

Your thoughtful opinion can create change

When you speak, do people listen? When others are sharing, do you listen or are the wheels of defense and response already spinning up?

We are a nation of opinions, beliefs and actions. We don't always have the answers, but we certainly have ideas; they are as plentiful as skeeters on skin. Take a look around. Your Facebook and Twitter buddies have probably shared so much in the last week you can hardly keep up.

But how much of what gets pushed out has lasting value, meaning, or is for the good of more than the author?

Erik Weihenmayer, an adventurer and explorer who has experienced more of the outdoor world than most of us would ever dare, has plenty he could share. Whether it's scaling Mt. Everest, navigating the rapids of a raging river, or standing at the edge of a volcanic monster, he has accomplished much in his 53 years of life. But his greatest accomplishment may be that he has done it all without sight. He is blind.

He began losing his sight as a teen and was completely blind by 14.



KEITH ANDERSON
Columnist

No doubt that was an incredibly abrupt change for a teenager. But what he quickly learned is that humans rarely maximize the other senses at their disposal. For him, it was mastering his sense of smell, touch and hearing. That opened a previously unexplored world for Weihenmayer and has allowed him to achieve greatness through patience, listening and being keenly aware of his surroundings.

When I experience a rose, I mostly appreciate its initial value because of what I see, not because of how it smells or feels. It's just easier for me to see the beauty from afar and move along. However, there is much more to a rose than what we see, just as there is in every life encounter. By not utilizing all my senses, I have failed to experience the full value of that rose, which is my loss.

This brings us back to patience, listening and being aware of our surroundings. They are all

skills I have not mastered. Some of you have.

This past year the 27 newspapers within our group at Adams Publishing of East Central Minnesota published more than 1,283 letters to the editor. That's about 25 letters each week from local readers who have opinions and ideas on different topics. Our goal with letters to the editor, which appear on our opinion pages, is to seek civic discourse on issues that will ultimately lead to stronger communities.

Sometimes the letters were stinging, criticizing a candidate or an elected official. Some were directed at specific people, like Gov. Tim Walz and his use of emergency orders during the pandemic, or they sought answers to end racial injustice. Still, others blasted critical race theory, flavored tobacco, gun control, the environment, election fraud and the caucus system. Others offered praise, often noting the volunteer work of unique people in various communities, the countless hours devoted to issues by elected officials, or the merits of ranked-choice voting.

The most effective

letter writers use their opportunity to enlighten a community by sharing facts, experience and a belief that there is always a better way.

As we move into a new year, one that includes a mid-term election, we know there will be many letters coming our way. We appreciate all of your thoughts and opinions, but this may be the perfect time to think about people like Weihenmayer when planning your next letter.

Having an opinion is sort of like breathing. On the surface, it doesn't take much effort. But when we are patient, truly listen to others and become more aware of our surroundings, our perspective becomes more balanced and hopefully allows us to transcend the temptation of a "gotcha" letter and create something more lasting and thoughtful.

Not every letter will change the world or even a community. But when we become the complete explorer, anything is possible.

Keith Anderson is director of news for APG of East Central Minnesota.

MY VIEW

Hallmark-worthy holidays

The freshly-fallen snow glistens on the ground. The house is aglow with festive holiday lights and décor. Stockings are neatly hung. It's a picture-perfect depiction you'd see on a Hallmark card or holiday movie, but not all holidays are Hallmark-worthy.

Along with the holidays comes a frenzy of busyness, hype and lofty expectations of flawless gatherings and celebrations. Most of us have likely had a holiday that wasn't quite as merry and bright as we'd hoped. Perhaps there was an empty seat at the table after losing a loved one or the time has come when we had to share children with in-laws; maybe money was tight, the weather prohibited travel or we were worried about the health of a loved one.

Given the current political climate and differing views about the pandemic, some gatherings have the potential to be less than harmonious. Sometimes, the holidays can differ from the moments sugar plum dreams are made of and can result in feelings of disillusionment.

I've felt it. Sometimes, I long to be enveloped by the love and warmth of my parents' home, to smell my mom's cooking or to savor my dad's perfectly-baked ham. I miss my dad's ornamental candy dish filled with old-fashioned hard Christmas candy (a tradition carried on from his mother), his annual gift of a large Hershey bar with cash nestled inside the wrapper, and most of all, I miss their hugs and love.

Yet, we carry on - honoring some of the old traditions and creating new ones. My boys fondly remember the tradition of papa's Christmas candy. The ornamental candy dish is now always filled at my house, and "papa's candy" fills my son's decorative jar in his new apartment in honor of dad. My husband attempts to replicate the perfectly cooked ham we looked forward to in year's past. Hershey bars with a stash of cash may reappear under the tree this year. A selection of my parents' ornaments adorns my tree.

Over the years, we've created many of our own traditions. My heart is full of gratitude as my son puts all the exterior lights up on the house and barn as he has done for years. I stop from the bustle of decorating to absorb the moment as my boys put the finishing touches on the tree and decide whose turn it is to put the star on top. We laugh and listen to favorite Christmas songs as we bake Christmas cookies together. I notice the gifts from my husband beneath the tree. Each is wrapped with tender loving care - barely a seam can be seen. My gifts from him are Hallmark-worthy.

The reality is life is not always flawless. When I find myself longing for home or feeling like things are not picture-perfect during the holidays, I stop to remind myself to take notice of the magic in small moments. I focus on gratitude for the reason for the season, for the gift of those I love, for the memories held dear and for traditions - old and new. That's close enough to Hallmark-worthy for me.

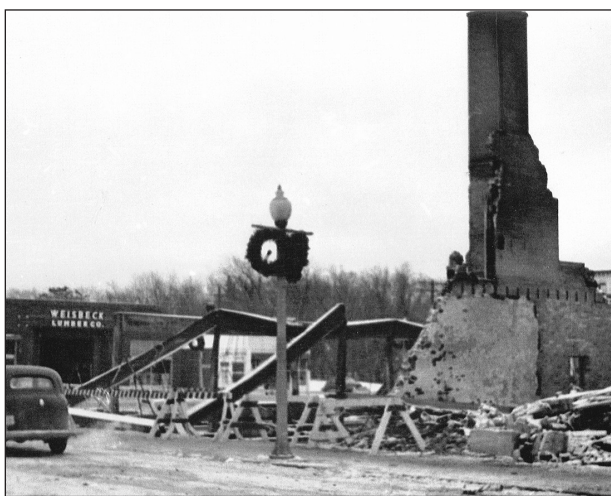


SHARI HORTON
Columnist



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

The MacGregor-Dennerly building was built in 1919. This photo was taken somewhere between 1929-1932. In the early hours of Christmas Day in 1949, the building caught fire. When over, only a small section of the south wall and a part of the rear of the building were left standing.



The same building after a fire, taken between Dec. 26-30, 1949.

Gould/ Smallest kindness make a difference

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Consider baking cookies or treats and delivering them to the local police station, fire house or hospital for the men and women who work on Christmas. Pay it forward - the smallest bit of kindness makes a difference, from paying for someone's coffee

to buying a lunch for someone in need. Buy a gas card for someone who can't afford to go visit family during the holidays.

If you need more ideas, look online and many charity and non-profits will pop-up. Organizations like Be An Elf, Project Linus, Pay Away the Lay-away, The Holiday Project,

Make-A-Wish - Wishes in Flight, Angel Tree, Christmas Spirit Foundation, One Simple Wish and Operation Blessing are but of few of these amazing organizations that make Christmas just a little bit brighter for those in need.

And this giving spirit doesn't have to end with Christmas. With all the

new gifts received, what can be donated amongst your old toys, clothes, and household goods?

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy holiday season and start to the new year.

Heidi Gould is the administrator of the Aitkin County Historical Society.

Don't take the fun out of the holidays

Eggnog. Mulled wine. Seasonal beers and festive cocktails. The holidays can pose tough choices.

But there's one choice that's not only easy to make; it will save lives. That's the choice not to drive if you've been drinking.

For people who make the wrong choice, though, there are extra DWI patrols on Minnesota roads. The campaign started Nov. 24 and runs through New Year's Eve. More than 300 law enforcement agencies throughout the state are working together to get drunk drivers off the road.

Last year, from the day before Thanksgiving through Dec. 30, there were 1,588 people arrested for impaired driving. And in



SGT. JESSE GRABOW
Ask a Trooper

all of 2020, 22,653 people were arrested for DWIs. Granted, that means those people were taken off the roads, but enough stayed on

to contribute to 26 deaths during the holiday extra patrol period over the last five years (2016-2020).

The holidays are the time of year when people gather with family and friends, often traveling great distances to do so. In too many cases, someone's choice to drive drunk replaces joyful get-togethers with tragedy. Fortunately,

if you plan ahead and Drive Smart, avoiding such tragedy isn't hard. If you're headed to a party with friends, decide ahead of time who will be the sober driver; use a taxi, bus, or train; or arrange to stay wherever the party is. Their couch may not be the most comfortable, but it's better than a jail cell or a coffin.

Always use your seat belt, whether you've been drinking or not. You can't control whether others drive impaired, but your seatbelt is the best defense when they do.

Lastly, speak up. Loved one heading out to a party? Offer to pick them up afterward. At a party where an impaired friend is planning to drive home? Help them find a safe ride. Witness

an impaired driver on the road? Call 911 and be ready to tell the dispatcher the location, plate number and observed behavior.

The holidays can be such fun. Planning ahead for safe ways to get home allows you to have fun, stay safe, and keep others safe as well. You'll be avoiding a DWI, but most importantly, you're avoiding creating an empty seat at someone else's holiday table, or your own.

If you have any questions concerning traffic related laws in Minnesota, send them to: Trooper Jesse Grabow, Minnesota State Patrol, 1000 Hwy. 10 West, Detroit Lakes, MN 56501 or jesse.grabow@state.mn.us.

online opinion poll

views from www.aitkinage.com readers

Category	# OF VOTES
Cheeky child	5
Tormented teenager	5
Mad mid-lifer	32
Groovy grandparent	17

NEW OPINION POLL - VOTE NOW

Would you approve of non-citizens having the right to vote in local elections in your community?

Online polls are found at aitkinage.com. Scroll down the page and look for it in the right-hand column.

SUGGEST A POLL QUESTION Do you have a good poll question? Send it to kat.robb@apeccm.com.

Visit the Age at www.aitkinage.com