

OPINION

The First Amendment
 Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition their Government for a redress of grievances.

(Not) "Bad Kids"



By Caitlyn May
 cmay@cgsentinel.com

There's a bulletin board outside the room at the district office where the South Lane school board meets that has a sign pinned to it. "People will forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel."

For the last seven months, readers have been given the chance to follow the students of Al Kennedy High School as they moved to a new location, got a new principal and continued to do more with less as part of an ongoing series in *The Sentinel* called "Bad Kids."

The project was a little unconventional. Give two reporters complete access to a high school campus on an ever-changing, no-notice schedule and let them see what happens. They'll take notes and photographs, ask questions in-between lessons, observe lectures and attend school events. Everything was on the record until it wasn't. Every few weeks, they'll write a story and while the administration was granted the authority to review the pieces before they went to press, the deal mandated that if the story was accurate, it ran. Never once did the administration ask us to take something out, put something in or alter something for perception-sake. The only thing they asked, was that we have a conversation about the title of the series and after a handful of discussions and a few drafts,

we agreed. "Bad Kids." We landed on the title because it was impossible not to. If we were going to be faithful to the idea that this project was about a school doing the most with the least and learning what stories to tell as we went then we could not turn a blind eye to the most fundamental lesson we learned as we began to engage with the community at Kennedy: That in addition to carrying the weight of homelessness, teen pregnancy, learning disorders, trauma and all around bad luck, these students were burdened with the judgement of a community that would rather measure them against the stereotypes associated with their circumstance than provide them the support needed to overcome it.

"That's where the bad kids go" was uttered so frequently in conjunction with the name 'Kennedy' that bystanders would not be faulted for thinking it part of the school's designation.

So, we gave the phrase back to the students. We said, no. No, they're not unable to learn. No, they're not trouble makers. No, they don't have anything wrong with them. No. They're not bad kids. That's why it's in quotes. But, that may have been lost in translation for some. The title is essentially an accidental Rorschach test. It's what someone makes of it, sometimes exposing an inherent bias. That wasn't our intention, of course.

We chose the title "Bad Kids" to challenge the misconceptions because anyone who spends more than a few minutes on campus will come to discover that the students at Kennedy are the most hardworking, generous, open-minded, accepting students in the South Lane School District. The bum cards some of them have been dealt and the inequity they face in their own community doesn't dictate their behavior. At Kennedy, kids don't believe in spite. They don't complain when someone gets more than they do, they just work harder. They try again.

In the next installment, readers will have the chance to see just how hard they have to work and how many more times they have to try. And just how unfair it can seem.

After spending a day at Kennedy, we knew they weren't bad kids. That's what we've been trying to show for the last seven months. How this misconception of Kennedy as a school has sometimes made the students feel like bad kids and the danger of indulging in stereotypes that rob potential and confidence from children already facing extraordinary circumstances with grit and grace lacking in people who've had decades' more practice.

The staff and students of Kennedy let us onto their campus and into their lives to share their story and as we come to the end of the school year, and this series, we hope that's become abundantly clear. These are not bad kids. And they're not oblivious.

They know what you call them. But they're taking back the title because this is their school.

And their story.

One the Lighter Side

Who's ready for Cow Patty Bingo?



By Ned Hickson
 nhickson@cgsentinel.com

For those who might not be familiar with the spectator sport of Cow Patty Bingo for reasons of sanity, I'll just take a moment to cover the basics.

First, you need a cow. Second, you need a really BIG bingo card.

Okay, not really. But you really do need a cow, preferably one that has just eaten a lot of fiber — like, say... a 55-gallon drum of granola. Next, you need a large field or yard (preferably a neighbor's) that can be divided into numbered grids. Once you have the cow and the grid, it's time to start selling squares. This requires finding people who think that poop is entertaining.

If you know anyone who watched "Bachelor in Paradise," that would probably be a good place to start.

The rules to Cow-Patty Bingo are simple. Each square is numbered and sold for \$5 each, and you can buy as many squares as you like. Keep in mind, however, that the more money you spend on squares the less you can spend on beer, which is something you'll need a lot of in order to cloud any memory of yourself standing in the bleachers screaming "POOP IN MY SQUARE!"

It's also important to note that in order for a "drop" to qualify, it must be deemed "clearly visible" by the judges. This is actually a lot harder than it sounds. That's because, in order to prepare for this level of scrutiny, judges, on average, consume twice as much beer as spectators at these events.

Okay, now that we've covered the basics, it's time to talk controversy. According to an article sent to me by Jack Ortiz of Reedsport, Ore., a recent Cow-Patty Bingo fund raiser held at Florida Southern College became the target of protests from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) which said, and

I quote: "Cows are adversely affected by laughter."

(I should clarify that PETA was referring to human laughter, and not cows getting laughed at by other cows. I should further clarify that, as far as cows are concerned, the poop thing just isn't that funny anymore.)

Furthermore, Amy Rhodes, a caseworker for PETA, strongly denounced the college's participation in Cow-Patty Bingo, saying that it was "A dangerous message to send to kids."

I completely agree with this, and can see how prolonged exposure to this type of activity starting at an early age can only lead to one thing — and that is retirement and real bingo. Probably somewhere in Florida.

While there are certainly no easy solutions to the growing controversy over Cow-Patty Bingo, I think finding some common ground would be a good place to start. From there, we can finally move forward.

Just as long as everyone watches where they step.

LETTERS

Why I teach...

Why did I start teaching? Several reasons I guess. It's in my blood, I come from a long line of teachers. My grandmother, great aunt, both parents and an older brother were all teachers. They say you do what you see. But throughout my years as a student I also had many wonderful teachers who influenced my choice to become a teacher.

My first grade teacher was a wonderfully kind woman who built my self-confidence and pride. My high school yearbook/English teacher made me believe anything career was possible. He was a man who loved all students and gave them the gift of wanting to learn for a lifetime. He was a soft spoken man who gave respect so he got respect.

I think my most influential teachers were

my coaches. I loved sports, still do, wanting to coach was my big draw to teaching. I wanted to continue to be involved in sports after finishing college.

I think the most important question to ask is, "Why did I continued to teach for 33 years?" It is the energy of the young people. Many times you hear people say, "Our future is in trouble."

I respectfully disagree. The young people I have met over the last 30 plus years have been incredible. They aren't all going to be our future leaders, but some will. Many will be the behind the scenes "work horses" that keep the day to day operations working smoothly. Some of the other reasons I teach:

- I love the "light bulb" moments when it

comes together for a student;

- I love how they help each other be successful.
- I love how they lift each other up when they are sad.
- I love having a sense of belonging to this big beautiful messy family we call school.

But most of all, I love finding out what they have done with their lives after they have moved on in life: leaders, problem solvers, caregivers, etc. But my favorite thing is when they come back and let you know what an influence you had on them and thank you for being a part of their lives.

—Sandra Wilkinson

Cottage Grove High School
 30 years + 3 years at Burns Union High



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The Sentinel welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or without documentation will not be published. Letters containing poetry or from outside *The Sentinel* readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

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 Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large. Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric. Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising. As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:
 nhickson@cgsentinel.com or cmay@cgsentinel.com

HOW TO CALL YOUR REPS

Oregon state representatives	Oregon federal representatives
Senator Floyd Prozanski District 4 State Senator PO Box 11511 Eugene, OR 97440 Phone: (541)342-2447 E-Mail: sen.floydprozanski@state.or.us	Peter DeFazio (House of Representatives) 405 East 8th Ave. #2030 Eugene, OR 97401 Email: defazio.house.gov/contact/email-peter Phone: (541) 465-6732
Rep. Cedric Hayden, Republican District 7 State Representative 900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301 Phone: (503) 986-1407 Website: http://www.leg.state.or.us/hayden E-Mail: rep.cedrichayden@state.or.us	Ron Wyden (Senator) 405 East 8th Ave., Suite 2020 Eugene, OR, 97401 Email: visit wyden.senate.gov Phone: (541) 431-0229 Jeff Merkley (Senator) Email: visit merkley.senate.gov Phone: (541) 465-6750

Cottage Grove Sentinel
 (541) 942-3325

Administration

Jenna Bartlett, Group Publisher
 Gary Manly, General Manager.....Ext. 207
 gmanly@cgsentinel.com
 Jakelen Eckstine, Marketing Specialist.....Ext. 213
 jekstine@cgsentinel.com
 Jana Stelle, Marketing Specialist.....Ext. 203
 jsteele@cgsentinel.com

Editorial

Ned Hickson, Managing Editor.....541-902-3520
 nhickson@cgsentinel.com
 Caitlyn May, Editor.....Ext. 212
 cmay@cgsentinel.com
 Zach Silva, Sport Editor.....Ext. 204
 zsilva@cgsentinel.com

Customer Service

Mandi Jacobs, Office ManagerExt. 200
 Legals, Classifieds.....Ext. 200
 mjacobs@cgsentinel.com

Production

Ron Annis, Production Supervisor.....Ext.215
 graphics@cgsentinel.com

(USP 133880)

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