

Encourage graduates to live, work in Oberlin

As graduates file across the stage this week, how many of them have been encouraged to learn and study and return to Oberlin, or even to some part of rural Kansas, to help make this a better place?

Our seniors will collect thousands of dollars in scholarships from colleges, civic groups, businesses and the like. Most of that money was earned here, by people who spent their lives building a business, a farming operation, a life on the plains.

Early on, we knew we wanted the best for our children. We wanted them to have the best education possible before they went on to whatever they would do in life.

At first, a great many of them did come back. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, it was expected that children would continue a family business or farm.

All that changed with the end of World War II. The so-called Greatest Generation came home from war wanting other things — a better life in the city being first among those.

And since then, fewer and fewer of our graduates have come home to run businesses, to keep farms going, to make life better for rural America.

And we raise money each year to pay them to go. We send our own children off to university with little hope they will come back, even though this is a good life.

We help raise money for other people's children to do the same. At the twilight of our lives, those who have made some money often leave a chunk of it for scholarships. It's a wonderful thing, a noble cause.

But in the end, we are financing the flight of our youth to life in the city. We're paying them to flee the plains and the life our grandfathers built.

To some extent, that's just life in America today. Rural areas have been losing population. Opportunities are fewer and farther between.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The cul-

ture of small-town life changed before, and it could change again.

Why do we have to give kids scholarships so they can get a good job in the city?

Why not encourage them, with our money, to learn how to make a living and grow a business or a professional practice here, at home, where life is safe and relatively simple?

We are not talking about coercing anyone. Youths should be free to make their own decisions, and some always have — and always will — choose city life. There are things you can only do in New York or Los Angeles or Washington, after all.

But we could encourage them to value small-town life and we could give them money to study for a career in rural America.

It's our money, after all. We can give it however we like.

Every civic group, every donor, every parent is free to give preference to those who will study and come back to contribute to our way of life.

We could choose to do that. *The Herald*, in fact, does consider that when it gives scholarships. So do a few others.

But not enough. Not nearly enough.

The day should come when every scholarship raised here, or in any rural town, encourages somehow not just a good education, but a desire to contribute to a better life in Oberlin, in rural Kansas, in small-town America.

No law, no rule of life, no moral imperative forces us to keep spending as we always have spent, with no thought for where these kids will end up.

If we continue as we are, we are pounding nails in the coffin of rural life. We can change that. We should change that.

We should encourage our lifestyle, cherish its values and pass them on. Not pay kids to make a life in the crowded, crime-ridden cities and sprawling suburbs.

So why don't we?

— Steve Haynes



Watch out for the alligator

This is a story of alligators and jingle bells.

As anyone who reads my column knows, I like animals, especially creepy crawlies.

Since I've been visiting areas in the south that are known to have alligators, I've been on the lookout for them.

In Louisiana a few weeks ago, I went on a short swamp walk and saw a lot of great things — turtles, which tried to mug us; ducks; and snakes. The only alligators, however, were in a glass tank in the nature center and they were only about a foot long. Still a foot-long alligator is better than none.

So two weeks ago while we were visiting our girls and their husbands in Augusta, Ga., when eldest daughter said she wanted to visit a swamp/park, I was more than ready to go.

The Phinizy Swamp lies between Augusta and its airport. The area has always been a swamp but the city has added to it with tertiary settling ponds for its sewage lagoons. By the time the waste water gets to that area it's pretty clean and the wetlands help get out the last of the stuff you don't want in the river.

We hoped to see some wildlife and get a good walk in at the same time.

What we got was a little more than we bargained for.

We ambled over bridges built over the water and admired the view from lookout areas. We watched herons and butterflies float over the water and bugs skim along the



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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surface. There were wildflowers, cattaills and exotic trees to admire.

Then we got on a dirt road, which wound around a sand-pit size pond, we were stopped by a man in a jeep, who told us to watch out for the alligator.

Sure enough right ahead of us in the middle of the pond was a huge gator. We couldn't see all of him — just those cold beady eyes and sections of scaly back. We all walked closer and when eldest daughter and I stopped, Steve kept going.

We yelled at him saying he couldn't pet the gator.

As the reptile moved farther away, we edged as far as we could to the side of the road and past him. He turned slowly in the water and followed our every move.

Steve says I wanted to see an alligator and then freaked out. I say that just because I paid for his insurance, I don't want to have to use it.

Still, I felt my trip to the swamps was complete. I've seen a real life, in the wild monster alligator!

Back in Augusta youngest daughter has a new puppy, a miniature schnauzer named Zoey, which she is teaching to go out by ringing a small

bell by the back door. The potty training is going well except that she gave a treat each time the dog rang the bell to train it. By the time we left the schnauzer was ringing the bell every five minutes. I'm not sure who was being trained here.

Oldest daughter, who has two dogs — a lab mix called Bushy and a rottweiler/elephant mix called Khan, said she tried the bell method on Khan, who weighs in at 115 pounds.

She put up a string of jingle bells on a leather strap, she said. Unfortunately, Khan ate the device — bells, strap and all.

At this point in the story, youngest daughter looked aghast.

"I found a jingle bell in your yard last week," she wailed. "It was all rusted and gross so I threw it away. Oh cr**."

"Yep," her sister replied with a smile. She knew that the dog had barfed the bells all over the kitchen floor about five minutes after consuming them. But, she didn't tell her sister that.

Me, I just laughed until I was sick.

Life dreams become a reality

It's graduation time again. When I read the future plans of these high school graduates I see their dreams of a bright future. Little do they know how dramatically those plans will change.

Life will begin to happen to them. Decisions will be made. Career paths will be determined. Some, who no one thought would ever amount to anything, will become preachers, law enforcement officers and lawyers. Conversely, those who had every opportunity and advantage, might stumble along the way.

When I graduated from high school I didn't have a clue what I would do. Hadn't even given it any thought, really. High school had been so much fun I had not looked any further.

I hadn't been scholarship material so there was no financial help. And, my folks couldn't afford college. About mid-August that summer, a girl friend called. She lived across the state in a junior college town and said, "Hey, Kelley! Why don't you come on down. The tuition is cheap and the boys are cute!" Sounded like a deal to me and that was all the thought I gave to planning for



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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the future.

If I had stayed home how different my life would have been. Probably would have married a nice hometown boy; had a passel of kids; and went to the in-laws every Sunday. It would have been a good life — but not the one I was destined for.

I've lived lots of different places, known lots of interesting people and had fun, challenging jobs.

So, for those graduates who didn't always know what they wanted to be when they grow up — I say, "Hang in there. Try everything, once. Don't be afraid to step out. Find your faith. Know what you believe. Dare to be different. And, keep learning, whether in college or not."

It might sound weird, but, I've been out talking to the iris. I said, "Come on, bloom. Bloom. You can

do it. Just a few more days until it's time to decorate graves." Earlier this month I was afraid all the flowers would be bloomed and gone before Memorial Day. Now, I'm afraid they won't be bloomed at all.

My brother, Jim, and his wife, Linda, are coming for Alumni Banquet this weekend. It's Jim's 50th anniversary year and one of the few times he has been back for a class reunion. After all the reunion festivities, I know we'll want to go visit the cemeteries together. I sure would like to have some fresh flowers to take along.

Jim is working up our garden spot. We had such good luck with our tomatoes, squash and zucchini last year, he is considering enlarging it. I hope his eyes aren't bigger than my ability to can it.

Another cat lover speaks out

To the Editor:

In a recent *Oberlin Herald* article, one of our city council board members is quoted as saying "Let's send all the cats to baby Jesus," in other words, let's kill them.

His comment relates to what he and other city council members would like to do to the cats in our town. He and others apparently view cats as an expendable species of animal best annihilated.

Somehow I don't believe baby Jesus would agree. These people do not speak for everyone in Oberlin. Many people love cats and enjoy their company and believe in the humane treatment of every living thing. Perhaps the city council needs to listen more to their constituents and talk less about their personal agendas. . . . in this case to rid the city of cats because of personal dislike and bias.

These same council members have mentioned that cats, specifically feral cats, pose a health problem.

The type of a health problem they pose has never been identified and whether these cats represent a health problem is debatable.

There is a difference between a verifiable health problem and personal opinion. But the manner in which the city council proposes to rid our town of these animals is a health concern.

The proposed dumping of poison down the sewers to kill the cats will cause dead rotting cat bodies and, the runoff from the poisoned and rotting cat sewage can and probably will leach into our water at some point; and don't forget the stench.

Has the city council considered that their plan will cause a much greater health hazard to the people of Oberlin than the current cat population?

Perhaps the city council should consider a less barbaric and more humane method of eliminating the cats, such as using live traps, possible adoption, and if necessary, humane euthanasia. Furthermore, has anyone given any thought to what will happen to the domesticated dogs and cats and other animals, rabbits, squirrels, birds, etc., that may eat the poison? And what about

Letters to the Editor

wildlife that may eat the poisoned cats? The idea of poisoning cats is short sighted at best, and gruesome and inhumane at worst with untold consequences.

This proposed solution is based on the misguided personal biases of a few people, not on the best interest of the people or the animal population in the City of Oberlin or those who reside in Decatur County.

This is not the first time cat killing has occurred in Oberlin.

Many of us have already suffered from the decisions of others who have taken the law into their own hands and killed our beloved pets through trapping, poisoning or shooting.

The democratic process is in place for a reason. If the majority of people in this town agree with the city government's blood lust, then a city ordinance should be passed. But a viable solution needs to be in place to protect our pets.

If people need cat permits to possess cats, then pass the ordinance. If cats can't roam freely, then pass an ordinance.

However, the money obtained from these permits should be used to implant a computer chip in each cat and a reader so that the "dog/cat catcher" can verify which cats are permitted and develop ethical solutions for the remainder.

Slow down; save a child

To the Editor:

This letter is directed to the person who couldn't slow down at Commercial and Cass Avenues on May 5. You hit and killed a squirrel.

This corner is a major intersection for children from south of Commercial, who cross here twice daily to attend the grade school. Next time you travel through this intersection, keep in mind that you could have killed a child.

Marlin Bowen
Oberlin

Perhaps, the city council should review state laws regarding cruelty to animals before they make a final decision. Animal abuse is a felony offense. A crime is still a crime regardless of your personal biases.

While we are on the subject of health problems, one has to wonder if the city council members have spent any time working out viable solutions for other issues our town is confronted with such as contaminated water wells, electrical outages, snow and ice covered streets and potholes, water shortages and sewer problems, to name a few.

Or are these short-sighted individuals dreaming up equally obnoxious solutions for these problems, too? It seems like the city council has plenty of unresolved infrastructure problems without spending its time planning the barbaric demise of the cat population in Oberlin.

Surely the city council can control their blood lust long enough for a sensible and humane solution to be put into place as well as focus on solutions that appeal to everyone rather than to satisfy the cruelty of a few. Plus, maybe they should focus on the issues that really matter!

I wonder what People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals would do if they got wind of this?

Fred Anderson
Oberlin

From the Bible

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

St. John 10:14-16

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