

# No spring break from dad jokes

Daughter Annie and wife Cindy recently took a trip to Europe for ten days during spring break. They, along with a couple dozen other students, parents and grandparents from our community, visited Dresden, Krakow, Prague, Budapest and other cities in addition to a sobering visit to the former concentration camp Auschwitz. Son Willie and I did not even consider tagging along. Besides already being perpetually late in our springtime farm work, Willie perhaps accurately observed, "Our ancestors all left Europe for North America 130-some years ago; why would I want to go back?" Ah yes, a chip off the old homebound, provincial block.

Upon returning home, Cindy exhibited symptoms of jet lag — to which I queried, "If you had flown in a propeller-driven plane, would you still suffer from jet lag?" Nobody laughed at my amateurish attempt at humor, but it did prompt a break for the rest of the family from my interminable discussion (they called it a monologue) relating some of my personal favorite questions, anecdotes, and axioms.

More than 30 years ago, one of my best friends commented that he'd rather "have a bottle in front of me, than a frontal lobotomy." Though I've never experienced the latter, the former has proven to be enjoyable on numerous occasions.

On a somewhat related topic, I'm reminded of my favorite story concerning one of the most important figures of the last century, former English Prime Minister Winston Churchill. While attending a party at which Sir Winston had apparently helped drain a bottle or two, a woman accosted him by saying, "Sir, you are drunk." Without missing a beat the accused responded, "Yes, madam, and you are ugly; but in the morning I'll be sober." No wonder he won a Nobel Prize.

While I was in college, I worked at a pizza parlor. As I was rolling the cutter across the fresh pie, I sometimes thought of Yogi Berra and the waitress who inquired, "Mr. Berra, would you like your pizza cut into four or eight slices?" His reply? "You'd better make it four. I don't think I can eat eight."

My favorite uncle's favorite Yogi-ism was a story about Berra attending a ceremony on a sultry summer day. Dressed in a dapper outfit, Yogi drew a compliment from an equally well-dressed lady who said, "You look cool in that suit, Yogi." His immediate response was, "Thanks, you don't look so hot yourself."

All kidding aside, I have gleaned some sage advice over the years from varied and sundry sources ranging from employers to educators, neighbors to family and too many witticisms from friends to even begin to accurately catalog.

No one is ever totally worthless — for you can always serve as a bad example.

One of my earliest bosses (when I was about 14 or so) told me, "No one is ever totally worthless — for you can always serve as a bad example." There was a veiled compliment there somewhere, I believe.

A favorite teacher had a sign above the exit to our Industrial Arts building that read, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." Now those are words by which to live! I'm not sure that creative and productive physical activity can solve all of our collective problems — but it's an awfully good start. I would postulate that the crime rate among peoples and societies whose primary focus is pursuit of food and shelter and whose waking hours consist primarily of work (Maynard Krebs' least favorite four-letter word) is much lower than it is for those of us who are fortunate enough to live in "evolved and advanced" circumstances wherein work is only performed as a necessary evil to pay for all the fun stuff we do on weekends and evenings.

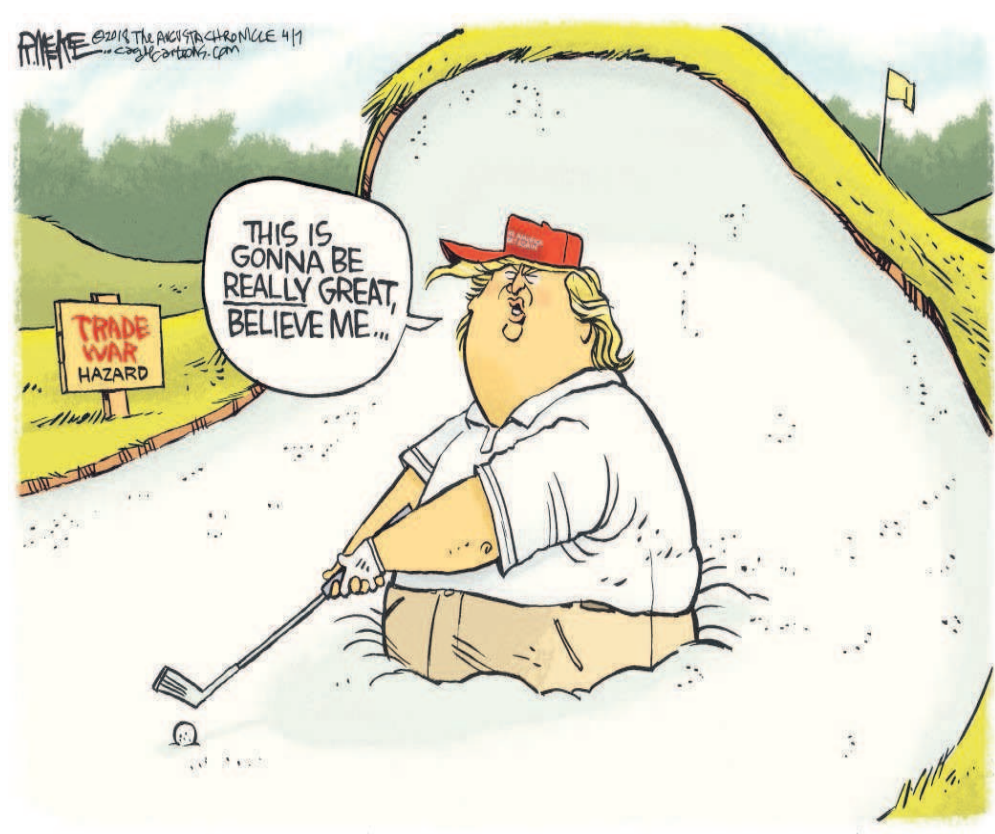
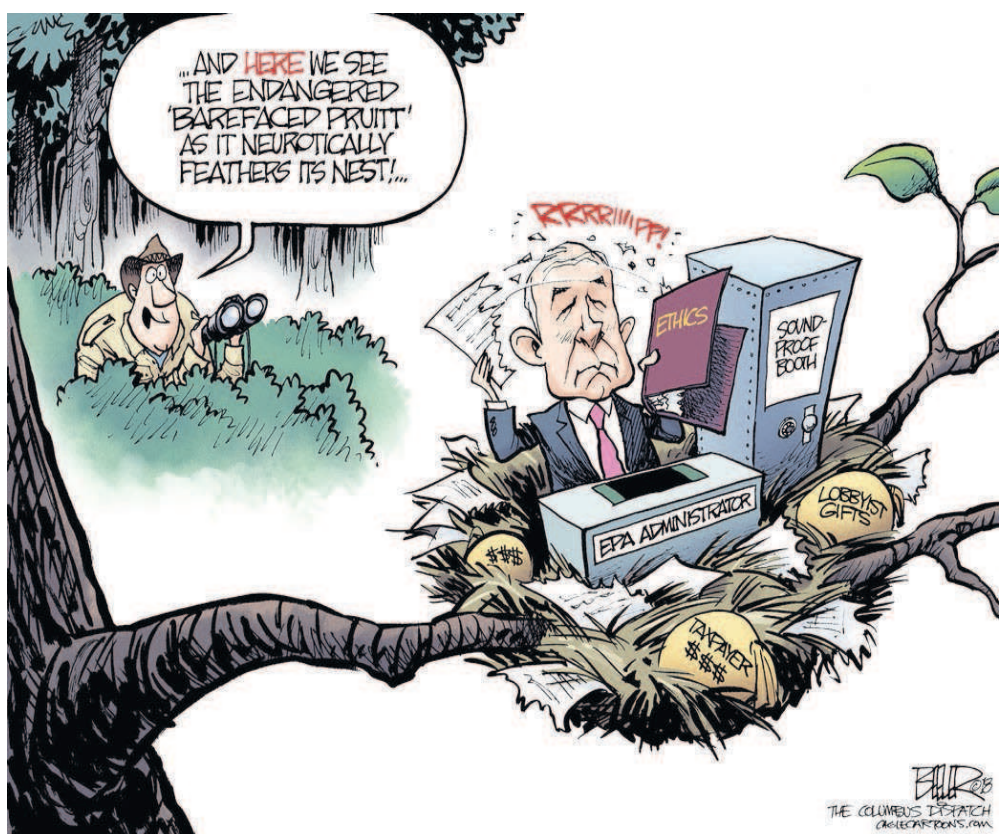
Speaking of enlightened or fully developed nations like our own reminds me of an axiom first brought to my attention nearly three decades ago by my then-faculty advisor. In one of our history classes we were discussing the progress we had made collectively in the U.S. of A. in our attempt to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. A concern was voiced that we still had pockets of civil unrest and examples of disparate wealth in America. True, conceded my wise professor, but he said, "Equality of opportunity does not guarantee equality of circumstance." That is a tough pill for my socialist friends to swallow, but no truer words were ever spoken.



MATT WOOD FROM THE TRACTOR

My admonishment to my kids when I used to drop them off at school was simple but heartfelt — Work hard. Be honest. (And, for this weekend, I would add "Have fun." Willie and I are taking a vacation of our own to the Portland Swap Meet.)

Matt Wood is his son's hired man and his daughter's biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.



## Public email for public business

The Oregonian/OregonLive

Back in 2016, when transparency in Oregon government was all the rage, state agencies were reminded of some basic tenets of open government. Among them: Public employees and officials should use their state-provided email accounts for public business. If they had to use their personal email, they should copy the message to their public accounts as soon as possible.

This was more than just an idle recommendation. With the resignation of former Gov. John Kitzhaber amid allegations — since confirmed with his recent settlement with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission — of misusing his public office for personal gain, Oregonians learned just how opaque Oregon government is. Some of the evidence against Kitzhaber and his fiancée Cylvia Hayes, whose own state ethics case is ongoing, came from emails they sent from private accounts that few in the public knew even existed.

Unfortunately, even with such clear-cut examples of the need to conduct public business on public email, the calls for transparency haven't always stuck. The Oregon Board of Education is a case in point.

The board, charged with setting educational policy for the state's K-12 system, includes seven voting members appointed by the governor and two non-voting members representing the secretary of state and state treasurer. They are public officials serving on a public body that is subject to Oregon's open meetings and records laws and have a duty to retain and make accessible its records.

But as a recent email showed, Oregon Department of Education staff sent materials for an upcoming meeting to members' personal or work accounts — not the state accounts that the department opened in their names. The only member who received education-board materials at her education-board email account was Kim Sordyl, the secretary of state's designee and a perennial

thorn in the department's side.

To be fair, there's no reason to believe that members of the education board are conspiring in personal email exchanges. Charles Martinez, the chairman of the board of education, told *The Oregonian/OregonLive* Editorial Board that members don't use email much beyond routine matters, instead reserving discussions for public meetings.

At the same time, there's no reason that education board members should be using personal accounts in the first place. They all have state-issued email accounts through which the public expects them to conduct their work as members of the board of education. That's Public Records 101, as State Archivist Mary Beth Herkert noted. If they must use a private email, they should immediately copy the record to their official accounts where they can be retained and preserved. Otherwise, how is the agency supposed to keep custody and ensure retention if such messages are in the control of Gmail or an internet service provider?

In fact, the state Department of Administrative Services reinforced that protocol as part of a model records management policy it issued in 2016. State agencies, including the Oregon Department of Education, adopted versions by October of that year.

Unfortunately, adopting a policy isn't the same as ensuring it's followed.

Chances are the board of education isn't the only one still allowing widespread use of private emails. As *The Oregonian/OregonLive* revealed three years ago, elected officials and employees throughout state government routinely used private accounts rather than their state emails to handle public business.

The next step should be for agencies to evaluate how faithfully they are adhering to these best practices. The Department of Administrative Services should also assess their compliance. Provided that transparency is still the goal.

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## Playing with fire can be a great teacher

When our son was 6, we began letting him play with fire. It made sense a few decades ago and I think it still does, but you be the judge.

Ever since he was a baby, our son had gone camping with us in southern Arizona. Even during lean years, such as when I went back to school, our family considered it cheap entertainment to take whatever was in the fridge, a box of shells and, for just a few dollars' worth of gas — yes, that's how many years ago this was — drive to what we called Camp Meager, in the Tortolita Mountains north of Tucson. The spot was a desert camper's dream. The circular clearing next to the mesquite-lined wash was big enough for a few tents, a fire pit and a regulation hopscotch arena. Large coveys of quail lurked in any direction you chose. We spent many evenings there with family and friends, eating roasted camp potatoes with our day's take of mesquite-grilled quail.

At Camp Meager, our 6-year-old was appointed official camp fire-tender. He had conscientiously worked at mastering the skills required to build a campfire. (This was a kid who caught his first bass on a rubber worm at age 3, but threw it back because it was too small.) Immediately upon our arrival, he surveyed the area to find the best location, checked for overhanging branches, scraped away dried grass to ensure a safe perimeter, and made sure the fire would be far enough away from anything burnable to be safe. After he collected rocks to ring and line the fire pit, he assigned me the task of gathering sticks and twigs for kindling. I was up for the job.

He learned how to construct our cooking fire in the shape of a light bulb, with a round main pit and a narrow straight section where the grill would be placed over the coals. He carefully arranged the fire so the breeze could feed it without blowing smoke into the cook's face.

Then the fun began. He would crumple three or four sheets of newspaper to support a soccer-ball-sized heap of tinder. This served as the base for a tepee of pencil-thin mesquite twigs, which was



ALAN CROWE Comment

followed by thicker, longer pieces. A couple of openings were left for air to get to the tinder. Then came the part where even the most lenient parents might cringe: We let him start the fire. He used a disposable lighter to light both sides of the tinder, then sat back to watch his handiwork go up with a roar. From that point on, the job was just tending, poking, pushing to the center, and adding pieces of mesquite.

His favorite part — even more than the post-meal bonfire — was being allowed to poke the fire. He was aware that other kids would probably be scolded for playing with the fire, but he understood it was his job, and a serious one at that. One of my most vivid memories is the image of him crouching by the campfire against a background of a billion stars, mesmerized by the smoke swirling upward from the end of his poking stick.

It's impossible to measure the positive effect this backcountry activity, as well as others like it, had on his confidence and sense of self-worth. We're talking actual fire here — like running with scissors on steroids. Yet that confidence stayed with him long after we returned to civilization. It made a lasting impression on him that is still reflected in adulthood. That 6-year-old is now a hulking 6-foot, 220-pound police officer in Kansas with a family of his own.

Looking back, my wife and I agree that our son's fire-tending career was at least as rewarding for us as it was for him. It's one of our sweetest memories, and it comes up occasionally when his family visits and we gather around the fire pit at home. But now, he's the one gathering tinder and snapping twigs, while my wife and I kick back with a cold beverage, reminiscing about Camp Meager and watching our 6-year-old grandson poke the fire.

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