

## High volume could explain many things

It doesn't make any sense but in this day and age it's not supposed to, we guess.

News out of Columbus, Ohio, tells of a rock concert that erupted in gunfire, killing four and injuring others.

That news brought about a conversation of sorts in our newsroom. We all had differing opinions on what happened.

As the conversation unfolded, we talked about concerts today in general as they compare with concerts of yesteryear.

One reporter said she and her sister were at a concert over the Thanksgiving holiday in Colorado and she said the first thing she did was to put in her ear plugs. Reason being, of course, was to keep the sound from blowing her ears off.

I told her that was strange because in my day when we went to a concert we went to hear the music.

Maybe the comparison explains why our kids today all seem to be hearing deficient. Not only do they get blown away at live concerts, but many of them live with embedded earphones.

Reports across the country seem to indicate that test scores in our school systems aren't up to where they should be. Perhaps the explanation is simple. Perhaps our kids aren't hearing what is being taught as clearly as they should because of the unbearable volume of music that is roaring into their ears — be it via earphones, vehicle sound systems, sound systems in their bedrooms. Everywhere.

They tell me that a new store in the Hays mall features music so loud that customers elsewhere in the facility complain, as do other merchants. But a request to tone it down did little to satisfy those who felt it's a nuisance.

We live with volume, massive volume. And it doesn't seem to be anywhere near changing. Next time you call your kid and get no response maybe it's because his/her hearing has been abused by the volume he/she allows to batter the eardrums.

Huh? What did ya' say?

— Tom "TD" Dreiling

## Holidays evoke memories

Sights, sounds, and smells can be strong reminders of the past.

The changing of the seasons can bring nostalgia and recall times of loss, recovery and renewal.

The distinctive colors and characteristics of different times of the year serve as cues to memories of events of the past.

The memory of a specific event can also be colored and modified by the season in which it occurred. A family gathering, whether it be a wedding or a funeral, in the warmth of spring or summer, under a lovely blue sky will take on more positive memories than the same event that occurs in the gloom of a cold, cloudy fall or winter day.

The holiday season evokes many of these memories, which can bring joy as well as sadness.

Seasonal decorations add color, sparkle and cheer to a home and community. The smell of cookies baking in the kitchen brings anticipation of plans for family gatherings, yet can also be a reminder of someone who is now missing from those events.

The sound of holiday bell-ringing creates anticipation, but may also bring thoughts of a time when life was a struggle, and a reminder of changes through the years.

Such memories are developed early in life, when a child is unaware of the stress

### High Plains Mental Health

Karen Beery

and conflicts taking place among the adults in their life. To the child, everything appears as beautiful decorations, wonderful gifts and pleasant surprises.

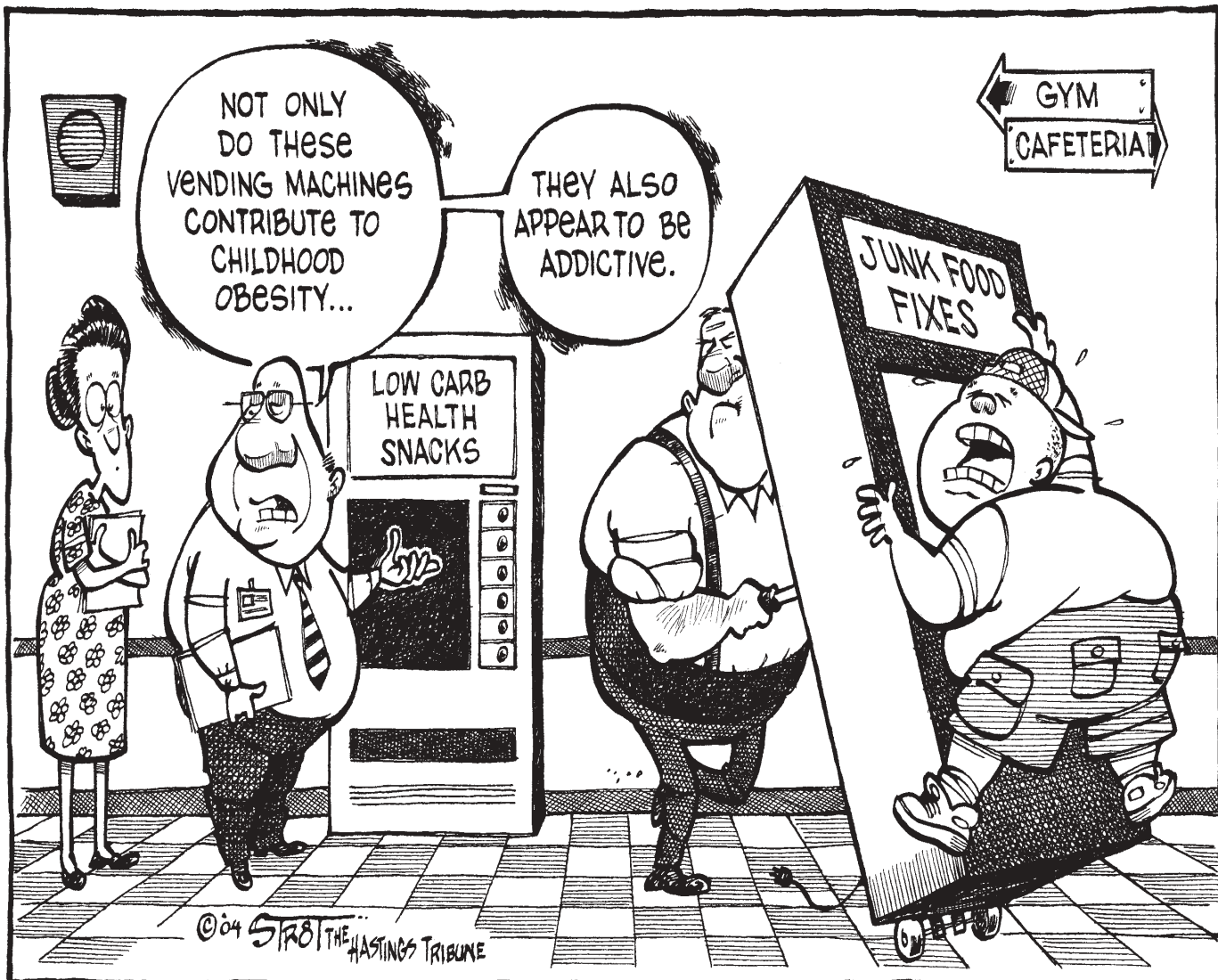
When those memories are brought to mind in adulthood, the events of the current year may not seem as enjoyable in comparison. And they fail to recognize that this is an unrealistic comparison.

The association of sights, sounds and smells, along with biological changes in mood and behavior are important components of both physical and mental well-being.

Sudden, intense memories can result in feelings of both joy and sorrow. It is important to understand that these are normal human reactions that usually decrease in a short time.

These views here are those of Ms. Beery and should not be considered a replacement for seeking professional help.

Mail questions to High Plains Mental Health Center, Plain Sense, consultation and education department, 208 East 7th, Hays, Kan. 67601



## Christmas done the simple way

I love Christmas but since we had moved all the Christmas decorations (when we packed them away last January) I threatened to go on strike this year.

No holidays this year I proclaimed. The youngest went into her cutest pout. "We'll have presents won't we?" she cried.

Then my sister called. Her daughter had figured out the best way for us to get together was at our house the day after Christmas. So I decided I couldn't be a complete scrooge. And I started looking around for some simple ways to make the house look festive.

I stockpiled anything red or green, watched HGTV and went into action. At the risk of sounding like Heloise I would like to share some of my ideas for Christmas without the usual stuff.

Do you have framed photographs? Get out the wrapping paper and cut out snowmen or Santas and put them on top of the photos until January. These are especially pretty grouped together in gold or silver frames. Plan ahead and save your Christmas cards for this project next year.

Do you have baskets? Fill them with pine cones, skeins of red and green yarn, fat quarters of red and green fabrics or Christmas craft books, magazines or cook

### Back Home

Nancy Hagman



books.

Do your kids have teddy bears? Get some ribbon, tie seasonal bows around their necks and place them around the room.

You can buy candles for a song. Group red and green ones on a white turkey platter. Put inexpensive glass votive holders on a mirror in the center of a table. This is beautiful when lit.

I have a small collection of milk glass from my mom. I put it on the buffet and filled some pieces with colorfully wrapped holiday candy. Crystal can be grouped for a similar effect.

I have some Christmas china but this year I plan to make do with paper products. I found some in blue that I liked. Rather than set a table I stacked the plates on a white tablecloth and folded the napkins on a tray. One blue candle really set it off.

I put some red berries in the cornucopia from Thanksgiving. Right now it is probably my favorite thing. You can buy little sprigs of greenery on picks for as little as three for \$1 if you hit the right sale. Randomly place them on bookshelves and among your knick-knacks.

Potpourri is another favorite of mine. It looks good in all sorts of containers and adds to the sensory experience. I also think every house needs a poinsettia.

I will confess I found one box of decorations that I had not moved and I did go through the stuff I moved until I found the Christmas stockings. I made them so lovingly when they were babies. (with Patricia's name misspelled — don't ask.)

I wrapped some presents. Wrapped presents are a fabulous way to decorate a dark corner. I don't have a tree but I have the spirit. I am really pleased with how things are looking and, of course, it brings home the true meaning of Christmas. I realize I don't need all that stuff I moved. I don't even need the stuff I've made do with.

This will be a simple Christmas, and hopefully a meaningful one, but lest you think I am really reforming; I am already thinking about the stuff in the boxes in the other house and how I can display it next year.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Soldier writes letter about life in Iraq to his family

(The following is a letter from Master Sgt. Jerry Chambers in Iraq to his family, dated Nov. 17, 2004. Sgt. Chambers is the son of Bruce Chambers of Norton.)

Things are still fine here in Iraq. We still get mortared daily, although they are less frequent and somewhat sporadic here lately.

On the evening of Thursday, Nov. 11, we had an insurgent rush from down south due to the NATO forces attacking and trying to stabilize Fallujah. Guess they figured they would come up here and try to raise hell since the area has been, overall, somewhat peaceful in comparison to the rest of the country throughout the whole war. They tried to overtake our base perimeter about 20 meters northeast of my barracks and were met with overwhelming firepower.

We were shooting back at their AK-47s with 50-caliber machine guns, M-249 SAW light machine guns, M-16 rifles, AT4 rocket launchers and fragmentation grenades. It sounded like World War III going off right behind my building. It lasted for about a half-hour, then the Kiowa attack helicopters came in and used their 30 mm cannons to obliterate the area.

It got fairly quiet in our area after that. I had about six soldiers who wanted to go outside and try to videotape the whole thing (in the dark), and they made it just outside the front door when I caught them and really had to lay down the law about real bullets and real combat. They came in fairly quick when a couple of rounds hit the building and trees out front.

That was the most that really happened, other than occasional little skirmishes here and there, but the little Iraqis still find time to mortar and shoot every day some-

where near the base.

The Kurds from up north sent about 800 troops this past week and they have orders to kill on sight anyone with a weapon who is not a NATO soldier, Iraqi National Guard or Iraqi Police. I understand the Kurds terminate with extreme prejudice and that Mosul "will be the most peaceful city in Iraq, before long."

We try to stay busy during the day. We have a laundry mission with two laundry units set up here on the base, and do about 40 bundles per day average, which is not really that much (kinda like our house when I haven't done laundry in a week). It takes four soldiers for that mission.

We also have to man the Sustainer Library, which in and of itself is a joke, because nobody seems to care about using it, so we have to tie up one soldier with that daily. In addition, we have a clothing repair shop which takes one more soldier each day, and business there is really slow.

Our main missions consist of manning a Fire Point tower on the perimeter, which takes six soldiers working in shifts from 5 p.m. to about 6-6:30 a.m., and the convoy missions 95 miles north of us on the Turkey border, and it takes seven soldiers.

The remaining five soldiers are kept busy filling in on standby for the other missions if someone gets sick, etc.

Then that leaves me. I do all the daily, weekly and monthly reports to the battalion, attend the battalion meetings three times per week, handle all the personnel issues, create the work rotation schedules, and anything else that keeps the soldiers doing their jobs and occupied.

On our down time, the younger kids usually play X-box until the wee hours, some watch movies, and recently I have taken up reading again. I have read two

fiction novels in the past week and a half, totaling about 1,000 pages. I forgot how I could get into a book, and sometimes I read until 1 a.m.

We also play Texas Hold-em for chips, and Monopoly, etc. They have a movie theatre here, but they mostly do something like a "Wesley Snipes day," where they play a whole bunch of his movies. Once in a blue moon they have something that looks interesting, and a few go check it out. Other than that, it is mostly boring.

I have made a good friend in Staff Sgt. Bryan Brown, an active duty soldier stationed in Hawaii, who is originally from Texas. He is the operations NCO with the 540th QMCO, who we are replacing. We work in the same office all day, and trade Richard Pryor standup comedy bits, of which we are both big fans. He is a funny guy, 30 years old, black, and listens to music like ABBA, the Beach Boys, etc. He has some hip-hop, but says that he can't stand most of it.

The rest of the 540th have been really helpful in getting us settled in and making contacts on the base. Their commander, Capt. Donahue, is shorter than Capt. Mitchell, if you can believe that. What he lacks in height, he makes up for in common sense, though.

Well, can't think of a lot else to tell you at this point, so I better get busy doing some master sergeant stuff.

I think of you all every few minutes, and love you all very much. Hopefully I can get home for leave here in the next six months sometime. We'll just have to see how it pans out.

Master Sgt. Jerry Chambers  
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