



In-the-past-tense Day

So, I'm in an interesting situation here. Thanks to this year's placement of our national holiday, people who live close to Sauk Centre are going to be getting this newspaper July 3. Some of those people might read the paper right away, but others might not read it until their July 4 vacation, and everyone farther away – hi, Mom and Dad! – won't even get the paper in their mailboxes until July 5 or later. That means I'm writing for people who are either about to celebrate, are currently celebrating or have already celebrated Independence Day, so the only thing I can do is try to address all of you at once while I'm writing this column in late June. Let's see how it goes.

I hope you had a great Fourth of July, are having a great Fourth of July or are planning to have a great Fourth of July. If, for some reason, you aren't planning or didn't plan to have a great Fourth of July, I still hope you had, are having or are about to have a great day anyway.

Whether you're anticipating, enjoying or remembering your day off to celebrate our country's independence, we need to talk about fireworks. Now that we're past the summer solstice, the days are getting shorter, so I suppose it's fitting we defy the waning daytime hours by launching projectiles of brilliant light, or by preparing to launch projectiles of brilliant light, or by cleaning up the burning debris from a misfired projectile of brilliant light, depending on when you're reading this column.

I'm not really kidding about the burning debris thing, not while I have memories of running away from a large bottle rocket that got stuck in the ground. There's still a vivid snapshot in my mind's eye: me and my siblings at a full sprint, our backs lit up in green like a Disney villain had erupted from the



by Ben Sonnek

Ultra Sonnek

ground behind us. Nothing caught fire and nobody was injured, but I do recommend a greater degree of professional care in the use of all your celebratory combustibles. At least, I recommend that to all you July 3 people; it might be happening to you July 4 people right now, and you July 5 people already think those bygone incidents were awesome.

Man, this feels like the time I had to give a dinner speech at a time travelers' convention.

There's not much I can tell you about food, because I know you have already decided to overeat, are currently overeating or are trying to get in one more work day while in the midst of a food coma. I can't blame any of you; watermelon is addicting. Hot dogs are also OK, but my

salute goes out to you who are about to eat – or are eating – or have already eaten – bratwurst. Come on, those are giant meat rolls of happiness, superior to hot dogs in every measurable and immeasurable way. I have never found an onion-stuffed hot dog, and you know you're doing well in life if the sandwich's main filling doesn't fit in the bun. Best of all, you don't have to eat a lot of bratwurst before you feel like you weigh a million pounds, as I'm sure the July 4 and July 5 people will verify.

However your holiday goes, I reiterate my opening wishes. I hope this Independence Day goes, is going or has gone well; I hope the food will be, is or was delicious; I hope the fireworks will be, are or were spectacular; and I hope the candy throwers in the parade will throw, are throwing or did throw far enough to reach you adults in the back rows. It is good to celebrate our freedom as Americans, but let us continue to cherish our liberty during the rest of the year when I can go back to conjugating my verbs only once.

My advance directive for dementia

Do you ever wonder what it would be like to have dementia? Do you ever wonder if you are already getting it? I have always dreaded this disease.

There has been some history of it in my family, with my mother having it to a degree towards the very end of her life, at least two grandparents and an aunt or two.

During a particularly chaotic time in the last year, at least three times I found myself absentmindedly putting something in the wrong place. It freaked me out to the point where I talked to my doctor about it at my annual physical. She said unless you are doing weird things on a daily basis, there is no need to worry. If you do weird things once in a great while, it is probably sensory overload or maybe even hormones. Anyway, I was moved to take one of those online tests to check if you are getting dementia and scored very well on it. I was not completely convinced, but felt better nonetheless.

Should I ever be diagnosed with dementia, here are some of my ideas for an advanced directive. I put this out there for my husband, children, sisters, sisters-in-law and anyone who may ever care for me in an institution. We can address one issue at a time.

Becoming violent: Please don't ever let me hurt anyone. I probably will not body slam anyone, but I don't want anything left to chance. I am not sure how you do this, but we can research it in the meantime.

Foul language: If in that period of time I am soft-spoken, just let me mutter my profanities under my breath. If I become very loud, I give you permission to ignore me, or if necessary, place me where most people can't hear. If I should say anything rude to or about you, remember I am not in my right mind – i.e., don't believe the myth that the real me is emerging.

Removing clothing: Some people with dementia develop an aversion to wearing clothing and remove it at will, regardless of where they may be. Please dress me in clothing with closures in the back that I cannot reach or undo. Please.



by Diane Leukam

Random Reflections

Personal enjoyment: I love the beauty in all of creation. If that love remains during dementia, please show me beautiful books. When my grandmother had dementia, she lived with my parents for some time. Every day they gave her one of those big coffee table books with the beautiful photographs and every day it was new to her. She found more joy in those photos and it was really a sweet thing if you could ignore the fact that she loved it because she had dementia.

Or, you could put me outside where I can enjoy nature in person. However, please remember my temperature comfort zone is very limited, from about 70 to 85 degrees, depending on the wind speed and sunshine; please make sure I am dressed accordingly.

If I still enjoy painting, feel free to put me in front of an easel. I might even develop a new love for the abstract. My aunt painted beautiful pictures with Alzheimer's and none of us even knew she had it in her. I have copies of several of her paintings.

Personal hygiene: I do not like my hair being pulled. Anyone who brushes it might want to be prepared for the foul language mentioned above. If I have any hairs growing on my chin as I age, someone must be appointed to remove them before they are visible to the public. If you wish, you could put a little eye shadow and mascara on me, depending on how old I am. Any other makeup I really don't care about. I would be OK with white hair.

Finally, and this is specific to an institution: Do not park me by the birds. While I do love birds and could probably be parked by a window in my home to watch them for hours, I do not want people to watch me watching the birds. For some that is fine and dandy, but this is a personal advance directive after all, and my wish.

I hope this directive never needs to be implemented and if you ever get dementia, I promise to look out for you, as well. Just have your directive ready, because I don't know how you feel about birds.

Letter to the Editor

What is freedom?

By Anna Enright, Hutchinson

Every Fourth of July, we remember the Declaration of Independence; those who pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor for this great country in order to make it a reality; and those who fought to keep it free for 243 years.

Freedom is the ability to do what one ought to do. It is the ability to do good; to live; to speak the truth; to practice one's religion; to defend one's self and family from physical harm; for parents to educate their children. Freedom is more about being able to give of oneself than to receive.

In our current tumultuous political climate, it is important to understand what freedom is not. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever one wants, or a government handout or mandate. It is not free college or student loan forgiveness. Freedom is a healthy economy with an abundance of private scholarships and good jobs where individuals have opportunities to pay back their debts.

Freedom is not a one-size-fits-all universal healthcare system. It is a less regulated medical market resulting in more doctors, competition and independent clinics that give patients options to seek out the best care at affordable prices. Freedom for a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy is not abortion. Instead, it is a nearby pregnancy help center, a supportive community, and family and friends that can provide her with the encouragement and practical help she needs to joyfully give birth to her little boy or girl.

Freedom is not legalizing marijuana. It is living in a culture where one's human dignity and hope for the future are so supported that no one turns to harmful drugs, with effective programs available to help people beat their addictions.

Freedom is not "taking a knee" during the National Anthem. It is standing respectfully with the knowledge that men and women died in battle so that you could be there at all – in relative peace and prosperity in the greatest country on earth.

The authors of the Declaration of Independence had a good grasp of the definition of freedom and they knew that the purpose of government was to secure the people's freedoms. The government doesn't invent freedoms, but should protect them. Our nation – built on the foundation of freedom – will continue, but only as long as voters choose their representatives carefully and with a true understanding of freedom.

Up a creek

For Mother's Day, my family gifted me with a kayak. I have been really excited to take it out on its maiden voyage, and I had the opportunity to do so this past weekend.

A friend organized a trip from Little Sauk, going down the river and coming out onto Sauk Lake. The plan was to start mid-morning and end with lunch at a resort on the lake. There were four of us going on this little excursion, and I was really looking forward to it, not one bit concerned about my lack of kayaking skills – until we had to drop into the river.

The water was high and it was moving at a pretty swift speed where we entered. I felt like I had more things to juggle than I was prepared for, adjusting my seat back straps which proceeded to break in the first five minutes, securing a cooler which I never had the coordination to dig into, along with keeping a hold of my paddle which was quickly covered in the excess sunscreen left on my hands. This was all going on while I tried to put on my life jacket and then push myself into the water. I managed it all, but let's just say I was glad that it wasn't captured on video.

It wasn't long after I got into the water that the other three ladies just up ahead of me were asking if I was OK and if I was coming with them; these became frequent concerns throughout the trip. It was not long before I found myself caught up on two different trees, taking on a little water and laughing so hard that I couldn't catch my breath. This was another common theme throughout the day: hard, breath-stealing laughter. Whether it was due to my lover of a kayak, which always wanted to be touching another kayak, or all of us paddling for our lives after hearing what we swore to be a water buffalo out in the tall grass, or taking in the sights and sounds around us at the advice of our six-eyed guide, I am not sure if my side hurt from laughing so hard or the core workout I was getting.

Over lunch, we were recapping the trip and we all agreed that the only bad part of it all was that it was over. We have already agreed to another trip, and the only question is how soon can we make it happen. I don't know if I would have been brave enough to go on this trip by myself, but I do know that I would not have had as much fun without the company.

At the centre of it, it was a river, not a creek, and I did have a paddle. I also had good company and great laughs which made for one heck of a summer day.



by Sara Thompson
At the Centre of it

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