

# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## Time may be right for the ‘C’ word

Consolidation.

Rural schools have been avoiding the “C” word since the 1960s, when the Kansas Legislature pared hundreds of little districts down to a few dozen consolidated entities, fewer than 300.

But now, its time has come. And the state isn’t having to force anyone to consolidate. Rural schools are beginning to see the handwriting on the wall.

Lenora closed its schools and pays to send the kids to Norton. Bogue shut down and merged into its larger neighbor, Hill City. In Ness County, small schools banded together to form a larger, more solvent district.

Out here, Herndon, its enrollment under 90 and dropping, is shopping for a merger partner.

As the rural population continues to drop, we’ll see more schools fall by the wayside. But that won’t be the end of it.

In this new century, we may find that we just can’t afford to go on doing things the way we’ve always done them.

Why, for instance, do we need four cities, 25 townships and a county government in Decatur County?

When there were hundreds of families on the land, it made sense, but not today. Many townships can’t get people to run for office. Some draw only 5-6 voters in an election. Smaller cities have trouble filling city councils. And city residents wind up paying twice for services like roads and law enforcement.

Do we really need a three-man police department and a three-man sheriff’s office? If I live in town, why do I pay for the police and the sheriff? It’s an interesting system.

Some Kansas counties have experimented with consolidation, notably Wyandotte, where the county and Kansas City, Kan., merged, and Riley, where the Manhattan police and the sheriff’s office stepped up to the altar.

There’s been talk off and on of merging the city and the county, or merging the police and the sheriff’s office. There are many ways either goal could be accomplished. We could, as Wyandotte County did, allow the smaller towns to keep their independence. It’s an interesting system, where one government is a city and a county with small cities within it.

In Sherman County, where Goodland is the dominant municipality, there’s been talk of some sort of merger. One thing that gets people going is the fact that the city and county often seem to work at cross purposes. On issue after issue, they fail to be on the same wave length until people start saying, why do we have both?

Consolidation of school districts, high schools, cities and counties, or law enforcement won’t solve the world’s problems. It might save some money, but these services will still cost something.

Some schools, and some cities, just get to the point where, like a person in the last stages of a good life, they just give up.

And maybe that makes sense today. Why should we keep paying for all this duplication? Can a county with fewer than 1,500 people, for instance, afford to keep up a full-service operation?

These are questions we’re going to hear more and more about. It’s an issue that’s come of age. — *Steve Haynes*

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## Sometimes I get lonely

I don’t know about you, but sometimes I get lonely.

It sneaks up on me when I am unaware — seldom during the holidays or anniversaries, etc. It just rolls over me in waves at unexpected times.

Like last week. It just took over my life before I had a clue. All at once it was there, and I was intensely jealous of everyone who was married, anyone who had a special person in his/her life.

I suspect that this bout of loneliness was triggered by the turmoil my sister is experiencing after the sudden death of her husband.

Maybe it subconsciously reminded me of all I went through after my husband died in a plane crash. Who knows? It just enveloped me, and I had to deal with it.

I was reminded of this quote I added to my collection years ago: “There are moments in life when you miss someone so much that you just want to pick them from your dreams and



**lorna g t**

- commentary

hug them for real!” - Unknown

Do you ever stop dreaming of a loved one you’ve lost? My mother swore that she could physically sense daddy’s presence in the room. She’d turn around, expecting to see him. I don’t know that I’ve had such a joy dissolve into disappointment, but I do still have the dreams.

To combat my loneliness last week, I got down from a very dusty shelf all the old scrapbooks of my life. One by one, I went through them, renewing the memories, re-gluing some corners, taping some torn edges. I had intended to weed out unnecessary things and just save the “important” pictures. But I couldn’t. Looking through them, remembering the good times

(and the bad) as well as all the happy hours I spent putting the books together, prevented me from discarding much of anything. Silly though someone else may consider them, they are precious to me.

So I survived another bout of loneliness. I thanked God for the gifts of a good family background, a husband who loved and honored me even though he was taken from me much too soon.

I laughed and shed a few tears, seeing my grown sons once again as babies and young men. I have had many blessings, and I will not let loneliness defeat me. V.C. Andrews in *Rain* wrote: “There was so much here, so many reasons to be happy and content, so many weapons with which to battles depression and sadness. These walls should be tall enough to keep out unhappiness; these hallways should be resounding with laughter and the mirrors should be worn out with smiles.”

I’ll try not to forget that wisdom again.

## Surviving Cantor Fitzgerald’s 9/11 loss

The phone rang at 2 a.m. in Tom Barbash’s Cole Valley, Calif., apartment about a week after the twin towers collapsed.

“Tom?”

It was Barbash’s college friend Howard Lutnick, Cantor Fitzgerald’s chief executive officer who had lost 658 employees in the terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001.

The two already had spoken that week. Barbash, a writing instructor at San Francisco State, had called almost immediately after the tragedy. Both had lost many college friends whom Lutnick had hired at Cantor.

Barbash knew Lutnick had survived only because he had accompanied his son to his first day of kindergarten and arrived at the World Trade Center moments before the first building fell.

Despite the blur of grief, Lutnick understood that if Cantor went under, the spouses and children of the dead would have nothing. He knew he was in the midst of an extraordinary and defining time for himself, his company and the country.

He wanted Tom Barbash to chronicle it.

The result of that fateful phone call is the new book “On Top of the World: Cantor Fitzgerald, Howard Lutnick, & 9/11: A Story of Loss & Renewal” (HarperCollins).

Since their days on the tennis team at Haverford College near Philadelphia, Tom Barbash and Howard Lutnick had remained close, if unlikely, friends. But their lives had taken different paths, to say the least.

Barbash had spent time guiding river tours in Kashmir and then became a newspaper reporter in Syracuse, N.Y. After that, he moved to Iowa and studied fiction. Eventually, he landed in San Francisco, where he made a modest living as a writing instructor while finishing a novel.

“Every time I called Howard, I was doing something different,” Barbash recalls.

Lutnick went straight to Manhattan after college and never left. He always knew what he would be — a master of the universe in tailor-made suits with the kind of money and power that protects you from harm. He had lost both his parents before he had finished his freshman year of college. Nothing, he seemed to decide, would ever be taken from him again.

A year out of college, he was handling investments for some of Cantor Fitzgerald’s best clients. By age 29, he was president of the company and driving a Ferrari. By 40, he was CEO and taking vacations on the French Riviera in \$42,000-a-week villas. When Barbash visited Lutnick, it was like dropping into another life, a fantasy.

Now the two found themselves united in tragedy. Barbash wasn’t sure exactly what Lutnick wanted from a book on the aftermath of the attacks, but he knew they should meet. Barbash had grown up in New York and the tragedy was all he could think about anyway.

And he knew it was a story worth telling, the story of all these people who had died, told



**joan ryan**

- commentary

against the backdrop of Lutnick’s and Cantor’s rise to the top and resurrection from the ashes.

But he couldn’t have known, in this emotionally complex intersection between grief and money, what was in store for Lutnick — and how it would change them both.

In the first days after the attack, Lutnick became the human face of Wall Street. In an interview with Connie Chung, he cried openly about the 955 children who lost a parent at Cantor Fitzgerald and pledged to take care of all the families.

But soon after the interview, Lutnick cut off paychecks to the families of the dead — and just as suddenly, he was the face of greed and heartlessness. Newspapers and television shows had a field day. “CANTOR KIN: BOSS BROKE BOND TO US” blared the New York Post. “The O’Reilly Factor” devoted a whole segment to the story. Angry letters, faxes and phone calls poured into the Lutnick home.

Barbash watched all this unfold. He knew that Lutnick had explained why he had stopped the checks. If he continued, the company would go under, and the families would have nothing.

Barbash also knew Lutnick had explained his plan for taking care of the families to the media. He had promised that 25 percent of the company’s profits would be split among the families, that all bonuses would be paid in full and that the families would get 10 years of health insurance. Lutnick made sure that the life insurance company paid out claims without death certificates, and that the Red Cross expedited its fund distribution to Cantor families.

Nevertheless, Connie Chung went back on the air with a follow-up story suggesting that Lutnick’s tears in the first interview were a public relations ploy to gain sympathy and attract business. Later, several wives told Lutnick that Chung had interviewed them. They told her they were happy with his financial plan, but she didn’t air the interviews.

Barbash knew Lutnick was working almost around the clock, setting up temporary offices, coordinating with the company’s London office, talking on the phone to as many widows as he could, visiting the crisis center the company had set up at the Pierre hotel. He attended funerals almost every day, but the list of memorial services for Cantor employees was 78 pages long. There were 40 Cantor funerals in one weekend.

Lutnick was criticized for not returning calls to some of the widows and not attending all the employee funerals. He felt truly wounded by the criticism. Every night, Barbash would sit down with Lutnick for an hour or two and go over the day’s events, almost as if it were a

therapy session.

“I don’t think he thought it would get as bad as it did,” Barbash says. “There was almost an innocence to the way he was approaching it. I think he thought, ‘I know what I’m doing. I know I’m doing the right thing, and everybody else has got to understand.’”

Against all odds, within days of the attacks, Lutnick and his survivors got Cantor back up and running. The company turned a profit in the quarter starting Oct. 1, 2001, earning \$19.7 million. This meant \$4.9 million for the families under the 25 percent plan.

By March, Barbash was back in San Francisco. He had four months to write the book.

Lutnick is said to be satisfied with the results, but Barbash says it’s still painful for his friend to relive those first few weeks. Both men, predictably, have been changed by the experience.

Tragedy is a brutal leveler. Yet it challenges everyone in different ways. For Lutnick and the Cantor group, the challenge was to accept their vulnerability after lifetimes of building financial and emotional fortresses around themselves.

“Before, I think Howard wanted to be the richest guy in the world. I think he wanted to make a lot of money and wanted to share it with his friends and have a lot of fun and be the best at what he did.

“But since the tragedy, he has been so single-minded about taking care of the families, obsessively so. It is literally all he talks about.”

After so many years on divergent paths, one of the worst tragedies in American history brought the two college friends back together. Barbash found himself letting go of his assumptions and judgments about Lutnick’s way of life and replacing them with a deep admiration for what Lutnick accomplished after the attacks, which Barbash considers a heroic journey.

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### berry’s world

