

commentary

from other pens...

Closing schools a part of small town decline

Great Bend Tribune on small town decline:
You could call it an epidemic.
Across northwest Kansas, schools are closing and three high schools have now announced they will not have another school term.
At Morland, Utica and Lenora there will be no more high school and we all know what a difficult decision that is for a small community.
Any small town that has experienced a falling population knows how it goes. You lose your high school, you lose your grocery store, you lose your grade school, you lose your church and what is left, if you're lucky, is a few homes and a service station.
We are witness to the passing of a way of life in truly small town America but these people are not getting national attention or support. Very few people care.
But Kansans ought to, from the statehouse to the local coffee shop. These small towns are, or were, our state's bread and butter. We ought to care if they are dying.

The Topeka Capital Journal on presidential pardon:
Peter Ninemire didn't know the president's brother. He wasn't a fat-cat contributor to the Democrat Party...
He just didn't belong in prison anymore.
The former president got this one right, by golly.
Ten years ago, Ninemire, a Norton-area native, was sentenced to an incredible 27 years in federal prison for growing 600 marijuana plants.
On Jan. 20, when outgoing President Clinton commuted the remainder of Ninemire's sentence and he walked out of a medium security prison near Denver...
Oh, the hysteria surrounding the war on drugs! It just defies reason sometimes. Imagine: Absent the president's action, Ninemire might have spent nearly 30 years in prison for growing marijuana. That's up in the double-murder range. And it's crazy.
But to his credit, Ninemire did more than just put in more than his share of time. He turned his life around in prison...
(Federal defender Marilyn Trubey) felt at the time that Ninemire's sentence — prescribed essentially by congressional fiat — was wrong. And she never gave up trying to change it somehow.
She promised...
Trubey doesn't want people to think that all 140 of the former president's last-minute pardons and commutations were politically tainted. Ninemire was released because of his extraordinary transformation in prison, "not because he had a high-priced attorney," she said. No, but one worth her weight in gold.

The Iola Register on regulating county rock sales:
A bill that passed out of the House and went to the Senate... make it difficult for some of the smaller towns hereabouts to improve streets.
The bill would restrict on what could be done with rock crushed in county-owned quarries.
Only four counties crush rock. Allen County is one. Others are Bourbon, Neosho and Labette...
The association which represents Kansas aggregate producers lobbied for the bill that would curtail what the four counties could do with the rock they crush... Allen and Labette counties have furnished rock to cities within their borders at no charge. That's logical...
Last year the county provided 5,000 tons of pea-sized rock for chip-seal and other street work in Allen County towns other than Iola...
Sen. Derek Schmidt, who represents Allen County, said he wasn't eager to have state government impose itself on counties.
His reasoning is rock solid.
Legislators have their hands full with statewide issues without trying to micromanage what occurs in a handful of counties. That comes in spades when the interference disrupts strong, beneficial and well-working relationships within the counties.



Not matter when I die, I'll look good in print

Ray Morgan died a couple of weeks ago. He went into the hospital on Friday, wrote his obituary on Saturday and went to sleep.
Steve and Ray had worked together at *The Kansas City Times*, in what seems a lifetime ago. Ray was a seasoned political reporter, then a columnist, and Steve was the Jimmy Olson cub reporter.
When I heard about Ray's death, I called Steve and told him that Ray had written his obituary and died.
There was silence for almost a minute before Steve said, "That sounds like Ray."
To some people, writing your own obituary might seem strange or macabre. It's really a very sensible way to do things, like buying your burial plot. My parents bought their plot more than 50 years ago, when Dad's parents were buying theirs. Over the past 50 years, three of the five spaces have been filled and Mom has a marker on hers. The fifth spot is up for grabs, I guess. I never could figure out why my grandfather bought three burial plots. Maybe he planned on remarrying after Gramma



cynthia haynes

• open season

died — or maybe he just wanted elbow room.
Steve's parents didn't purchase their plots and markers in advance, but Steve did write his father's obituary more than a year before his dad died.
Steve's father was a widely-known lawyer and his father had been a politician and newspaperman. Many papers keep obituaries on file of important people so that if they keel over tomorrow, the basic facts will be ready for the story.
Steve's father was sick for several years before he died and Steve was given the job of getting the obituary. He had a wonderful talk with his dad about what he had done, where he had been and what he had seen.
"I didn't know Dad was a Shriner," was the one

of several things that popped in the months after that.
Katherine White, who was the editor of *The Emporia Gazette*, not only wrote her own obituary, she chose the picture to go with it and designed the layout. Mrs. White, the daughter-in-law of the famous William Allen White, ran the Gazette for several years after her husband, author William Lindsay White, died.
When she knew that time was getting short, Mrs. White got her obituary together, picked out a picture of her in her prime (circa 1940) and told the managing editor how she wanted it set up — on Page 1 of course.
I don't know that I'll ever write my own obituary, or Steve's for that matter. But I do try to keep my resume up to date and that lists all my clubs, organizations, honors and ad nauseam.
And, of course, I've got a nice picture, circa 1970, on file. I may not know the hour or the day, but when my picture comes out in the paper — baby am I gonna look GOOD!

Parents must face weight of the world

You get a call from the police, and your stomach drops. There's been an accident, the voice says. The rest of the words cut like knives in some fever dream you can't quite comprehend. In a moment, your world cracks and falls to the floor in shards. Life before the phone call is now delineated from everything that will come afterward.
Your child has been killed. It is a parent's worst nightmare.
This is a parent's second-worst nightmare: Your child did the killing.
I can't push from my mind the newspaper photograph of Diane Attias inside the Santa Barbara County Superior Court on Feb. 27. The anguish on her face captured so hauntingly the unthinkable possibilities of life.
Her 18-year-old son, David, stood before a judge in an orange jail jumpsuit facing murder charges for gunning his car down a crowded street near the University of California at Santa Barbara. He killed four people and injured a fifth. Witnesses said Attias screamed, "I am the angel of death!" and ran up to the bodies and said, "This is the way you're supposed to die."
In the photo of Diane Attias' face, I saw the weight of those four deaths and the collective grief of four sets of parents. I also imagined I saw another death: The death of a hope she perhaps had carried most of her son's life, that he would be OK,



joan ryan

• commentary

that the medication and psychiatrists and special schools and her own love would ultimately calm the confounding, restless forces inside him.
No parents imagine their children are capable of such horror, but when another teen-ager in shackles shuffles into another courtroom, we know he is some parent's child.
"Parents typically take more responsibility than is warranted for the actions of their young-adult children," said Dr. Reid Meloy, a forensic psychiatrist and author of "Violence Risk and Threat Assessment." "They think they should have been more loving, more helpful. What I've seen is that the parents who suffer the most are the ones who did the most they could."
The parents of the two Columbine High School killers were blamed — and rightly so — for not knowing that their sons had built arsenals right under their noses. But we seemed a little too eager to accept the parents' ignorance as a reason for the massacre. It seems that if we can point to a logical

and predictable cause, then we're safe. Something so horrible couldn't possibly happen in our families.
So far, we know nothing that suggests the Attiases could have prevented the killings. "I can't say enough good things about his parents," said a former baby sitter. "They were such a lovely family."
David, though, has been described as aggressive, impulsive and erratic, earning the nickname "Crazy Dave." He reportedly has seen psychiatrists and was prescribed medication. But in their one public statement, the Attiases did not use their son's mental condition to distance themselves from the tragedy.
"On behalf of my wife, I'd like to say how devastated and heartbroken we are for everyone affected by this horrible event," Daniel Attias told reporters. He talked of the "unspeakable grief" the families of the victims must be feeling. And, choking up, he extended "whatever compassion we are capable of."
Surely nothing can compare to the anguish of losing a child. But when I look at Diane Attias' face in that photo, I can't help hoping that we extend to her and her husband whatever compassion we, too, are capable of.
Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

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e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com



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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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