

The power of a thank-you note

I have a fascination with handwritten thank-you notes. Right off the bat, I must say I've written only a handful in my lifetime.

It's a remarkable gesture: taking the time to buy a card or pick up a note, raising the pen, composing a message, delivering your gratitude. That's truly thoughtful. The people who make a habit of doing this, I think, are very special. Tex Winter was one of those people.

The former Bulls and Lakers assistant coach passed away recently at age 96. When a friend of mine let me know, the news stuck. I knew it would. I always thought I would write something about Mr. Winter when he passed away.

To be honest, I didn't know what I wanted to write. I just knew I wanted to share the story of someone who wrote me a handwritten thank-you card.

In the summer of 2004, I was a sophomore-to-be at Eastern Oregon University. I wrote for the La Grande Observer in my hometown in Eastern Oregon. I also worked at a KFC. My dad, Jim, works at Grande Ronde Hospital. One of his old co-workers — a sweet-as-can-be woman named Jeanette Baum — knew Mr. Winter well. They had attended Oregon State University together. Winter's late wife, Nancy, and Mrs. Baum were Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority sisters. Winter went on to coach collegiately and professionally, and the rest is history. He accrued nine NBA championship rings and was inducted into the Hall of Fame after innovating the triangle offense. That summer in '04, Mrs. Baum told my dad Mr. Winter was coming to town to visit her family. I think she had heard from my dad that I loved the NBA.

I wanted to write a feature on Mr. Winter for The Observer. A date was arranged, and on that day, our home phone rang. The caller ID showed Mrs. Baum's number. I was nervous and excited. I picked up and it was Mr. Winter: "Hi, Dan," he said. "This is Tex Winter. Where would you like to meet?"

We met at Mrs. Baum's house and he drove me to a nearby diner, one that's long gone now. The meeting was surreal — I asked him about Michael Jordan ("He expected an awful lot from players," Mr. Winter said), about Dennis Rodman ("His life off the floor is what I worried about") and about being surrounded by stardom ("I am never starstruck. I think much of the adulation of these players is undeserved").

We returned to Mrs. Baum's house, where Mr. Winter showed me his collection of rings. I took photographs for the newspaper and snapped several shots of him next to his accolades. My day, my week, my year had been made.

The story was published, and it seemed to generate a positive response (sometimes the best feedback is no feedback at all, you learn).

After a week or two passed, a letter arrived from California. It was from Mr. Winter, on Lakers stationery. The NBA legend wrote to say thank you for the article. He also said in the letter that I had a future as a writer. I was floored. Mr. Winter voluntarily went out of his way to thank a small-town kid for writing a story that surely had been told dozens of times before.

I went on to have a decade-long career as a sports reporter. As the years passed, I'd occasionally open up my belongings in storage to look at that note. The letter, I think, says a lot about successful people. I think it says a lot about Mr. Winter, and the amazing man he was.

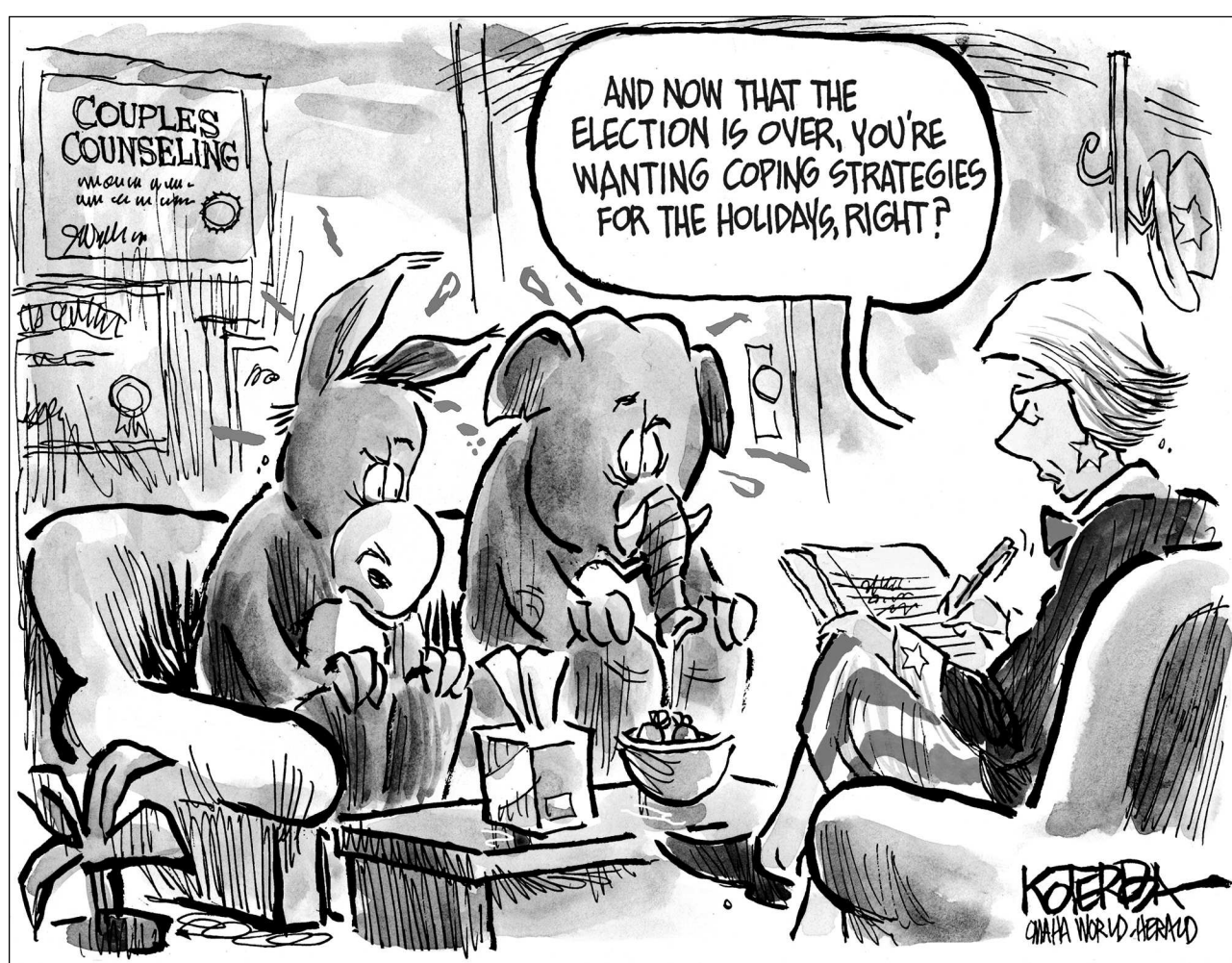
My Voice

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Jones wrote for The Observer in the early 2000s and had the chance to do a piece on Hall of Fame coach Tex Winter, who had ties to La Grande. Mr. Winter passed away in October.



My Voice columns reflect the views of the author only. My Voice columns should be 500-700 words or as space allows. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We do not fact check. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns



Your views

Peters: La Grande Soroptimists make our community better

To the Editor:
With the Festival of Trees rapidly approaching, I wanted to take a moment to call attention to what a great contribution Soroptimist International of La Grande makes to our community every year. Not only do they put on a great, family-friendly event, they also raise money to support efforts in the community to help those in need. For many years they have helped

support Community Connection of Northeast Oregon with funding to Kids Club.

This year they have also given funding to Northeast Oregon Public Transit (of Community Connection) to help our Rides to Wellness program.

Their efforts in fundraising have gone directly toward delivering Union County residents to medical appointments both inside and outside of Union County that they would not have been able to go to if the program did not exist.

As I am sure many

Write to us

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's address and phone number (for verification purposes only).

Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 5th St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

people are aware, accessing medical care in a rural community can be very difficult for reasons that range from financial constraints to the inability to drive oneself.

I believe we are all very lucky that Soroptimist

International of La Grande is so generous in financially supporting our community through a wide variety of projects.

Angelic Peters
Northeast Oregon Public Transit

The logical ends of political hate

By The Daily Astorian

Bumper stickers proclaim, "Kate Brown is not my governor." T-shirts, magnets and decals declare, "Donald Trump is not my president."

Those items are reprehensible.

They are far from the magnitude of the shootings at a Pittsburgh synagogue and the mailings of pipe bombs to high-profile detractors of President Trump.

But they are dangerous to our political souls and those around us, if not to our physical bodies. Kate Brown in Oregon and Donald Trump in America hold public offices that represent all of us, regardless of whether we agree with them or not.

Public disagreement and civilized protest can be a sign of a healthy republic, but defining your life by the protest can be destructive.

It certainly appears to have been for Cesar Sayoc,

who has been charged with sending pipe bombs to prominent Democrats. His ardent support for Trump isn't what defined his life — his hatred toward others is.

Ronald Lowy, a lawyer for Sayoc's family, described it well in a New York Times interview: "He lacked an identity. He created a persona."

That persona was stoked anonymously in a like-minded online community, and his actions, while ultimately failing their intended purpose, showed the logical conclusion to such rage.

In Pittsburgh, the consequences of that anger were tragic, as 11 people were gunned down during religious worship.

Although it will come as news to many partisans, political views can be polar opposite and legitimate. Neither Brown nor Trump deserves vilification. Neither one merits being called an extremist.

Trump has intensified America's political and cultural divides through his polarizing, us-vs.-them mentality. Sadly, many Democrats have responded in kind. There is no good end to this game. Such rhetoric might be appropriate for a football coach; but in politics, America needs more of the rugby or lacrosse style in which opponents battle fiercely on the field and then join for pizza afterward.

This is not a plea for everyone to play nicely, although that would be good. We know that one editorial cannot cause a person to say, "By golly, now I know I shouldn't vilify my political foes — just like I shouldn't run with scissors or play with lighters!"

Rather, we humbly suggest that if people are dismayed by the current political tenor — we believe most are — that they take it upon themselves to

change the tone. This might sound like a contradiction, but the place to start is with those who share their views — the candidates, political parties and organizations whom they support.

No one can change the other person, regardless of how much arguing takes place. Research indicates that such arguing usually cements a person's existing view. Instead, people have greater opportunity to influence the like-minded individuals who already have their trust. Together, help them see the value in pulling back on the rhetoric and reclaiming truth instead of pushing insinuation.

Consider what could happen if voters demonstrated irrevocable civility and demanded civility from the candidates they supported. Until that becomes the societal expectation, the current political climate will only worsen.

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