

America is being held hostage

What is wrong with this picture: Pirates, really just children in leaky boats, carrying rifles and grenade launchers, rule the high seas. They seize ships and demand multi-million-dollar ransoms, which shipping companies and insurance firms are only too willing to pay.

Pirates lurk off the Horn of Africa, among the islands of Indonesia and the Philippines, even in a lake between Mexico and Texas.

When threatened, they murder their victims, then surrender. They know somewhere, they'll get a fair trial and maybe even wind up living in the free world.

The world's most powerful navies – from the U.S., China, England, Germany, Holland, France, all the great and small powers of the civilized nations – seem powerless to stop the pirates.

When pirates are caught at sea, they claim to be fishermen. Instead of blowing them out of the water, the world's navies just let them go. Their arms are seized and they get a slap on the wrist.

Their masters have more boats and more children to send out to sea, anyway. What do they care? They're making a lot of money.

Shipping companies resist arming their vessels. They claim it's bad for business, and besides, just having armed guards might not deter the pirates. Never mind that these kids attack tall steel ships from wooden boats and have to climb the sides to take over a freighter or tanker.

Government officials claim they can't track pirate vessels in an area so vast as the Indian Ocean, though that seems disingenuous in an era when spy satellites can see virtually anything that moves on the face of the globe and computers can be used to interpret images.

The situation is remarkably like the one that faced the American Navy and Marine Corps in their earliest years, when President Thomas Jefferson sent them to subdue the Barbary Pirates who preyed on Mediterranean shipping off North Africa. The Marines went ashore to assault pirate bases, as we may have to ask them to do in Somalia today.

In that era, more than 200 years ago, the pirates seemingly had all the advantages. Today, surely the world's great and most civilized nations can find some way to discourage and defeat vicious pirates. It must be done.

Our forces should be able to back up international law with military might. They should treat the pirates – and their warlord masters ashore – as the terrorists they are, showing no mercy and giving no quarter.

If arrests and trials will help, by all means arrest those willing to surrender. The rest, treat them with the same mercy they show their victims.

The civilized world cannot afford to be held hostage by pirates, whether off Africa, in southeast Asia or in Texas. Freedom of safe transit on the high seas is too important to all nations to be abandoned.

Unless the world reacts, there will be more killings, more kidnappings and more bloodshed. The time to make a stand is today, not after it's too late to save the next victims.

– Steve Haynes

Dear Editor:

The American Cancer Society has been an active member of Norton County for many years offering a number of patient and family services, cancer support groups, tobacco control programs, lifesaving educational tools and research. The Society continues its mission thanks to the help of generous volunteers and dedicated staff.

The American Cancer Society Relay For Life of Norton County is a community event in every sense of the word. It is a chance for Norton County to come together for one common cause. Being part of Relay For Life means I'm part of a national grassroots movement to fight cancer. Being a Relay For Life volunteer means I'm making life better for cancer survivors, patients, and their families.

But we are faced with a critical shortage of volunteer leaders. With the challenges of our economy and day-to-day demands, time has become a premium and many people are finding it more difficult to participate in community service. It is because of the volunteers who preceded us, however, that certain types of cancer are now highly treatable or even curable. With more help, we will continue to win the fight.

The American Cancer Society needs your help now. Plans are under way for the annual Relay For Life of Norton County, hosted at Court House Square on May 13-14, 2011, to fight for every birthday, threatened by cancer, in every community, including our own.

Now is the time for individuals, families, organizations, schools, religious groups, corporations and small businesses to build a team and join our fight to reduce the burden of cancer across America. Relay For Life can be the site of a company picnic or family gathering while supporting a great cause.

To sign up to participate or to learn how to form a team, call Dana Hanlon at 785-202-1528 or visit www.RelayForLife.org/Nortoncountyks.

Sincerely,

Gayle and Jay Walsh

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785-669-2131

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Finding answers to some big questions

When we get together the girls and I sometimes exchange books. So I've come to be reading "Eat, Pray, Love," by Elizabeth Gilbert. A book that poses some really big questions!

The daughter who was moved to buy it after seeing the movie, wishes she had read the book first.

Another, who has only read the book, wonders how they ever made a movie. She also marvels as to how a person can afford to just go off and spend a year in pursuit of one's best self. Gilbert addressed this: she got a book advance! I'm admitting I missed much of the point of the book by saying this: Gilbert may have been fiscally responsible but she is more than just a little self indulgent.

Still I learned a great deal from the PRAY aspect of this book. Transcendental Meditation has been a hot topic in Smith County, where I live. A while back land here was purchased by followers of the Maharisha Yogi. They began building a "University".

It seemed like such a nutty idea I was surprised at how threatened people were. Since reading "Eat, Pray, Love" I think the "University" was to be an Ashram, a place where enlightenment is sought. In the ensuing years the Maharisha died and most of the land has been sold back

This Too Shall Pass

Nancy Hagman



to area farmers.

I have done a little Yoga for Arthritis, which is merely an exercise program. This aspect of Yoga is Hatha Yoga. It was developed to loosen up muscles to prepare them for sitting in stillness for hours during meditation. I felt it helped me. But at our Wellness Center it was almost forbidden to mention because it was not "Christian." The DVD I followed did not include any "meditation".

The whole experience really took a turn towards ugly and got me to wondering exactly what meditation is? I always sort of thought prayer was meditation.

Gilbert says prayer is when we talk to God and meditation is when He talks to us and we reflect on what He is saying. Yogis (those who meditate) come from all faiths, even Christian.

In her book Gilbert also says, "The Indians around here tell a cautionary fable about a great saint who was always surrounded in his Ashram by loyal devo-

tees. For hours a day he and his followers would meditate on God. The only problem was that the saint had a young cat, an annoying creature, who used to walk through the temple meowing and purring and bothering everyone during meditation. So the saint, in all his practical wisdom, commanded that the cat be tied to a pole outside for a few hours a day, only during meditation, so as to not disturb anyone. This became a habit, tying the cat to the pole and then meditating on God—but as years passed, the habit hardened into religious ritual. Nobody could meditate unless the cat was tied to the pole first. Then the cat died. The saint's followers were panic-stricken. It was a major religious crisis, how could they meditate now, without a cat to tie to a pole? How would they reach God?"

It is risky to take something that was helpful in one set of circumstances (tying up a cat) and apply it for all time. It is healthy to question "Why are we tying up a cat?"

I'm not exactly certain I would recommend this book to anyone else. I can understand why some might find it offensive. Parts of it offended me. I plan to take what I can use and apply it to my life. And keep looking for answers to the big questions.

We need cooperative funding to continue

Once when I was working for a non-profit agency, a time honored tradition for Christmas was threatened. No one would step to the front and take responsibility for its completion, even though many children took part in the activity and parents were dedicated to bringing them. The problem is the parents' enthusiasm for the activity did not translate into support. There is much to be learned from this story.

As the federal budget crisis looms, we must look at activities we enjoy. Are the projects we embrace important enough? We either need private funds or increased taxes if we are to sustain the programs. For instance, I am a great fan of the Public Broadcasting System, PBS, but does it have the citizen support to sustain it if federal funds are withdrawn?

Perhaps it is time to also reexamine the rules for food stamps and housing support. Years ago, in the 1980s, it was said if each church took responsibility for one welfare family we could eliminate welfare rolls. I remember when Jack was teaching for CCC. He had a large number of single mothers in class, working two jobs, taking classes and all to put food on the table, improve their quality of life and remain off the welfare rolls. Hard work? There is no question about that, but also a builder of pride and positive civil responsibility.

As a community, are we dedicated

Phase II

Mary Kay Woodyard



enough to our educational system to support it with taxes? Not just sports events and facilities, but education itself. Therein lies the problem, we want the services, but we don't want to pay for them.

To meet our budget crisis we must call upon our personal dedication to our pet projects and a better understanding of others' passions. The U.S. ranks at the lower end of the tax structure at 28 percent, as compared to other developed countries, the average being 36 percent. Countries such as Sweden and Belgium are near 50 percent. Are we willing to increase our taxes to accommodate our projects, be they defense spending or entitlement programs? Are there positive impacts to increased taxes? Considering the U.S. is not in the top ten for a high quality of life, perhaps. The infant mortality rate in Sweden is 2.74 per 1,000 births and in the U.S. it is 6.06. As for adults the U.S. life expectancy is 78.37 and Sweden is 81.07. Maybe a dedication to caring for one another has positive benefits. Of the

top ten countries with the highest quality of life, the only one with taxes similar to ours is Japan; all others who claim a high quality of life also pay more taxes. Food for thought.

In 2008, over 38 percent of our federal spending was discretionary including things such as defense, agricultural subsidies, highway construction and federal courts. Mandatory spending which includes Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, disability, food stamps, etc. amounted to 54 percent. In 1962, mandatory spending accounted for about one fourth of our federal budget; in 2008, it was over half.

The reason we are at a stalemate now and in the past is just this. We each want to fund our particular interest at the expense of those we find less desirable. Arthritis received little attention until Jimmy Carter's mother publicly acknowledged her problems. Stem cell research for Alzheimer's didn't become a national concern until President Reagan was diagnosed.

Jack recently said, "If you want civilization you must have cooperation." You have to be willing to fund some projects you don't embrace, just as your opponent must do, otherwise all you have is the bully in the schoolyard. <<mailto:mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net>>

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