

Attorney General's loss a tragedy on many levels

The resignation Friday of Paul Morrison as Kansas attorney general is a personal and political tragedy, one the state will survive, but difficult nonetheless.

It marked the first time in many decades that a Kansas state official has been driven from office, though at least two previous attorney generals became ensnared in sex scandals.

It also marked a strange end to a somewhat strange political career.

Just short of a year in office, Mr. Morrison left a week after the Topeka Capital-Journal revealed details of a sexual harassment complaint filed against him by a former employee.

The complaint alleged the former attorney general conducted a two-year affair with the director of administration in the Johnson County district attorney's office before and while he was running for attorney general and after he took office. As district attorney, of course, he was her boss.

That would cover the time he was running against Phill Kline, the incumbent Republican. During that same campaign, the erstwhile attorney general promised to restore integrity to an office he claimed Mr. Kline had used to pursue a "personal agenda."

The Morrison campaign ran two sets of television ads at one point, the first attacking Mr. Kline, the second featuring the candidate's family.

On one hand, the ads used half truths to undermine the incumbent — charging that he was out to get everyone's private medical records when in fact the attorney general had asked for a few dozen records from abortion clinics he accused of breaking state law. Phill Kline wound up being painted as some sort of evil ogre, an image the dour Kline never successfully shook off.

On the other, the ads portrayed the Democrat candidate as a decent family man surrounded by a loving wife and children. And while that may be true, it obviously wasn't the whole truth.

While all this was going on, strange things were happening in Johnson County. Because Mr. Morrison was elected and served 18 years in office as a Republican before being recruited by the Democrats to run against Mr.

Kline, the Republican county committee got to pick his replacement.

That turned out to be the same Phill Kline he'd just defeated. That made Linda Carter, who later would file a federal civil rights complaint against the attorney general, Mr. Kline's employee.

And Mr. Morrison might have survived her charges about their affair had that been the end of it. She says it wasn't. Part of her claim, as revealed by the Capital-Journal, is that after moving to Topeka, Mr. Morrison attempted to persuade her to give him details of the district attorney's operation, including a request for support for eight employees Mr. Kline fired when he took over. He also allegedly tried to get details of what was going on in the office, which she viewed as improper.

Those allegations, which Mr. Morrison turned over to the state office which investigates complaints against lawyers, may have been his undoing as much as anything.

It was obvious he was near his end when the governor who had recruited him took great pains to distance herself from her one-time ally. She got so far behind him, she couldn't see him: her statement implied that "if the allegations were proven," he might well have to resign.

So much for party solidarity. Without support from his new friends, and viewed as a traitor by most Republicans, the attorney general was out on the end of the proverbial limb. It will be up to his successor, whoever the governor names, to restore integrity to the office.

How all that will affect the political scene is a big unknown. Mr. Morrison's swift resignation cut off a budding swell of Republican comments. The governor, just a year into her second term, has been talked up as a Democratic candidate for vice president should Hillary Clinton not win the presidential slot — or as a candidate for the U.S. Senate when Sam Brownback steps down in 2010.

Some of the scandal could wear off on her, but observers say three years gives voters plenty of time to forget the Morrison debacle.

For her, perhaps, a minor irritation. For Mr. Morrison, a career. — Steve Haynes

Dog lover weighs in on debate

To the Editor:

I wanted to comment on the dog story. My heart goes out to that family, who are losing one of their members.

Many years ago, Hank Beardsley Jr. and his family bought a purebred pit bull, Mickey Centennial Chum, to our town. He was from Texas.

My family brought home a pup from a pit bull dog crossed with a rat terrier, Ginger. He was brindle and the only clue that he was a bulldog. My brother David, his best buddy Hank and their dogs could be found

all over town and their favorite place, down to the creek. Neither of those dogs were ever anything but friendly.

If that dog (in Oberlin) is a Staffordshire Terrier, I think he belongs with his family.

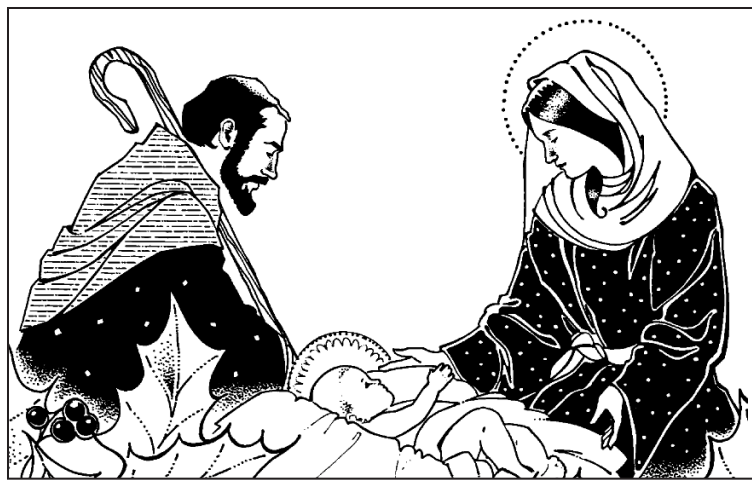
Enid McGee Foland, Almena

Letter to the Editor

From the Bible

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger....

Luke 2:7



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Candyland comes to kitchen

My kitchen has turned into a candy factory.

So far, I've made about 17 dozen peanut butter balls, two dozen almond butter birdies, one batch of peanut brittle, dipped pretzels, six dozen spritz cookies and fudge.

But I'm just getting started. There are still spicy sugared nuts, minted walnuts, more peanut brittle, caramel popcorn, more fudge and glass candy to make.

I love to make candy and, thank goodness, I love to give it away, too. (Jim would like me to keep a little more at home than I do.)

-ob-

Ever since Petey died, we think Sammy has been lonely. The two were such good playmates.

So when my friend Sherry said she knew of a cat that needed a good home, we decided to adopt her.

Yes, it's a female, but she and Sammy have both been neutered so we are in no danger of starting a kitten factory.

We haven't met her yet, but Sherry said she is black. Sherry also said she has a quirky trait of puffing out her neck hair when she feels



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts cplots@nwkansas.com

threatened. Said she looks like a little owl.

We'll just have to get to know her before we decide on a name. You know it's got to fit her personality.

Sure hope she and Sammy get along.

-ob-

We did not get to go to Texas last week like we wanted. The ice and snow altered our plans.

We might be crazy, but we're not stupid.

It would have been suicide to try it — but that doesn't mean I was happy about it.

I pouted for a couple of days, thinking about what we would have been doing if we were with the kids.

I got over it and realized we were

needed here, too. I guess it's that old "if life hands you lemons, make lemonade" scenario. There was a good reason we didn't go.

-ob-

For all our good intentions about decorating for Christmas, we sure haven't accomplished much.

I brag about how Jim puts lights on anything that will stand still, but somehow the storm kind of took the "want-to" out of him.

As for decorating inside, I haven't felt compelled to do anything much.

Lord knows it's not for lack of "stuff." I have more Christmas decor than most department stores.

Who knows, maybe all I'll get done for Christmas is cook.

Oh, well, Jim thinks that's OK.

Cold days can be beautiful

Winter is dark, and sometimes seems kind of blah, especially when the snow settles in.

Short nights are depressing, the cold gets into your bones and the snow makes it hard to get around. Still, it can be a beautiful season — if you can bear to stick your head out of your hood and look around.

So it was Friday night, when the snow kept drifting down and I didn't have to drive anywhere. The flakes were large, the night beautiful under the old cast-iron street lights. If the street was slick and snowbound and the highways icy, I didn't have to go anywhere.

Then over the weekend, the sun came out, and the world was — for the time, anyway — new and bright. Sunday found the fields around town dazzling white with brown accents, tinged with blue shadows that grew as the day wore on.

Cynthia went to visit her mom, so Annie, our dog, and I started out for adventure. We hadn't been walking all week, relying on the snow shovel for exercise. And Annie loves to run.

We'd started north at noon, only to get a call asking if the paper was covering the train wreck. What train wreck? Turned out to be the opposite direction, so we headed for Jennings.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes s.haynes@nwkansas.com

Sure enough, the railroad had put seven or eight cars of wheat — it was hard to count the way they were piled up and I wasn't about to climb in there — into the ditch east of town. One rested clear across a township road.

We took pictures, talked with the trackmen and dozer operator, stopped to meet the trainmaster, then turned north. At Indianola, we stopped to wait for a train the signals said was coming.

We did a couple of miles as the sun — and the mercury — plunged out of sight. (It was 12 degrees outside my house Monday morning, not as cold as it had been, but plenty cold enough.)

We'd done four circuits of the town when the train appeared out of the west, a Christmas express loaded with parcels and running at least four hours late, screaming through town in a cloud of snow, whistle blaring. And it was gone.

Out in the valley, as the sun sank lower, the blue spread and merged into deep purple. The sky turned orange, then violet, the colors reflecting off the snow blanket as they mingled and faded.

Layered up as I was, with insulated gloves and jacket and warm stocking cap, it still was cold and getting dark. We pressed on to the soup supper at church, getting there late and finding just one bowl of bean soup left.

That was a good way to cap an afternoon. Monday, there'd be hours of work to do and little time to enjoy the dazzling show winter can put on. The temperature is supposed to hit the 40s, and the snow may begin to turn to slush on the streets. (We can only hope, huh?)

But for one evening and one afternoon, the shortest day of the year fast approaching, it was quite a show, well worth the price of admission.

Complaints take over column

As I was scrubbing the dried-up chili from the roaster, I fumed and thought of my pet peeves.

(I know this is the time of year to count your blessings, but I had about one too many packages to wrap, too many cards to send, too many tasks to do and too many cat boxes to clean.)

Why am I the only one in this house able to scrub out the roaster after a soup supper, food day at the office or turkey dinner?

The answer is simple — I can't stand dirty things in the kitchen. Steve, while a very clean, neat person, hates doing certain kitchen cleanups. As a result he can ignore a dirty skillet or roaster far longer than I can. So I do the job out of exasperation. And believe me, it is exasperation, since I like scrubbing dried up crud off of roasters about as much as I like dealing with dirty diapers or cleaning showers in locker rooms.

I shouldn't complain, I suppose. Steve always mows the lawn, a job I can ignore until a machete is required. He's also good at cleaning out the gutters, changing the light



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes c.haynes@nwkansas.com

bulbs around the house and rinsing the dishes.

Jobs he avoids but I don't mind include folding clothes, emptying the dishwasher and hanging shirts.

Oh well. I won't have to deal with the roaster again for a few weeks, so I guess I'll have to complain about something else.

Like people who use snow blowers to clean their walks and driveways by blowing the snow into newly plowed streets or other people's property.

This is also true of those who use shovels, but they seem to be working so much harder that I have a harder time building up much indignation.

My last pet peeve of the week was a call from my youngest daughter,

who lives in Augusta, Ga.

I was just headed out the door to shovel the latest offering of white from Mother Nature when the call came.

"Hi, baby, how's your weather?"

"Oh, it's in the 50s now and supposed to get into the 60s later today. It's really hard to get in the Christmas spirit when it's so warm."

Twerp. I think I'll send her a package of Christmas spirit — but not by mail. It'd melt before it got there. I'd probably have to buy dry ice.

Which is faster, anyway, UPS or FedEx?

I think I'll provide her with a white (or at least wet) Christmas this year.