

Hermiston Herald

VOLUME 109 • NUMBER 31



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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Delivered by carrier and mail Wednesdays and Saturdays
Inside Umatilla/Morrow counties.....\$42.65
Outside Umatilla/Morrow counties.....\$53.90

The Hermiston Herald (USPS 242220, ISSN 8750-4782) is published twice weekly at Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838, (541) 567-6457, FAX (541) 567-1764. Periodical postage paid at Hermiston, OR. Postmaster, send address changes to Hermiston Herald, 333 E. Main St., Hermiston, OR 97838.

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Smile — You're on camera

When people are observed — and know they're being observed — their behavior improves. This is called the Hawthorne Effect, from 1920s sociological/psychological experiments at the Hawthorne factory. I can confirm the effect, as I sometimes ask offenders, "Would you have done that if there was a police officer right behind you?" and the invariable answer is, "No." This also demonstrates the validity of the second leg of the punishment triad, "certainty" (the other two being "speed" and "severity"). Offenders who know they will be caught are more likely to turn into model citizens.

This is not a call for everyone to have a monitor drone with 24/7 audio-video feed to a law enforcement database. "Innocent until proven guilty" is an important part of the justice system — although I can see some interesting gray areas for monitor drones as part of a convict's parole and probation. But, as happens, I digress.

This is actually in regard to and in praise of the Hermiston Police Department's body cam. As I understand it, it's actually a headcam or a hatcam, and there's apparently a "wear it on a lapel or epaulet" option, as well. Whatever you want to call it, though, I've had the opportunity to view the results of one in action and, based on an admittedly small statistical sample, all I can say is "Wow!"

That's a technical legal term, by the way. If I weren't being technical I'd add at least two or three more exclamation points. There's no doubt, though, that body cams have benefits.

The first benefit involves "he said/she said" cases. Whether criminal, civil, or just plain parenting, they are exasperating. A relaxed and talented fibber can come off far better than the correct but shy and retiring honest person. Judges do their best to determine credibility, read between the lines, assess everything possible and still on occasion have to admit that, "Unfortunately there is no magic camera to



THOMAS CREASING
OFF THE BENCH
Herald columnist

show us what happened." The presence of the body cam will be making those decisions a lot easier, at least sometimes, as it did in the case where I was privileged to see the video.

The second benefit is a future one. Defendants often complain that an officer was rude or abusive, and while that's certainly possible, I suspect that such complaints are just professional terseness on the part of the officer. Now that we have body cams, though, it seems we may be seeing the Hawthorne Effect. One study showed "an 88 percent decline in the number of complaints filed against officers" (New York Times, "Wearing a Badge, and a Video Camera" April 6, 2013). Whether the decline was related to better police behavior or better behavior by individuals is still open for analysis, but does it really matter as to the source of the decline? Or would the existence of a continued decline be good enough reason, regardless of "why?"

Interestingly, that article also mentions that the ACLU agrees with me that having officers recording from shift start to shift end is not for the best — but that recording individual transactions between officers and individuals is very worthwhile. Given what we can expect from both an evidence aspect and from the Hawthorne Effect, the decision by Chief Jason Edmiston and HPD to introduce body cams was an excellent one, and I have no doubt that Hermiston will be seeing the benefits — on video — for a long time to come.

But that's just the "smile, you're on camera!" opinion of an opinionated guy. Share your opinions in response! Letters to the editor or by email to hermistonherald@offthebench@gmail.com. Names of the terminally shy will be withheld on request.

— Thomas Creasing is Hermiston's Municipal Court judge and a Herald columnist



Coming soon: Letters to the gene editor?

Get ready for the return of all the cooing and wailing about "designer babies."

According to Vox.com, geneticists at Sun Yat-sen University in China recently achieved a breakthrough by modifying the DNA of a nonviable human embryo. Results were published in the journal "Protein & Cell."

The technique, known as CRISPR, is faster and cheaper than other gene-editing practices, but it has stirred a firestorm of controversy. The prestigious journals "Science" and "Nature" refused to print the study, on ethical grounds. The director of the National Institutes of Health announced on April 29 that he will not pay for scientists meddling with DNA in a human zygote.

Even the Chinese government is squeamish. An official said that embryos should not be kept in a laboratory and subjected to these manipulations. Instead, the embryos should be in Chinese factories cranking out cheap, junky products for Americans. Supporters of CRISPR



DANNY TYREE
TYRADES!
Cagle columnist

see it as the medical breakthrough of the century, a potential way to eradicate AIDS, leukemia, cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's disease and more. Skeptics fear that doctors curing one ailment might accidentally cause another; such mutations would be passed down generation after generation.

CRISPR is being touted as a way for practically any scientist to change practically any cell. I shudder to think of the impact on school science fairs. Instead of displaying the tried and true baking-soda-and-vinegar volcano, a first-grader will declare, "Watch me create a unibrow for Mrs. Smith's unborn baby."

Some people are tickled pink at the advances, but others are disappointed with the way science fiction has evolved into science fact. CRISPR can be used to cure, say, scoliosis. All the people who dreamed of the world of 2015 having cool stuff such as personal jet packs

and robots like the one on "Lost In Space" now find science being used to HELP YOU STAND UP STRAIGHT. Move over, Stephen Hawking; science has been taken over by everybody's grandmother!

Maybe Uncle Sam won't contribute to CRISPR research, but he'll profit from it. If you think estate taxes on property and bank accounts are high, just think about putting a tax on inherited attributes. ("Hmm...cleft chin, wavy hair, blue eyes to die for...it's bonus time at the IRS!")

Many people are worried about therapeutic genetic procedures giving way to unthinkable eugenics experiments aimed at creating a master race. ("Heil — er, I mean, I'll—not dignify that with an answer.")

Coincidentally, people fear a new wave of "haves" and "have nots," with a Seinfeldesque Gene Nazi picking winners and losers. ("No washboard abs for you!") Many people automatically think "mad scientist" when gene editing is mentioned. Of course they also go into "pitchforks and torches"

mode when someone suggests they cover their mouth while sneezing or refrain from letting their dog French kiss them. Never mind.

Some people just have misgivings about editors in general. ("My qualifications for the grant? I prevented a family from having sickle cell anemia, I blocked the development of hemophilia and I, uh, rejected the manuscript for 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone' 12 times.")

Given all the unknowns, I hope many years of study and debate precede further steps with CRISPR. If nothing else, maybe perfectionism will slow progress. ("We gave him incredible stamina, superhuman vision and a computer-like mind — but we can't get that funky Six-Million-Dollar-Man-jumping sound effect! Back to the drawing board!")

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SCHOOLING MILLENNIALS

Welcome to class, American millennials. Sit down and take notes — because you are in for a rude awakening.

According to a report by the Educational Testing Service, you have "weak skills in literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments" when compared to your international peers.

Based on data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, a survey of adult skills, American millennials didn't perform so well.

Our millennials "scored lower than 15 of the 22 participating countries" in literacy. "Only millennials in Spain and Italy had lower scores," the ETS report says. "In numeracy, they ranked last, along with Italy and Spain."

In problem-solving in technology-rich environments, they "also ranked last, along with the Slovak Republic, Ireland, and Poland."

And "The youngest segment of the U.S. millennial cohort (16- to 24-year-olds), who could be in the labor force for the



TOM PURCELL
Cagle columnist

next 50 years, ranked last in numeracy along with Italy and among the bottom countries in" technological problem-solving. "In literacy, they scored higher than their peers in Italy and Spain."

Oh, well. At least our millennials are No. 1 in self-esteem!

When you consider that the key area of job growth in America is in the technology sector — where communication, math and problem-solving skills are essential — the future doesn't bode well for millions of you millennials.

As the report notes, those with the proper education and skills will do better than prior generations, whereas those of you with the lowest level of skills are in for a world of hurt — like millions of former middle-class Americans who are hurting because good-paying jobs that do not require advanced skills are a thing of the past.

What's puzzling is that you American millennials have had more years of education than any cohort in American history — but

far too many of you "are graduating high school and completing postsecondary educational programs without receiving adequate skills," says Irwin Kirsch, director of the ETS Center for Global Assessment.

What's worse is that you highly educated millennials have lower literacy and numeracy skills when compared with previous adult surveys. The more you are schooled, the less you are learning.

I, for one, am worried sick over your lack of skills. Your generation will be in charge of the economy in the next 20 years, and I need you to succeed so that you can pay my Medicare and Social Security bills.

But I'm not sure most of you will pull it off. Your generation got A's for showing up to class. You didn't have to win to get a trophy. You were discouraged from competing. You were told you were smart without having to accomplish much.

But reality is catching up and it isn't going to be pretty. Millennials in other countries are hungrier than you. They have developed skills and are prepared to compete for the technology jobs of the future. In the real

world, you can't opt out of competing with them, which is why I worry.

So, what to do? ETS recommends that educators and other stakeholders must rethink their teaching processes. Kids need to develop real, usable skills as they complete their courses — not just passing grades.

Fortunately, many organizations are working feverishly to help kids develop STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) skills to fend off a projected shortage of Americans with these needed skills.

I hate to be so brash, American millennials, but you are not so smart or skilled as you think. You need to get cracking.

If you succeed, America will flourish. If you fail, America will suffer. Our future is up to you.

— ©2015 Tom Purcell. Tom Purcell, author of "Misadventures of a 1970's Childhood" and "Comical Sense: A Lone Humorist Takes on a World Gone Nutsy!" is a Pittsburgh Tribune-Review humor columnist and is nationally syndicated exclusively by Cagle Cartoons Inc. Send comments to Tom at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

Letters Policy

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