

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Let's just call this: 'Thursday's thunder'

Oxymoron is defined as a figure of speech in which opposite or contradictory ideas or terms are combined, such as thunderous silence, sweet sorrow. A reader e-mailed this one, which tops all others that have crossed this desk:

“Oxymoron” — Removing the Ten Commandments from the courthouse while making people in court swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God ... while their hand is on the Bible!

Is it just us or does it also sound to you, like in the case of Kobe Bryant, that it isn't Mr. Bryant who's on trial but the victim?

Carol Moseley Braun, one of the nine Democrats seeking the office of president, is expected to drop out of the race today. Her support was next to nothing, she is deeply in debt and her only message was simply to remove the “Men Only” sign from the White House door. Talk was she will endorse Howard Dean's candidacy.

Reports today are that front runner Mr. Dean is slipping in Iowa and Rep. Dick Gephardt is gaining ground. Reports also say that Sen. John Kerry is making a move and is statistically tied with Mr. Dean. And reports further say that Sen. John Edwards is making a run and picked up a point or two over the past three days. If Kerry is in a statistical tie with Dean, then Dean can't be the front runner. If Gephardt is gaining ground, on who is he gaining? And if Edwards picked up a point or two, where is he in the polls? Here's what all those reports mean: we've got a bunch of confused people reporting.

The northeast part of the country is experiencing cold like they haven't seen for years. We are trying to understand that. Gosh, just a week or so ago here in Colby, the morning low was minus 11 (without figuring in the wind chill). That's bitterly cold, but we don't recall the networks putting reporters on the ground out here. And speaking about reporters: if it is as dangerously cold as they tell us it is, why do some of them stand in hurricane force winds with chills minus 30 or lower, with no head cover? (That minus 11 in Colby occurred on Jan. 6.)

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius gave her State of the State address earlier this week. Not bad. We were pretty much satisfied with most of what she proposed. Maybe she can hold the legislature's feet to the fire this session.

We see where Barbara Walters has an interview with another superstar who is facing a murder trial. A part of the interview with Jayson Williams was on the tube this morning, the rest tonight. Why is it that those with names get to state their cases to millions of people, while ordinary John Q Public gets no such break? How often in the past month or so has Michael Jackson and other family members controlled the airwaves in the quest to convince the world that Michael is just a regular guy with no problems?

—Tom A. Dreiling, publisher

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Thank goodness for Aunt Dorothy

Unbeknownst to me, my Aunt Dorothy has been writing short stories based on information she has gathered over the years about our family.

Not only was that a surprise to me, but then on New Year's Day, my cousin, Greg, who lives in McPherson, called to say that all family members were getting their own individual volume with those stories included.

The reason for my aunt writing these stories, compiling them into 17 separate notebooks and then mailing them off to other family members, was twofold. First she wanted to share these adventures with her entire family and secondly she is hoping that each of us will contribute our own stories to the notebook.

Maybe there are a lot of families already doing something similar to this, but for my family (here in Colby) it was exciting to read about five generations or more back who traveled from the east coast to Kansas. And had it not been for my aunt's enthusiasm, these stories might have been lost forever.

The notebook couldn't have come at a better time either. It will be something I can read for the next few weeks and then begin writing stories for others to (hopefully) enjoy.

As I have mentioned before, I am a native Kansan, but instead of being from northwest Kansas, my family settled in the northeast part of the state.

Yet before the majority of the family migrated to Atchison and along the Missouri River, the great-great grandparents first traveled from Bangor, Maine to New Orleans following the Atlantic coast to the Gulf of Mexico and paddle boating up the Mississippi.

In my aunt's account of those days, my great-great-great grandfather, Jeremiah and his wife, Mary Ann, first settled in Leavenworth. What I found comical about this was that in my aunt's writings she said Jeremiah was asked by the city fathers to take the job as the first sheriff of the town.

The reason it was funny was because my aunt said Jeremiah was a Methodist minister and protested the thought of becoming a sheriff.

"How could I mix two careers like that?" he told the board. "Anyway my gun skills would invite desperadoes to rob you bank."

In response, the board members said they



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

didn't want a gunman, but rather they wanted a man people could trust who was educated and would give moral fiber.

Unwittingly, this ancestor agreed to the job as sheriff and without realizing it, he had decided to take the job in one of the most harassed and bandit-ridden parts of the territory destined to become "Bloody Kansas."

Even though he kept the job as sheriff for many years, the day came when he stepped down and moved about 60 miles up the Missouri River to a new place that was eventually named "Geary" in honor of Union General John White Geary.

In my aunt's writings, she wrote about so many adventures of family members from the early 1800s and up.

Something I hadn't thought about until reading the pages of this notebook was the way people planned vacations. In one of her stories, she said her father had always wanted to take the family on a river rafting trip to New Orleans from Doniphan County on the Missouri-Mississippi Rivers. The idea was to build a raft when the family wasn't farming and then after harvest to make the journey. Once in New Orleans, my aunt's father wanted to then sell the raft and return on a steamboat. The one thing I am not sure about after reading the story is whether or not my great-grandfather ever made the trip. I will need Aunt Dorothy to clarify that part.

There's just one other story I would like to mention from the book. According to a story my aunt retold that my father apparently remembered was their grandfather going to market in Atchison.

The trip to Atchison (and I assume from Geary) took a day's work by horse and buggy. Once their grandfather arrived in Atchison, he spoke with the man at the market about his watermelons. The man at the market said he would

give Collis Roundy (the grandpa) five cents each for the watermelons, which Aunt Dorothy described as grown in "the rich, sandy soil of the river bottoms."

The story goes that their grandfather didn't argue with the man, but instead he parked in front of that market, printed a sign, "Free Watermelons," and gave every one of them away. The next time he came with a load of watermelons and from then on, the man at the market gave him a fair price.

As I mentioned earlier, this compilation of stories is a way of remembering all those people who came before. Although there are funny accounts of the family, there are also many stories dealing with tragedy ranging from early deaths attributed to fever and pneumonia to devastating fires and more.

There are so many things we take for granted today as well. For example, in those early, early years, communication was poor and most of the news was told by river boat captains, etc. House fires were also common (at least in my family) because in those days there weren't "fireproof" materials in constructing homes.

Even what attracted men was somewhat different in those days. For instance, women didn't want a beautiful, dark suntan like all of us want today. Rather, women went out of their way to make sure their skin stayed extremely light by using crushed cucumbers and sour cream.

That would be great for me since I am so light-skinned. Actually, it's really bad in the summer when I try wearing shorts and my children jokingly say, "Wow, mom, better get the sunglasses out so we don't have to squint looking at those legs!"

As I continue to read these family stories, it's a great feeling to know more about them and I am so glad my aunt decided to get us started.

The only catch for the book is that when we contribute our own personal stories, we need to send them to the other 16 families on the list and vice-versa.

So far I haven't found too many stories of procrastination, so maybe there's a good chance all of us will take pen in hand and start writing.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Thursdays. E-mail her at pdecker@nwkansas.com.

The syndrome strikes

Rosie Stockton

- Rosie's Route

she was on a trip to Washington D.C., I gave her a call one day and she said, "Mom, you will never guess where I am? The top of the Washington Monument!" That was so cool. But it is still sad to know that things will never be as they are now. Where we have had a close time, enjoying one another's company as two adults, as friends.

I am so glad for the time I had raising my daughters and I truly wouldn't trade those years but once again a person can either change and grow or die. I have watched various families through the years that didn't let their children go, to experience the world; yes, it prevented the hurt of separation but there was so much potential destroyed, as well, that it would never be worth doing as far as I am concerned.

I am dealing with this in the way I have always dealt with situations similar to this, praying and writing. Writing is something that I have done ever since I can remember. I can remember doing it even before going to school even though it was just scribbles, to me it was special. I am a person that thinks out loud, but when I can write things down it is like I am getting thoughts out of my system, but if saved, hopefully the words can be used for encouragement, growth and education in someone else's life. The expression of words on paper is the overflowing of the emotions, thoughts and feelings of my heart. It is helping someone "feel and see" without a picture.

I have been very involved in my children's lives, by being a stay-at-home mom, helping

start the private-school they attended, home schooling them and then being very involved with the daily details of their lives while they were in public school and community college. Now that chapter in life is closed and I am facing the issue of, "what is the next step for me as a person?"

I am still a mom and always will be, but that is an evolving process. I am still a wife, however that relationship will also change since the dynamics in our house have changed.

There is still lots of time involved, talking to the girls long-distance, thank goodness for unlimited nights and weekends on our cell phone, instant messaging on the Internet, sending them care packages, and going to see them as often as a trip can be squeezed into our schedules.

But the time has come after twenty-one years of hiding behind the thought, "I don't have time to really do what I want creatively or career wise because I'm too busy with the girls." That can't be an excuse anymore. I must either put up or shut up. I have to get serious and say, "What is it that I want to do or be and what steps do I have to take to do that or become that person?" Or will I be a "Yeah, I could have done that kind of person. But I never followed through to find out if it was true or not."

Do I have the discipline to be the best writer I can be or the best graphic artist I can be? What can I do to develop all the parts of my life and continue to grow? That is the scary part. It is something I have to do, but thankfully my husband is very supportive and hopefully there will be other people along the way that will be there to pave the way with encouragement and challenges.

So not only is January 2004 the beginning of a new year, but in our family it is the beginning of a new phase in life.

We turned the page on a new chapter.

Rosie Stockton of rural Colby is a frequent contributor to this page.