

# OPINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Let's have a happy, civil new year

As we wish all our North Coast neighbors and subscribers around the world a happy and safe new year, we cannot help but look ahead to 2018.

What will the year bring?

On the national level, it is an easy prediction that the political rifts that have divided the nation will continue. Can we do anything about that here?

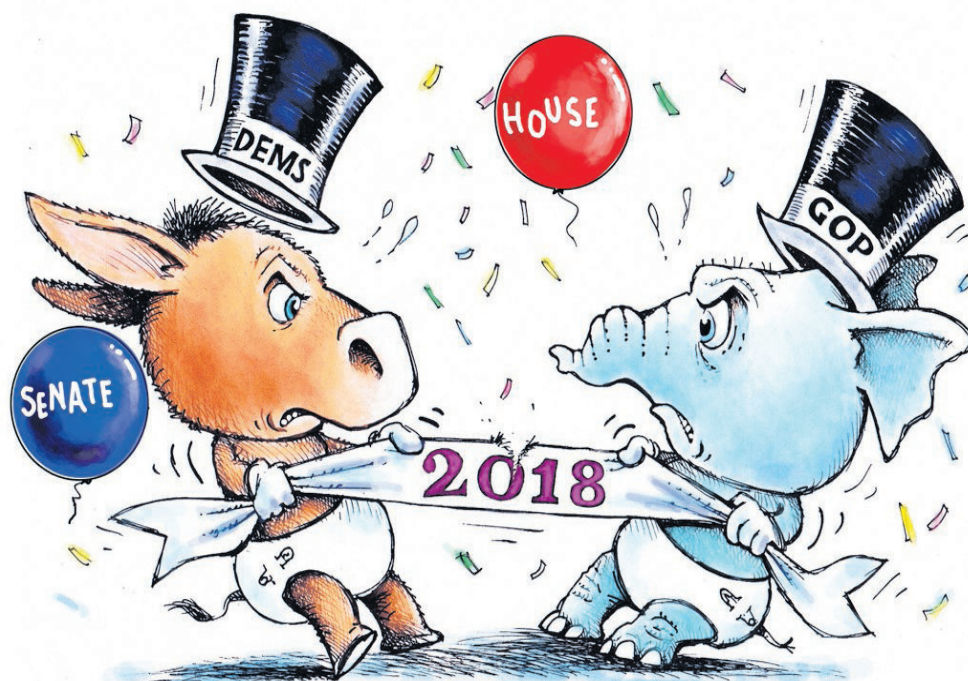
The turmoil that our nation has endured since the divisive presidential campaign and the outcome of the 2016 election is exacerbated by social media, which either deifies or vilifies Donald Trump and his like-minded party Republican colleagues in Congress.

The ugly tone is not one any of us would choose. The longer it lasts, the worse it gets.

On the Democratic Party side, Hillary Clinton remains in many people's crosshairs, though she holds no office whatsoever. And President Obama's name is besmirched and his accomplishments derided on a daily basis by people motivated by political opposition and the naked racism that continues to divide this country.

At some point our divided country needs to come together — and to do so it must re-establish a positive tone for communications. We're not even close to that right now. Beyond tarnishing our reputation in the eyes of the world, it's also stopping us from getting vital things done.

One speaker to a North Coast fra-



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**We should reach out to those with differences, and maybe try listening instead of just reacting.**

tional organization last year called for civility and offered some valuable definitions. For him, civility means politeness, showing tolerance, having patience with neighbors with whom you disagree, not talking about people behind their backs, and following the "Golden Rule."

It echoed a concept exemplified by Robert Fulghum in his memorable 1986 work, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten."

His book was subtitled "Uncommon Thoughts On Common Things" and one of its classic lines was, "Ignorance and power and pride are a deadly mix-

ture, you know?"

Yes. We do know.

So, how about we start a campaign for civility here? It has to begin somewhere; why not here?

The North Coast is a wonderful place to live, work, get an education and enjoy the bounty of the Northwest. It is also a place where neighbors help neighbors, despite their differences. Our recent 10-year anniversary recollections of the area's reaction to the 2007 Great Coastal Gale confirmed that.

How about we take Fulghum's admonitions and turn the words into action? We should reach out to those with differences, and maybe try listening instead of just reacting. If we disagree, let's keep the tone polite. 2018 can be the year for that. Monday is a great day to begin as we turn the calendar over for a fresh year, a new start, though, really, why wait until then?

Speeches and declarations might put on record the direction we jointly believe we should go. But they are useless unless they are followed by positive action.

As the writer said, "It doesn't matter what you say you believe — it only matters what you do."

Let's try it.

We suspect we have more in common than appears at first glance.

Let's ring in a happy new year in 2018.

Let's work toward a civil new year.

## GUEST COLUMN

# Nursery rhymes help define who we are

Our young minds are luminous jellyfish swimming in a sea of words. Be they magical and kind or cruel and corrosive, what we hear as babies wraps around all the rest of our lives — as comfy blankets or verminous shrouds.

Some considerable part of the joy we derive from Christmas comes from rehearing carols that conjure up living memories of childhood. Though it's hardly a timeless masterpiece, Bing Crosby's "Silver Bells" instantly transports me to the squeaking Naugahyde seat of my mother's Buick at a particular intersection on a specific frigid, slushy December day in my hometown. We're listening on AM radio to "City sidewalks, busy sidewalks | Dressed in holiday style | In the air there's a feeling of Christmas | Children laughing, people passing | Meeting smile after smile | And on every street corner you hear | Silver bells, silver bells." Today, thinking of those lyrics isn't so much nostalgia as time travel: I can touch and smell and hear my Mom as we bustle around buying last-minute gifts for Christmas 1968 in our little cowtown that was in no sense a "city."

Nowadays, there are endlessly exploding hurricanes of words, blowing up around each of us as we gluttonously gulp language from electronic gadgets and mass media tailored to each person's hungers, whims and biases. I picture a furiously spinning machine, casting off glowing clouds of frizzy sparks without illuminating anything. Too many words, too many empty phrases are fed to us through corporate hoses like the plastic tubes forced down the throats of geese being fattened for harvest.

Though the appeal of most rap and hip-hop admittedly are a mystery to me, this isn't meant to be a rant or rejection of all popular culture — how tiresome it would be to only partake in what we liked when we were 12 or 20. There is much to enjoy in every decade's music and literature.

But I worry whether many little kids today still learn the simple hymns and rhymes and riddles of a half century ago. They are still my essential words, the scaffold of who I am, and in some ways the foundation of who we all are.

### Accidental treasure finder

One of 2017's notable deaths was that of Iona Opie, described by the *Washington Post* as a "scholarly explorer of the lore and customs of childhood. ... Mrs. Opie and her husband, Peter, became accidental anthropolo-



Nursery rhymes like "Jack be nimble" are an important part of the scaffolding of our imaginations.

gists of the rites and rituals of children and devoted their lives to what was then an overlooked field of study."

Their lifetime of studying what they called "the greatest of savage tribes — the worldwide fraternity of children" turned into a treasury of centuries' worth of fundamental language, including "The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes." I ordered a copy from England in early November just after reading of Iona's death. After a sluggish interval in shipment that seemed as if it must have included a trans-Atlantic voyage aboard a wheezing 19th-century steamship, it arrived around Dec. 1 and has been essential bedside

reading in the weeks since.

It rewards careful study, with voluminous tiny footnotes that in some cases trace nursery rhymes back into periods when little of what ordinary people said was otherwise preserved. "What I was looking for — what I hope I have found," Opie wrote, "are the most mysterious fragments from our shared memory: long-ago laughter of little meaning and echoes of ancient spells."

Some of the rhymes are as familiar as your little brother's voice, things like "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candle stick." This, the Opies explain, really was both a sport and a form of fortune-tell-

ing. Especially at Christmastime, "They used to have a lighted candle on the floor and two of the old girls used to ... pull their skirts up" and sing the rhyme. To make the jump without accidentally blowing the candle out was good luck.

A rhyme I was unfamiliar with, and love, is "Misty, moisty morning," a phrase that could easily be the motto of this coast:

*One misty, moisty morning,  
When cloudy was the weather,  
There I met an old man,  
Clothed all in leather;  
Clothed all in leather,  
With cap under his chin,  
How do you do, and how do you do,  
And how do you do again?  
The dictionary includes 549 rhymes and riddles, plus many more variations, such as:  
If all the earth were paper white,  
And all the sea were ink  
'Twere not enough for me to write  
As my poor heart doth think.*

### Not all good

There's racism, sexism and every other kind of "ism" in some of these old rhymes, and plenty of violence and death: King Charles the First walked and talked | Half an hour after his head was chopped off.

Or just imagine any modern mother reciting this to her kid:

*Baby, baby, naughty baby,  
Hush, you squalling thing, I say.  
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe  
Bonaparte will pass this way.  
Baby, baby, if he hears you,  
As he gallops past the house,  
Limb from limb at once he'll tear you,  
Just as pussy tears a mouse.*

Although I can't advocate threatening small children will be murdered by Napoleon if they don't shut up, the old nursery rhymes acknowledge that childhood can be a bleak and scary time. These frights — rhymed, chanted and shared together — are defanged and put in their proper place.

Encountering in the 1970s in my Tacoma college library the original, unsanitized tales collected by the Brothers Grimm was a similar revelation — a glimpse into the dark psyche of European tribal life — nightmares given voice.

Partly, these rhymes and tales are a sign people have always enjoyed being vicariously scared, grossed out or simply silly. Beyond this, they provide a common vocabulary and way to envision the absurdities of the world.

Leaving these old tales behind could deny us the ability to actually understand one another. Let's endeavor to keep them alive.