

Opinion

Our View

Bridging cultural gap through storytelling

The United States has often been branded the mixing pot of cultures. All are welcome here, or so one is made to believe. But is that really true? Our cities are becoming more and more diverse but in some cases our minds, ideals and comforts are not. There is still an abundance of fear and lack of understanding of one another.

One thing humans are really good at is telling stories. You may not be a poet or a writer, but at some point in your life you've told a story. Whether it was the gigantic fish you caught that one time on Mille Lacs Lake, or the scary car accident you almost got into driving home from the cabin, storytelling comes to us more naturally than we might think. But what you might not realize is when you're telling these stories you're making connections and relating to those around you.

Now think about this when it comes to strangers, or to those who are of different religions, races or cultures. What if we all stopped and took the time to hear each other's stories? Everyone has something to share as everyone has lived a life filled with experiences, heartaches, pain and joy. It is within these histories we find connections to one another.

When the word racism comes up the first thing that comes to mind is fear and the second is misunderstanding. But when we know even a little bit about one another, that bridge between fear and understanding starts to form. We start to get answers about why someone might have moved here, or why they pray the way they pray, or dress the way they dress. We learn a truth rather than making assumptions that only create more division. We start to learn their history and when that happens it becomes clear the differences we once thought were so vast between each other, substantially shrink in size.

It's not always easy to find opportunities to learn about each other and it's almost certainly not at the top of our to-do lists either, but maybe it should be. Building communities with diversity is a beautiful thing. In learning about other cultures, races and religions, we slowly start to pick away at that fear and replace it with acceptance.

Talk to your neighbors, get to know their stories. You might be surprised to learn you are not that different after all.

Letters policy

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What we can learn from animals

I had a beagle named Marvin. He used to join in singing Happy Birthday and Old MacDonald any chance he got. He pursed his lips, threw back his head and let out that classic beagle howl. He even knew which parts were his and which were mine. We found out early on with him that he was also a beer thief. If you didn't guard your beer carefully around Marvin, it wouldn't take him long to sneak in and tip it over so he could lap it up. He could even maneuver a can out of those mesh cup holders you find in a lawn chair. Like I said, a filthy thief.

When you grow up on a farm and spend the majority of your day with animals, you learn quite a few things. The most valuable lesson I took away from those years is if an animal doesn't trust you, neither will I. Animals know people. They can tell if you're nervous, angry, happy or sad and they respond to those emotions accordingly.

Like Marvin, animals don't hide their true natures. What you see is what you get. Now Marvin might have been a sneaky, little devil, but at least we all knew what his intentions were. He didn't have any hidden agendas, he never pretended to be anyone but himself. He had a horrible singing voice, but he didn't care. Singing gave him joy so he didn't hold back. He knew he wasn't supposed to have beer because it's bad for him, but he also knew that to indulge yourself once

Leanne Loy
Editor



in a while was all a part of living. And he understood there could be consequences from that indulging. Like the time he stole one too many and spent the following day hung over on the couch, grumpy as could be. But he accepted that too, as graceful as a beagle could be expected to.

I despise hearing the phrase, "you're acting like an animal." This phrase is used as an insult when it should be a compliment. Most animals, dogs especially, are loyal. They follow their true nature and live their lives to be of service to others. It's instinctual to animals to help those in need. I think people have forgotten this somewhere along the way. We've become more and more focused on the "self" than those around us. In fact, when you walk into a bookstore or library there are shelves upon shelves of self-help books. And our ads are covered with how to do "self-care." But how many of those books have a chapter on helping others? How many of those ads show us how we can support those in our communities?

I think what we need to discover is in helping others we inadvertently help ourselves. I have an anxiety disorder. Most

A new day dawns as storm clouds gather

A new bright day has dawned after a long slog through darkness and isolation. At long last, after nearly 17 months, there is a light at the end of the Covid-19 tunnel.

We shouldn't rush to celebrate just yet, however; the Delta virus variant is making headway, partly because too many people have refused to get vaccinated. Still, all in all, the near future looks a lot brighter than it did just months ago, even though there lingers the haunting sadness of a half million deaths.

The pandemic revealed, at times so starkly, the inequities in society, as well as the good and the bad of human behavior.

Inequities? Workers living a paycheck or two from disaster; a lack of affordable daycare for many desperate families; people who had no choice but to go to work, virus or not, if they wanted to put food on the table and survive.

The bad? The virus crisis exacerbating the political polarization in this country; maskers vs. no-maskers, including some cases of cold-blooded murder when no-maskers shot to death clerks or assaulted airplane attendants; vaxxers vs. anti-vaxxers; some people dismissing the crisis as a politically-induced hoax; eruptions of anger or blame against virus scientists.

The good? Fortunately, the good outweighs the bad. The following list is just a partial one:

Courageous medical personnel often under agonizing stress (doctors, nurses, aides, technicians, receptionists) risking their lives 'round the clock to keep people alive.

People, even total strangers, helping

Dennis Dalman
Reporter



others, including the sewing of homemade masks, donations of food and money, help with chores and giving rides to appointments.

Parents and children, teachers and school staff, school bus drivers and other school personnel bravely adapting to a "new normal" with astonishing flexibility, adaptability, ingenious make-do-ism, last-minute improvisations, schedule rearrangements and new ways of learning. Virtually all aspects of their lives were affected, turned topsy-turvy, and yet they managed to endure and even thrive with grace-under-pressure. It's almost certain the stresses and struggles made all of them stronger.

Business owners having to endure total shut-downs, partial shut-downs, closings (some permanent) after working so long and hard to make their businesses successful. They had no choice but to lay off many employees, who in turn suffered in a sudden world of economic anxiety and frightening uncertainties. But through it all, business owners and employees (those laid off and not laid off), adapted in remarkable ways, and most of them managed to squeak through the dark tunnel to these brighter, better times.

Front-line workers, like those in grocery

days it's bearable and I can find my own way. But a few years back I went through a very difficult time and for weeks felt very alone. My sister-in-law noticed something was off. She understood it because she had been there at some point in her life as well. The conversation that followed normalized what I was going through and gave me comfort. I never asked her personally if helping me helped her, but that conversation led to me sharing my story in front of about a hundred strangers at a conference.

When I was done speaking, a line of people formed to talk to me individually. Each person shared a bit of their story and how it was so refreshing to hear they weren't alone in their struggles. Each story offered me a bit of my own healing.

Marvin the beagle understood this. When he made us laugh or performed a trick, it almost always ended in us giving him a treat or a pat on the head. He most likely didn't enjoy balancing on his hind legs and spinning in circles like a ballerina; and as an introvert, I didn't particularly enjoy speaking in front of a hundred people, but in doing so we both ended up providing that much needed "self-care" we hear so much about these days. So the next time you find yourself feeling sad, anxious or stressed out try acting like a loyal, selfless animal and see how it inadvertently helps you too.

stores, also performed courageously and deserve our deepest gratitude.

Last but not least, at the very top of the "Good List" are those virologists and lab technicians. Their persistent, challenging explorations of virus components and the cells of the human body made possible the vaccines that brought us to this point, to this exhilarating rush of hope and gladness.

Hopefully, viruses old and new will forever be vanquished or quickly kept in check. But, in the meantime, there is another worrisome "virus" of sorts that has reared its ugly head. That contagion is the constant assault on our democracy. It is fueled by outrageous lies, conspiracy theories, divisive tactics, pseudo-populist bluster and, last but not least, by widespread legislative schemes to suppress our free and fair voting tradition, the very bedrock of this democracy, the "we" in "We the People."

The vicious mob insurrection Jan. 6 at our nation's Capitol is – or should have been – a dire warning of just how fragile a democratic nation can become when people prefer preposterous lies over facts and truths. This is a frightening time, in some ways scarier than the virus that stalked us for so long.

Hope springs eternal. All of the qualities listed above in this column (those all-American virtues of compromise, adaptation, kindness, practicality, innovation, respect for science and facts) will hopefully come together to lead us out of this dangerous darkness into a brighter future.

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