

Month of anniversaries brings cheers, tears

June 5 is a day that is celebrated in my family because it's my parents wedding anniversary.

But it is also a date I have begun to dread, for reason's unrelated to my parents. On this particular June 5th, I was at my parents home wishing thing a happy anniversary when I got a message from an old friend from college.

"You hear about Dave Gilkey?" asked, Karl Maasdam. Karl, Dave and I were among a group of aspiring photojournalists who all attended Oregon State University in the mid to late 1980s. I hadn't heard anything from, or of, Dave in a while, though.

Karl brought me up to speed brutally quick.

"Killed in Afghanistan today" was Karl's response, followed by a link to a story on National Public Radio's website. Gilkey had been working for NPR since 2007. Gilkey had distinguished himself as a still photographer and videographer, most recently working for a national radio medium, which NPR's core audience, its listeners, couldn't even see his work unless they went online. Such is the modern media world, where a photojournalist was doing award-winning work for radio. And where a 50-year-old American journalist is killed in a conflict most Americans have put out of their daily consciousness.

It's now going on 15 years since al-Qaeda terrorists attacked the United States, leading to the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

I had not stayed in touch with David over the years, but for some reason with which I have not come to terms, his death has left me in mourning.

I have had opportunities to hear from and share messages with several friends in the last 10 days who also knew David back at Oregon State. We share our recollections, news, memories and our grief. There is comradeship and a shared emptiness.

One friend who no longer works in journalism was left feeling guilty for not still being involved in news reporting any more. Gilkey paid the ultimate price for sharing news from a dangerous, hostile place and this friend, who now does commercial photography, was feeling less accomplished — less pure — for being home instead of out dodging bombs and bullets.

I've never had a desire to be a war correspondent. I've always been more interested in helping to tell the local stories, those close to home, in communities of varying sizes here on the West Coast. Being at a crime scene where police officers had weapons drawn has provided more than enough of an adrenaline rush for me and when the adrenaline wore off, I still

got to sleep in my own bed.

But I have also seen the effect of the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001 on local communities, including right here in Hermiston. Two friends that immediately come to mind deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, leaving families behind to worry about their security and safety. Fortunately for their families, those friends came home safely. One is now retired from the Marines, the other is still in the Oregon National Guard. Other friends from high school and college served in both gulf wars or were deployed to other conflict zones during their service.

So, for the last 10 days I have been trying to process and understand my grief over David Gilkey's death. David and I shared a passion for photography and journalism in college, but ended up taking very different paths. We weren't close in college, but I considered him a friend. I don't know if he would say the same. We were competitors for assignments and space on the pages in the Daily Barometer. Dave was always just a bit better at capturing the moment and telling the story with a camera than I was, I'd have to admit. But that made me better at it too, competing with him in that safe, nurturing environment of student journalism. He didn't stick around to finish school, turning an internship at the Daily Camera in Boulder, Colorado, into a full-time paying job. I finished school and landed at the Herald and News in Klamath Falls, following in the footsteps of another of our college peer-photojournalism group.

Along the way, I largely hung up the cameras for desk jobs and editing gigs, while Dave kept shooting and expanding into video storytelling.

David had a connection to another Hermiston Herald editor too. During his time

in Boulder, before moving on to the Detroit Free Press and NPR, Gilkey worked with Neill Woelk at the Daily Camera.

Maybe I, like my friend, am grieving not just David's death, but all I have not accomplished along the way as a journalist. But more likely, I think, is that David's death reminds me of the last time I saw my cousin Randy, who died five years ago this month. The last time I saw Randy, who in many ways was like a big brother, was when I was home visiting for my parents anniversary five years ago. He died about two weeks later, on June 20.

I still get struck with flashes of grief over his death from time to time. He was only 57, not much older than I am now, and I still miss his

way of telling a story that made it much funnier than it deserved to be, his laugh, his occasional advice and his relating stories about family members, many of whom are now gone.

I don't understand grief, but I am beginning to think its affect is an accumulative thing. The more I experience grief as I age, the quicker and harder it hits me when it returns on the next occasion. Like I have to re-mourn every past lost with every new one.

And the date of my parents' anniversary, June 5, was also the date when a former fiancée chose to break our engagement and end our relationship a dozen years ago.

So, a date that I had previously associated with a happy family occasion now has

some sad memories attached to it. That's not my parents' fault, or my cousin Randy's, or David Gilkey's. It's not even what's-her-name's fault. But I think now, going forward, it will always be a day of mixed emotions.

It's been an interesting couple of weeks. We've marked my parents' anniversary, my dad's birthday, a niece's graduation from Woodrow Wilson High School (ironically, the same school Gilkey graduated from) and got to meet another niece for the first time, plus I got to spend some time with my daughter and her boyfriend and other family members. On top of it all I've been in touch with friends from my college days all within the span of one week.

Then comes the mass shooting in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida, which once would have been a news event in a far away place, but over the years I've worked with friends who have spent part of their careers — lived, or as still living and working

in Florida, bringing that far away tragedy closer to home.

Oh, and this week marks my 11 year anniversary with EO Media Group.

All those are reasons to pause and reflect. There are milestones to mark and cherish, but there are other June milestones that have led to more than a few tears being shed.

I hope your June is marked with milestones that bring to mind happy times and memories of family and good friends. I try to tell myself that the sad events and milestones also serve a purpose and remind us of the things that are truly important. But sometimes its hard to read the reminder notes I've written to myself through watery eyes.

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SHADES OF GRAY

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IN BRIEF

Cheese takes center stage during weekend event

Cheese, cheese and more cheese is featured during the upcoming Tillamook Cheese Days.

Visitors can enjoy macaroni and cheese, cheesy corn muffins, salad, cookie and drink for \$5. And, it includes admission to the SAGE Center, an interactive visitor center that highlights sustainable agriculture and energy. Also, cheese curds will be available for purchase in the center's store.

The event is Friday, June 24 and Saturday, June 25 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the SAGE Center, 101 Olson Road, Boardman. Regular hours are Sunday through Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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