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NEWS ITEM: 14 NFL TEAMS* ARE PAID BY THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TO HONOR OUR TROOPS...



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For Memorial Day — Special-needs students honor veterans

It was the most moving Memorial Day ceremony I've ever attended.

The event took place at the ACLD Tillotson School in Pittsburgh, a special-needs school with a private academic license approved yearly by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The brain is a complicated thing, you see. Even the slightest deviation in normal brain function can interrupt an individual's ability to receive, process and communicate information.

According to the National Institutes of Health, one out of seven Americans has Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) — a complex cluster of neurobiological deficits that can severely inhibit the ability to process information.

Interestingly, some of the world's most inventive people have learning disabilities. Einstein had Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism. Thomas Edison suffered severe ADHD. His third-grade teacher kicked him out of school for being "inattentive, fidgety and slow."

Tillotson students run the gamut, from children with normal to high IQs who have difficulty learning to read, to some with moderate to severe autism, to others with a host of other learning disabilities. Some go on to college. Others succeed in the trades. Some are taught to maximize basic skills, so they can become productive,



TOM PURCELL
Cagle columnist

self-sufficient citizens.

All of the students require exceptional patience and care. That is delivered in abundance by Tillotson's teachers and administrators, which was evident when I attended the Memorial Day event.

In the spirit of full disclosure, Kristine Sacco, the Tillotson art teacher who organized the event, is my sister. She said the students have been learning about Memorial Day in social studies. To help them better understand the meaning of service, the school initiated a door-decorating contest — then agreed to take the concept a step further by inviting veterans to visit the students.

Three veterans attended the event: Air Force Capt. Patricia Atkinson, who served for six years following the Vietnam War and is now a paraprofessional at Tillotson; Air Force Reserve Maj. Deborah Gorencic, who served for 23 years and participated in the 1993 Iraq War; and my father, Army Pfc. Thomas Purcell, a military policeman who served for two years after the Korean War.

The veterans were given a tour of the school as students lined both sides of the hallway, waving flags. They proudly displayed their carefully crafted Memorial

Day decorations that adorned the doors and walls.

As the veterans were led to the dais, one group of students walked onto the stage. Each took turns explaining how Memorial Day differs from other holidays — that its purpose is to remember those who died in active military service.

As the first student group exited, a second took the stage. Students took turns reciting "The Unknown Soldier" by Roger Robicheau: "You need not ever know my name, this unknown soldier seeks no fame..."

The three veterans took turns describing their service from the podium. One described her experiences as a nurse in the military, where she assisted wounded soldiers returning from battle.

One described how, during the Vietnam War, before she had served, her unit was responsible for evacuating people during the fall of Saigon. She described one tragedy in which a plane filled with babies crashed, killing most everyone on board. Her words were greeted with dead silence.

My father explained that it was like to be a military policeman in Germany in the 1950s — what it was like to be drafted.

The students had spirited, insightful questions for the veterans. The question-and-answer session went on for some time.

At the conclusion of the

event, the students presented the veterans with certificates thanking them for their service, then gave them hearty applause.

Learning may be more challenging for these kids than others, but they intuitively understand the meaning of Memorial Day better than most.

They understand that the wonderful school that is helping them blossom and prepare for life is a direct beneficiary of the freedom and prosperity made possible by the many veterans who sacrificed for their country.

As I sat by my 81-year-old dad after the event, one young girl walked up to him and shook his hand.

"Thank you for your service, sir," she said to him. I got choked up by the respect she gave him.

That's why this was most moving Memorial Day ceremony I have ever attended.

(ACLD Tillotson School was founded in 1972 by special-education pioneer Katherine Dean Tillotson. Learn more at acldtillotsonschool.org.)

— ©2015 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. Send comments to Tom at Purcell@caglecartoons.com

Top 11 reasons being POTUS is so darn cool

As it appears we're smack dab in the middle of the 2016 presidential campaign announcement season, this might be the perfect time to ask the question on every American's lips: What kind of twisted psychopath chooses to do this? Who are these people that are so all fired up to enter this soul-sucking fray just to sit in an Office that is oval? Masochists? Sadists? Sadomasochists? Masosadochists? Folks who didn't pay attention during any previous election?

As we ravenous hounds of the media descend like quadrennial locusts on the plucky pioneers making their early intentions known, the public is entitled to know what kind of flippo-unit willingly volunteers to sell their soul and ditch their family for the chance to become a human sound byte and eat crap food for 18 months. Who in their right mind would desire to be President? Aye, there's the rub. The right mind part. Reinforcing a belief that anybody who wants to be president shouldn't be.

It can't be the power. Buffeted by the winds of domestic, foreign and intergalactic fate, a president is as effective as a weatherman in an outhouse hit by a tornado. Running for POTUS is an exercise in doomed futility. Like applying for the job of lion tamer knowing they're going to take away your clothes, whip and chair, paint dashes around your neck, and hang a sign that says, "bite here."

It's got to be the perks. In order to compensate for all this dismal malarkey, the fringe benefits must be pretty darn sweet. After intensive investigation, we here at Durstco have discovered the top 11 reasons why being president is so darn cool. Why 11? Because it's 10 percent funnier than 10, that's why.

11. Not only are your driving days over, but you'll never sweat a red light again. Don't want to



WILL DURST
RAGING MODERATE
Cagle columnist

wear a seat belt? Don't.

10. A cool \$400,000 a year salary. About the same as a mid-level porn producer. Although, if Carly Fiorina or Hillary Clinton wins, we only have to pay them 77 percent, or \$308,000.

9. From out of nowhere, mothers will hand you their babies. To do with what you will.

8. Your own 747. With in-flight refueling connections, ballistic missiles, evasive action capabilities and 19 televisions.

7. Everywhere you go, someone close will be carrying a football.

6. People pay attention to what you say. Your every syllable will be raked over like a beach near the crash site of a jet carrying the world's largest shipment of blue diamonds.

5. Got a minor phobia about being late? Nothing will ever start without you again.

4. You want lobster thermidor at 3 a.m.? You can have lobster thermidor at 3 a.m.

3. Guaranteed to age into a stylish head of distinguished grey hair. Every president gets it. Obama looks like a snow-capped mountain pass. Thank God John McCain didn't win in 2008. The guy started out a sarcophagus. By the end of his first term, he would have looked like a rubber Yoda hand puppet shriveled in the Arizona summer sun.

2. Extremely attentive health care. You don't just have a doctor on call. He's in the bullet-proof car behind you.

1. Your post presidential speaking fee just crossed into seven figures.

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13 things Reader's Digest won't tell you

If not for my son Gideon (age 11), I might have missed my deadline this week.

Over the past few months, Gideon has become an avid reader of the venerable "Reader's Digest," following in the footsteps of me and my late father (and probably my grandmother Tyree).

I had scoured the internet news sites in vain for a late-breaking topic that appealed to me, but that issue lying on the back seat of the Nissan Rogue triggered a brainstorm.

A few years ago, RD began carrying a feature called "Things Your (Fill-in-the-blank) Won't Tell You," spilling the insider beans on the lives of doctors, grocers, bankers and others who deeply affect our lives.

Well, turnabout is fair play, as someone probably said in one of those RD "Quotable Quotes" features. I've tracked down an anonymous RD staffer who wishes to reveal "13 Things Reader's Digest Won't Tell You":

1. The items in our "That's Outrageous!"



DANNY TYREE
TYRADES!
Cagle columnist

feature don't sound so outrageous after we go back on our meds.

2. "Laughter Is The Best Medicine"? Yeah, sure, that's why so many states are rushing to open medical laughter dispensaries.

3. Santa Claus reads "Reader's Digest," so all the smart-aleck kids who get quoted in our magazine should be aware that there will come a reckoning.

4. When we think that the HECTIC, STRESS-FILLED LIFESTYLE of 1922 necessitated the creation of "Reader's Digest" and its abbreviated articles, we inevitably laugh so hard we wet our pants.

5. Union rules won't let our "Everyday Heroes" be on duty every day.

6. We seriously considered whacking JFK ourselves when he turned down helping with our "Ich bin ein subscriber" marketing campaign. (We did manage to squash FDR's

"Fifth Freedom." You know, "Freedom From &^%\$# Magazine Insert Cards Littering Your Floor.")

7. We have now sneaked a microchip into each issue, so when "It Pays To Enrich Your Word Power" pays you, the IRS will come around for its share.

8. The U.S. edition emphasizes uplifting celebrations of traditional American values; but some of our foreign editions lean more toward "Death To Those United States," "Great Satan In Uniform" and "Do you have an amusing beheading anecdote?"

9. Our Braille edition and Large Print Edition have not been nearly the money pits that our "free service dog with each purchase" gimmick turned out to be.

10. Yes, we've killed a lot of trees over the years; but the timber mills assure us they've been planting new trees, where the deer and rabbits and unicorns can play. Say what? Oh, sugar!

11. We take pride in keeping up with the times and staying hep. Page us on

our beeper and we'll send our society editor out to cover your civil union.

12. Our toughest condensing job involved whether to drop "Jesus" or "wept." We're still trying to clean up from that plague of frogs.

13. Our editorial board is still debating whether to update "All In A Day's Work" to "All In A Day's Faking Disability" and "You Be The Judge" to "You Be The Activist Judge."

I'm glad I could give a tip of the hat to "Reader's Digest." It certainly inspires me to write "an article a week of enduring value — for housebreaking puppies."

Hmph! Perhaps whoever edited that last paragraph would like "Paragon Glimpses" of my size 14 boot headed his way...

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