

November not a break from the tornado season

The leaves have fallen, and we're a lot more likely to have a blizzard than a tornado, right? That may be what people in Indiana and Kentucky thought this weekend, before a mammoth twister ripped through homes and a trailer court, killing at least 22 people.

It's too late for a tornado. But unfortunately for those in its path, this storm hadn't read the rules. It came ripping through the night, and many victims slept through storm warnings.

The storm hit about 2 a.m., maybe the worst time to get people up and into shelters. Victims at a trailer park never had a chance.

It's sobering thought, tornadoes in November, and it sounds far off, but the site is only about as far south as Scott City.

We could have tornadoes here in November. It's not that uncommon to have weather warm and wet enough to breed these terrible storms. November is not exactly April when it comes to tornadoes, but we can't count on not having any.

A few years ago, November tornadoes near Hays hit several homes, but avoided populated areas. No one was hurt.

October storms are pretty common, even farther north. Funnels were photographed near Goodland in late October a few years back. One of the biggest tornadoes to hit Colorado came roaring right over Wolf Creek Pass a decade ago in October.

Tornadoes aren't supposed to form in the mountains, either. Elk hunters were amazed, but they were the only people in the area. Again, no one was hurt. Millions of trees died, and wood cutters are still trying to haul off the remains.

The worst tornado disaster in the nation's history swept across Missouri, Illinois and Indiana early in the season, March 18, 1925. Six hundred ninety-five people died. Major storms have struck as early as February.

The message ought to be clear: We need to be prepared for tornadoes year around. Sirens need to be tested. Weather spotters trained and alerted as needed.

Blizzard season may provide a break from tornadoes, but we can't rule them out. We should never assume tornado season is "over."

It might be no one told the tornadoes.

— Steve Haynes



Washington full of busy people

I love visiting Washington, the city of monuments and important people.

It was a flying trip. We left Denver on Wednesday morning and were home in our beds Friday night — well, more like Saturday morning, but home, nevertheless.

While Steve was at his National Newspaper Association meeting, the reason we were in the capital, I worked on my computer, editing copy and writing stories. Then I set off for the National Press Club for a press conference and lunch with the new secretary of health and human services, Mike Leavitt.

Mr. Leavitt talked about the problem of some type of bird flu coming out of Southeast Asia. Since then, everywhere I look — magazines, newspapers and television — there's some story about bird flu.

It's a real danger. History shows us that every 10 years or so, the flu gets mean. Now and then it gets lethal enough to close schools and public buildings and fill up both hospitals and morgues.

It's happened before. It can and probably will happen again.

On that sober note, we headed for the Hill to visit with Sen. Pat Roberts' staff and Rep. Jerry Moran.

At Sen. Roberts' office, we were asking that the bids and contracts being awarded in the hurricane relief operations be published in the newspapers in the counties affected.

There's a lot of distrust of the government over this whole relief effort. Letting people know about and be able to bid on contracts and then telling them who, what and where the money is going will help to alleviate some of it. It will cost the government a few thousand dollars to tell people where and how it is spending millions. It will also help those newspapers that, like all other businesses in the area, have been hit hard by the storms and their aftermath.

We had nothing special to talk to Jerry Moran about, but we wanted to say hi.

The congressman told us that he decided not to run for governor for



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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A RIFLEMAN COULD BE SEEN on top of the White House as the president's helicopter landed on the South Lawn last week.

— Herald staff photo by Cynthia Haynes

family reasons. His daughters are a sophomore and a senior at Hays High School. In fact, he said, he was leaving early that Friday to fly home since his oldest was running in the state cross country meet in Wamego.

Working in Washington is hard enough, he said. Campaigning for governor and moving to Topeka, if he won, would have been tough on his teenagers.

Mr. Moran asked us what people were saying out our way and seemed to be informed about most of our problems and concerns.

The next day, Friday, we walked over to the World War II and Korean War monuments. They are breathtaking. We saw lots of older couples walking around taking pictures. I'm sure many of those men were re-

membering those wars because they were there.

On the way back to the hotel to pick up our suitcases, we cut across the area around the Washington Monument near the White House. Suddenly a helicopter soared over us.

Steve looked up and said, "That's the president."

Sure enough, the helicopter landed on the South Lawn and there were about 200 people standing around waiting for him. On the roofs, we could see riflemen checking the area for danger.

It was a short trip to the nation's capital, but we saw a lot, learned a lot and enjoyed getting home to northwest Kansas, where there's little traffic, less crime and broader vistas to enjoy.

What to do with a million?

Last week, one of my columnist friends wrote about what she would do if she won the lottery. Since she is a farm wife, we know where most of it would go.

Back in the '50s, my favorite television show was "The Millionaire." That was when a million dollars seemed like all the money there was in the world, but a million dollars ain't what it used to be.

Nowadays, a million dollars is a good start for a retirement nest egg.

But, like my friend Nancy, I think it is fun to think about the "what-ifs."

Also, like my friend Nancy, I don't buy lottery tickets. I think there is something wrong with buying chances. It's "greed" rearing his ugly head that makes people buy a chance at "something for nothing."

Nonetheless, I like to think if I suddenly had more money than I knew what to do with (and not from gambling), I would be very generous. And, anonymous.

My list would look something like this:

- Ten percent off the top to my church. We're supposed to give God our first fruits, not our leftovers.
- Pay off all our debts. Rich or not, I hate to pay interest.
- Educational funds for our grandchildren. If they're prepared for their future, they can make their own way.
- A trust fund to both of our favor-



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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ite ministries, Casas por Cristo, and Prison Fellowship Ministries. The poor and imprisoned will always be with us.

• A year's worth of groceries to everyone who has used the county food pantry. It must be hard to ask for food.

• A generous sum to the food pantry to keep their shelves stocked. It provides a wonderful service to people who need a helping hand. A helping hand is a lot different than a handout.

• I would pave the streets of our little town. Fighting mud is one of life's frustrations.

• I would find out who the single parents are in the county and pay their rent until their children are grown. I've been there, and sometimes it's a choice between paying bills and paying the rent.

You get the idea. Nobody gets a "free ride," but we all could use a little help now and then.

It's more blessed to give than to

receive. And, what fun I would have giving it away.

It's speculation, anyway. We don't have any rich relation to leave us an inheritance.

Notice I didn't leave our children anything. A lot of people have been ruined by having everything handed to them on a silver platter. I love all my kids too much to do that to them.

Our children all make more than we could ever dream of anyway, so more than likely, they'll end up taking care of us in the end. I love that bumper sticker: "I plan on living long enough to become a burden to my children."

Amen.

From the Bible

O let not the oppressed return ashamed: let the poor and needy praise thy name.
Psalm 74:21

Reader applauds drama club

To the Editor:

I just wanted to give the Decatur Community High Drama Club and Leigh Davis a great big kudos. They did a terrific job on the haunted house. I think it was a great idea for the club kids and the community.

Miss Davis and the drama club did an excellent job on the decorations and the story. When you went inside, you were amazed at the time and effort put into this haunted

house.

I think this should be an annual event. It gave the kids in the community something to do for Halloween. It helped the drama club raise money and gave people a great experience to see the talent right here in Ober-

lin.

So take a bow, drama club and Miss Davis; you should be really proud of your students and you also did a great job. Thank you for the experience.

LaDawna Richards
Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

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Every once in a while, when I'm leafing through the pile of papers in the dining room, I run across my friend Ray's graduation picture.

He sent it last year after he graduated college down in Texas. It was a hard-won degree.

When I first met Ray, he was managing editor of a little daily newspaper out in Colorado. He had no degree or training to speak of, but he thought he could do the job as well as anyone. He probably could.

After several years, he and the owner parted ways, but I saw him now and then. When we wanted to start a paper in another Colorado town, we thought of Ray.

Would he come work for us?

Well, he'd need a car. Didn't have one, didn't want to buy one. We said OK.

And we were richly rewarded for our decision.

Ray was in his element working on his own, starting that little paper from scratch and, within a year, winning nearly every award there was for journalism in Colorado.

At the state press convention that year, I thought Ray — more than a little overweight and a lot out of shape — might have a heart attack. They kept calling him back up to the front to get another plaque.

By the time he was done, Ray had the sweepstakes awards for news, photography and design, general excellence and a stack of individual writing and graphics categories.

It took three or four of us to carry all that hardware out to the car. He was that good.

With his intelligence, I think, Ray



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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had a certain arrogance. He knew how good he was. He knew how smart he was. But, heck, with all those awards, I didn't mind.

Later, a chain from Illinois came in and bought all the papers in the area, ours included. Ray stayed on for a while, but eventually drifted back to his home town.

We moved to Kansas. What happened next is hard to fathom.

Ray fell in with a biker meth gang. They were running drugs in from out of state and selling them around town. Ray allegedly kept the records.

He told me later it started out just delivering a package. He had no idea what was in it, and didn't ask.

By the time the FBI swept in, though, he was deeply involved. I think he thought selling drugs wasn't really hurting anyone. I know he thought he was smart enough to never get caught.

He's the only guy I know with one of those "nicknames" the FBI hangs on a desperado.

Unlikely desperado that he was, middle aged, balding and fat, Ray went to jail. He got seven years hard time in federal stir, first at El Reno, Okla., no picnic there, but later at

one of those country club places you read about.

We went to see him. He was doing OK, but you could tell it was no fun, stuck out there on the wind-swept Texas plains.

In prison, Ray found himself and he found Jesus. He started working on the college degree he never finished. He grew a garden and did chores for the warden.

Finally, he got sent to a halfway house in the city. He got a job and learned how to get back into civilian life. He told me it was stupid to cross the government, and he'd never make that mistake again.

Well, lots of people find religion in stir, and lots of people work on degrees. Lots of people say they've learned a lesson. I don't know. I hope Ray has.

It took years, but he finished college and applied to go on and get a master's. I hope that works out.

Ray has a job now, and a goal to keep him working. He's not back in journalism, and he may never be, but I think, and hope, he knows himself better.

When I see him beaming out of that graduation photo, cap firmly in place, it's easy for me to believe he'll make it.