

OUR VIEW

Banning books is antithetical to our democracy

For September and into October, the path at Umatilla's Hash Park has been lined with frames of pages of a banned book, "The Story of Ferdinand," by Monroe Leaf. The display was first arranged as part of a series of activities around "Banned Book Week," which ran from Sept. 26 to Oct. 2.

The activities were important for several reasons, not the least of which is an effort to raise awareness regarding banned books and the process libraries go through when a book is challenged.

The word "banned" carries plenty of negative connota-

tions and when a book is "challenged" it is "banned" by a library whether it is removed from the library or if it stays. It is then added to a banned book list, where other libraries are warned they may experience a challenge from a local resident.

Banning books in a democracy is simply a bad idea. While every resident has the right to voice a concern regarding the topic of a book, there isn't much justification to force a local library to remove a book because it happens to offend the sensibilities of a few people.

That doesn't mean residents should be discouraged from

challenging a book. If they feel a book's themes are controversial or inappropriate, they should voice their concern. Yet in the end if they believe a book is inappropriate, they are under no obligation to read the tome nor even leaf through it.

If there is a concern that a book's perceived objectionable material will be viewed by children, then each parent can ensure they exercise oversight. To outright ban a book, though, doesn't hold up when framed against the principals of our great nation

Books, literature, are, at their best, pieces of art that push the boundaries of present-day

norms. Good novels and non-fiction allow us an avenue to think of the world — and its people — in different ways than we did before. The enlightened goal is for a book to transform our understanding of people and to give us insight into our own humanity. Sometimes achieving those goals can rub some people wrong. That's fine. All of us have our own opinions, and we are entitled to them.

But banning books of any kind in our democracy is just a bad idea. That's why the efforts of those behind the "Banned Book Week" deserve praise for highlighting this important issue.



Erick Peterson/Hermiston Herald
A sign Sept. 16, 2021, in Hash Park, Umatilla, announces Banned Book Week.

PETERSON'S POINTS

The deadline that motivates my work as editor

My minutes are numbered, and I have to work fast.

More than a month ago, I took a very good job. As editor and senior reporter of the Hermiston Herald, I get to meet people, learn about them and tell their stories. It is work that has put me in touch with artists, politicians and workers of every stripe. As COVID-19 remains the biggest story each week, I have spoken with many afflicted people, as well as the medical professionals who treat them. During this time, I have also been able to meet athletes, students, teachers, police officers and more.

I have told many stories, and I know there are many more to tell. One person, just this past week, wrote a letter offering one suggestion. She wants me to write about people's bad driving. She has noticed many drivers crossing multiple lanes when turning onto a street. Instead, they should be turning into one

lane and then transitioning into another lane.



Erick Peterson

Her gripe is justified. And I would write about it if I were not sometimes guilty of it. Also, there are restrictions, which I will write more about in a second.

Another person came into my office and asked me to cover Hermiston school board meetings. It was a reasonable request, which I followed up on by viewing a meeting this week.

Several people have requested other stories, by Facebook Messenger, email, phone and in person. I have written some of their stories and I have made plans to write others.

I reject few story ideas, because everyone is valued and their experiences are valuable. It pains me to not write a story once the idea is in front of me, but there are reasons I do. The reasons are as follows: space and time (mostly time, which I personify as "The Clock").

1) Space. As I am writing this column, I know the number of pages available to me in the paper. This paper is 14 pages. Three of the pages are classified ads, holy and untouchable to me. This leaves 11 pages, but not even that space is all for me. Other writers contribute to this paper. Once I place their work, and account for the advertisements, I have even less space for my writing.

I also have a rough idea of the amount of space I am limited to write this column. Above, below and to the sides, there is other work. One editorial provides a major message of this paper. My favorite piece here is from award-winning columnist Tammy Malgesini. I look forward to her column every month.

2) The Clock. This is the one that gets me — The Clock, which marks my minutes. Unheard but felt, in the throbbing veins at my temples, The Clock spells the eventual end to my work as the editor of this paper.

Just as every newspaper has a dead-

line, my position here too has a conclusion. Someday, I will quit, retire or get fired. Maybe, I will die while working at this job, behind the desk that I am now standing behind. This may be my last sentence...

Or not.

My point is, I do not know the time or the reason for the end, just that it is coming. Every day, it nears. This fear causes me to work harder to write the things that matter most to me and the things that may mean the most to you.

I type this week's column as a response to my bosses, who asked me to write a column about the sort of editor I wish to be for this area. My answer to them, and to readers, is I am an editor and a writer who feels the pain of a deadline. I hope to write every story at least once, perhaps more, if The Clock allows.

Erick Peterson is the editor and senior reporter of the Hermiston Herald.

COLUMN

There's still time to share your scary tales

If you haven't already put a pen to paper for the Hermiston Herald's true scary story contest, I urge you to do so.

There's something about being scared that's exhilarating — whether it's watching a scary movie, participating in an extreme sport, riding a roller coaster or finding yourself in a dangerous situation. The adrenaline rush is like an endorphin overdose. And I've had my share of intense (cue "The Twilight Zone" theme song) moments.

Just out of college, I worked at Rosemont School, a secure treatment facility for adolescent girls. Housed in an old Catholic convent in north Portland, the building was on the National Register of Historic Places. When I worked there, it was a bit creaky and freaky.

Of Colonial Revival Georgian architecture, the sprawling multiple-story structure featured Palladian central windows, a cupola and lots of spider webs. Late at night, the building — and stories the kitchen staff told — created an opportunity for the imagination to run wild.

Rather than risking the 40-mile drive home during ice storms, I'd bring an overnight bag and sleep in the old priest's quarters. One night I awoke to loud clanging and banging. Frozen in fear, my eyes darted around the darkened room — finally I realized the sound was from the old radiator heating system.

There was another time when I got freaked out at Rosemont. After a year, I was the senior staff on the first floor dormitory, which meant I was the designated person to give the "all clear" if an alarm sounded or during fire drills. Everyone else was to immediately exit the building to the courtyard.

It was a dark and rainy night the first time I had to brave the corridors and stairwells by myself. As I finished the upper floor checks, I headed back down the stairs and as I turned the corner on the landing, I just about ran into a staff person from the third floor.

Fear seems to bring out the four-letter words — and they came out in a stream that would have made a sailor blush. It seems in the midst of a frightening situation, I can muster up just enough courage to deal with it — only to collapse into a frenzy of emotions later. Such was the case when a knife-wielding dude accosted me outside a 7-Eleven in Portland.

I had just gotten off work and had a 50-minute drive ahead of me. Hungry and tired, I wanted to eat my snack and go home. As I exited the store and headed to my rig, I heard him say, "Have you ever been hungry?" I was thinking, "Ummmm, yeah like right now." However, I ignored him — hoping he would just go away.

But he didn't. As I got into my car and put the box of piping hot Pizza Rolls



Tammy Malgesini

on the dash, he positioned himself so I couldn't close my door and then repeated his question. I told him I didn't have anything. With maybe 50 cents in my pocket, I wasn't giving up my Pepsi and Pizza Rolls.

I still can visualize the encounter in slow motion when he pulled a knife out of his jacket. And at that precise moment, the store clerk came rushing out yelling — giving me enough time to close my door and jet out of the parking lot. After flagging down a police officer and giving a report, I needed to call John to let him know I would be late getting home.

I remained calm throughout the whole incident until I heard John's voice when the operator asked if he would accept a collect call — and then I lost it. I was a stuttering, blubbing mess, "This g-g-g-guy ... a m-m-m-man, h-h-h-he w-w-w-wouldn't l-l-l-let m-m-m-me g-g-g-go. H-h-h-he w-w-w-wanted my p-p-p-pizza rolls."

I guess I'm not always calm under pressure — there was that time I cracked a bone in my wrist because I thought a spider was crawling up my arm. It turned out to only be a piece of black thread — and time to get a new prescription for my glasses.

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

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Early detection saves lives

On Oct. 2, my younger brother told me he has end stage cancer. We do not know how long he will live. New technology to improve cancer early detection and save lives is on our fingertips. Several companies are developing new blood tests to detect multiple cancers early that would complement existing early detection tests.

These tests could be life-changing, but only if people can access them. That's the message I shared with Sen. Ron Wyden and my members of Congress during a virtual event with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. I asked them to support legislation to increase cancer screening and early detection in Medicare.

This bipartisan legislation would ensure that those on Medicare don't face unacceptable delays in accessing these new tests once they are FDA approved, which is important since Medicare already covers early detection tests for breast, colorectal and prostate cancers. People on Medicare must have access to new screening options.

Detecting cancer early could be the difference between life or death. I'm grateful that Reps. Earl Blumenauer and Kurt Schrader support these efforts, and I hope that Wyden will support this legislation too. It is time to discover cancer cures. It will be too late for my brother.

Please make it in time for our loved ones.

Karen Malcolm Pendleton

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) 278-2673 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; death notices and information about services are published at no charge. Obituaries can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge.

Obituaries can be submitted via the funeral home, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818.