

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Reminders of life's blessings

By Governor Kathleen Sebelius
 Standing in the living room of Cedar Crest is a nine-foot tall Scotch Pine Christmas tree. It was grown here in Kansas and brought to Cedar Crest by a horse-drawn wagon.

On it, amidst the lights, are ornaments my boys made when they were little, ornaments I had when I was a child, and ornaments given to me by friends over the years.

These serve as little reminders of life's blessings and of having my family home for the holidays, celebrating Christmas with my father, my husband and our two sons. For a mother, there is no greater gift.

As governor, my thoughts often turn to the Kansas mothers and fathers whose own children will not be home this year — children who are now grown men and women, serving their country overseas.

As a state, we have taken steps to honor and support our military men and women, and we will continue to do so.

As a community, we have sent gifts and supplies, and we'll continue to do so. But this year, we must all remember to give that one thing for which there can never be enough.

We must give our love — to these brave men and women, to their friends, and, most importantly, to the families whose most precious keepsake is not an ornament on a tree, but a yellow ribbon on their lapel or a Service Star Banner in their window.

So as you celebrate this month, please send your love in letters, in prayers or in a simple "thank you" to all those willing to give everything, in a world where so many have nothing.

That is a true present. That is giving. That is Christmas. God bless us all, and God bless the great state of Kansas.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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The convenience of eating

The best Christmas gift I ever received was a litter of puppies. Sure enough, all eight of them, right there in the living room on Christmas Eve.

I don't know why that sticks in my mind, but I'll never forget my blonde cocker spaniel, Cookie, whimpering from behind the overstuffed chair when I walked in from the Christmas Even pageant at our church.

I was 9 years old and Cookie was my very own dog. I say very own, because my folks owned a kennel as a part-time job and while I enjoyed the dachshunds they raised, it was Cookie that I snuggled up to at night, cried on her fluffy ears when I needed a buddy, and rode bikes with all over town any chance we could.

That particular Christmas Eve was one special evening. We went to church as usual, but when we came home to open presents, as was the tradition in our family, and there, behind mom's brand new chair was Cookie and her puppies.

Still damp from being born, those puppies instantly became part of our extended family. Sure I was sad when my folks sold them, but we made sure that they went to loving homes and I still had Cookie.

It's memories like this one that make me really appreciate my life and being able to share it with those around me. As each day passes, life gets better and better. Whoever said growing old was not fun doesn't understand loving life to the fullest — including remembering puppies born



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

Christmas Eve in the living room behind your mom's brand new chair.

Speaking of growing older and the holidays, I had a conversation with two couples the other day about how they spent or planned to spend the holidays.

One couple said they always headed to their children's home for the holiday, and the other said they had gone out to lunch by themselves since none of their children came home. That was Thanksgiving.

As for Christmas, each couple had plans with children.

As for my Christmas, I'll again be with my husband and we'll celebrate together. We'll attend church Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, then we'll probably take our annual ride in the country looking for a pheasant which just can't fly fast enough to miss the end of my husband's shot gun. After that, we'll take a trek to Oakley to Mitten's Travel Plaza just like we

did last year, and the year before.

Since I'm not hip on cooking a huge meal for the holiday, and none of our kids will be with us, Mittens suits me just fine. I enjoy the atmosphere — watching people — and it's one of the nicest places in the area.

After lunch at Mittens, we'll probably travel west on Interstate 70 to the Oasis Travel Center in Colby. Yes, we've become quite the truck stop hoppers for holidays on which I do not want to cook.

Speaking of cooking, I've finally learned some new tricks of the trade. Seems my son has taught me something about cooking with onions and garlic and I'm having a blast with it.

I've learned to chop up those little critters, sauté them in a skillet with some olive oil and put in a little bit of some kind of tasty sauce and voila, a fine sauce to put over fish or chicken.

My son is actually a better cook than I am, having learned from my mom. But, learning from him goes to prove it is never too late to teach an old gal a new dish.

So, as you dig out the pots and pans, peel potatoes and cook up that turkey or ham, mashed potatoes, yams, green beans, corn or other veggie, and a salad, I'll be thinking of you as you plow through the pile of dishes as I roll past on Interstate 70.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Just have faith



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

Faith is not a very big word, but the concept it describes is. In fact, the concept is so large that many have difficulty in defining even their own viewpoint.

Unfortunately, as with many large concepts, our mortal attempts to wrap our minds around it has left us with many false and even trite concepts of faith.

Faith can be spoken of in two different ways. First is the faith, with a definite article, as in "keep the faith." It signifies a system of belief which requires action, akin to a code of conduct.

It may also be used in a more abstract way to describe things we believe or our trust in someone or something. It is when the term is used in this manner that two of the most egregious misconceptions enter the picture.

The first is what many call blind faith. It is that faith which has no basis in reality. I may believe with my entire mind, soul and heart that I will qualify for the British Open next year, but anyone who has seen me play golf knows that is simply blind faith!

Blind faith is no more than foolish wishing and as such does not deserve the term faith all. It is, however, too often romanticized through novels and the movies until some people are deceived into believing that it is the kind of faith by which we should live our lives.

Another deception is faith in faith itself. It is related to blind faith and is again pitched by

novels and movies, but it is also the subject of no small number of self-help books.

Remember "Field of Dreams?" "If you build it, they will come." All we need to do is believe. If, however, there is no rational basis for that belief, can we really call it faith, or is it simply a coincidence?

In the end, faith in faith is no more than faith in self gone to egocentric seed.

True, some have stronger faith than others, but to simply have faith in our ability to believe is no better than blind faith. It is just another delusion.

Is faith therefore useless? After all, it would seem that if we leave out blind faith there is nothing left but sight. Must we confine ourselves to a concrete world where we must see and hear everything for ourselves before we believe?

Certainly not! Faith does not depend on existing perception anymore than it should rely on fanciful notions of what should be.

Real faith is an expectation of what will be

based on current promises and past performance. Faith comes from both experience and trust.

Of course, faith may be misplaced or disappointed from time to time.

One may have faith, based on past experience, that a meal at one's favorite restaurant will be a pleasurable experience only to find out a new cook, or new ownership or some other unknown factor has changed the dynamic.

One may also exhibit real faith without having all the answers. Again, trust based on past performance or experience is the key. One may anticipate a surprise from a trusted friend although there is no hint of what that surprise may be.

On the other hand, an upcoming surprise from a less trusted acquaintance may have exactly the opposite effect because confidence is not sufficient to remove the doubt.

Real faith is what God wants from his creation. This is the time of year when our savior is close in the thoughts of many. It is a time when we are encouraged to renew our faith.

Let us not simply renew blind faith or selfish ambition.

The story goes beyond a baby in a manger. And it is true — every single word.

Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

About those letters . . .

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