

BULLY PULPIT

Family reunion

I just got back from a much-needed vacation that involved getting together with my cousins and second-cousins. I mentioned that in church; apparently family reunions aren’t at the top of people’s lists for vacation – but I had a great time.

It was great for many reasons. First, it was time; I hadn’t been on vacation, albeit for four days, for a long time. I drove to Ohio to join my cousin at a campground near Hocking Hills State Park. For those who haven’t heard of it – look it up, awesome, beautiful country with lots to do.

After driving through rain the entire day, it was a welcomed sight to get to campground 750 miles later. My cousin, Ken, his daughter Paris and boyfriend, Lucas, were there that night.

What was cool about the weekend was how it came about. My mom was one of four girls; after my grandma died, the family blew apart, various reasons were the cause, but none of us were close. Kenny and I managed to keep our relationship and have grown pretty close.

So, Paris graduated with her Occupational Therapy degree and her party, our reunion, etc. all ended up wrapped in the same ball. Twelve of us ventured to Hocking Hills to an AirBnB log-cabin to spend the weekend together, reacquainting ourselves or meeting for the first time.

Kenny was right – “it’ll be nice to see each other where there is no corpse involved.”

The state park features a river that runs through water-formed caves of limestone. Apparently, it’s a hit because when I saw Greyhound buses in the parking lot, I knew we were in for lots of people. But the trail system is extensive and they cater to everyone from experienced hikers to handicapped hikers that need a hand.

In the process of the reunion, I realized how much time had traveled under the bridge. Kenny’s brother, Keith, had died from a massive heart attack leaving two boys, Josh and Jeremy, whom I had never met.

Josh, it turns out, could be a stand-up comedian and had us all in stitches all weekend. I was fortunate to reacquaint myself with Maggie, 6 years older, who introduced me to the Marshall Tucker Band when I was 18.

Even after all the years, I could look at the two boys, now 37 and 40, and see their dad in them. Keith introduced me to Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon album, and actually had the album cover painted on his bedroom wall.

My appreciation for old rock and roll is genetic, I guess. Though, from Paris’ playlist, she should have been in college the same time as I was.

We had all forms of familial relationships inside that cabin – and everyone got along great and had a good time. Kenny’s perfect homebrew beer hit the spot after a seven-mile hike Friday and four-mile hike Saturday – he’s a chemical engineer so it was not out of his realm to assist with his talents.

I came away Sunday sad to leave; sad that so much time had wasted where lives changed, people died, people grew up and the family was distant. I was touched that I then had renewed relationships, new family members to get to know and a thankfulness that Kenny and I were able to be close and enjoy our families together.

The next time someone says family reunion and groans break out; think about the loved ones that have passed, will pass or have been born and look at the opportunity to get to know more of your own heritage.

I, for one, am looking forward to the next Kuras/Cerny family reunion and hope my son and his family will be there to enlarge the circle of family.

Jackie Taylor
Linn County News
Jackielcn1@gmail.com



Do shareholder proxy firms have too much power?

BY PETER ROFF

Few of us own as many shares as Warren Buffett, who recently announced he would retire at year’s end. Nevertheless, America is still a nation of investors who own stocks and bonds, real estate, collectibles and other assets that grow in value over time, adding to our wealth if we’re smart and lucky.

Behind all that is a network of asset management firms, financial advisors, brokers and others who manage our money and give advice on how to do well. Most of them operate out of a time-honored tradition of fiduciary responsibility, requiring those in the business of managing other people’s money to make generating the greatest return on investment possible their primary concern.

Being an investor also gives you power. It gives you a voice in the management of the corporations whose

stock you own. Every year, thousands of firms conduct votes of their shareholders on resolutions that make, affirm or change company policy.

There are so many that it’s hard for an individual investor to keep up. Most must rely on one of two firms — Glass Lewis and Institutional Shareholder Services, or ISS — to tell them whether to vote “Aye” or “Nay” by proxy. As a result, these firms have what critics allege amount to quasi-regulatory power over matters of corporate governance, power that has now come under congressional scrutiny.

On April 29, the House Financial Services Committee held a hearing on the role of proxy firms on the growth and health of the U.S. economy. For years, Glass Lewis and ISS have advocated for adopting measures legitimizing environmental, social and governance factors (ESG) as an investment strategy and

diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as a corporate management policy without regard to the effect on shareholder value and a company’s bottom line.

Size matters. These two firms’ combined clientele is just about 90% of the total, giving them extraordinary influence. At the same time, they offer ESG consulting services. ISS’s website clearly states “ESG No Longer Optional,” making their perspective on the matter, which they then push onto shareholders, noticeably clear. If you think that makes it hard to tell where one interest stops and the other starts, you’re not alone.

Glass Lewis is linked to \$40 trillion in assets across 100 global markets, exercising influence over 40,000 yearly shareholder meetings. ISS is more guarded about what it reveals but admits it may touch as many as 20,000 shareholder meetings yearly

across 100 countries, involving 3.8 trillion shares. Some analysts suggest the advice given by these firms can sway a proxy vote by as much as 30%, leading shareholders to approve measures forcing asset managers to consider more than just their primary fiduciary responsibility when investing other people’s money.

Some say that’s just how the free market works, lauding it as an example of democracy in action on Wall Street. Maybe, but the voting guidelines and decision-making processes of these firms are not transparent. Shareholders and corporate managers are not given access to the decision-making process by which advisory opinions are reached. Much of what has been put forward in the past has been inconsistent, even across similar proposals in front of different companies or even the same company
SEE PROXY, A3

Solid disappointment that childhood TV idols went full-throttle left

BY CHRISTINE FLOWERS

“Little House on the Prairie” was never one of my favorite television shows for a very specific reason: The series of books about a pioneer girl and her family, written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, was in

fact one of my favorite pieces of literature.

I spent hours in the early 1970s devouring the autobiographical children’s stories and had a very specific idea of what “my” Laura looked and sounded like. That is the beauty of the written word:

You get to create your own vision of the characters and aren’t constrained by Hollywood’s Velveeta version of authentic Gruyère.

So, when I saw Melissa Gilbert in the role of my beloved heroine, I wasn’t impressed. Freckles, auburn hair — not the “mousy brown” of the book — and unusually prominent orthodontia shattered my image of the plucky Miss Ingalls.

Nonetheless, I was a faithful viewer for its almost decades-long run, simply because there weren’t that many wholesome depictions of children’s literature on network prime time.

A few years ago, I found Melissa Gilbert, now a grandmother, on Instagram and decided to follow her for old time’s sake.

That was a mistake. Whatever residual affection I had

for her from our first encounter 50 years ago evaporated when I started reading her overtly political posts.

Laura hated Republicans? Laura supported abortion rights? Laura had rainbow flags and thought boys should be in girls’ bathroom spaces?

And then she, a Jewish woman, comes out suggesting rather forcefully that I, a Catholic woman, should be offended by a comical albeit tasteless AI image of Donald Trump as Pope?

This woman, who lavished praise on “Catholic” Joe Biden, a man who blithely took communion while lobbying for a constitutional right to abortion was telling me I had to be upset about a meme?

Unfollowed immediately, but not after trolling her for a week.

SEE CHILDHOOD IDOL, A3

Trump hit Carney with a Bieber bomb

BY NIK KOWSAR

This week, President Donald J. Trump — the man who once tried to buy Greenland as casually as an eBay impulse purchase — rolled out the red carpet for his newest fascination: new Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Yes, that Mark Carney. The banker-turned-politician who, mere months ago, couldn’t secure a seat at Canada’s cabinet table now strolled into 24 Sussex Drive like it was a weekend brunch spot.

Let’s rewind. Not long ago, Canada’s Liberal Party was polling somewhere between “flu-season approval ratings” and “airline food satisfaction.” Conventional wisdom suggested they’d need to burn through millions just to lose gracefully. Then came an unlikely savior: Donald Trump,

Canada’s accidental campaign strategist.

After one MAGA-fueled rant too many, Trump — never one to miss a geopolitical cringe moment — revived his bromance-turned-feud with former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau by declaring, “Canada should be America’s 51st state!” He even called Trudeau his “governor,” which in political terms was less a jab and more a thermonuclear elbow drop on the Conservative Party.

It was the Fifth Avenue shooting fantasy realized. Except this time, Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre played the collateral damage, left somewhere between Ottawa and political oblivion.

Poilievre’s “Make Canada Great Again” reboot died quietly. Canadians, fueled by Tim Hortons and Schaden-
SEE CARNEY, A3