

EDITOR'S DESK

Sorting fact from fiction is harder than ever

Someone once said that a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes.

It may have been Mark Twain. Or Jonathan Swift. Or Winston Churchill. All of them have been credited with inventing the saying, which in and of itself proves the difficulty of finding truth.

Wherever the witticism came from, at no time has it felt more literal than in the age of the internet, when the push of a single button can broadcast a lie around the world in an instant.

To make matters more complicated, the world isn't divided into truths and outright, intentional lies. Sometimes the truth is also buried in piles of well-intentioned but false conclusions, outdated information, half-truths, incorrect assumptions, things that are only true in certain circumstances and things that are technically true but were taken out of context.

In those conditions, it is a wonder any of us is ever really right about anything.

So, how can we find the truth in such a world? The first step is having the same commitment to accuracy in our own lives that we hold our journalists, scientists and other professionals to.

My Facebook friends know I'm quick to comment on their posts, sources in hand, to let them know that the quote they posted is fake or the "news" article about a politician they hate never happened. People may think this is some sort of journalistic superpower, but often debunking something takes a 10-second Google search for a few key phrases from the post. It's the same thing I do before sharing, and I cannot tell you how many times it has saved me from embarrassment.

Second, read the article.

This may sound like simple advice, but as someone who writes the articles I can tell you that many, many people skip this step. They then respond with a comment full of inaccuracies, which others who also didn't read the article then assume was part of the article, perpetuating the cycle of misinformation.

I once saw an article about a professor getting fired that had dozens of comments underneath arguing over whether he should have lost his job.

The professor was a woman.

Next, be willing to change your mind.

The human mind has a natural instinct, called confirmation bias, to automatically dismiss any information that opposes our beliefs as false and anything that confirms our worldview as true.

People who are good at finding the truth are also good at overcoming confirmation bias.

They are able to listen to diverse viewpoints and read information from opposing sources with an open mind, looking for logic and evidence rather than what makes them feel good.

Part of that process is actively seeking information from a variety of good-quality sources. Primary sources are best — if you want to know what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says about COVID-19 testing, go to the CDC website. Second best is to read multiple news reports from quality news outlets with a reputation for accuracy, written by named journalists with experience covering the subject and firsthand knowledge of the situation.

The more mysterious a source, the more suspect it is. You will rarely find truth in anonymous, undated "articles" on little-known websites that attribute their information with



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR



phrases, such as "police say" without ever naming a single department or officer. Look for specifics in the who, what, when, where, why and how of the article and if they are not there, ask yourself why.

Another tip for truth-seekers: Check the date. A legitimate news article may have been great information when it was first written, but no longer accurate now. Look for updates. And make sure not to get fooled by those posts that claim the media is "ignoring" the death of an American soldier or other event, when the real reason you're not seeing it in the news now is it happened six years ago.

Separating fact from fiction in this world can be daunting, but remember: The truth is out there.

Go find it.

COLUMN

No work and no play makes Tammy ...

I'm starting to come down with something. Don't worry, it's not the 'rona — I have a severe case of cabin fever.

During past lapses in employment, I did everything from watching spring training baseball in Arizona and Christmas shopping in San Francisco to skiing in four different states and riding a bobsled and mushing a dogsled team in Colorado. At one point, my husband, John, asked if I ever planned on going back to work.

Being jobless during a pandemic is totally different. Public officials and medical professionals highly recommend that people limit excursions to essential travel. I think I could make a case that I'm going to lose my marbles if I don't get a change of scenery.

My writing might soon be reminiscent of Jack Torrance from "The Shining" — "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

I think John was getting a little worried the other day when showing me a photo of his garden. Holding up his cellphone, my eyes were fixated on flesh-colored tuber-like objects among a mass of green. I squinted, and then asked if they were carrots.

Staring blankly at me, John replied in a matter-of-fact voice,

"Carrots grow underground."

He had taken a photo of his jalapeño peppers and held his hand up for size reference. In my defense, I hadn't been awake very long and hadn't consumed my morning Pepsi yet.

While watching TV, I find some commercials intriguing — resulting in random thoughts and over-thinking.

I'm baffled that toilet paper companies would even waste their money with advertising during the months of April and May. The shortage that resulted from panic buying led people to purchase whatever they could actually find on the shelf.

John bought an off-brand that says it's made from bamboo. When I visualize bamboo, I don't think it's something I would want to utilize on my bum. However, nothing could be as bad as the 40-grit TP in the newsroom bathroom.

A common theme these days for pizza places is touting their contactless delivery. In addition, they ensure potential customers that after the pizza comes out of the oven, it's not touched. It makes me wonder if they were playing patty cake with my pizza before the pandemic.

Meanwhile, for those keeping score at home, I received yet

another letter from the Oregon Employment Department. Despite explaining my periodic freelance work, they continue to question why I reported working a few hours one week and none the next. Since they're obviously incapable of simply cross-referencing my weekly claim forms, I'm forced to go to the post office to buy stamps and mail their questionnaire.

Also, I once again lost track of the days and found myself in line at the drive-thru during a holiday weekend. As annoying as that was, I was more disturbed by the vehicle behind me that wasn't maintaining appropriate social distancing.

And about Gov. Kate Brown's mask order — people are arguing that it's infringing on their constitutional rights. However, they don't balk at "No shirt, No shoes, No service."

When my mom found out a local store wasn't going to insist that customers comply, I told her I was going to drive to Coos Bay and enter the store with just a mask and shorts on — no shirt, no shoes. #wearmask

Tammy Malgesini, the former Hermiston Herald community editor, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.



Tammy Malgesini

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Proposed shelter a fence line away from sports complex

To the editor:

The only proposed location of the Stepping Stones homeless shelter is next door to a city park. Helping those facing homelessness is needed and should be in a location away from where our children play; not next door to our parks.

Drug paraphernalia and needles that are currently littered along Harper Road and the canal behind the sports complex will inevitably end up in the park and hands of children if Stepping Stones bulldozes past this glaring concern. Business owners surrounding the proposed location already battle with theft and drug paraphernalia littered by people walking to and from the proposed location. It is irresponsible, dangerous, and a serious liability to propose such a location.

As citizens of Hermiston, you are responsible and obliged to keep our children and families safe.

Please urge Stepping Stones and the city of Hermiston to consider a more safe location.

Kim Cimmiyotti
Portland (formerly Hermiston)

Thanks to first responders

Howdy,

It was interesting driving around on the Fourth of July. I would like to thank those businesses and private citizens who had Old Glory flying for all to see.

I would also like to thank all those who put on wonderful displays of fireworks Friday and Saturday. It sure made my Fourth that much better! And again, thanks to all the first responders, firefighters and staff who help us be safe!

I would also like to publicly thank the sheriff's department, city cops, state police, their office people and each of the auxiliaries for what they do to keep us safe in our neighborhoods. My experience with each of the departments through my many years has been nothing but positive. Actually, when I have asked for advice or help, you have gone the extra mile.

I am grateful to have you in our communities! I pray for each of your safety and your family's welfare! Thank you!

Pa Routson
Umatilla

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.