

Challenges lead to answered prayer

Two weeks ago, I visited the oldest of my two brothers, who I had not seen in a year.

The timing of that emotional visit was interesting. I had just written about a Community Education outreach that is challenging residents to complete activities from an extensive list as they move along a Sauk Rapids-Rice inspired map.

When I headed out on the morning of Jan. 9, I didn't know I would complete two activities from that list at one time: Spend time with someone you love and look at family photos.

Sixteen years my senior, my brother has battled alcoholism for more than 20 years. Excessive drinking has damaged his body to the point he almost died – twice, spending weeks in the intensive care unit. A few years ago, after hearing he was in an ambulance and first responders doubted he would make it to the hospital alive, all I could picture was a rusty old Chevy and being little again.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, he took me everywhere with him.

“He was so proud of his baby sister; he had to show you off to everyone,” my mom always says.

The drinking worsened after we lost our dad in May 2019. But we'd already felt the brunt of his illness. Dad carried that burden, and the heartache that comes with it, to his grave.

Alcoholics don't damage just their organs. Their hurtful words and behavior damage their families too.

My first husband was an alcoholic, so I'd walked the long road to forgiveness before. Through that experience, and my subsequent work at an outpatient treatment center, I learned firsthand how powerless over alcohol they become. Through my brother's experience, I learned that treatment doesn't always work the first time, and that alcoholics have to want to stop drinking in order to achieve sobriety. No one can do it for them.

As angry and hurt as I've been in the past, nothing can change the love in my heart for a big brother I affectionately called “Osh” before I could pronounce the letter J.

Two weeks ago, I passed his gravel road on my way to a baby shower at my other brother's house. I had time to kill, so I threw the car in reverse.

He wasn't expecting me, but my heart told me to knock anyway.

When I walked inside, a bottle was beside him. Water.

I didn't smell alcohol, and Miller Lite wasn't in its usual spots. I thought twice about it before deciding not to bring it up.

He appeared to be completely sober. I haven't seen him sober since ... I don't remember when. Ten years, probably.

We talked for an hour, mostly about Dad and how different life is now. He retrieved some photos of Dad in his youth that he recently acquired from our uncle. I was late to the baby shower.

“He's been sober a good nine, 10 months now,” a family member told me.

On my drive home, I tearfully remembered what I'd done the summer after Dad died, when I was living in our childhood home. My brother came over, reeking of alcohol, one Saturday morning to mow the lawn. From inside the house, I watched him get off the mower and stand solemnly over Dad's grave, which is on a hill overlooking the farm.

That night, I dropped to my knees and prayed. I asked God to save him.



EXPRESSIONS BY EL
BY ELLARRY PRENTICE

A few other challenges I selected from the list:

– Complete a do-it-yourself project you have been putting off.

After many months of work, Expressions by El, a greeting card line I created in memory of my dad, is complete (well, until I make more cards). I received prints of the final three designs last week.

There are 50 cards in the collection for occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, births, and bridal and baby showers. I also wrote and designed sympathy cards, thank you cards and cards that offer support for people going through tough times.

Cards will soon be available to purchase locally, and 100% of the proceeds will support an upcoming mission trip with my ministry team, Beauty for Ashes. (The trip date is unknown due to COVID-19.) We will be helping women who are victims of domestic violence.

– Make cookies from scratch.

Baking is a love that was passed down to me from my parents and both my grandmothers. In his 50s, my dad learned to bake and was quite good at it. I was really missing him over the holidays, so I decided to make his chocolate chip cookies.

– Listen to music.

This one was easy. I listen to music every day. On Sundays, I like to listen to classic country music. It was tradition growing up. I always feel like I am back home on the farm or in my dad's gravel pit and Mack truck when I hear tunes by John Anderson. Dad used to sing Anderson's 1983 hit “Swingin'” and Hank Williams' “Hey Good Lookin'” to me when I was young.

– Read a children's book.

One of my favorite things to do is snuggle with my two youngest nieces, ages 2 and 5, and read to them. They love books. One of the books we read recently was from the Llama Llama series by Anna Dewdney.

I wrote a children's book last summer, and the manuscript is now in the hands of an illustrator. I hope to release it this year and look forward to reading it to kids.

Community Education staff have created a list of 64 activities for participants to choose from as they move along a Sauk Rapids-Rice-inspired paper map, or game board. After completing a selected activity from the list, participants mark the associated number of spaces on their map. Each activity moves participants as many as six spaces and as few as two spaces toward the finish line. There are 55 spaces on the board.

Activities range from ordering take-out from a local restaurant to good deeds to making funny faces in the mirror.

Printable maps and instructions are available at the Community Education office, 901 First St. S., Sauk Rapids, and at the main office of Rice Elementary School, 200 N.E. Third Ave. A link to print the map from home is on the Sauk Rapids-Rice Community Education Facebook page. The map and instructions can also be accessed by typing <http://bit.ly/SRRCommChallengeMap> in an internet browser.

Bring completed maps to the Community Education office or Rice Elementary by Wednesday, Jan. 27.

Names of participants who turned in completed maps will be drawn Jan. 28, and gift card winners will be contacted shortly thereafter. Businesses donating gift cards are Benton Station, Danny's Dugout, Dutch Maid Bakery, Jimmy's Pour House, O'Brien's Pub, Old Capital Tavern, Old Creamery Café, Manea's Meats, Mixin' It Up and Rock Creek Coffeehouse.

Letter to the Editor

Mishandled civil disturbances

James A. Hovda,
former Minneapolis police officer of Rice

As a former resident of Minneapolis, I am writing to express the extreme frustration I have over the total bungling of the senior law enforcement and their political bosses about the mishandling of civil disturbances in Minneapolis and Washington, D.C.

None of the disturbances were a surprise. Easy to predict. Not difficult to estimate the severity. It has happened before. A number of folks were fired or took retirement at the federal level. Finally, some planning that should have been done in the first place. I strongly suspect some of the law enforcement folks

asked for but were refused help. They were cannon fodder. The troops on the front lines suffered. At least one officer was killed.

And, regarding Minneapolis, let's not forget the Hennepin County Sheriff Dave Hutchinson. He had the authority, as chief law enforcement officer in Hennepin County, to request the services of the Minnesota National Guard. Where was he? No politicians for him to report to. The good citizens of Minneapolis allowed their elected officials to turn their first-class city into a third-class city. They got what they voted for. I hope our area law enforcement will step up to the plate when and if needed. I am confident they will. I am glad I live in Rice.

A look at highlights to start the 2021 session

It is good the 2021 session is underway so legislators may formally address numerous challenges facing our state. Here is a look at some of the latest news and notes from the House:

COVID-19 vaccination pilot site in St. Cloud

A COVID-19 vaccine pilot program has been launched in Minnesota, including a St. Cloud site.

The pilot sites will initially serve adults aged 65 and older, pre-kindergarten through grade 12 teachers and school staff, and staff working at licensed and certified childcare programs. Minnesotans 65 and older can schedule an appointment by calling 612-426-7230 or 833-431-2053 or by visiting mn.gov/vaccine. School districts will select pilot program participants, and childcare providers will be randomly selected and notified to secure an appointment.

COVID-19 vaccine online dashboard

Minnesotans have been expressing concerns about the lack of information on the slow progress of our state's application of COVID-19 vaccinations. A website, mn.gov/covid19/vaccine/data, has been launched that provides relatively timely information on vaccinations across Minnesota so people, for any number of reasons, can track vaccination data. The dashboard includes information on the number of doses allocated to the state by the federal government; shipped to Minnesota providers; and ultimately administered to Minnesotans.

California auto standards in Minnesota

Gov. Tim Walz is pushing to mandate California car standards in our state, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency intends to adopt these regulations via the administrative rulemaking process. The MPCA recently conducted its first public information session regarding the mandate.

This is another example of circumventing the Legislature to advance an agenda. This initiative would lead to higher costs (reportedly by at least \$1,000 per vehicle) and fewer choices for Minnesotans.

Mandating more electric vehicles means fewer vehicles that Minnesotans demand (trucks and SUV's) available on dealer lots. By following California's auto standards, we will be the only state in the Midwest subject to bureaucrats 1,700 miles away. And, if the MPCA turns over our state's car regulations to California, what is to stop them from doing the same with big rigs, boats, lawnmowers, snow blowers or anything else with cylinders that California regulates?

Emergency powers

At this point, there is enough science and data to support ending the governor's emergency powers and return to the representative system of government our Constitution provides. We have had one- to two-weeks' advance notice on the governor's executive orders for the last several months. These are not emergency responses, rather planned rollouts. Minnesotans deserve to have their voices heard at the Capitol with their legislators involved in a collaborative decision-making process.

Penalties for crimes against law enforcement

Under current law, a person found guilty of murder of a peace officer, prosecutor, judge or correctional officer is sentenced to life in prison without release. The penalty for attempted murder of a peace officer is a maximum of 20 years with the offender becoming eligible for conditional release after serving two-thirds of the sentence – or just more than 13 years.

A bill has been authored in the House to stiffen these penalties to better protect law enforcement in our state. The proposal would require an offender to be sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of release after 30 years for the attempted murder of a peace officer, prosecutor, judge or correctional officer. There would be no early release nor would the offender be automatically released after serving a sentence of 30 years. The Commissioner of Corrections could grant a release after a minimum of 30 years in prison after hearing from the victims and prosecutors.



STRAIGHT FROM THE CAPITOL
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