

PARENTS TALK BACK

Debt-free college is not entitled thinking

Like many families, we talk about college a lot in our home. In a recent conversation, my seventh-grader made an offhand remark about how she needed to find a way to earn some money for college. It wasn't the first time I'd heard her say something along those lines.

It hit me that she had internalized my own incessant worry: How would we save enough to send two children, close in age, to great colleges?

The soaring cost of college is the top financial concern for American parents.

In its 2001-2015 Economy and Personal Finance survey, Gallup found that 73 percent of U.S. parents worry about paying for their children's college education. That's a higher percentage than any other subgroup worries about any other common financial concern. The second-highest percentage goes to lower-income Americans, 70 percent of whom worry about paying for medical costs in the event of a serious illness or accident.

The fear of saddling children with years of staggering debt is not confined to lower-income parents: Sixty-one percent of parents making \$100,000 or more per year still worry about it. Families who earn "too much" to qualify for need-based aid bear the brunt of massive loans that can mortgage a child's future and eat into parents' retirement hopes.

By some measures, college tuition has increased in cost more than any other good or service in the U.S. economy since 1978, according to a recent NPR report. Student debt has nearly tripled in the past decade to \$1.2 trillion, taking a huge toll on young people trying to start their adult lives.

Crippling debt is a loss of freedom. It keeps future generations from entering the middle class, which has long been the engine of America's economy.

The debate between the Democratic presidential candidates over tuition-free vs. debt-free college highlights what a centerpiece issue this has become to the middle class.

Bernie Sanders' overwhelming support from millennials — exit polls in Iowa and New Hampshire, and entrance polls in Nevada, found more than 80 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds supported Sanders — shows that he's speaking to their concerns. The Vermont senator has proposed that the federal government cover about two-thirds of the cost for states to eliminate tuition at their public colleges and universities through a new tax on Wall Street financial transactions. States would have to agree to cover the remaining third.

Hillary Clinton's "debt-free" plan would have the federal government send large grants to states, to ensure students can pay tuition without loans. States would be required to increase their allocations, while schools would face new constraints on spending. There's a component for family and student contributions, as well.

Both ideas have faced scrutiny for the associated costs and likelihood of getting state legislatures to comply. Republican candidates have criticized both plans as creating too large a tax burden on corporations.

At a time when we've indoctrinated students about the need for a college degree for future success, we've placed it further out of reach. That feels like a cruel joke.

I've told our children about how I worked throughout college and found two or three jobs each summer to help offset my living expenses. My parents kicked in what they could (not much, considering they had five other children to provide for), and I borrowed the rest. My husband worked his way through college, which he entirely self-funded.

We were part of generations that could do that.

We want our children to have the same sweat-equity investment in their future degrees. But we are aware of how much has changed.

Today's average college student, without support from financial aid and family resources, would need to complete 48 hours of minimum-wage work a week to pay for his or her courses, according to an analysis of credit-hour costs and the minimum wage by analyst Dr. Randy Olson.

That's just tuition — not textbooks, rent, food and other living expenses.

Those who say that this generation's desire for affordable access to college reflects an entitled mentality could not be more wrong. If you were able to attend college when it was affordable yet want to deny the same opportunities to young people today, you are the entitled one.

Their future is also our future. It's selfish and obtuse to shortchange it.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.



AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

FENCING: One thing he can do on his own

Continued from 1C

about wheelchair fencers.

"And then the fencing came along and that was huge, because, you know, he doesn't get to do a lot of things that are really fast," Miller said.

Barrilleaux had tried other activities but never was as excited about them.

He rode horses but had to rely on help. A few people would lift him onto the horse. Once in the saddle, he had one person lead the horse and a person on either side to prevent his sliding off.

In sabre, once his mom straps him into the frame meant to keep the wheelchairs steady, it becomes a one-on-one sport. He is equal to his opponent.

And Barrilleaux is often better than his opponent.

"He's got an incredibly cheeky cut to wrist," Aldridge said. "Everyone who fences him, they always think, 'Yes, I've got a point,' and then you realize he's already hit you on the underside of your wrist."

Barrilleaux has no intention of developing his fencing into anything but a recreational activity. However, a professional sphere for able-bodied and wheelchair fencers is a reality for some.

Ten years after being discharged from the Army because of injuries from a bombing, Leo Curtis of Beaverton is one tournament away from qualifying for the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Curtis began wheelchair fencing in 2012, mainly as a way to get out of the house. He had gone through depression and PTSD after the IED explosion that left him with major injuries to his brain, spine, ankles and other body parts.

Now Curtis is one of the world's top wheelchair epee and sabre competitors.

He enjoys fencing for many of the same reasons as Barrilleaux: the speed and the mental challenge.

"It's the same sport, but it's a different game," he said of wheelchair fencing compared with standard fencing. "Whatever I do with my blade has to be right. If it's not right,



In this Friday, Feb. 12 photo, Julie Miller helps her son, Chris Barrilleaux, get dressed for his weekly sabre lesson at their home in Aurora.



In this Jan. 8 photo, Chris Barrilleaux, left, duels with his coach Sam Aldridge during his weekly sabre lesson at Salem Fencing Club in Salem.

I'm going to get hit. So in a wheelchair, you have to be more technically precise with your blade work."

Beyond training for competitions, Curtis spends his time teaching fencing to disabled children. He gives them an outlet.

"Unfortunately, no matter where you live, there's not a lot for kids with disabilities to do," Curtis said. "We live in an area where the wintertime can be very difficult with children with disabilities, and even adults with disabilities."

He enjoys opening their eyes to fencing but also to the fact that they are able to do the same activities as others.

"It's really fun when you take somebody who has not been able to do any type of sporting event ever, or not found the one that fits with their disability needs, and they get the concept the first time," Curtis said. "They really understand what you're telling them, and they're able to do it."

"Ready."
"Fence."

OUT OF THE VAULT

Loose talk leads to murder conviction

Loose lips sink ships — or, in the case of Charles Monte, help ship you off to the penitentiary.

A daring escape on June 9, 1902, from the Oregon state penitentiary in Salem by inmates Harry Tracy and Dave Merrill also led to the death of guard Frank Ferrell. Alleged to have aided in the escape was Charles Monte, who was accused of smuggling guns over the prison wall to the escapees. He in turn implicated a friend, Harry Wright, in the caper.

Sheriff Til Taylor discovered Monte's role in the escape after a jail inmate, James Morris, came forward in April 1905 to offer information about a conversation he had with Monte while both were jailed in Umatilla County. Monte



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

and Merrill escape. Morris was hoping his information would result in a lighter sentence for his own crimes; he ended up being sentenced to the penitentiary anyway.

After state law enforcement gathered evidence on the pair, Monte and Wright were indicted on first-degree murder charges in Salem circuit court

on April 25, 1905. Monte was brought from his cell at the Salem penitentiary, where he was serving his sentence on the burglary charge, and Wright was brought to Salem from the penitentiary in Walla Walla.

Monte's jury deliberated 18 hours, and required 16 ballots, before returning a verdict of "guilty of murder in the second degree." He was sentenced to life in prison. While waiting for the street car to take him back to the penitentiary, Monte turned to Sheriff Culver and said, "How would you like to try me for something I had really done? You may have that chance in the future." It was supposed that Monte meant to have revenge on Morris, who he claimed gave false witness during his trial.

Wright was acquitted of

the murder charge in his trial, but he didn't get off scot-free. Before the murder charge was dismissed, the district attorney filed a new charge against Wright, one of larceny. He was accused of hiring a team and buggy in May 1902 under the pretense of making a short drive. He promptly drove the team from Salem to Portland and attempted to sell the outfit at a livery barn there. Wright was brought before Judge Barrett and plead guilty, and was sentenced to a year in the pen.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Robot finds 'monster' in Loch Ness — but it's a movie prop

LONDON (AP) — An underwater robot exploring Loch Ness has discovered a dark, monster-shaped mass in its depths.

Disappointingly, tourism officials say the 30-foot object is not the fabled Loch Ness Monster, but a prop left over from a 1970 film.

Billy Wilder's "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" puts the great detective on the trail of the monster — which turns out to be a disguised submarine. A model of the submarine-monster sank during production to the bottom of the 750-foot-deep lake.

Tourism body Visit Scotland is backing a survey of the Highlands lake by a marine robot to study its depths and see if there is any sign of the fabled monster, which helps attract hundreds of thousands of visitors a year to the region.

Visit Scotland chief executive Malcolm Roughead said that whatever the survey finds, "there will always be a sense of mystery and the unknown around what really lies beneath Loch Ness."

Principal won't punish ninth-graders who hired stripper

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A Des Moines principal has decided not to punish



AP Photo, File

This is an undated file photo of a shadowy shape that some people say is a photo of the Loch Ness monster in Scotland. An underwater robot exploring Loch Ness has discovered a dark, monster-shaped mass in its depths. Disappointingly, tourism officials said Thursday the 30-foot object is not the fabled Loch Ness Monster, but a prop left over from a 1970 film.

the ninth-grade girls who arranged for a male stripper to perform at their high school's synchronized swimming club banquet.

Officials say the girls employed the stripper as a joke and that the stripper didn't totally disrobe at Friday evening's event at the Des Moines Social Club. A club employee interrupted the performance

and asked the stripper to leave.

Roosevelt High School Principal Kevin Biggs said Wednesday that the girls didn't do anything illegal and didn't violate the district's conduct code.

The club has been operating outside of direct school supervision, with members raising all the money for its support. But Biggs says the district plans to place the club and its finances under the control of Roosevelt High's activities department.

Rescued calf now companion for blind cow who lost pig pal

DARTMOUTH, Mass. (AP) — A calf that spent several days on the loose in Massachusetts is now a companion for a blind cow that recently lost a pig playmate.

The cow, Baby, lives at the Don't Forget Us Pet Us animal sanctuary in Dartmouth.

The unnamed calf had escaped from Robinson's Livestock and was returned to the farm last week. It had been destined for the slaughterhouse. But Jean Briggs saw stories about its escape, used her tax refund to buy the calf from Robinson's for \$450 and turned it over to the sanctuary.

Deborah Devlin, who runs the sanctuary, says the timing is perfect. She says Baby's friend for the last eight years, Lulu the pig, died Sunday and that the cow was heartbroken.

The cow and the calf were introduced Tuesday.