

Getting the facts first

It may seem strange to see media criticizing itself, but just about everyone should recognize how poorly handled the coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing was.

Covering breaking news is never easy. You are dealing with inaccurate information, because nobody ever knows all the facts right away. You are also dealing with officials in government and law enforcement whose first instinct is usually to withhold information.

This leads news organizations to go elsewhere looking for as much information as they can, usually in the name of getting the story out there first. There has been a disturbing trend in the national media of using social media – websites such as Facebook and Twitter – as a substitute for real news gathering. The problem there is these sites are a poorly regulated and free for where anyone can say anything.

The sheer amount of hoaxes perpetrated on a daily basis by social media users is reason enough not to trust any reports posted. A few hours after the bombing, photos circulating on social media site Reddit caused people to pin the attack on an innocent person. A few days after the bombings, the Associated Press' Twitter account was hacked and posts were made saying the White House had also been bombed. It hadn't. You could fill Grand Canyon with the number of celebrity death hoaxes put on Twitter each year.

But the national news organizations and most especially the partisan talk shows will insist on using these as sources. This leads to mistakes and inaccurate reports that can cause real harm.

As a result of this, the only news reports you can trust are those from about two weeks after a major incident.

Relying on unreliable sources is probably the cardinal sin of journalism. You need to have real reporters doing real reporting: observing events, talking to people at the scene, verifying information with officials. We understand this is difficult. Most newspapers have felt the economic squeeze over the past few years and have reduced their staffs. But for big, developing stories, it is essential to get someone there to verify everything. Do not take social media at face value. Do not repeat anything until you know it's a fact.

When our college had its minor scabies outbreak a few weeks ago, a Wichita TV news station sent a reporter to Goodland. Whether or not you think this story should have been important enough for that, it shows a willingness on their part to send a real person to the scene to get the truth.

That's what should happen. If something is happening, send a reporter. You need trained journalists on the ground to talk to people and observe for themselves what is happening. Do not rely on "crowdsourcing."

As they say in the military, "There's no substitute for boots on the ground."
—Kevin Bottrell

Simple tricks and nonsense

Kevin Bottrell



I'll be done spring cleaning next spring

Ever since our return from Guatemala I've been planning to clean house. I mean really clean the house. The kind of house cleaning where you move the furniture, wipe down the walls, wash the windows and dust the baseboards.

This weekend seemed like the time to do it and the bathroom was the sensible place to start. First, I had Jim move the cute little bench and towel cabinet out to the family room. Then it was sweeping, mopping and sanitizing. The shower stall received a thorough cleaning; even the shampoo and conditioner bottles. How they get so grimy, I don't know.

By this time I was running out of steam and said, "I'll finish this tomorrow." Which meant the cute little bench and towel cabinet were still in the family room. Sunday is a full day for us and it was after 5 p.m. when we got home. A nap is usually our first priority and after that a light supper. That made it about 8 p.m. before I could drag myself back into the bathroom to finish what I had started.

When we built the addition to our

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



house, Jim designed and crafted my one-of-a-kind dressing table/vanity. I call it a diorama. It sits at a 90 degree angle to my sink vanity with a three-tiered, raised-panel cabinet in the corner. It is about five inches deep with a glass top. Inside are sand and seashells, reflecting my bathroom décor theme. He even wrote a little "love message" in the sand. It's my favorite thing.

However, it's also a flat surface. In our house "flat surface" translates into: a place to put things when you don't know where else to put them. I began by sorting things into small plastic baskets, according to purpose. Lotions went into one basket. Hair products into another basket. Candles, clippers, Kleenex, address labels, paint can

opener, thumbtacks, ink pens, sun visor, sunscreen, the list goes on. Where does it all come from? The bigger question: where does it all go?

The bathroom was mostly done Sunday night, but a few things remained. Early Monday morning thumping and scraping sounds awakened me. It was Jim moving that cute little bench and towel cabinet back into the bathroom. Oh, I still have a window to wash and the walls to wipe down, but all-in-all I'm feeling pretty good about it.

However, (there's that darned "however" again) at this rate it will be next Spring before I get the whole house done and then it will be time to start all over again.

—ob—

I saw a quote from P.J. O'Rourke on Facebook. He is an American political satirist and has a "pithy" outlook on life. He wrote, "If you think healthcare is expensive now, wait until you see what it costs when it's free." I like this guy.

Freeze worsens the wheat growers woes

Just when Kansas wheat growers thought this year couldn't get any worse, Mother Nature dealt them a cruel blow with a record freeze. April 23 may have driven the final nail in the coffin for some wheat fields in southwestern Kansas.

Temperatures were plenty cold in Ford County where Rick Konecny recorded 18 degrees for an overnight low. East of his farm Dodge City reported a 23 degree night and north in Garden City the mercury dipped to 19 degrees.

"I'm not sure if our wheat crop can survive this freeze," Konecny says. "This is a pretty severe freeze for this time of the year."

But while he's worried about the wheat crop, the veteran Ford County farmer hasn't given up hope.

"Who knows what may happen," he says. "We'll have to wait until it warms up. You can never count a wheat crop out. When you do, it'll prove you wrong."

Compounding the late April freeze was an earlier freeze when temperatures dropped as low as 13 degrees on April 10. After this killer freeze, Finney County farmer Gary Millershaski said his wheat looked like someone sprayed a defoliant on it.

When you couple these two hard freezes in April with the continuation of a three year drought – some label as the worst since the 1930s, you have a recipe for disaster.

That's been the case on Konecny's three farms within a 22 mile radius

Insight

John Schlageck



west of Dodge City. During a two and one-half year period, his land has fallen behind by 34 inches in moisture. That's in a region of Kansas where the annual rainfall is 16-17 inches per year.

With no subsoil moisture and no rainfall, the winter wheat crop on Konecny's farms looks bleak.

"We see some clouds once in a while," the dry-land wheat farmer says. "A front occasionally moves through and the forecast is for moisture but all we receive is a couple points of precipitation."

Konecny's wheat crop 22 miles southwest of Dodge City is "virtually gone."

Brown spots started to show up in early April.

"This wheat crumples in your fingers," he says. "This year's crop never got going."

Freezes are a funny thing, Konecny says. When a freeze hits a dry plant that is already stressed for moisture it disrupts the cellular structure and even though the plant may still look green, it kills it, he says.

"It's kind of like when you take a flower or leaf and press it in a book," the Ford County farmer says. "It may maintain the same color but there's

nothing there. It's not a live plant anymore."

While many believe a wheat crop has nine lives, Konecny doesn't believe this adage holds true this year. Couple that with his last three wheat crops that averaged 25, 5 and 3 bushels-per-acre, the prospect of another wheat failure would hit him square in the heart and deep in the pocket.

"It's very hard right now," he says. "As a farmer I'm used to producing, you want to produce a wheat crop. It's your livelihood. It's how I grew up. Harvesting a good wheat crop helps define me and my self-worth. There's a real weight that comes on you when you deal with three years of drought and raising very little grain."

Continuing to farm represents a legacy of several generations, Konecny explains. He feels not only responsible for his immediate family but the future of his children and the rich tradition of family farmers that were his parents and grandparents.

"Late at night, you sometimes wonder, 'Am I done? Can I continue to farm? How long do I go on with 50 years and the better part of my life devoted to farming?'"

In spite of the dire circumstances and the prospect for another drought and crop failure, Konecny says he'll keep the faith and pray to his God to help him weather this drought.

"We simply go through the effort as farmers," he says. "I just always try to uphold my end of the bargain and pray. He's always seen us through."

Dear Editor,
In answer to Mary Kay Woodyard's article in the Telegram on April 19.

As a legal gun owner and an avid member of the National Rifle Association I feel the need to defend my rights under the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

In Mrs. Woodyard's article she inferred that NRA members are, as she put it, "afraid" to submit to background checks. NO we are not afraid! We are fighting any illegal infringement on our rights to buy and own guns for legal purposes.

Mrs. Woodyard seems to think that back ground checks would deter these criminals' intent to murder and maim as many as they possibly can. Will they go to the local sheriff and submit to a back ground check?

On that same note, maybe we should infringe on Mrs. Woodyard's First Amendment rights and require her to submit to a back ground check before she is allowed to speak or write her article!

Yes, the NRA did spend lots of money to defeat this illegal legislation. This money came from NRA dues and donations. How many tax payer dollars were spent promoting this illegal legislation??? Wake Up America!!!

Allen E. Braun
Rural Norton County Resident



Thumbs up to Shelbi McKenna for making the Colby Community College Dance Team and Cheer Squad for the 2013-2014 school year. Great job Shelbi! Brought in.

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