



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Killer's release not compassionate

The release of a Libyan terrorist convicted of downing Pan American Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, killing all 259 people on board and 11 on the ground, raised a groundswell of anger and anguish around the world. As well it should.

Families of the Lockerbie victims, American officials who prosecuted the case and put Abdelbeset Ali Mohamed al Megrahi behind bars, the British foreign ministry, FBI director Robert Muller, President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton all raised a howl of protest.

This cry could not be drowned out by the cheers of the Libyan crowd which welcomed al Megrahi home as a hero in Tripoli. It should not be allowed to die.

The release of an unrepentant mass murderer is appalling, even if, as some of the Scottish doctors who examined him say, he has terminal cancer and will be dead in three months. He should have been allowed to die alone, near his victims, and his corpse shipped back home.

That may seem harsh. It is no harsher a judgement than al Megrahi and his Libyan secret service bosses passed on those 270 innocents who died that day, just before Christmas.

In an apparent political act, the Libyan government agent put a suitcase on a plane in Malta which, in those days before computers counted and matched every bag on aboard an airliner, went on the doomed Pan Am jet on its way to London and the U.S.

Evidence showed the bomber, who worked at the airport on Malta, had been seen buying the clothes that filled the bag carrying the bomb. While he has always maintained his innocence, al Megrahi was convicted by a Scottish court that released another defendant. There was little doubt of his guilt.

The Libyan government turned the man over for prosecution in a deal that included \$270 million in reparations for families of the victims. The government implicitly admitted its part in the affair in return for lifting of western sanctions against it as a terrorist regime.

That was 2001. In 2009, Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill ruled that the bomber, despite the short time he has served in 270 murders, deserved a "compassionate release" so he could see his family before he dies.

That might have washed, had the Libyans had the good sense not to put on a televised hero's welcome. He could have landed in anonymity and been whisked off to see his wife and children.

Allegations of oil-for-prisoner deals likely are not true. Despite what some victims families have said, the West already has access to Libyan oil. That's what the 2001 deal was all about, restoring trade with a supposedly repentant rogue nation.

Only time will tell if there is anything in the Scottish decision besides an overdose of compassion, but there's no doubt it stinks.

Secretary MacAskill says he did it because it was the right thing to do. He did not invite comment from the victims' families, from the U.S. or the world at large before he made his decision, however.

The world cannot countenance mass murder. To do so makes a mockery of all our efforts to address the terrorists and their kind. The release was a mistake, plain and simple.

The world owed this murderer justice, fairness, humane treatment, but no more compassion than he showed his victims. — Steve Haynes



AW, C'MON! I HAD TO INHERIT BUSH'S POLL NUMBERS, TOO?!

### Tall sunflowers are a reminder

The sunflowers are just as I remembered them — tall and spiky.

They're one of the reasons I moved here in 1980.

Here is Creede, Colo., an old mining town turned to tourism to survive.

In 1980, however, Homestake's Bulldog Mine was going full blast. So was a big exploration project. Miners and drillers mingled with gift-shop owners and summer visitors.

It was August, and Steve, my son and I flew to Denver, and then on to Alamosa, Colo., in a plane so small the pilots had to use oxygen. The girls stayed with grandma, but Lacy was just a month old, and where I went, he went.

We must have been totally crazy. The whole idea was absurd. Who would be stupid enough to buy a newspaper in an area that boasted a full-time population of less than 900 people, where it got to be 40 degrees below zero in the winter?

Yep, you guessed it. The owners of *The Mineral County Miner and South Fork Times* (that's not a typo, it's a pun) picked us up at the Alamosa airport and drove us through the San Luis Valley to Creede. The highway was lined with sunflower-



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

ers. It was just like home, only 20 degrees cooler, and while the locals complained of the heat, 80 degrees felt pretty good to us.

Up from the Valley floor into the mountains we drove to Creede, which is built between cliffs.

The area was gorgeous, and our hosts showed us how they made a living in the tiny community with an economy split pretty much equally between mining and tourism. Tourism brought thousands of people to the area each summer, and mining provided a steady winter base.

We bit like trout on a dry fly. We were so ready to get out of the city and raise our three children in a small town.

So in the fall of 1980, we sold our beautiful home in Kansas City, Kansas, quit our jobs,

packed up our three children — ages 6, 3 and 6 months — and headed west.

As I sit in the house we built and look out over the Valley, I can't believe we were that brave or foolhardy or just plain ready for a challenge.

It was a great adventure, and turned into more of a challenge when the mine closed a few years later.

The mine is still closed, but tourism took off, and the children grew and worked beside us in the business. We may not have made a fortune in these silver-rich mountains, but we had some great adventures.

Our lives have changed places, and we enjoy the people and the golden plains of Kansas now. But, sometimes we look back and wonder if we would do it all over again.

Yep, because we're still crazy, and the sunflowers are still tall and beautiful here. Just like home.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of *Nor'West Newspapers*, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkans.com

### Online education still falls short

I cautioned Kansas students to be sure that the online degree they pursue today will be recognized as the union card for the job they want tomorrow in my column "No Online Degrees" back in February.

That column was picked up by a world news service. I added the fact that universities often eliminate candidates with online degrees in the first cut, even institutions offering online degrees.

The reaction, mostly from heads of eLearning and online institutes, was overwhelming. Some looked up my institution and noted that I worked at a school that offered some online courses and degrees. I must be the only dinosaur left at my school that hadn't adopted the teaching method of the future, they said. On the contrary, I have colleagues across many campuses who agree with me. It is our polite silence, our reluctance to criticize this tuition-driven decision, that gives online advocates the false sense that anytime-anywhere virtual education is about to replace bricks-and-mortar schools.

Lecturer and author Elayne Clift is neither shy nor quiet. Last May, she explained in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* why "I'll never teach online again." A successful traditional teacher, she details some of the shortcomings of online or distance education.

- Lack of immediacy in communication that draws out the interchange.
- Far greater time and effort required to prepare and deliver the "course."
- Anytime-anywhere for the student means the teacher is expected to be available all the



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

time. • Inefficiency of online teaching reduces the amount of material covered, so students learn less.

Response to her criticism was again mostly from administrators of online schools. Instead of addressing the specific shortcomings, they claim online is a completely different mode of teaching; you cannot merely transfer lectures into online materials.

The common example is the student who is too shy to speak up in a classroom but will write out her thoughts online (much more slowly, I will note). But is this really an advantage when the student never develops the ability to speak up in public? Students must live and perform in real life, not a virtual "second life."

Clift already addressed such online "advantages": "While some people find the anonymity enabling and are able to bond with their cybergroup and engage in true confession, I find it extraordinarily difficult to communicate with people for whom I have no face, no persona, no body language, no in-the-moment exchange."

That brings me back to the faculty vacancy and interview process. When applicants send

us their resumes, we get a written view of who they think they are. We then use internet and phone to "interview" at a distance, and we get a little more information.

But when the final candidates show up in person, we can find there is a big difference between what the media portrayed at a distance and the reality in person. In the same way, all of the so-called "interaction" online falls far short when it comes to a student building a shared understanding with a teacher and class.

The immediacy and efficiency of face-to-face teaching in the rich context of classroom discussion is not remotely matched by the most advanced online technology, filtered and strained through keyboard and mouse.

Universities and colleges that shift to online will pay a big price down the road if students no longer work face-to-face with faculty. Alumni are an important source of funding for scholarships and facilities. Without exception, alumni donors express their appreciation for a school where one or more faculty members "knew them" and changed their lives. Such appreciation is triggered at a level well beyond "My employer gave me a raise for my online degree."

So far, I have yet to meet one donor who is beholden to an electronic correspondence course.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org

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