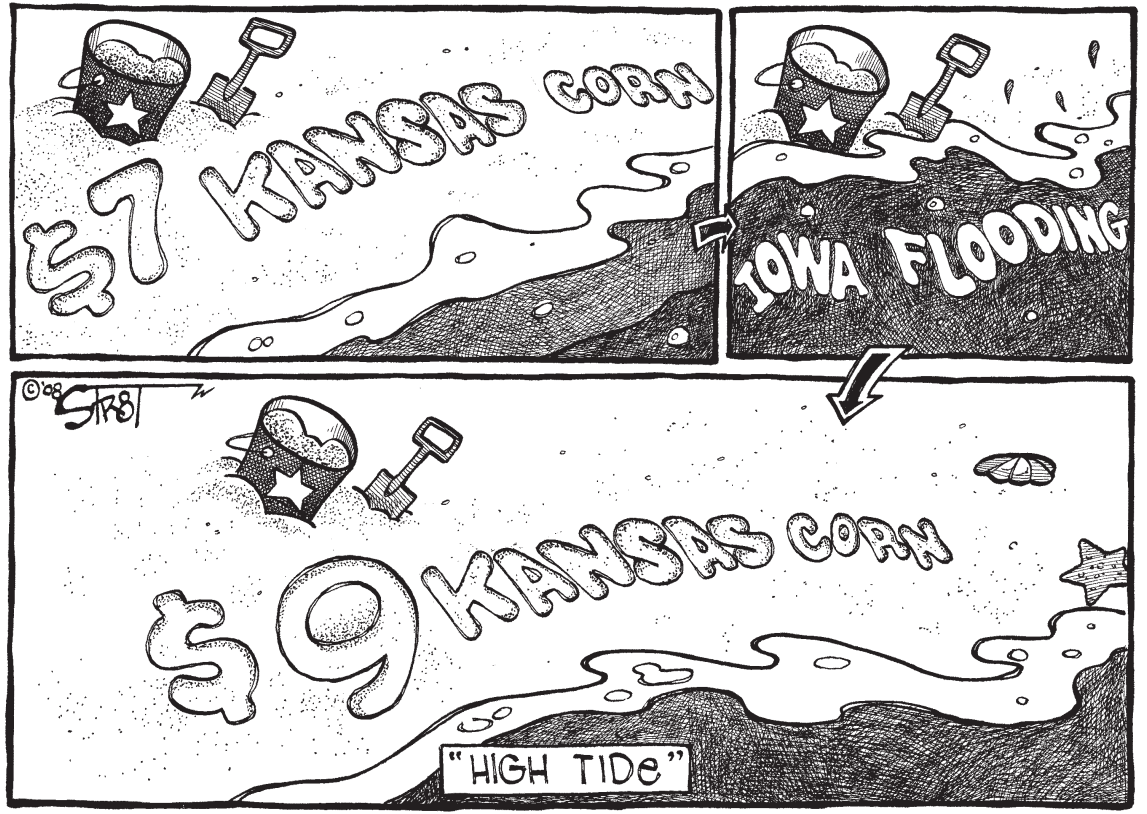


What does lack of a pin say about the candidate?

Is Barack Obama a patriot? Was he before he started wearing an American Flag pin? Does it matter whether he salutes the flag during the Pledge of Allegiance or the National Anthem? What about his wife, Michelle? Do we care if she'd ever been proud of her country before her husband's victory in the primaries? Does all that matter? Yes, and maybe no. Everything the candidates say, everything they do, everything their families and friends and supporters do and say, means something. Sen. Obama didn't used to wear a flag pin, not until opponents started to point that fact out. Now, he wears one some days. That probably says something about how he feels about patriotism and the flag. Or maybe it only says something about how he feels about flag pins. A lot of people don't wear one every day. That includes a lot of politicians. It's a sign Barack Obama is not Lou Dobbs, the anti-immigration CNN commentator. But not a sign, necessarily, that he's anti-American. If he didn't love this country, why would he give up his former life to serve it? His wife's comments, while not exactly politic when you think about them, should not be surprising, coming from a young, activist woman in her situation. She didn't say she didn't love her country. She just said — whether she meant it or not — that she'd never been proud of it before. Probably, she meant she never had been so proud of it before.

And you can't fault her for that. A lot of people might agree. Then there's the comments this weekend by former Gen. Wesley Clark, who disparaged Sen. John McCain's military record by saying it didn't necessarily qualify him to be commander in chief. Gen. Clark, a former NATO commander, probably thinks his experience is superior, but voters have said otherwise. His campaign for president, like Sen. McCain's fighter jet, went down in flames. Capt. McCain, a Navy pilot who spent five years as a prisoner of war after his plane was shot down over Vietnam, took offense. And while it's true that the Arizona senator and probable Republican nominee never advanced to flag rank, as his father had, he has served for years in the U.S. Senate, overseeing in part the nation's foreign affairs. In any event, his military experience far exceeds Sen. Obama's. Who's most qualified to be commander in chief? The voters will have to decide. Our view is that voters will divine something about the Obamas' thinking from their comments and actions. Some will like it, some will not. The same can be said for the candidates' experience. Some may want a leader who's never been in the military, who brings "fresh" thinking to the White House after a few years in the Senate. Others will want a seasoned veteran of both worlds. In November, we'll know. — Steve Haynes



Best show down in the pit

Readers, be warned. This column involves women throwing intimate apparel. Grown women. Matronly women. If you or your children find this a sensitive subject — and I'm sure the kids will — best cover some eyes. I have to admit, I was a little naive, not knowing what to expect from a Tom Jones concert. Sure, the Welsh singer was a heart throb when we were in college back in the 1960s. I remembered his hits from those days — "What's New, Pussycat?", "Delilah" and "She's a Lady," for instance — and knew he was still out there, but he hasn't exactly been a hit maker lately. Back in the day, he had a weekly television program on ABC and filled stadiums for concerts, but then, didn't they all? But while I followed the careers of Linda Ronstadt and Bonnie Raitt, I can't say I ever felt like buying tickets to see Tom Jones. So I was, uh, a little unprepared for what would happen when friends told us they had tickets for us to see his concert Thursday in Biloxi, Miss. "Sure," we said. "Why not?" I can't say that either Cynthia or my hostess, Amy, are exactly Tom Jones fans. (Cynthia gravitates to elevator music, country rock (for swing dancing) and Jimmy Buffet.) But I know neither Bill nor I was prepared for this. My first warning came when we entered the foyer and came face to face with two huge posters, one of a clean-shaven young Tom Jones in tight leather pants, leaning into the mike, the other of Sir Tom Jones at 68, in not-so-tight pants, beard and a smile, holding a big cigar. Women were snapping them up. Inside, still well before the show, we made our way to our seats. I



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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smiled at a nice-looking blonde matron of 55 or so. She was absolutely squirming in her seat, but I didn't for one minute think I had anything to do with that. After we sat down, a young couple sat to my left. "Are you a fan?" asked Jamie, a perky 20-something reporter from west Mississippi, "or did you just come to make your wife happy?" I told her I thought Amy had bought the tickets. "Me, too," said Jason, Jamie's husband. "Well, I didn't have to go to that 'Sex in the City' movie," I said, and that got a grin. We high-fived. And soon enough, the great man came out, wearing relaxed-fit pants, a red sports coat and his trademark open-neck black shirt. Women screamed again. "I wonder if he has to dye the chest hair," Cynthia whispered. About then, Tom started another song, and Jamie grabbed my arm. "Isn't this great?" she shouted, jumping up and dancing. Pretty soon, I noticed a couple of women edging up to the stage. One threw a pair of panties. A security guard politely ushered her back toward her seat, but the other one got off a shot. About that time, Jason sneaked out, saying he was going to the restroom. That took about five songs, and when he came back, he'd fortified himself with a second beer. Jamie disappeared for a while, too, and I'm not sure where she went. As the show wound on, the carpet of underwear began to grow. White ones, grey ones, pink ones, red ones. "Bet you didn't know Depends even came in red," Cynthia whispered. The security crew — an older man and an even older woman — had increasing trouble shooing the women away. Then Tom said, "If you want to dance in the aisles, this is the time." And that was pretty much all she wrote. The man retreated to the wings. The poor woman tried her best to guard the stage, looking first one way, then desperately, the other. Finally, she just gave up and started bobbing to the music. Exactly an hour and a half — and three curtain calls — after the show started, Tom went off and the house lights came up. The women began to file out. Tomorrow they'd be grandmothers again. Except for Jamie, barely a mother. But she was beaming. "I'm so sorry about your ears," she said. I just smiled and nodded. Bill, Jason and I had survived. In fact, I'd have to admit, ol' Tom put on a pretty good show. But not as good as the one out in the seats. Or the one in the pit.

Sense of humor survives loss

Jim's dad had surgery last Tuesday, and the doctors removed his left leg a few inches above the knee. We came to his room shortly afterward, while he was still pretty groggy from the anesthesia. He roused up and said, "They cut off both my legs." We quickly pulled back the covers and found his right leg still intact, toes and all. "No, Dad. You've still got your good leg," Jim said, "but, if they had of, you wouldn't have a leg to stand on." I know it's kind of macabre humor, but Dad got it and chuckled. Guess he knows his son's sense of humor. When we saw him Saturday, he was sitting up in a recliner, eating lunch. His appetite is good and he is steadily improving. He's gaining strength every day and if his kidneys will catch up to the rest of his progress, he'll do fine. There's no mention of going home yet, so it's still a wait-and-see proposition. We know Dad has some good years left, and we want him to be able to find some enjoyment in them. —ob— Before I leave for work this morning, I have to run a bucket of cherries through the pitter. Our little cherry



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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tree was loaded, and Jim picked them while I took a nap Sunday afternoon. I will sugar them and get them ready for pie. I'll put about two cups each in baggies, add sugar and pop them into the freezer, ready to make pies. I made a pie from them last year, and put in too much thickening. It was like I had developed a new building compound. The slices were like bricks. They tasted OK, but were definitely firm. No runny cherries in that pie. —ob— I'm still planting flowers. Every pot on the place has flowers poking out of it. Some stores are selling the last of their bedding plants for 10 cents a six-pack. They look a little sick, but for that price, you can afford to take a chance. I've had pretty good luck. Usually, all the plants needed was room to grow, a little sun and lots of water. We're trying to get more perenni-

als established. The day lilies have taken hold and some "showy" flowers I like. I have some shasta daisies and some black-eyed susans, too. I spend a lot of time weeding flower beds. Maybe someday, I'll have time to do them right

From the Bible

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Psalms, 67:17 - 18

Katrina erased coast history

Remember spelling it out in school — MISSISSIPPI — the Deep South, where stately, tree-shaded antebellum mansions line the roads — and the beach? Not no more, baby. Our 10th state press association meeting was in Biloxi, Miss., along the Gulf Coast, where three years ago Hurricane Katrina wrecked devastation every bit as bad as that in New Orleans, just a short jaunt down the coast. Today, people decry the loss of the New Orleans of yesteryear as the city struggles to rebuild its business and commercial base. Well, it isn't the only one to lose its history. Along the beach highway, which itself is being rebuilt, scraggly trees try to shade the foundations of mansions truly Gone With the Wind — and waves. What has come back are the casinos. Gambling is legal in Mississippi, and the glitzy, ritzy palaces of slot machines and poker spot the landscape. There are still a few of the old homes, either being renovated or rebuilt. One is Beauvoir, the last home of the first and only president of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis. Beauvoir (say "bow view," or beautiful view, and it is) was built in 1848 by James Brown, a wealthy plantation owner, as a summer



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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home. The next major owner was Sarah Dorsey, who named it. In 1877, Mr. Davis rented a side building, once used as a school, from Ms. Dorsey. He planned to spend his remaining years writing his memoirs and telling the tale of the Confederacy. Later, he purchased the home from Ms. Dorsey, who died shortly after the former president had made his first payment. She left it to him in her will. The Davis family lived there until his death in 1889. The home went to his spinster daughter Winnie and, when she died, to his widow. It is said that, although she lived in genteel poverty and was offered up to \$90,000 for the property, she would not sell Beauvoir. She left it as a home for Confederate veterans, their wives and widows. It was used for that from 1903 until the last widows went into a nursing home in 1957. The property was then turned into a memorial to Mr. Davis. Several hurricanes damaged the property over the years, but Katrina almost did it in. Three days after the storm, photos show the partly roofless building in a shambles. The outbuildings, including the one where Mr. Davis first lived, are gone, along with the porches, and most of the furniture, paintings and memorabilia. Last week, however, men were reglazing windows, hanging and repainting frescos on the ceilings and walls. Some furniture had been salvaged and refinished and two rocking chairs sat on the wide veranda porch. Beauvoir had taken a hit, but battered and torn, had weathered the storm. Out front, an equally battered statue of Jefferson Davis stands, staring out over the highway to the beaches of the Gulf. In Mississippi, people took a long time to come to grips with that unpleasantness with the North and the carpetbaggers who came with Reconstruction. They'll take about that long to come to grips with an equally unpleasant visitor, Miss Katrina, but like Beauvoir, they will.

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FFA collecting wheat for program

To the Editor: Our Oberlin FFA Chapter is growing, with many new members interested in agriculture as a field of study. We are excited with the leadership opportunities we have for our upcoming year. In order to build our program up, we need the community's support. We are an agriculture-based community, and having kids start out

Letter to the Editor

with a quality agriculture program will help their futures in agricultural jobs. We are asking farmers and ranchers in our area to donate grain from this upcoming wheat crop to the Oberlin FFA. Decatur Co-op has

graciously provided free storage for grain and the money will directly go to the Oberlin FFA. The Decatur Community High FFA hopes for a plentiful and safe harvest. Kortnie Fisher, president Oberlin FFA Chapter