

## Local newspapers showing importance of a good story

By Lamar Alexander

I learned about the importance of telling a good story – something your publications try to do each and every day – from a Tennessean who was a dear friend of mine. His name was Alex Haley and he became famous for telling stories, in particular those of his African ancestry in his best-selling novel, *Roots*.

Perhaps most importantly, he lived his life by these six words “Find the good and praise it.” When I think about the good in our Tennessee communities – what makes them strong and special – hometown newspapers telling local stories certainly qualify.

The power of stories is all around us. Alex Haley once told me that when I went to make a speech that if I told a story instead, people might actually listen to what I had to say. I’ve found that to be true. And small, hometown newspapers demonstrate the power of storytelling – both the good and bad facing their communities – in a way that can be difficult to come by in our 24/7 media environment.

For Alex Haley, the power of stories came to him when he was a child, listening to his grandmother and aunts tell the stories of his ancestors.

He used to say that his Aunt Liz and Aunt Plus, sitting on the porch telling those stories, could knock a firefly out of the sky at 14 feet with an accurate stream of tobacco juice. Alex Haley went on to tell those stories in *Roots*, the story of Kunta Kinte – an African who was captured and sold into slavery – and his ancestors.

For community newspapers, stories take on many forms. Our Founding Fathers wrote the First Amendment into the U.S. Constitution to protect the rights of the American people to organize and speak up and speak out. Local newspapers play a vital role in helping people do that – covering local government activity and sometimes unveiling problems facing a community or its leaders. Our Founders even used local newspapers to speak out as they organized against the King, and wrote the Declaration of Independence.

There’s also plenty that local newspapers do to bring people together. From covering local community events to telling the stories of local residents, small, hometown newspapers tell people what they need to know to feel connected to one another. Sometimes these stories can even inspire.

And despite how much media has changed in recent years, local community newspapers can also do quite a lot to connect people to the outside world. I know this to be true as I work on fixing the federal debt, taking more decisions out of Washington and back to Tennessee and pushing back against the regulations that are throwing a big, wet blanket over the economy.

I can’t always expect the voices in local newspapers to agree with me. But by asking questions and writing about issues of importance to Tennesseans (and letting me have my say in a story or opinion column once in a while) community papers provide an important service.

And whatever the major issues of the day, good stories surround us always. I think back to my friend Alex Haley, and a man he met in Knoxville named Joseph Rivera. Alex found out that Joseph couldn’t read, so he taught him and then wrote about him in *Parade* magazine – a great example of his motto “find the good and praise it.”

Tennesseans in communities all across our state could just as easily pick up a copy of their small, hometown newspaper. It’s important to see our shortcomings. But it’s also important to find the good and praise it, and local newspapers do that for their communities every time they go to print.

## Be the church, be the community

Hats off to the Norton Christian Church. We have seen their sense of community with the operation of The Rock. Last weekend they took it a step further and they deserve recognition, not only for the work, but the idea and organization of the event.

The ad in the Telegram stating “Don’t Go to Church” was bound to get attention and it certainly grabbed mine. One of the chief complaints of many is the Church, no matter the denomination, is out of touch with the general population. Over the years, churches have frequently set themselves apart in their community of residence, creating more of a schism than a bond. Norton Christian Church set out this weekend to be in the community.

One person noted the good works done in her neighborhood on Sunday morning, as she watched them mow, clean up and yes, minister, with their hands. A very real presence was not just felt, but seen.

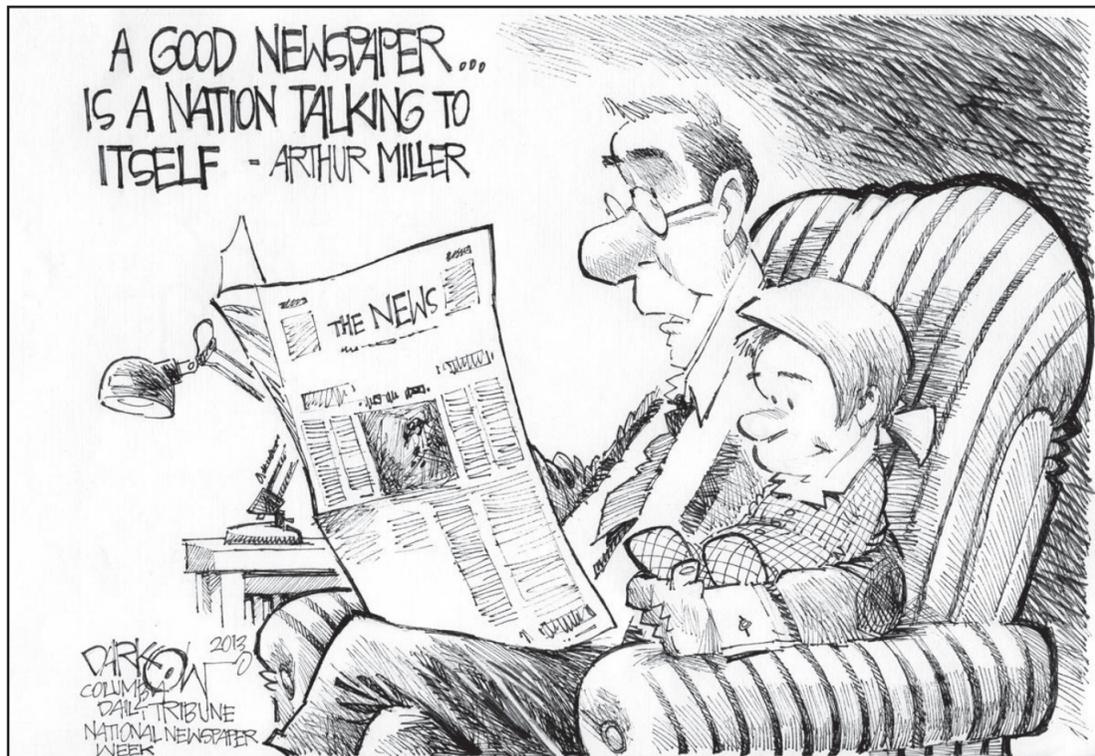
I am reminded of the story of a church in Strasbourg which was de-

**Phase II**  
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stroyed during WWII. Upon further examination, they realized the statue of Christ remained, however the hands were “sheared” off by a giant beam. Many years later an architect offered to fix the statue. After deliberation, the church elders decided to leave it as it was, depicting the idea that WE are the hands of God.

My hope is the Christian Church will take the next step to make it at least an annual event, if not more often, and to invite other churches to share the idea and the day. I think God would say to them, “Well done, my good and faithful servants.” mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net



## Best laid plans for a great pie

More often than I like to admit, things don’t come out of my kitchen like I want. Case in point, the lemon meringue pie I tried to make.

I had picked up a few lemons to make this awesome dessert called “Angel Pie.” Trouble is, I ended up not making it and there the lemons were. Thursday I noticed that one lemon had already spoiled so that night I decided to make lemon pies and baked two crusts to have ready to fill early the next morning. Son James often eats lunch with us on Fridays and I thought homemade pies would be a nice treat.

I planned to work a few hours Friday, so I wanted to have everything ready so all Jim would have to do is reheat and serve. With that in mind I prepped all the ingredients. I zested the lemons, poured the milk, measured the corn starch and combined it with the sugar and a dash of salt. Using my antique juicer, the lemon juice was measured and the eggs separated.

Since I was making two pies I knew my double boiler wouldn’t be big enough so, improviser that I am, I set one small kettle inside a larger one holding water and set them on the stove to heat. With water boiling, ingredients were added, and the prescribed constant stirring began. The recipe said it would take about eight to ten minutes for the filling to thicken. Twenty minutes later

**Out Back**  
**Carolyn Plotts**



I was still stirring and it looked more like lemon soup. The clock was ticking my workday away. All I could think to do was add more corn starch. Three more tablespoons and still nothing. By now, almost an hour had lapsed and I was done. I decided a “rescue attempt” would have to be made later and turned the heat off.

Jim and James were ready for lunch so I hurriedly made some French fries and reheated cheeseburger bundles I had made the day before. “Sorry guys,” I said as I headed out the door, “No dessert today.” They didn’t seem to mind. Give a guy meat and potatoes and he’s happy.

That night I gave up on the double boiler and set the pot holding the potential filling directly on the burner and cranked it up, after adding just a little more corn starch. Any of my readers who are real cooks are already beginning to see disaster looming on the horizon.

As the mixture heated it started to

get a little “gloppy” on the bottom. I determined it needed more power, so while continuing to stir with one hand, I reached into the cabinet drawer for my hand-held mixer. Holding the mixer between my knees (still stirring) the beaters were installed and the electrical cord plugged in. The switch was made from stirring to “full throttle” power. Instantly, lemon globs were flying everywhere. Oops! Too much power. One thing about that mixer – even on low, it puts out a lot of RPMs.

Power off. Switch back to stirring (I’ll clean the ceiling later).

Well, at least it thickened up. But I had come this far and I wasn’t about to stop. We were going to have pie, and like it. There was no pouring the filling into the shells. It had to be “plopped” in with a spatula and then “smushed” down level.

Meringue on top, browned gently, cooled nicely. Looks good. But then, you know how looks can be deceiving. Let’s just say, “It really stands up in the pan.”

Bless my husband’s heart. He actually ate a piece and said, “Not too bad.” And that’s probably why we’ve stayed married 19 years. He’s willing to overlook my faults and know that I’ll do better next time.

## The government shut down shuts us all down

**This Too**  
**Shall Pass**  
**Nancy**  
**Hagman**



I still have faith in human nature and believe that most of the furloughed workers are chagrined at their extended paid vacation. It is not what they want.

I am also praying by the time this column goes to press the shutdown is over. If it has been more than 20 minutes no one will even remember it happened. One thing I’ll say for people no matter where they stand on the political spectrum, everyone has Attention Deficient Disorder.

Case in point: remember the crisis in Syria? Weren’t we ready to attack them for using chemical weapons or something----blah, blah, blah?

All we had to do to solve that problem was create another (shut down the government)!

Genius! I’ve voiced the opinion that if the Affordable Care Act was really so terrible the opposition should have just let it happen. What could be better? When it all went south as predicted they wouldn’t even need to say, “See, I told you so!”

Giving them the benefit of the doubt, I guess they could not in good conscience stand by and let something

they thought was truly dangerous go into effect.

As it turns out just attempting to sign up for Affordable Care has turned out to be a disaster. So bad John Stewart had Health and Human Services Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, on the Daily Show chiding her ever so gently about how things are going.

It is interesting to me that Sebelius and Affordable Care champions maintain it will affect only 15 percent of the population but now that their website has crashed are surprised at how many people are trying to set up accounts.

Did they not understand how many people 15 percent of the population is? If they could handle 15 percent, maybe it is affecting far more than predicted? Hmmm, were some of the claims (on all sides) misleading?

As an employer, Hagman Hilltop Farms, Inc. got a letter from some government agency informing us we must let our employees know of the options available under the Affordable Care Act.

I told the hubby. He rolled his eyes. The letter’s last line: If you have questions you may wish to consult your attorney!

Think of that for a moment. Most of our elected lawmakers are lawyers.

Think of Dilbert. I’m not into conspiracy theories but perhaps the Affordable Care Act was just a marketing ploy.

Let’s just give ourselves huge raises and do nothing at all!

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