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In praise of big families

Pope Francis recently praised the benefits of big families — that a big family teaches children selflessness and sharing, which benefits the whole of society — and I couldn't agree more.



TOM PURCELL
Cagle columnist

I was raised as an only boy with five sisters, which was at once a blessing and a curse.

When I was 12, the neighborhood bully was constantly picking on me, but I had no brothers to teach me to fight. My sisters taught me. I looked the bully dead in the eye and said, "You are soooooo immature!"

Despite me having no brothers, my father made me wear hand-me-downs. It wasn't too bad most of the year, but Easter Sunday was unpleasant. Do you know how hard it is to outrun the neighborhood bully with your pantyhose bunching up on you and your bonnet flopping in the wind?

Though my sisters loved and doted on me at times, at other times they complained to my parents that my behavior grossed them out. (So I liked to pick my nose. Big whoop!)

I longed to have a brother — longed to have someone of like mind and griminess — and almost was blessed with one in 1970 with my mother's sixth pregnancy. (I had four sisters by then and my mother had suffered one miscarriage years before.)

All of us were rooting for a boy. And if the baby was a boy we would name him Edward, after my mother's father.

I had big plans for little Eddie. I'd teach him to play ball. We'd ride bikes together. We'd go down to the creek by the water company and build a dam and catch crayfish. We'd build a shack in the woods!

Early one morning, my mother began having contractions. Our neighborhood went into Red Cross mode. Mrs. Krieger tended to my mother, as my father rushed home from work to drive my mother to the hospital. Other neighbors were assigned to watch over my sisters and me. And then Mrs. Clearly showed up with a meatloaf, as she did every time any family in our church had an emergency. I was placed with Mrs.

Gillen, since I was buddies with her son, also named Tommy. Tommy and I played all afternoon. But after dinner, Mrs. Gillen pulled me aside.

"Tommy," she said, in a somber tone, "may I talk with you?"

"Yes," I said, feeling suddenly awkward.

She put her hand on my shoulder.

"Tommy, it is about your mother. It is about her baby. Tommy, your mother had a miscarriage."

The doctor told my father the baby was a boy. We were all saddened by our loss, and my parents would eventually heal. They'd have one more child, my sister Jennifer, almost a year later, and our family would roll along.

According to Breitbart, Pope Francis said that "the fact of having brothers and sisters is good for you: the sons and daughters of a large family are more capable of fraternal communion from early childhood."

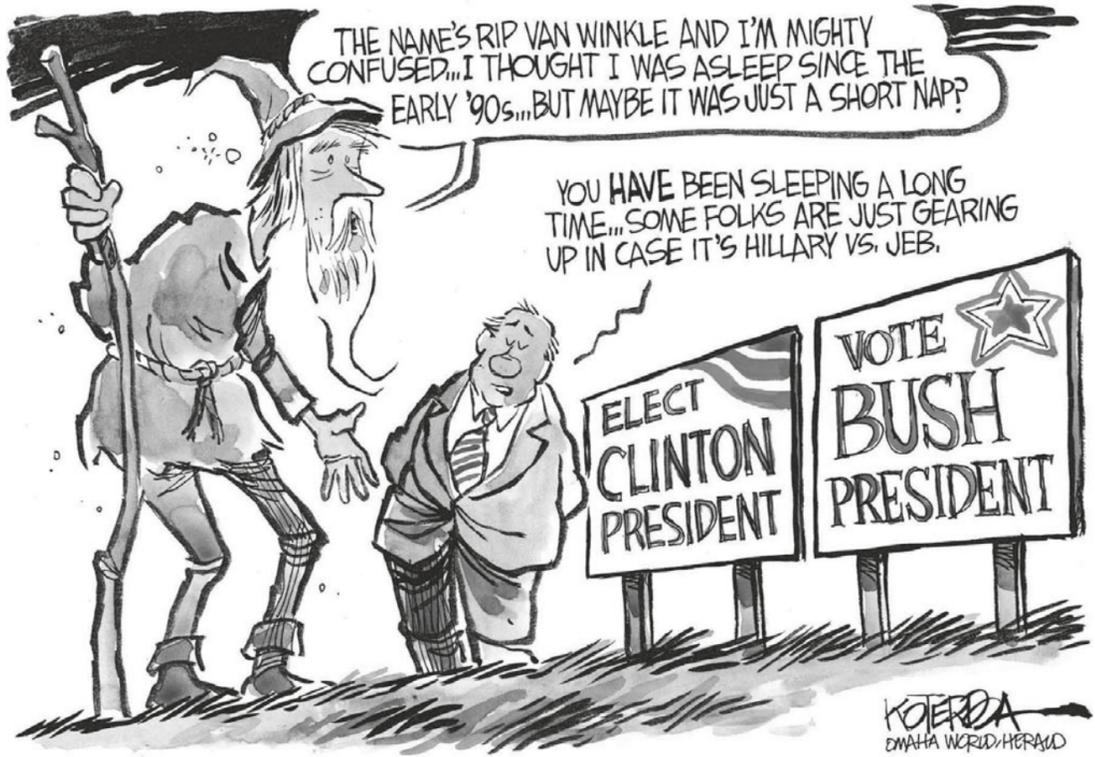
He said that "each family is the cell of society, but the large family is a richer, more vibrant cell ..."

I found this to be true. My parents' house is still a raucous place where people come and go at all hours. The laughter and drama common to big extended families has filled me with an incredible sense of joy and camaraderie. It has been great to be the only boy with five sisters and, when we get together, we laugh as hard as we ever did.

Still, I wonder how different my life would have been if I had a little brother. We could have teamed up to really gross out our sisters. And we'd surely be best buddies today.

That's why I still get sad, now and then, at the loss of little Eddie.

— ©2014 Tom Purcell. Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood" and "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutty!" is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc.



What to expect in 2015

Good-bye and good riddance to 2014. As we move into 2015, what can we learn from how 2014 ended and how we're now "trending" in various areas? Here are a few items to watch:

- Look for signs of President Barack Obama's REAL intentions. Not only were the results of the 2014 Congressional elections a "shellacking" for Democrats and Obama, a major paint job — with four coats of black and blue paint. Now the question is whether Obama intends to spend his remaining two years nurturing compromises where he can get them, or looking for ways to embarrass, check-mate, thwart and weaken the Republicans who've spent his term stalemating his agenda, trying to destroy his legacy and demonizing him. By December 2015 who will have had the last laugh?

- Will the Tea Party tail continue to wag the Republican dog — or is the Republican dog now the Tea Party's tail? There are already signs that House Speaker John Boehner and Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell are headed into a political buzz saw in their dealings with Congress' most conservative members who favor confrontation, political brinkmanship and power politics over compromise, consensus and bipartisanship. Will



JOE GANDELMAN
INDEPENDENT'S EYE
Cagle columnist

Boehner and McConnell prove to be leaders who direct party members on a political path, or fearful followers and panderers obsessed with not losing support?

- Notoriety means big box office. North Korea and its hacking buddies' attempt to keep Sony Pictures from releasing the comedy "The Interview" featuring a story involving the assassination of North Korea's very much alive leader Kim Jong-un utterly backfired. By hacking Sony and allegedly being responsible for making terrorist threats against movie theaters which subsequently pulled the movie, North Korea helped the flick shatter online movie sales records. Add its almost certain release on DVD, cable and overseas showings, and North Korea turned a reportedly lame and inept comedy into ... big B.O. Get ready for some studio to announce a movie about a team of Navy Seals assigned force ISIS leaders to eat pork chops.

- Hollywood may get more daring. Never underestimate Hollywood's ability to grind out predictable sequels, formula action pix and cookie-cutter kids' movies. 2014 gave us the film "Birdman," featuring a comeback-generating

performance by Michael Keaton, filmed to make it appear to have been shot in one or a few continuous takes, with an ending that left moviegoers debating and guessing. It started off in limited release and immediately soared, with more theaters quickly added.

Acceptance of the quirky film is a sign that Americans don't only yearn for (God save us) more Adam Sandler movies. Another sign came in early 2015 with the hit release of the film adaptation of Stephen Sondheim's and James Lapine's "Into the Woods." While Sondheim's famous complex scores that often seem to be fleeing traditional melody may make theatergoer's swoon, they're more of an acquired taste to others.

- The pizza revolution will continue. Pizza remains one of the biggest offenders when it comes to unhealthy fast food. But consumers are now demanding more than just sauce and cheese on crust, and they're often getting it. Frank Peppe Pizzeria, the 90-year-old top ranked pizzeria from my home city of New Haven, has started to add restaurants in New York and Massachusetts. Pizza Hut revamped its menu with some unusual and often weird new flavors. When I went to Colgate University from 1968-1972, local pizza in the town of Hamilton,

New York was terrible to tolerable. Today, Hamilton's pizza places offer r-e-a-l world class pizza flavor.

- Will those mistreating women find zero tolerance? 2014 was a bad year for politician and celebrity sex harassers, offenders and exhibitionists in the U.S. and in Canada. Will 2015 end in the definitive implosion of comedian Bill Cosby, who is reportedly hiring private investigators?

- Can several big corporations stay afloat? Will 2015 end with a big "buh-bye" to the greatly-ailing JC Penny and to Radio Shack?

- Species going extinct: The Siberian Tiger and 14 other species may be gone by the of the year, mostly due to human negligence or aggression. The black rhino is almost extinct. The Republican RINO is extinct.

— Copyright 2015 Joe Gandelman, distributed exclusively by Cagle Cartoons newspaper syndicate. Joe Gandelman is a veteran journalist who wrote for newspapers overseas and in the United States. He has appeared on cable news show political panels and is Editor-in-Chief of The Moderate Voice, an Internet hub for independents, centrists and moderates. He also writes for The Week's online edition. He can be reached at jgandelman@themoderatevoice.com

COMMUNITY APPRECIATION

Family thanks agencies for rescue efforts

Editor,
This is a letter of appreciation to all who participated in the rescue of Marie (Pat) Earle from the Umatilla River in Hermiston on the morning of Dec. 21. Included in the rescue were the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office, Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Hermiston Fire Department, EMTs, City of Umatilla police, Med Star chopper and others who helped.

A special thank you to the good folks from the Country Church at Hermiston for their prayers and expression of concern.

BILL AND PAT EARLE
HERMISTON

Thank you for Matheny Project support

Editor,
Thank you, from Sandy Matheny and Doriz Pitzer to all who continue to support the Matheny Project: those

who buy the CDs, the East Oregonian and the Hermiston Herald for the informative articles and all who have donated their time.

Proceeds from the CD purchases go to fund spinal cord research through OHSU.

Special thanks to Walker's Furniture in Hermiston and Murray's Drug Store in Heppner, where CDs are available. For more information or to order online, go to www.mathenyproject.com.

DORIS PITZER

Balance beam is great addition

Editor,
To Hermiston High School and its wood shop: Thank you for a beautiful balance beam for learning to ... balance! Thank you!

LITTLE DRAGONS OF MASTER LONEY'S SCHOOL, AND TOM AND MIKE LAIN

HERMISTON

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