

from our viewpoint...

Is rural America just killing itself?

This editorial, by Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers, won a first place for editorial writing from the National Newspaper Association. It has been reprinted in several newspapers around Kansas and elsewhere.

If rural America is dying, what's killing it? Though it's popular to blame Wal-Mart, I don't think that's it. Wal-Mart is a symptom, not a disease. What's killing rural American is rural Americans. We don't realize how good we have things, and we don't invest in our own, wonderful way of life. We teach our kids that they need to go off to the university and get a good job in the city. We don't make jobs for them back at home like we used to. We do our shopping out of town or with some big, faceless corporation. We don't support the hometown grocery or the mom-and-pop stores on Main Street. We're hooked on the excitement of going to the big stores and buying big-brand merchandise. A trip to the next-bigger town becomes a social outing, not just treason to the local economy.

But it's more complicated than that. Wal-Mart exists because it does what people want. It has low prices, if you don't mind hiking through a jammed up, ding-and-dent parking lot. It's open all day so people can shop when they have time.

One retail expert notes that in an era when everyone works, a store that's open 9 to 5 must be catering to the retired and the unemployed. That's not the most profitable demographic, is it?

Go to any Wal-Mart at night or on Sunday, or at 9 p.m. on a Wednesday, and you'll find cars from all the surrounding towns. Go downtown in those same towns, and you'll find most of the stores locked and shuttered. Maybe the owners are home complaining. Maybe they're over shopping at Wal-Mart along with all their customers.

Most of our towns have places to buy the things we need. These businesses provide jobs that keep our towns going. They are the building blocks of our communities. But we drive right by them on our way out of town.

Then we get together and complain about the declining population and the ever-lower enrollment in our schools. We gripe that it's tough to attract new businesses. We complain that no one wants to live "out here."

We'd all be a lot better off if we learned to invest in our own towns and the businesses that support them. Instead of hitting the highway to buy a car or a coat, we ought to look downtown. Out on the highway. Or worst come to worse, in the next county over.

Not in the city. Not at some chain store that sucks profits out of our town and sends them to five of the 10 wealthiest people in the world. We don't, though. We think we're going to save money on the road. We're mad at the town grocer or the Ford dealer. We want to have some fun. Hey, nobody spends all his money at home. There are things you can't get here. There are things we want in the city. That's not the point.

If we want rural America to survive, rural Americans have to start investing in our own back yards. We need to spend most of our money at home. We need to shop at the town grocery and support the downtown stores. We need to spend our money where it supports jobs and taxes and profits at home, not in some other state.

Even if it costs a few cents more. Because if we don't, we're all going to have to move to the city. And while it's a nice place to visit, I don't want to live there. — Steve Haynes

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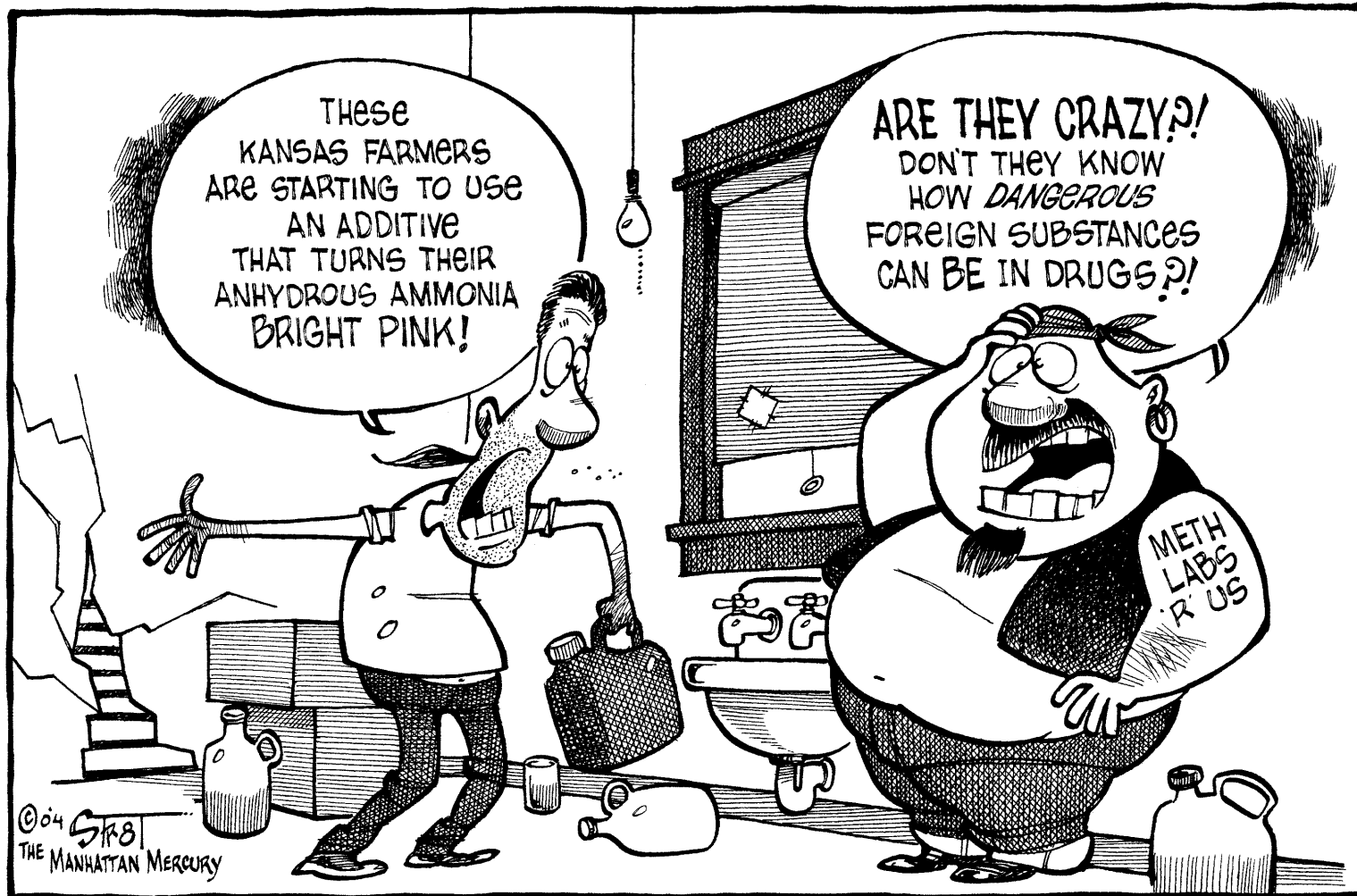
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Seldom used word list getting quite long

I don't know about you, but my list of new and seldom used words is getting quite long. I collect these words as I read. Some struck me as strange; some I'd never heard (or seen) before; all intrigued me enough to jot them down.

I'll start with a few of "irritating" politically-correct ones which were new to me: 1) Shopping is "retail therapy." (unknown author) 2) The homeless are "residentially challenged" - John Lescroft "The First Law". 3) Garbage described as "nonproductive ex-consumer materials" - Happy All the Time by Laurie Colwin. (Can you really imagine someone who talks with politically-correct phrases all the time?)

Now here are some words by which you can test your vocabulary skills: 1. Jeremiahl (not in my dictionary; I'm assuming it means "like Jeremiah"). 2. Pictures were hung chockablock (in a crowded condition). 3. Bibelots (small household ornament or decorative object). 4. Hoopela (I had heard this one, but never saw it



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in print before. After I looked it up, I realized why the word looked strange. It WAS MIS-SPELLED! No "e.") 5 Solipsistic (pertaining to "a theory that the self can know nothing but its own modifications and that the self is the only existent thing." (I've known people like that; haven't you?) 6. Autodidact (self-taught person). 7. Kathunked (I truly think this is a noise and not a word.) 8. Juvenilia ("artistic or literary compositions produced in the artist's youth"; or designed for youth.) 9. Tony shops (shops "marked by an aristocratic or high-toned manner or style"). 10. Caromed (making a certain type of billiard shot). (We

used to have a small carome board as children. I wonder if my mother realized she had a pool table in her home.)

Well, enough of taxing your brains. Here's some quotes you're sure to enjoy: 1. A garbage collector speaks: "You think of us as garbage collectors, but we think of you as garbage producers." 2. "The condition jealousy covered was simply envy mixed with fear." 3. "I don't call it gossip. I call it 'emotional speculations.'" All three quotes are by Laurie Colwin in her book, "Happy All the Time". Currently there is a popular country/western song called "I Hate Everything." According to Steve Martini in "Undue Influence", that person is a "social contrarian."

That reminds me of another quote that I still haven't figured out: "They were about to 'lose their facsimilies.'" I don't know what book that is from, but I think the author needs to get a new editor.

The iris bed finally gets cleaned out

We spent the afternoon Saturday cleaning out the iris beds behind the house, and now I remember why we have been putting this chore off.

It's not that it's that tough a job, but now I have to listen to Cynthia complain about her sore muscles and stiff back all week.

Oh, yeah, and my muscles are sore, too. There must be an easier way to do this, but I can't think of it.

The irises had been in the bed 10 years. We planted them the year we moved into the house.

They were overgrown and so crowded that they hardly bloomed this year. I didn't realize how overcrowded they were until I tried to drive a stake into the bed and found out they had covered more than a foot of sidewalk. (The plants over the concrete didn't bloom much, either.)

We had been talking about this job for more than a month, but there always was some reason not to start it. Saturday, I set the afternoon aside. Cynthia said it was too hot, so she went to take a nap. She does that a lot.

Three hours later, she was up, but in no mood to pull bulbs. It was about 5 p.m., and the game



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was over, by the time we started. You take a shovel or a potato fork, and pry up the bulbs. When they're overgrown like these, you have to pry them apart, to separate the individual plants.

We started throwing them on the patio, and wound up with a huge pile. It was getting dark, but we still had bulbs to pull, dirt to shake. We had to finish.

This project, I might point out, had to be completed without the help of the cats, who showed no interest in the bulbs, the dirt or any of the creepy-crawlies that ran out from under the pile.

Some of the spiders down there looked downright wicked, by the way, but no one got bit. At least, not that I know of.

Did I mention that it was getting dark by now?

I started planting the bulbs we wanted to keep, including one special variety I had marked. The others are potluck for color and size, mostly heritage types that we had collected from friends and relatives.

I put them back, leaving plenty of room for growth. I reserved a corner for the garlic that apparently was left over from the last owners' herb garden. It gets one corner of the bed, while the spearmint takes over the other, along with any bare ground it can get into.

We cook with the garlic. I haven't figured out what to do with the mint, but it sure does smell good.

All that was left now was to trim and bag the excess iris. We counted seven paper grocery bags full — after we had replanted, plus a small sack of garlic plants.

So, if you know anyone who needs a few iris bulbs, do call.

We'll give some to anyone who can bear to listen to the complaints about stiff legs and sore backs.

Rory Schreiber, Sublette

Grandchild thanks unknown Angel

To the Editor:

Great things really do happen in small towns due to the wonderful people who live in them. I want to acknowledge the help that was given to my grandmother, Phyllis Seaman, when she had a serious health issue during a shopping trip at the local Dollar General store. A day later she was hospitalized for tests.

My grandmother told me that while she was shopping, she began to feel weak, hot, and faint, like she was going to fall to the ground. There was no way that my mother, who was with her, could have got grandma to a safe spot on her own.

There was an ANGEL in the store, a total stranger to both my grandmother and mother and the clerk who was working. Who ever this ANGEL was, she does deserve to be acknowledged, even if by my small letter to the editor. You see this ANGEL helped get my grand-



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readers

• to the editor

mother to a bench, bought her a bottle of water to pour over her face and to drink, bought her new slippers, helped her to their car and then made sure that she was going to be all right. Then she disappeared before they could get her name.

During a trip to Florida this summer, I was shocked to see a man had fallen to the ground and no one stopped to help or clear a path. All the while, his wife was desperate for some help. People kept going about their business, walking over the man and trying to get strollers

around the man, as he lay helpless on the ground. I believe that small-town people really are out to help one another, have big hearts and they are not afraid to show human kindness. For the Angel who helped my grandmother that day, you are a blessing! What you did will not be forgotten!

Rory Schreiber, Sublette

Letter Policy

The Goodland Star-News encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, and must include a telephone number and a signature. Unsigned letters will not be published. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and good taste. We encourage letters by e-mail to: star-news@nwkanssas.com.

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