

OPINION

GROWING UP IN

HENDERSON

Don
Osell



The lighter side of COVID-19: Lend me an ear or two

In my growing-up years in Henderson — in the 1930s — it was not uncommon to see quarantine signs on front doors. It was to advise that someone living here had a communicable disease — stay away! Usually it was measles, mumps, chicken pox or whooping cough.

There were no masks, they were unheard of in those days except for doctors and nurses. Not so today. I'm a believer and user of masks, but they can be a challenge for me and others in my situation.

Of course COVID is distracting, disruptive, disturbing, dismaying or whatever dis-adjective you might come up with. I'm not

trying to dissuade you of that, but if humor is a beneficial distraction, let's go there for just a moment.

My problem, if you can call it that, is that I only have two ears. Not enough for all of the things that are going on these days in and around the only two ears I have. Consider:

1. I'm old enough to need hearing aids to hear whatever you're trying to tell me. I need two ears for these "helpers."
2. I also need glasses, the better to see you with.
3. On bright sunshiny days I also need sunglasses over my seeing glasses. Things

are beginning to get complicated around my too few, two ears.

4. Now add a mask (I'm a wearer and believer.) All together it's a bit much. I take off my mask and it snags my hearing aids. Where did they go??

Mild panic sets in. Hey, if I can't find them, we're talking thousands of dollars. More than I can possibly find under my sofa cushions. It's happened to me folks, and more than once. So far, I've been able to find them, Often under the same sofa cushions where I have too few coins.

Then I remind myself, it's only money (but lots of money!). Cool down. So far,

I've been able to find them. So far. But not without a lot of stress. During these disruptive times we could use an extra set of ears, but God only gave us two.

Someday, truth be told, this will all be history. Having only two ears is a minor problem. When I think of all the really difficult challenges during this pandemic: health, loss of life, loss of jobs and businesses, racial tension and more, my ear problems don't even make the list.

So smile. It does wonders to erase the worry lines in your face.

And this too shall pass.

Letters to the Editor

September is Falls Prevention Month

We have rearranged our priorities this year to accommodate the recent events throughout the world. Meetings are being held virtually, schools are using a distant learning platform, and many are holding off visiting people. One thing we do not want to change, or overlook are things that we can control, like falls.

Did you know that many falls can be prevented? Falls are not a natural part of the aging process and steps can and should be taken to prevent falls.

Examples of ways to do this successfully include taking classes,

such as Matter of Balance (MOB), Tai Ji Quan or Stepping On, to name a few programs. These evidenced-based classes promote preventing falls through low impact exercises and improving balance. Classes are offered throughout the state and can be found by contacting your local Area Agency on Aging or speaking with your medical providers.

Another form of preventing falls is to review what you have in your homes. Reduce clutter; papers on the floor, rugs, pet accessories or other items that can be moved to allow a clear and even walking surface. Placing furniture strategically throughout your home to use as a balance tool is not a safe way to ambulate. If you find yourself doing this, you may need to talk to a physical therapist about balance and safe alternatives for ambula-

tion.

There are many ways to check your risk of falling. One way is to visit the National Council on Aging website (www.ncoa.org) where you can take an assessment of your risk of falls. This is a free

service and I encourage you, if you are concerned about falling to take this assessment and discuss it with your medical providers.

Remember, one out of every four individuals over the age of 65 experience falls. Falls can lead to

serious injury; hospital stays and sometimes can be fatal. Falls can be prevented, be proactive and take the initiative to be safe.

Jason W. Swanson, HSE
Executive Director
MNRAAA

The Henderson Independent's political letters policy

The Henderson Independent charges \$25 for endorsement letters or election-related letters that advocate for or against a candidate or political party, up to 250 words, or \$8 per inch charge for letters exceeding 250 words. Payment must be made prior to the letter running in the paper.

This policy does NOT affect letters written in regards to ballot measures, like referendums.

Letter writers need to identify

themselves if they are part of the candidate's campaign. It is also policy not to publish political or election-related letters the week before the election, however paid political advertising is accepted.

Writers of political letters must include the writer's name, address, phone number and email. Letters can be emailed to hendersonmnnews@gmail.com. The deadline is Monday at noon.

All letters to the editor and ad-

vertising content submitted are published at the sole discretion of the Editor who also reserves the right to verify information before publication. If you have any questions regarding this policy, you can contact the Editor, Rachel Miller, at the Independent office at 507-248-3223. The Henderson Independent does not endorse candidates for local, state or national office.

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PHOTOS BY BETH CORNISH

Even hummingbirds keep up with the news

The newest prospective subscriber to the *Henderson Independent*, Ms. Hummer, dropped by the office on Sept. 17 for a sweet libation and to enquire about snowbird rates. She will have to contact us with her out of town address when she reaches her winter home.

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Memories of a long-ago sugarbush

Ah, March, when winter starts to loosen its frozen grip on the north country. Time to make a pleasant memory trip to the sugarbush and the spring ritual of tapping the maple trees.

Sugar maples produce the best and sweetest syrup of all the maple species that make their home in Minnesota. My earliest sugarbush memories go back to about 1940 with my boyhood friend Monroe Tieg.

We knew about some nice sugar maples up and around Brown Cemetery. We decided to try our hand at tapping some of those trees. Our skills were crude com-

pared to the high technology used these days to make maple syrup. We made our own spiles, the spigot you need to get at the flowing sap in the trees.

We hand-made our spiles from a 5-inch branch of sumac, a half-inch in diameter, and we hollowed out the soft, pithy center so we had a tube through which sap could flow. Next, we hand-drilled a hole in the tree, slightly smaller than the spile, then pounded our makeshift spile into the tree. It worked. Within seconds the drip, drip of sweet juice begin flowing. We used Karo syrup cans wired to the end of the spiles to catch the sap.

Up on Brown Cemetery, near the

tall Joe Brown monument, there was (still is, I believe) a beautifully shaped sugar maple tree, back then all of 18-inches in diameter. Big enough for two spiles. It produced so much sap we called it Old Faithful.

Brown Cemetery is the resting place of my parents, Alfred and Clara. When I visit there I always walk over and check on the well-being of Old Faithful. It has been a few years but the last time I checked she (I always think of trees as she; dogs, too) was in remarkably good shape.

My guess is that she was at least 40 years old when Monroe and I first tapped her, that would make

her about 120 years old now, so she was a seedling around 1900. Some sleuthing tells me that sugar maples can live 200 years or more. If trees could talk, Old Faithful could tell a wonderful story. Someday, not just yet, she may go to a sawmill and repurpose into a piece of beautiful wood furniture.

My mother, bless her, and Monroe's mother, Hilda, dutifully cooked down our liquid harvest and we might have gotten a quart or two of amber brown syrup for our efforts. A labor of enjoyment, really. In the early mornings and after school we'd check the pails on the six or eight trees we'd tapped, and on cold days a thin

skim of ice formed on the top of the sap. It is the water that freezes, leaving the concentrated liquid even sweeter. How well I remember the taste of that sweet, cold liquid as we moved from tree to tree emptying the pails.

When the first Europeans traveled up the Minnesota River around 1700, they found the Indians here making syrup, a delicacy unknown where they came from since there are no maple trees in Europe. From that primitive beginning, the dollar value of the North American maple syrup market today is about \$500 million dollars.

I'm not sure which is sweeter: the syrup or the memories.

DISTANCE LEARNING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

still, even though we've been doing it all year," she said.

Right now, the entire district is in a hybrid model with K-6 coming in Monday through Thursday, and everybody engaging in distance learning on Fridays. Although this

option is available, there are still students who have chosen to remain as distance learners, as well as students that bounce between the two models depending on their health or recent exposures.

Another facet of the distance and hybrid learning situation is the parents.

A mom of two, Megan Bisek counts herself lucky that her children being home didn't affect her work schedule and that they were able to manage themselves for the most part.

Bisek has two sons, JT, who is in ninth grade this year, and Derek, who is in fifth grade. Bisek said they have adapted well to all of the learning models, and her greatest strategy involves creating routines for both school and free time.

"JT set the stage by choosing to get up at 6 every morning so that

he could get his work done... that way if his dad or other farmers in the neighborhood needed help he could go and help," Megan said.

This spurred on little brother Derek, 11, to do the same.

It wasn't all sunshine and roses, but "some time limits [on video games] and some group effort" was all it took.

"They didn't always like it, but it was predictable," Megan said, adding that she believes her family has been blessed through all the changes.

MNCS Elementary School has been continuing with four days per week in person, and recently the 7-12 grades have been back in the building two days a week.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Minnesota New Country School student Katie Dimock shows off the homemade masks that she donated to a Mankato hospital.

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LS-H March Students of the Month



6th grade:
Jack Thelemann

Jack is always making sure he understands what he did wrong, is respectful, has a great work ethic and is responsible. Jack is organized and always on task - he does a great job advocating for himself and others.



7th grade:
Snodynn Meacham

Peyton is a high energy student who always ups the morale in the classroom. He uses his humor to entertain his classmates and lift the mood. Peyton is also very good at seeking out help when he needs it and always looks to do his best on his work.



8th grade:
Natalie Haemig

Natalie is a role model student. She is responsible and always goes above and beyond what is expected. She takes pride in her work and has strong, creative skills. Natalie's attention to detail can be seen in all of her school work.



9th grade:
Morgan Gregersen

Morgan is very personable and does a great job in class! She is a quick learner and is always prepared. Morgan always brings an excellent attitude. Her ability to be involved but also make class fun is certainly infectious.



10th grade:
Bella Holloway

Bella is kind, calm and has a great attention to detail. She is just an outstanding young lady and a stellar student who is always attentive in class. Belle is always organized and prepared and asks questions if she needs help. She is very polite and very confident in her demeanor.



11th grade:
Mia Schwarz

Mia is always willing to help out, and she has a positive attitude about everything! She is attentive in class regardless of the mode (distance or in-person). Mia is hardworking, sweet, and goes above and beyond. She takes great care in her work, is prepared, and asks questions.



12th grade:
Olivia Fritz

Olivia is a hard worker who is determined to do her best and to be successful. Olivia goes above and beyond what is necessary of a high schooler. She puts her best foot forward in her academics and athletics. Olivia has been a pleasure to coach because she listens and tries her best.

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Sister Peggy Traxler: A woman of great distinction

The thought occurred to me recently: Of all the people who grew up in Henderson, who might be the person who went on to make the biggest impact on the world stage?

An impossible question to answer, to be sure, after all, how do you go about measuring something like that? But, as the saying goes, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

So here's my nomination: Sister Margaret (Peggy) Traxler, known in her religious life for many years as Sister Mary Peters.

Who was this woman and what did she do to merit that accolade, in my judgement? If you are new to the Henderson scene, the Traxler name probably means nothing to you. She was born Margaret Ellen Traxler on March 12, 1924, the daughter of a Henderson doctor and his nurse wife, Dr. John Traxler and his wife, Army nurse Marie.

The two met during World War I, married after the war and found their way to Henderson. Sister Peggy was the fourth of five daughters; all were bright, talented, social and energetic. All of the Traxler sisters graduated high school from Good Counsel Academy in Mankato, but they had a strong presence in Henderson.

Peggy went on to earn degrees at St. Catherine's and the University of Notre Dame. During



Sister Margaret Traxler, in her nun habit. At that time, she was known as Sister Mary Peter.

that time she took her vows with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND). She was completing her doctorate when her other activities interrupted academic life.

Two brief stories exemplify Peggy's personality. My friend, Ed Schultz, who attended grade school with her, told me that one day during recess, in a playground skirmish, "she had me pinned to the ground before I knew what was happening." At Good Counsel she gained a reputation as an iconoclast.

Her younger sister, Kitty Jo, told me she was constantly challenging authority. This story was passed onto me: When she enrolled at Good Counsel her doctor father told the head administrator, "Don't you dare break her spirit or we'll come and bring her home." That spirit stayed with her all her life.

Sister Peggy was a longtime activist for women's rights, both in and outside the church. At the height of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, she proceeded to convince a number of her SSND nun sisters to travel with her to Selma, Alabama, to join in the now-historic 1965 Civil Rights March. Her housemother reluctantly told her, "fine, but stay in the back."

The day of the march she was in the front row, arms locked with her Sister nuns, right there with Martin Luther King Jr. Her mother, Marie, feared for her safety, but Peggy's birth sisters told her, "Don't worry about her, Mother, Peggy's doing what she wants to do and she'll be all right." Her mother finally agreed.

Back in Chicago, she was active in many women's rights movements. She convinced then-Cardi-

nal Joseph Bernadine to turn over a vacated church building to house the Sisters of Notre Dame. Despite her opposition to some church practices, she gained and kept the respect of the church hierarchy. I suspect many knew she was right on many issues, but ahead of her time.

She established Margaret's Village in 1974 for homeless women, families and children. She visited women's prisons regularly and provided sewing machines so they could make some of the clothing they needed. She championed the State of Israel and the cause of Jews attempting to emigrate from the Soviet Union, for which she received the Golda Meir Award. She was active in the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and was at the peace conferences in Paris working to end the war in Vietnam. And she was at the Vatican demonstrating for women's rights in the church.

Her activity took a toll on her health and she developed heart problems in 2000 that ended her public life. She retired to her motherhouse in Mankato where she suffered a stroke that ended her life two years later. We have only scratched the surface of the things Sister Peggy accomplished in her life. Her life could fill a book.

I knew the family well. Especially her younger sister Kitty Jo, whose career was in nursing. Her faith was deep but unconventional in some respects because she had no fear or hesitancy in challenging authority. I often think of that remark her parents made years ago when she entered her school years in Mankato, "Do not break her spirit or we will come and bring



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Sister Margaret Traxler, in her nun habit. At that time, she was known as Sister Mary Peter.

her home." Those words were prescient and would chart her destiny in life.

Recently, I received a mailing from her friends at Margaret's Village in Chicago, the home she founded 50 years ago. During the week of March 8, 2021, they shared favorite stories of Sister Margaret (she'll always be Peggy to me) on their social media pages. March 12 is her birthday, what she accomplished lives on.

In the interest of space, we have only skimmed the surface of the life story of this remarkable woman. It is right, I believe, to recognize the achievements of those even though they are no longer with us. Gone but certainly not forgotten, her legacy carries on. Tax deductible contributions are welcomed at Margaret's Village, 7315 South Yale Ave., Chicago, IL 60621-3441. A nice way to remember Peggy and carry on her work.

There you have my case for the person with Henderson roots who went on to make the most difference in the world. For the record,

let it be known that I am not Catholic, but I have enormous respect for this woman and her work.

Feel free to disagree and to make your nominations. The polls are always open.

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