantially reduce power plant ozone and fine particle emissions. As part of this legislation, we should also establish mandatory emission caps on carbon dioxide.

- Maintain rules mandating cleaner highway and off-highway diesel engines.

We can't control the short-term weather. But these measures would provide leadership to begin to cool the globe. And they would create noticeably cleaner air in the next decade. This August's smoggy air reminds us why even that isn't soon enough.

Armond Cohen is executive director of the Clean Air Task Force, a Boston-based nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring clean air and healthy environments through scientific research, public education, and legal advocacy. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Colby Free Press. Feedback to td@nwkansas.com.

About those letters . . .

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Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

