

"CALL'EMNIST, CALLYUMNIST OR COMMUNIST?"

Carey Dillinger, June, 1994

The Daily Commercial

When I read the paper was looking for local folks to write a monthly column on events of interest to those of us living in Lake and Sumter counties, I admit I had some opinions I wanted to express in a venue longer than the normal letter to the editor. Little did I realize when I submitted the first draft of this column I would be chosen. I was basically blowing off some steam about the current lack of conservative columnists in the paper. Now I can guarantee you, oh gentle reader, that for the next 12 months, there will be at least one column a month from the conservative (note I did not say right wing, Tele-evangelist watchin', antivivisectionist) viewpoint.

One of the coolest things about having your words in print is that no one can make fun of your pronunciations. Take the word column for instance. Is it "call'em" or "callyum." I usually say "call'em" but if I'm trying to draw unnecessary attention to myself I say "callyum." it's like battery, do you say bat-ter-ee or bat-tree? My point is this, in print it just doesn't matter. I write it how I say it and you read it like you say it and we're both happy.

Now that my musings are in print, am I a "call'emnist" or a "callyumnist?" Wanting a second opinion on this I called my childhood mentor and all around "good ole boy," Earl Quartlow. "Earl, I've become a call'emnist, what do you think?" "Well boy," he replied, "You must be stuck in the 80's, cuz while you been nappin' they've done tore down the Berlin Wall, Russia's done fer and Commie'nism is on the wane."

"Not a communist," I responded, a call'emnist, a newspaper call'emnist for the Daily Commercial!" "Bout the same difference ain't it boy," he retorted as he hung up the telephone.

Later, as I thought about Earl's closing remark, I realized there were only two columnists he ever read, Al Capp and Lewis Grizzard. Most of the rest of the column writing lot is just too far to the left of the center line for old Earl. He feels there is no one in the paper to express his opinion and I tend to agree.

I'll be expressing my (and Earl's) opinion over the next 12 months and I promise that I have so many different opinions that you're bound to agree with some of them. If you don't, then I guess that's your opinion and you can't get your opinion wrong, can you?

Now, on with the opinionatin', right. Wrong! There are rules that must be followed when expressing your opinion as a guest columnist for The Daily Commercial. These rules are cast-in-stone per my editor.

#1 - You must be accurate. All of the Daily Commercial columnists adhere to this one, so I promise to be just as accurate, if not more so.

#2 - No personal attacks. For example, if I do not like a column one of my colleagues writes, I cannot say he is a buffoon. I can't even say that he writes like a buffoon. However, I can say that his column is pure buffoonery.

#3 - You must meet your deadline. That's why I'm writing this column three weeks in advance. It has nothing to do with the fact that today is the only day this month my family will let me use the computer.

#4 - Be local. My first column was originally titled "My Child of the Superior American Culture Just Beat Up your Foreign Exchange Student." Now that Geraldo, Crossfire and who-knows-who-all has taken on this topic, it is out of my bailiwick. Actually, I am still allowed to write on this topic because of its local impact, my real trouble is coming up with a catchy angle that no one else has already explored.

Have you thought about the potential in bumper sticker sales when the "superior culture policy" takes effect this fall? Both sides are bound to have them, for instance:

MY CHILD IS A STUDENT OF SUPERIOR CULTURE AT SO AND SO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

CULTURES ARE LIKE GREAT LAKES - ONLY ONE IS SUPERIOR!

WE DON'T CARE HOW YOU DO IT IN _____. (FILL IN ANY COUNTRY WITH AN INFERIOR CULTURE.)

IF OTHER CULTURES ARE OUTLAWED, THEN ONLY OUTLAWS WILL HAVE CULTURE.

EAT AMERICAN YOGURT, ITS CULTURE IS SUPERIOR.

DISCO, LEISURE SUITS, PEEWEE HERMAN, AH THAT GOOD OLD AMERICAN CULTURE.

HISTORY, SCHMISTORY, WE'RE NUMERO UNO!

IF THE GOOD LORD WOULD HAVE WANTED FOREIGNERS TO HAVE A SUPERIOR CULTURE, HE WOULD HAVE MADE THEM AMERICANS.

#5 - Go easy on the humor when discussing a serious subject, an opinion perceived as flippant will be rejected by our "cultured" reading audience. OOPS! Well four out of five ain't bad for my first effort, huh?

Inside The Teenage Mind

Carey Dillinger, July, 1994

The Daily Commercial

After devoting the past 20 odd years (and I mean odd) to the study of how the teenage mind works, I am ready to present my findings. In no way are these observations to be considered anything more than the stereotypical generalizations that they are.

First, teenagers don't think you know anything worth knowing, while their vast array of knowledge is like, you know, unfathomable to the ancient mind of anybody over 25. Unless, of course, their boyfriend is over 25.

Two, they cannot stand it if you try to speak their language. Try it sometime with the neighborhood teens and see what happens. As soon as adults start using their slang they change it. Now here is a little trick for you parents out there. Does your teen continue to use some slang phrase that really irritates you and refuses to desist even after repeated warnings? You start using the same phrase over and over again and within two weeks it will gone from your child's vocabulary.

C, Their clothes can look like something that Rambo threw away, but they will still complain about your outfit, even if it is new. They will not own anything permanent press but neither will they iron their cottons properly, preferring that just slept in look. By the way, their clothes have that just slept in look because they were just slept in. This eliminates that distasteful morning procedure of getting dressed.

IV, They pay little or no mind to details. Test them with this column. See if they notice the dumb way I've been counting these observations. Don't worry if you didn't notice yourself; that just means that you have something in common with your teenager after all.

5, Their concept of history is last Friday night and their vision of the future is next Friday night. If you ask a teenager how he spent his summer vacation he either won't remember or will refuse to tell you because his parents took him somewhere he thought was geeky like Cypress Gardens, Washington, D.C., or Aunt Matilda's.

As an adult you can imagine my surprise this past May 27th when a teenager blew my 20 years of research to pieces. Here are just a few of the things she told me.

Concerning the fall of the Berlin Wall: "This event proved that barriers between people must never exist...remember this and work hard to build bridges rather than walls in personal and international relations."

The Challenger disaster: "the ingredients for disaster are cutting corners, faulty and hasty testing, ignoring of recognized problems and valuing profits and deadlines more highly than is warranted."

The collapse of the Soviet Union: " the reason for the existence of government is to serve not enslave its people."

The passing of Richard Nixon: "We ought always to hold ourselves and others to high ethical standards. This is our right and duty. But, may we always be willing and quick to encourage and to forgive one another."

With regards to the environment: " Our (the teenage) generation is now more aware of and knowledgeable about environmental problems. We have learned the importance of such things as recycling, cleaning the air we breathe, and stopping the pollution of our waterways...The problems of Earth-care are not the fault of a single generation, and no single generation can solve all of the environmental problems completely. Yet the lessons of Earth-care require the best in us in living unselfishly. Like planting an acorn, most of what is done environmentally is done more for the future than for the present."

She concluded her comments by saying, "History has always been a great teacher, even if humanity often has been a poor student. People who have been wise enough to learn from their struggles, to stand together in their efforts, and to be strong in their convictions have dramatically increased their prospects of survival. This group of minority thinkers and doers have worked hard and courageously, if not always successfully, to hand off an improved version of the world to the next generation. I only hope that when the work of our generation is over, our children and grandchildren can proudly and truthfully declare of us: They 'fought a good fight, have finished the course and have kept the faith."

Yes ladies and gentlemen these are the thoughts of a teenager, born and raised in Lake County Florida. To tell the truth, I don't know many adults that think as clearly or with as much vision as this young lady. I do however understand how she became the co-salutatorian of the Leesburg High School class of 1994 and The Daily Commercial Female Academic Athlete of the Year. Her name is Amy Brooks and she has proven to my colleagues and I, as well as her classmates and teammates, that good things, *make that great things*, can and do come in small teenage packages. The things she said to me, she said to the other 3,000 people in attendance at the Leesburg High School commencement exercises this past May 27th. Everything attributed to her in this column are words I took from a copy of the salutatory she delivered that evening. As I listened to her speech, I did so with mixed emotions. On the one hand I was happy to find a teenager actually ready to enter adulthood and on the other hand sad to realize that many adults will never achieve the wisdom of this teenager.

One final, albeit selfish note. I am disappointed that I never had the opportunity of having Amy in any of my math classes, I'm sure I would have become a better teacher given the chance.

Everyone Needs A Mentor, Us Lucky Ones Have Two

Carey Dillinger, August, 1994

The Daily Commercial

Are you happy with your chosen profession? If you are, how did you end up that way? Being a teacher had been my goal since eighth grade; however, I wanted to teach American History, not mathematics. Luckily for me I had some top-notch guidance.

Two men must take the responsibility for the mathematics teacher I have become. Herbert Miller was my Algebra 1 and Geometry teacher. A no nonsense individual, clad in a white shirt and necktie, Mr. Miller was a prime example (pun intended) of what a math teacher should be. His explanations came in a slow and careful manner, and he was willing to repeat himself for the less gifted class members (which included me). At the end of my freshman year Mr. Miller coerced and cajoled myself and four or five of my friends, including his son, into taking geometry in summer school. Summer School! Five days a week, six hours a day for six weeks. He claimed we covered more material that summer than most classes covered in a regular school year. Those were my first two doses of college preparatory mathematics the way it should be taught. The best I could do was a B in those courses, but I felt that I had accomplished something. Remember when parents were happy if you made a B?

My eleventh and twelfth grade years I was under the tutelage of one Dan Blackwelder or as we called him "Dan the Man." "To his face," you may ask? Are you nuts? Mr. Blackwelder was the King of Reaction; his facial expressions in response to a weird answer are still a part of my fondest memories of high school. Remember, I had no thought of becoming a math teacher during my junior year, as a matter of fact I was not going to even sign up for a math course my senior year.

It was not very long into the spring of 1970 when Mr. Blackwelder began to ask us what math course we were going to take during the upcoming year. When he came to me I told him I was through with math. "I'll see you after class," he replied irritably. After class I went up to his desk and he got up and put his arm around my shoulders and asked me again what math class I was taking my senior year. Again I told him "none." "I thought I heard you say you were signing up for my Analytic Geometry class." "No sir, I'm through with math," I replied. Just then, his arm slid off of my shoulder and grabbed my left arm and he commenced to twist it. Then he pushed me up against the wall and said, "Boy we're signing up for classes next week and your name will be on the list for Analyt." "But I don't need anymore math." But my protest was weakening. "Son how many times have I told you that at age 17 you don't know what you need? If you refuse to take that math class, you're just cutting off your options in the future."

Let's shorten this story and make our point. He did not physically abuse me, nor was that his intention. His intention was to make me think, and that I did. I signed up for that math class, was inducted into the mathematics honor society, came to parent's night and derived the quadratic formula on the chalkboard while the parents looked on in awe and amazement. The rest is

history. Which brings me back to my original point, I thought I wanted to be a history teacher, but I thought wrong!

Because someone literally twisted my arm I became a math teacher. The extra time and interest Mr. Blackwelder showed in me was the impetus I needed to get my complete education and keep all my options for the future open. I loved that man, I think about him nearly every workday.

Now zoom with me to the present. When it comes time for me to operate in my mathematics classroom at Leesburg High School, I might consider something I learned in an education class at college or perhaps something I heard in a workshop, but when it comes down to it I usually just think, "How would Mr. Miller or Mr. Blackwelder do it," then I get to work.

Did you have someone like these men in your life? I hope you did. But even beyond that I hope you can do for some 17 year old what these men did for me. Find yourself an eleventh grader, put them under your wing, do a little creative arm twisting and set them down an educational path with all their options open. This is my vision of the 21st century apprenticeship program: everyone over 40 "adopts" a 17 year old and shows that teenager some concern, some direction and some affection, and then I believe we will make a difference.

The stable, supportive home life that many of us "fortysomething" had does not exist for a huge number of today's teens; they need our help that much more. Where would I be today without Mr. Miller and Mr. Blackwelder?

Final note: Is there a teacher in your life that meant as much to you as these men meant to me? Please get in contact with them tomorrow, if possible. If you detect a note of urgency here, there is a reason. Two years ago I decided to contact my two mentors only to find them on their deathbeds. I saw Mr. Miller only days before he passed on, but I was too late to see Mr. Blackwelder. One of a teacher's greatest rewards is to hear a success story, and know we had something to do with it.

Jargon Is No Bargain!

Carey Dillinger, September, 1994

The Daily Commercial

Contrary to what many students think, a teacher spends most of his or her time trying to simplify the subject at hand. This is their primary job. When the state of Florida issues a teaching certificate not only does this qualify a teacher in his area of certification, but it makes him an active member of the "Jargon Police." As a "Jarfoot" (slang for jargon policeman) a teacher must spend some time sorting through the various types of jargon encountered and labeling it acceptable or non-acceptable. Exactly what do we mean by jargon? From *The American Heritage Dictionary - Standard Edition*: jargon (jār-gōn) n. 1. Nonsensical, incoherent, or meaningless talk. 2. A hybrid language or dialect; a pidgin. 3. The specialized or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group.

Some synonyms for jargon include: terminology, buzzwords and lingo. (The arts and sciences have their own jargon for the word jargon, they call theirs nomenclature, while the media has labeled educational jargon as "edu-speak").

When jargon is the specialized language of a profession it can be a good thing. If a surgical team uses a shorthand technical language during an operation to facilitate the successful completion of that procedure, jargon is good. If tradesmen use their jargon to make their work easier or more efficient then so be it. If however, the surgeon or the auto mechanic chooses to bring their jargon out of the operating room or garage and into the waiting room, then their technical language degenerates into nonsensical, incoherent or meaningless talk!

Jargon is bad when it causes confusion or keeps the average person from understanding something they are fully capable of understanding. Some examples of bad jargon include: all "some assembly required" toy and furniture instructions, all tax documents, some insurance policies, some contracts, and of course quite a few of the nineteen competencies of the Lake County Schools Managerial Development Plan.

For those of you not familiar with the Lake County Schools Managerial Development Plan, it was developed during the 1980's so that Lake County would be in compliance with Section 231.0861 of Florida Statutes and within guidelines developed by the Florida Council on Educational Management. The purpose: "to implement a process for selection, screening, and appointment of principals and assistant principals." Copies of this plan are available in document form from the school board office in Tavares. It was promulgated at the public expense. (Promulgated is governmental jargon for "published.") The Plan lists the nineteen competencies that must be mastered for a candidate to be considered for a principalship in Lake County. Now take a deep breath and read the list of competencies aloud: Proactive Orientation, Decisiveness, Commitment to School Mission, Interpersonal Search, Information Search, Concept Formation, Conceptual Flexibility, Managing Interaction, Persuasiveness, Concern for Image, Tactical Adaptability, Achievement Motivation, Management Control, Developmental Orientation,

Organizational Ability, Delegation, Self Presentation, Written Communication, and Organizational Sensitivity.

Now it's time for us to use our imaginations...

"Hi honey, welcome home. How did your interview go? Wasn't it for the assistant principalship of Quartlow Middle School?"

"No dear, that interview was last week. I lost that job because of flaws in my 'tactical adaptability.' This week I was going for the Skidway Elementary Dean's opening."

"So how did this one go?"

"Great, I think. First I knocked them dead with my 'self presentation' and followed that with a masterful demonstration of 'proactive orientation.' Next I stunned them with an intuitive understanding of 'concern for image' by excusing myself to the little person's room to fix my hair."

"Oh Sweetie, that was a great maneuver, I'm sure you got high marks for 'achievement motivation!'"

"Finally, they wanted to ask me some questions, but I was able to 'manage the interaction' by agreeing to submit my answers through 'written communication.'"

Some time the following week...

"I know you're disappointed about not getting that dean's job, what went wrong?"

"I really don't know, they said I needed to do an interpersonal and information search, and then try to formulate a flexible concept. I basically took that to mean, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'"

Does a school administrator actually need to meet 19 specific competencies to be an effective principal or could it be possible that he could possess just a few general qualities and do the job? Let's think a minute. The excellent principal must know how to deal with four groups of folks: students, staff, parents and boosters, while successfully answering to the superintendent and the school board. He needs to have personal characteristics that will make this possible. He must be able to make all of his decisions based on the answer to one question: Is it for the good of my school and my students? Now, if he answers "yes" to this question, then he needs to be willing to consult the staff and the parents. If his decision is made according to these criteria and it violates no laws or county policies, then he must be able to expect support, not interference, from the county office and school board.

As you can see the Jarfoot's work is never done. As long as there are politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, "technonerds," and assorted other jargon lovin' miscreants, the Jargon Police will be on patrol, making Lake County idiomatically safe for you, me, and the rest of the conceptually inflexible.

There Will Always Be Prayer in Schools

Carey Dillinger, October, 1994

The Daily Commercial

When complaints are aired in the newspaper or on television and radio that prayer needs to be restored to the public schools, I know these people are sincere in their convictions, but I believe they are not truly in touch with reality. I have been in the Florida public schools as a student, intern or teacher since 1959, and doubt if many weeks have gone by that I have not prayed while at school. Some of these prayers have been rather selfish: help me pass this test; help me remember my vocabulary words; save me from being beat up by "Punkin'head" Johnson; get me a date with the Homecoming Queen; get me through this year of college; don't let me be drafted; and why do I have to have "Punkin'head" Johnson's oldest boy, "Mellonhead," as a student in my sixth period class? Other prayers have been extremely mature: be with the family of my high school friend John (who was killed our senior year); keep my J.V. basketball players safe from injury; make me a better teacher, co-worker and friend; help me do what is in the best interests of my students, not just what is easiest for me; thanks for all the blessings I have in my life, including the opportunity to teach these past few generations of Leesburg teenagers.

I know there are many students that have come through Leesburg High in the past 19 years that had an active prayer life while in school and on campus. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes (F.C.A.) has permission to meet for prayer before school as often as they wish. There have been and are teachers and administrators whose daily prayers reach up to God from campuses all over this county.

If all this praying is going on in our public schools, and I assure you it is, then why hasn't the government put a stop to it? Because it's private prayer. Private prayers of course are uttered silently or in a quiet place, not over the school P.A. system or in front of a school assembly. The political correctness of private prayer is a moot point, since no one can be offended by what they cannot hear. No one can control this form of prayer and that is what makes it perfectly suited for the public schools.

The private school is perfectly suited for public prayer. Since many of the local private schools are already affiliated with a religious organization, it is only natural that these schools would be operated under a set of procedures that would include not only public prayer, but required Bible study and mandatory attendance and participation at daily devotional assemblies. If you believe these things are an important part of a school's curriculum, then you must find a way to send your child to a private school.

The eclectic make-up of the public school population makes public prayer an impossibility. Any public prayer said in such a generic fashion as not to offend anyone's religious sensibilities would not be an acceptable prayer to many. For example, many Christians feel that a prayer is not acceptable unless it is prayed in the name of Jesus, but this is totally unacceptable to the Jews, Hindus, Moslems and those of other non-Christian religions. The entire concept of praying to one true God is foreign to many religions and of course the Atheists are mad no matter what

deity is being petitioned. Atheists have it made as far as prayer is concerned because they are allowed to *not* pray anytime. (I read that in Johnny Hart's cartoon *B.C.* a few years ago.)

The rest of us need to consider when and where our public prayers would be acceptable not only to our fellow man, but especially to our God. Praying aloud in front of family, friends, co-workers of like faith, and our religious brethren can be beneficial to all involved, but trying to overcome unwilling participants with a loud speaker and 200 or 300 watts of amplification can do nothing to enhance their lives and perhaps turn them against the system of religion using such tactics.

The same people who are insisting that public prayer be allowed in public schools, will be the same ones to complain if the prayers being led are not to their liking. Who will lead these prayers? Students, faculty, administrators or outsiders? If ten percent of the student body is Jewish, will one out of every ten prayers be led by a Jew. Even among the so-called Christian denominations there is disagreement as to who is qualified to lead public prayers. Can a woman lead public prayer? Must the leader even be a regular churchgoer? Who will decide? As a practitioner of freedom of religion I am unwilling to let these decisions be made for me.

The laws of the state of Florida allow the public schools to provide a moment of silence at the beginning of each school day or school sponsored event. It is our responsibility as parents to see to it that our children are taking advantage of these moments in whatever "silent" way we see fit. Tomorrow morning around 7:30, more than one person at Leesburg High will be praying for himself or herself and your children, privately and with the utmost sincerity. Wherever you are tomorrow morning at 7:30 stop for a moment of silent prayer. Pray for your child and us. Amen.

Public prayer for private school, private prayer for public school. There you have it, the solution to the great debate. It really can be that simple.

The Eternal Educational Triangle Parent, Student, and Teacher

Carey Dillinger, November, 1994

The Daily Commercial

The eternal educational triangle consisting of parent, student, and teacher is often a strained and adversarial relationship. In the old days, the parent and teacher would gang up on the student. Then in the 1980's a trend began where the parents would tend to side with the student against the teacher. Of course there are instances, such as when child abuse is suspected, when the teacher must take up the cause of the student. The worst case scenario is when everyone is against everyone. In an effort to get everyone working together, the following quotes are offered for your approval.

William Barclay, the author of *The Daily Study Bible Series*, said this concerning the apostle Paul: "Paul was much more interested in what a man could be, than what he was."

A sign hanging outside a certain science instructor's door at Lake-Sumter Community College, reads this way: "Self-Esteem is the Result, not the Precursor, of Accomplishment."

A banner hanging in a locker room states: "Preparation + Perspiration = Success."

Many teachers will tell you that they do not want to see a student's cumulative folder or discipline record at the beginning of the school year because they do not want a preconceived or prejudiced view of that child. In many instances this is a wise decision. However, if the student has a medical condition, psychological problem, or a learning disability it is imperative that the classroom teacher be informed, the sooner the better. It has been my experience that when parents inform the teacher of these types of problems as early in the school year as possible, many unhappy as well as embarrassing situations can be avoided. Parents seem to be more reluctant to discuss prior academic problems and this leads to even more problems.

Let's examine the case of Algebra, as an example. The school system spends nine years trying to prepare your child to pass one class, Algebra I. Why is this course so important? Because it is the foundation for the remainder of the college preparatory math classes in high school as well as all math classes at the collegiate level. Any career or academic aspirations that include such fields as biology, chemistry, economics, engineering, geometry, calculus, physics, navigation, astronomy, and statistics, will demand more than just a cursory knowledge of basic Algebra. To obtain the proficiency in Algebra that is necessary for these future pursuits, arithmetic must be mastered at the good or excellent level (a high B or an A) in the seventh and eighth grade. Sending a student on to Algebra with anything lower than this is dooming the student to failure. To paraphrase Barclay, a teacher should be more interested in what a student can be, than what he was. Unfortunately, when it comes to success in mathematics, what he was determines what he is and where he is going.

The elementary and middle schools are not going to retain students very often these days unless the parent requests it. In addition to this situation, there is a push around the state to completely

do away with general math and consumer math at the high school level. The fact that more than a few students make their way to the ninth grade unprepared for even the most basic curriculum makes me wonder how we are going to teach Algebra to every high school student. To compound the problem, some have gone as far as to suggest that no student should fail any course in which they have made an honest attempt. Sometimes however, an honest attempt is just not good enough. Everyone understands this concept when their septic system is backed up into the master bedroom. The same logic applies to Algebra I. To pass a student along just to feed his so-called self-esteem is insane, inane and as the curriculum specialists out there like to say, "Pedagogically unsound."

Here are my recommendations for the student that finds himself in over his head, due to the lack of proper preparation or perspiration:

Attend school every day. Some schools and individual teachers give "attendance incentives" towards extra credit. Plus, you cannot learn if you are not there. The nature of a course like Algebra demands your daily (and nightly) attention.

Be prepared to burn the late-night oil and do that homework. In math, homework is a given, not an option. Remember this, though: practice doesn't make perfect, *perfect* practice makes perfect. If you practice it wrong, you'll learn it wrong.

When you do not understand, you must ask questions. It is your responsibility!

If you still do not understand, seek professional help. Most teachers are prepared to help students after school, on an individual basis. Some schools provide tutoring services through the Honor Society or other "brain trusts." Lake-Sumter Community College offers Algebra tutoring through their Learning Center. It is free; give them a call to find out their hours. If all this fails, hire a tutor. Your school guidance counselor can help you find one.

Students finishing high school with a poor background in English and Algebra find that their post-secondary education will be prolonged by up to four remedial courses that must be taken at the community college level before they are allowed to proceed to the real stuff. These remedial courses have tuition and book fees as well as lab requirements in addition to attending class. The thing that these classes do not have is any college credit. They count for nothing, zip, zilch, goose-egg. Their only purpose is to make sure those taking the real college courses will have a chance to succeed. Hey, I thought that was what high school was all about!

So Long Sam, Old Friend

Carey Dillinger, December, 1994

The Daily Commercial

My good friend Sam passed away this week. You may have read his obituary in the paper, he was 95 years old. Mark A. Copeland, the former minister of the Michigan Avenue church of Christ (now known as the Beverly Shores church of Christ) delivered the eulogy at Sam's funeral. Much of the information included here was collected by Mark during the last ten years.

During his lifetime Sam held many jobs, including: rail splitter, wheat thresher, auctioneer, real estate broker, banker and property appraiser. While he changed jobs as frequently as the economy demanded it, he changed religions only once. In 1923, through careful consideration and many tears, Sam obeyed the gospel of Christ. Sam continued to practice his Christianity for the past three quarters of a century.

In the mid-seventies, Ella, his wife of over fifty years died. Sam lived out his remaining years a widower. He often found comfort for his personal loss in a poem Ella had slipped into his Bible before she passed on. You poetry aficionados out there may squirm a bit, but please read it from Sam's point of view.

The Rest of the Way Alone

(author unknown)

It isn't given to any of us,
To go all the way together.
However closely bound the flock,
The years must one day sever.
The ties that bind the loving group,
One goes then another -
And grieving doesn't help too much,
Be it husband, wife or brother.
It isn't given to any of us,
To be always with those most dear.
We one day reach the fork to the road -
One goes, while one stays here.
In our loneliness for those who are gone,
Don't forget the joys we have known.
The memory of them should light the road,
Though the rest of the way is - alone.

As the years without Ella went by, Sam would say, "Memories are among the greatest things we have."

Sam came to realize that memories were not all he possessed. Even though he had no wife, no children and no close relatives nearby, Sam found solace and companionship among his brethren and sisters in Christ. Even when he was in ill health, he visited the sick and the elderly and attended worship service. The church, which had been his spiritual family, now became his physical family as well.

I am sure I'll be corrected by the good folks at church if I'm wrong, but I believe Sam was a major part of the glue that has held our congregation together these past few years. Much communication between church members, during these years, can be attributed to checking up on Sam, visiting Sam, or discussing Sam's needs. We'll never forget our brother, Sam.

If Sam were alive and well, he would be preparing to attend church services this Sunday. Not because it is what the world calls Christmas, but because it is the Lord's Day. He knew that one or two Sundays a year cannot contain the amount of celebration required to do our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ justice. Besides the birth and resurrection of Christ, the New Testament would suggest that additional days or time periods of Jesus' existence are worthy of our attention.

First, we need to consider the preexistence of Christ. According to John's Gospel, chapter 1, Jesus is part of the Godhood and as such participated in creation. We need a day to celebrate our Creator.

Now what about Jesus as a child? Luke the second chapter indicates that He was an excellent child. Surely, that deserves at least one Sunday of celebration. We whoop it up at our house when our two offspring are excellent!

We need to examine His personal ministry while on this earth. He was the ultimate preacher. He practiced what He preached. He came through on all His promises. He was more concerned with spiritual possessions than physical ones. Hey, that's refreshing in this day of "tele-evangiliars" who are looking to make a fast buck off our spiritual and emotional needs. Let's celebrate the greatest Rabbi who ever lived.

There is His death to think about. This is the one thing that Jesus directly commanded us to celebrate through a communion service, commonly called "the Lord's Supper." It is interesting to me that men have come to hold their choice of "days" concerning Christ in higher esteem than the very day he designated. The New Testament church met weekly to commune with their Lord. Many today feel that once every three or four months is plenty. That is just not enough celebration.

We could make similar cases for His ascension, His work through the Apostles, disciples, and the Holy Spirit, as well as His promise to come again and His promise of a better home in the after a while. I hope you see my point. One or two celebrations a year will not get the job done. Jesus Christ demands our daily attention, if we are to be spiritually in tune with Him.

I am going to miss old Sam, but I am going to try to emulate his dedication to his Savior in my own life. I will do this by attempting to celebrate Jesus personally every day and collectively with my fellow Christians every Sunday.

The Ultimate Classroom

Carey Dillinger, January, 1995

The Daily Commercial

Time spent teaching in the ultimate classroom was the best of times. In almost every respect, it was the most rewarding experience of 19 plus years teaching in the Lake County school system. The room set aside for this class was wonderfully appointed. Imagine this, a self contained classroom, with water fountains and its own restroom facilities; and the main teaching area had dimensions of over 100 feet by 50 feet.

The students for this class were hand picked by administering a teacher made diagnostic test. No student was forced to take the course and could drop out at any time during the term if they or their parents decided the class was not for them. The teacher also had the prerogative to dismiss students from the class with little or no interference from the administration.

The class was untraditional in many other respects.

The school district provided transportation for ten field trips per term, many out of the county. For certain special trips, the school even picked up the tab for meals.

In Lake County, some of the high schools are trying block scheduling. This means the traditional six or seven period day is scrapped for a three period day with longer classes meeting on alternate days. It's really nothing new; the ultimate classroom has always had block scheduling. In the teaching situation being described, the number of class meetings per week was left to the discretion of the instructor. Sometimes the class met for as long as three hours, other times for as little as 30 minutes. Some weeks the class met six times (yes, even on Saturdays and holidays), other weeks, usually near the end of the term, only three times. Speaking of the "term", it ran approximately 16 weeks, usually from mid-November to late February.

Have you read that many of the inner city schools are beginning to experiment with having the students wear uniforms to class? We've had them for years. Other schools are examining the efficacy of the single-sex classroom, that is, a class with boys only or girls only. Based on my eight years in the ultimate classroom, I can tell you that this can be a great idea. I never had a class during that time that was not of the single-sex variety.

Grading in this situation was not done on the traditional A, B, C, D, F system, but was based on teacher observation of practice in the classroom and a series of statistics kept on each student during weekly contests against classes from other schools. At the end of each term, students were awarded medals, ribbons, letters, certificates or trophies celebrating their achievement. On the other hand, punishment for rule infractions was swift and to the point. Physical punishment, such as running or calisthenics, was used extensively and permitted by the administration and parents as a viable alternative to dismissal from the class.

Schools today spend quite a bit of time and energy trying to get parents involved. In the ultimate classroom this was not a problem. The problem was trying to keep the parents from becoming too involved, even to the point of telling the teacher how to do his job or even calling for the teacher's dismissal. Some parents became so involved that they had to be asked to be quiet during the student contests. Some were even banned from visiting the classroom, and were required to remain outside until class was over.

Doesn't this sound too good to be true? If you were a teacher, wouldn't you love to find yourself in a situation comparable to this one? There are a few drawbacks. In addition to teaching in the ultimate classroom you will be required to teach five classes in the traditional setting. Your building administrator will expect you to devote most of your time and energy to your traditional classes and make time before or after school for the ultimate one. During my last year in the ultimate classroom the school system saw fit to pay me \$1,200. When I added up my hours spent preparing for the term, teaching the term, and working with the students between terms, it came out to about \$1.75 per hour. I was paid this awesome amount because I had seven years experience.

Does the ultimate classroom sound like a place you parents would want your students to be? It obviously is, because the parent organizations formed to support the ultimate classroom have more card carrying members (including folks that aren't even parents), raise tons more money, and provide more state of the art facilities for it, than organizations formed to support the traditional classroom.

In my case, the ultimate classroom was the Ray M. Hayes Memorial Gymnasium located on the Leesburg High School campus. The class I taught was J.V. Boy's Basketball.

The old cliché says, "Those that can - do, those that can't - teach!" I heard this addendum in a teacher's meeting one afternoon: "those that can't teach - coach." While this entire saying is a glib generalization, the addendum stings a little deeper because a fellow teacher said it. A good coach must be an excellent teacher and an excellent coach is a superlative teacher. Believe it! However, it is a sad fact that some of my coaching brethren (and "sistern") do not bring their teaching expertise into the traditional classroom, but instead waste the student's time showing game films, arranging schedules and drawing up plays. Others find themselves frustrated in the traditional classroom due to its inherent limitations. That is, once you've taught in the ultimate classroom, it's hard to stomach the drawbacks imposed during the regular school day.

It is imperative that school systems and communities work together to provide the traditional classroom teachers with some of the "goodies" that make coaching athletics the ultimate teaching and learning experience.

Valentine's Day A Day To Truly Love Someone

Carey Dillinger, February, 1995

The Daily Commercial

Yesterday was Valentine's Day? I mean, yesterday was Valentine's Day! It could have been Christmas, an anniversary, a birthday or Mother's Day. Most of us men folk approach these occasions with less emotion than we usually portray. As a matter of fact, those of us who do keep up with these "Hallmark Holidays," basically check them off like a grocery list. "Let's see now, Valentine's is over, so we have a few months off until Mother's Day. Cool!" Sorry to say, but this attitude is a male character flaw that really needs changing. We better get serious.

You didn't get one of those silly cards for your sweetie, did you? Those wacky ones are fine for birthdays and the fourth of July, but for V-Day you better keep it serious. Too late, huh? File this column for Mother's Day (another holiday that doesn't lend itself to Tom-Foolery).

Couples deserve their own holiday and Valentine's Day fits that bill to a Vee. It's all about love. The kind of love only a man and a woman were meant to share.

Try as they might, most teenage couples will have a hard time possessing the God-given bond formed when a man and a woman unite their lives. Whatever they do possess is a model of love. By the way, a model in this context is a small, cheap, plastic imitation of the real thing. Usually the boy is more "in lust" than in love. The girl is the one who is in love, but often this love is of the motherly variety. So-called sex education is not the answer to the problems caused by "teenagers in love." It is more important to teach kids how to love, than how to "make love." If a child can learn to love, then it is more than just an emotion. It is as much a teachable characteristic as cleaning your room and personal hygiene. For someone to truly have the kind of love for their mate that Valentine's Day was designed for, let's consider amending our human growth and development curriculum to include a unit on love.

To begin with we need a lesson on the different kinds of love. The ancient Greeks had a different word for each type of love that is expressible by humans. A discussion of three of these words is in order here.

First we have *phileo*, the root word that makes Philadelphia, the "City of Brotherly Love." Embodied in this word are all the aspects of familial love. That is, parental love, natural affection for relatives (the reason blood *is* thicker than water) and just plain kindness. It is obvious from observations in the public school classroom that many of our children are not learning these attributes at home or at church, the places where most people that possess these characteristics first came to appreciate them. Additionally, it is apparent, even to the casual observer, that the reason these attributes are not being absorbed into the hearts and minds of the younger generation is because they are not in the hearts and minds of their parents. As parents we need to reevaluate our priorities concerning what is important to our families. Food, shelter and *phileo* must come to the top of the list. Possessions need to be moved down to a position that allows for everything else that pertains to love to take precedence. Time well spent with our children is the

only way to teach them familial love. Whoever said that "quality time is more important than quantity time," probably wasn't spending much of either with their children. Most quality moments in a family relationship are spontaneous and occur at the strangest moments. Rarely, do they happen during a period of parentally masterminded "quality time!"

The second Greek word for love is *agape*, which basically means to set aside one's own best interests to pursue the best interests of another. This is the love from which heroes are made. The kind of love where a five year old dives into a swimming pool to save his drowning three year old brother. The kind of love where people run into a burning building to save someone they don't even know. Jesus Christ summed up true *agape* best when he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NASV). When parents refuse to work out their differences, get divorced and say it's for the good of the children, it makes you wonder just whose best interests are really being taken into consideration. When children are treated like boarders or unwelcome house guests it doesn't take them very long to figure it out.

Agape is the kind of love that not only allows, but demands that we correct our children. This correction could involve punishment of some sort and in many instances mandates it. To say that a child is left unpunished because we love them too much, is actually saying that we do not know how to love them enough.

Another Greek word for love is *eros*. This is the love that gets talked about at the water cooler and on the street corners. This is the love that catches our attention in the movies, on television and in magazines, books, and yes even this beloved newspaper. This is the love that gets written about in "How -to" manuals and on bathroom walls, and yet for our children's well being it is the least important.

The world has it backwards as usual. Having our *phileo* and *agape* in order first will allow our *eros* to be what God meant it to be: an expression of love between a man and a woman that confirms the true all encompassing love that they have for one another.

Taking It Through The Channels

Carey Dillinger, March, 1995

The Daily Commercial

According to an article printed recently on the sport's page of this newspaper, there are parents of players on the Leesburg High School girl's soccer team that are scared. They fear potential retribution against their children if they go public with their concerns. They are concerned that their daughters are being psychologically mistreated by their coach. Other parents have been bolder and have written signed letters to the local papers and enlisted the aid of reporters, in their quest for what they perceive as justice. Still other parents have publicly rejected these concerns and have written them off as sour grapes from parents whose daughters were not getting playing time or not playing the position their parent's thought they should.

It is not the purpose of this column to debate either the legitimacy of the concerns expressed by the parents or whether high school athletics are worth all the trouble they seem to generate. Instead let's spend our time together trying to discover a more efficacious way to air concerns with our school programs so that innocent people are not persecuted.

The major predicament with the way the problem under consideration is being handled is that if the allegations turn out to be either true or false the soccer program will suffer. Also complicating this situation is the problem of personality conflict. In a pure debate it is a hard and fast rule that you attack the person's stand, but never attack the person. The nature of coaching precludes the separation of the stand and the person. Coaching, as with any job that depends on motivational techniques, is dependent on personality. There are bound to be conflicts between coaches and parents, coaches and athletes, coaches and administrators, coaches and faculty, coaches and the community, and last, but certainly not least, coaches and spouses. These kinds of conflicts reflect what many see as the down side of coaching. Since the personalities involved cannot be separated from the problem, it is imperative that a procedure to solve differences of opinion be invoked that involves using tact and going through the proper channels.

During the early 1980's an enthusiastic young coach came on the scene at Leesburg High School. His opinion was that his sport was the most important sport in the entire athletic program. He got his opinion wrong! Because of his attitude, he crossed swords with one of the most respected individuals in the school, Coach Hubert O. Dabney. Coach Dabney was the Athletic Director and all business concerning the individual sports teams was to be done through his office. The young coach decided that he would bypass the A.D. and take his business straight to the principal. Needless to say, Coach Dabney was not pleased with this maneuvering and the young coach found himself at odds with the one person who could help him the most. Luckily for the young coach, no newspaper headlines screamed, "Young Coach Attempts To Circumvent Authority of Athletic Director!" Why? Because even though the young coach did not know how to go through proper channels, Coach Dabney knew how to employ tact. He handled the problem man to man, quietly and in the privacy of his office.

The young coach learned a valuable lesson from the old coach and gained an important friend

and mentor in the process. A friendship that lasted through Coach Dabney's last days on this earth and continues even today in the heart of that young coach. The young coach is not that young anymore, but he continues to the best of his ability to use tact and go through the proper channels. Unfortunately, he has not always succeeded in his effort. In the ensuing years, he has alienated players, coaches, parents, students, faculty, administrators and even some readers of his monthly newspaper column. The point of this true anecdote is fourfold:

- ☑ we are going to make mistakes, even when we know how we should act;
- ☑ there is no such thing as being too careful when dealing with another individual;
- ☑ even when there is no clear-cut right way or wrong way to proceed, there is probably a best way and;
- ☑ if you are wrong you must admit it, apologize for it and fix it.

Many people consider the Bible to be a book that does not speak to the problems of the 21st century. However, it is interesting that there is a specific passage of scripture that could be adapted to the problem at hand. The following quote is taken from Matthew 18:15-17a (NKJV), the speaker is Jesus: "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church."

In the case of the L.H.S. soccer coach, the parent's have "told it to the church" before exhausting the other avenues available to them. First they should have gone privately to the coach the instant the problem was brought to their attention. If that failed to yield results then the athletic director and principal should have been contacted directly. Still no results? Now it's time to go to the county level with the grievance. Finally, and as the absolute last resort, take it to the public.

Teaching The Intangibles

Carey Dillinger, April, 1995

The Daily Commercial

The contract between the teachers and the Lake County School Board for the 1994-95 school year has finally been signed, sealed, and delivered. If you have given this newspaper even a cursory reading in the last seven months you are aware of all of the gory details. They will not be repeated here.

However, it would be a competent use of column space to try and answer a couple of questions posed to teachers, since the ratification of the contract, by members of the community at large.

Q: Why would any one in their right mind go to college for up to six years and take on a job that pays about the same as one you could get with two years of trade school?

A: The simple answer is no one in their right mind would!

Those of us that have made teaching our career are obviously in our "left minds!" Many of us may think that we are not underpaid. It may seem that teachers are not underpaid for the hours they are paid to work. A teacher in the Lake County School system with over seventeen years of experience and a Master's degree earns \$25.31 per hour. How could anyone making that wage in Lake County think they were underpaid? The good teachers **are** underpaid because of the hours they work for no pay. The good teachers are working an average of two to three hours (unpaid) overtime each day and another three or four hours on the weekend. This extra unpaid overtime reduces their hourly wage to about \$17.00 per hour. While the school board does provide some in-service training for which the teachers are compensated at \$10.00 per hour, many teachers are forced to pay for and attend up to six hours of college every five years to maintain their certification. Now if we factor in these unpaid hours, uncompensated after school duty, as well as the fact that most teachers are only on a 190 day contract and for all intents and purposes are unemployed the rest of the year, their annual hourly wage is about 14 bucks. Remember, these figures are for the good veteran teacher, the good beginning teacher's adjusted wage would be considerably lower. The sorry teachers out there are ripping off our tax money no matter how you figure it.

More opportunities, such as summer school, need to be made available for those teachers that want and need additional employment. As already mentioned there are some compensated summer institutes for teachers, but enrollment is always limited and interested teachers are turned away.

If teachers are not in it for the money, then why do they teach? To explain why we teach we must invoke the "I" word. The intangibles. *The American Heritage Dictionary Standard Edition* has the following definition: (1.) Incapable of being perceived by the senses. (2.) Incapable of being realized or defined.

If the intangibles are incapable of being perceived, realized or defined how can they be demonstrated? Thanks to the 1995 graduating class of Leesburg High School I was able to witness an intangible become tangible right before my eyes. It was my honor and pleasure to accompany the senior class to the Silver Lake Country Club for their annual luncheon. The purpose of the luncheon is two-fold: first, so the class can experience some organized fellowship and second, so they can dedicate their senior yearbook to a person they perceive as having been an outstanding influence on their lives during their four-year stay at the high school. In my twenty years at LHS they have made an excellent choice 95% of the time.

The class of '95 made an outstanding choice of an exemplary teacher, husband, father, friend and God-fearing man. A man who has dedicated the past 25 years of his life to teaching math and physics to the students of the Leesburg area. A man whose motto, "I'm only here to help you," is at times a gentle witticism, but always a reminder that he is available to help, encourage, and edify his students. The 1995 LaTorre is dedicated to Mike Wagner. The intangible became tangible in that few moments this past Friday afternoon as those of us present stood and applauded and "hollered" as Mike Wagner stepped to the podium.

In the fall of this school year, those of us at Leesburg High were fearful that Mike would not be long for this world. He was suffering from a disease that has given very few people a second chance. Thanks to a hard working and competent medical staff, along with the support and prayers of his family, loved ones, co-workers, and friends, Mike was given a second lease on life and able to return to his full teaching duties during the second quarter of the school year. In much the same way, the class of '95, renewed the lease on Mike's teaching life.

As long as some of those intangibles become tangible every now and then there will always be good teachers willing to work for \$14.00 an hour. It is up to us as students, parents, fellow teachers, administrators, taxpayers, and retirees to continue to support our good teachers.

There is just enough space this month for one more question.

Q: If the teachers voted down the first contract offer and the school board came back with a better offer, then why would anyone in their right mind not keep voting down the contract until there was no better offer?

A: Sometimes the simplest answer is the best, no one in their right mind would!

The Good News is the Bad News and the Bad News is the Good News

Carey Dillinger, May, 1995

The Daily Commercial

I recently received an interesting phone call from a loyal reader of this column and with his permission will share the highlights of that conversation.

Riinnnggg!! "Hello, Dillinger residence."

"Uh-huh, is this the same Dillinger that writes the newspaper callyum?"

"Why it certainly is, I hope you've been enjoying my articles this past year."

"Wail I cain't rightly say I've been enjoyin' it every month, but sometimes you knock the nail rat on the noggin'."

"Thank you, I think? Sir, may I ask you your name?"

"This cheer is Earl Quartlow of Paisley, Florida and I've a re-quest for your next callyum."

"Sir, it is my desire to take the pulse of the people! Please say on."

"My pulse is normal. What I want is you to write a callyum for my twin gals, Bouta and Jesta. An' not o'ly fer them, but fer all the up and comin' gradjits of Paisley High School."

"Mr. Quartlow, I was not even aware that there was a Paisley High School and I've been employed in the Lake County school system all of my adult life."

"Wail, Mr. Newspaper Callyumnist, you mus' not git out to northeast Lake County very offen or you'd be a-knowin' all there is to know about the Neckties."

"You mean the Paisley Neckties?"

"Who else could I mean?! Now are ya gonna write the gradjit callyum or ain't ya?"

"I do believe I will. Thanks for the idea! Bye!"

So, with no further ado, I present a column for Bouta Quartlow, Jesta Quartlow, and all the graduating Paisley Neckties, along with every other senior in all of the real high schools in Lake and Sumter counties.

As with any topic there is bound to be good news and bad news.

First the good news: there will not be as many adults helping to run (ruin?) your life. Take your parents, for example ("please take them," you say). They have had their nose in your business long enough, haven't they? I mean, stuff like buying you clothes and expecting you to wear them or buying and preparing food and expecting you to eat it. Then they offer to help with the car and insurance payments... don't they want you to learn a little responsibility? It is time to move away, or at least move out. You could get a full time job, join the service, or go to college. You have plenty of options and none of the good ones involve the parental units, do they?

What about all the adults at the old Alma Mater. Namely, teachers, principals and counselors, but especially those teachers. It will be great to get rid of them won't it? They are always in your business, trying to tell you what is good for you, what you should or shouldn't do, who you should or shouldn't hang with and what you can or can't wear. They act just like your parents, maybe worse! You won't have to listen to anymore of that "you'll need to know this in college" nonsense. They'll be at the graduation ceremony and that's where you can really get in the last two words: "See Ya!"

Won't it be a blast telling off the boss down at the part time job at Itzza Burger, as you make that ultimate career move to full time at Taco Or Leave It. Man, in that new job you'll be getting 50 or 60 hours a week. You'll be working overtime, babe! You won't have to worry about what to do in your spare time, because you won't have any.

Some of you are luckier; you won't have to take much grief from you drill sergeant in the service, will you? Those pesky high school dress code violations will be a bad memory and your hairstyle will be what's the word...? Regulation.

Luckier still are those of you that are college bound. It will be easy to sleep in a lecture hall with 500 other first year Calculus students. The professor probably won't take roll and he will never call your mamma, no matter what you do or don't do. No one will say, "You should have learned that in high school," will they? At the big universities it will be easy to get lost in the crowd. You'll even get to give up your identity to your student number. Man that will be cool, won't it?

Now for the bad news: there will not be as many *caring* adults helping to run your life.

In this world of the 21st century you will never be alone. However, you might be very lonely. No one or no thing can take the place of family. Unless you go to a very small college, you will never again receive the individual attention afforded you in high school. Your family and the memories of high school are a priceless commodity and not for sale. Graduates, please take one last piece of advice, for what it's worth. Never burn your bridges behind you because they are your only way back to your parents, teachers and friends. These are the people who for the past eighteen years have nurtured you, edified you, and helped to make you the important person that you really are. The prayers and best wishes of your families and teachers are with you.

Is Decorum Dead?

Carey Dillinger, June, 1995

The Daily Commercial

Decorum is one of those things that we do not think that much about until we witness a lack of it. There are other words that convey the same meaning, words such as: etiquette, propriety, formality, protocol, convention, custom, and what most of us call plain old fashioned good manners.

There are places and activities that call for us to be on our best behavior. Places like church, court, and the schoolroom come immediately to mind. Activities such as weddings, funerals, trials, and math class would call for, even demand, our best manners. Yet the behavior exhibited by many at this year's graduation ceremony at Leesburg High School left much to be desired. This year's ceremony was marred by episodes ranging from an off-the-cuff speech by a class officer with a personal axe to grind to graduates literally rolling in the aisles during the service.

What some members of the audience, as well as the graduates, failed to realize was that the ceremony was not just for their child and for them, but indeed for every family member, friend, faculty member and graduate present. This fact demands that some semblance of decorum be followed, so that every graduate could experience his or her place in the limelight. This special time was needlessly denied to many at this year's ceremony. Needlessly, because every one of us present at the ceremony had the ability to sit quietly when silence was mandated.

The top honor at any graduation goes to the valedictorian. Part of this honor includes a speech. Unfortunately for our valedictorian, some of his classmates chose to inflate and throw beach balls in the middle of his address, thus stealing his well deserved moment in the limelight.

For the individual graduate, the walk across the stage to receive his or her diploma is a moment to be remembered and cherished for a lifetime. For parents and loved ones, seeing that moment and hearing that name read over the public address system holds equal value. Too bad that this moment was stolen away by rude and uncaring classmates who refused to return to their seats, choosing instead to mill around in the aisles and visit with one another. It is a shame that many in the audience chose to ape the raucous behavior exhibited on the field, contributing to the denial of other graduates and parents having their place in the limelight.

Another honor bestowed on a member of the senior class is leading the benediction or closing prayer. This year, members of the audience chose to storm the field before the conclusion of the service, denying the one chosen to lead the closing prayer the quiet he needed to fulfill that responsibility.

The principal of the school usually enjoys a threefold distinction at graduation. He makes the opening remarks, hands out the diplomas and confers the degrees. To confer the degrees takes only a few seconds at the conclusion of the ceremony and involves the traditional moving of the tassel from one side to the other by the graduates upon the instruction of the principal. This

happy tradition fell by the wayside this year because it was scheduled to occur directly after the benediction.

As a participant in this year's ceremony, I wish to take this public opportunity to send out my heartfelt love, sympathy, and apologies to the those in attendance that were expecting a joyful, happy event, coupled with some feeling of reverence for the occasion. I know that many in attendance were as disappointed as I was and hope that this type of debacle will not be repeated at any graduation in the future.

It is up to us as parents, teachers, school administrators, class sponsors and especially students of the class of 1996 to begin now to make plans so that the next Leesburg High School graduation ceremony will be the kind of occasion that can be remembered with pride and affection. It is of the utmost importance that the graduating class be allowed input as to how the ceremony will be performed. It would not be unrealistic to allow them to design the entire service with guidance from their sponsor and perhaps an administrator, a teacher of their choice, and a parent or two. This summer would not be too early to begin the planning. It would then be up to the student committee members, along with the senior class officers, to "sell" the ceremony to the senior class. This approach would cause the majority of the graduates to feel that it is indeed their graduation and not something staged by the adults for them to "like it or lump it." Obviously, the seniors chose to "lump it" this year!

With the seniors satisfied, it is now up to the school officials and parents to keep those in the audience under a token amount of control. It is the opinion of this writer that some folks would behave at these events, if they knew how they were supposed to behave. With that in mind, it would not be inappropriate for someone to precede the graduates to the site and "warm-up" the crowd. That is, give a short talk on acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Even though printed programs are given out to those in attendance it would be effective if the program was reviewed with the audience prior to the entrance of the graduating class. These remarks could be concluded by pointing out exactly when it would be appropriate to "storm the field."

The high school graduation service ranks right up there with your wedding day, the birth of your first child, and the day you decide to fully pursue your religious beliefs, as one of the most memorable and important days in your life. Being able to recall these turning points in your life with pride, affection and joy will sure beat the visions of beach balls, soap bubbles, renegade audience members and a fine young man trying to lead a public prayer over pure pandemonium.

Have Mercy!

Carey Dillinger, July, 1995

The Daily Commercial

According to statistics kept by the National Park Service, five million folks are expected to visit Grand Canyon National Park this year. Only 10 percent of those visitors will make the five hour, 217 mile car ride to the north rim. The remaining 4.5 million tourists will spend an average of eight hours riding the south rim in cars and shuttle buses, exiting their vehicles for only forty-five minutes of viewing pleasure. That's too bad. While the south rim is crowded, hot, dry, and feels like downtown; the north rim (only twelve air miles away) is cooler in every respect. There are no crowds to fight, and the air is more temperate and contains enough humidity to make Floridians comfortable.

Perhaps it was only good luck that allowed our family to travel to the north rim and meet the most enlightening and entertaining ranger that we have ever met on an excursion into a National Park. However, due to the overall impact that this young woman had on our perception of life in these United States, we believe that more than luck was involved.

Mercy Aiken is one of the interpretative rangers working on the north rim of the Grand Canyon. This is her third summer season on the north rim and because she has recently finished her college degree and will not be returning to school this September, she will be working on through the fall. As an interpretative ranger (as opposed to a law enforcement ranger), her duties include such activities as guiding tourists on nature walks and giving informative talks at the campground amphitheater. It is an evening tradition in the campgrounds of our National Park System for an interpretative ranger to present a slide show depicting the local flora and fauna and involve the campers in a discussion on the chosen topic. Occasionally, these talks can tend to be boring, however, Ranger Aiken's slide presentation and talk is so unique, so personal, and so full of love, that even the most cynical and worldly among her listeners have their hearts touched by her message. Mercy Aiken grew up in the Grand Canyon.

Mercy Aiken is the eldest child of Bruce and Mary Aiken. She and her younger siblings, Shirley and Silas, were raised in a home located five miles down the North Kaibab trail in the Grand Canyon. Her father operates the fresh water pumping station that supplies the Park Service's north rim facilities. Eight months of the year the family lives in a home that is only accessible by foot trail, helicopter or on mule back.

Education for the children was provided by their parents except during the three or four months the family moved out of the canyon each winter. There is no television in the Grand Canyon. The closest place to get an ice cream cone is a six and one-half mile walk. One way. Straight up. There is however, music, books, and good conversation provided by the family and their endless stream of guests. Very few nights go by that some hikers do not stop by the Aiken residence in search of water, food, medical attention, or a place to rest. While it is not their job to provide such services, the family has taken on the task with patience and good humor.

Entertainment and recreation in the Grand Canyon is largely of the homemade variety. To play softball, the family would often recruit passing hikers or trail crews to round out their roster. The children were forced by their circumstances to devise their own games and recreation. Some of these activities involved playing pranks on the unsuspecting hikers on the Kaibab Trail. One popular activity for the children was to dress in mismatched clothing or inappropriate hiking clothes, such as formal evening wear, and slip up on some weary, unsuspecting hikers. The kids would then affect "foreign" accents and ask the hikers directions, then go on their merry way.

Living in the canyon two-thirds of the year precluded the Aiken children from being continually involved in organized sports and recreational activities. Did they suffer in their physical and social growth because they did not ride on the ever spinning merry-go-round of peewee football, mini-basketball and Little League baseball? To the contrary, not having their lives perfectly organized by some adult leader or coach allowed them to invent their own games, discover information using their own intuition, and basically fan the flames of self-discovery that many educators find lacking in the general student population today.

One of Bruce Aiken's reasons for coming to the Grand Canyon and moving his family into it, was to separate them from the crime, pollution, and overcrowding he had experienced growing up in New York. While many of us have moved to small towns or rural areas to hopefully achieve the same goals, most of us would be unwilling to give up our friends and families or even our vehicles and our televisions. It is ironic that the Aiken children were exposed to a large cross section of the world's population because of living in the Grand Canyon. The immense numbers of hikers traversing the canyon each year are as diverse in their cultural, ethnic, and historical backgrounds as can be found in any metropolitan area in the world.

The Aiken's are to be commended for providing their children with a well rounded upbringing in what seems to us "surface-dwellers" as untenable conditions. It can be shown through their example that a loving, caring family overcomes obstacles that many people expect the government, schools or churches to hurdle for them. These organizations, as well as day care centers and city recreation departments can never replace the nuclear family in the child rearing process. Few, if any, of these groups would be willing to take our children from Lake County to the Grand Canyon. If they would, the precious moment when those children behold that awesome spectacle would form a bond that would last their entire lives. The bond would not be between each individual child and his parent, but instead between the child and his chaperone or counselor. No wonder so many children today think they do not need Mom and Dad. They have been conditioned to think this way because their lives have been organized and arranged, so that in many cases and for most practical purposes, they don't need their parents!

The Invitational School

Carey Dillinger, August, 1995

The Daily Commercial

Did it seem awfully windy around Lake County early this past Monday morning? Perhaps it was the side-effects of Hurricane Felix or just a front moving through, but I suspect the air movement was caused by the collective sighs of relief as parents sent their beloved offspring back to school.

Teachers, administrators, and staff members have already put in at least a week making ready for the beginning of school. Fresh bulletin boards have been hung, desks have been arranged, handouts have been prepared, rosters have been perused, and new students have been enrolled. Hopefully, these preparations will help to make school an inviting place.

The philosophy of invitational education has been around for many years, having among its staunchest supporters many respected educators such as John Novack, Paula Stanley, and William Purkey. The Lake County secondary educators were fortunate to have Dr. Purkey as the keynote speaker at their conference last week. In his speech, Dr. Purkey related many of the theories of invitational education to those present. While those of us in education are probably familiar with the basic tenets of the inviting school, many parents and others not directly involved with the schools should be made aware of these concepts and find out how they can help to implement them. In their book, *The Inviting School Treasury*, Purkey and Stanley present the following description: "...invitational education is the process by which people are cordially summoned (invited) to realize their relatively boundless potential (education) in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor. Ideally, the factors of people, places, policies, programs, and processes should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world in which each individual is cordially summoned to develop intellectually, socially, physically, psychologically, and spiritually."

To put it more plainly, schools should be the kind of place where students are made welcome both to attend and to learn. Our schools must be friendly and safe. In the same way that a cold drink is inviting on a hot day, our schools must present themselves not only as a means to an education, but as the best means available. Just as that cold drink is the best answer to a physical thirst, our schools must be the best answer to a child's thirst for knowledge.

It is imperative that parents become involved in their children's education. One positive way for that to occur is to help your child's school become an inviting school. In their book, Purkey and Stanley specifically targeted the following groups as being directly involved in making their schools inviting: lunch room workers, librarians, principals, secretaries, superintendents, teachers, counselors, custodians, consultants, supervisors, bus drivers, students, and volunteers. This list has one obvious group that begs for participation by parents, townfolk and retirees alike, namely school volunteers. Our local schools already have a system in place for using volunteers and any one interested is encouraged to contact your local school to see how you can help.

Even though parents were not specifically listed in the target audience of *The Inviting School Treasury* there are quite a few of the 1001 ways to invite student success that could be adapted by parents. Please consider the following ideas:

- ☑ If your child's school allows parents to eat lunch with them periodically, make arrangements and do it.
- ☑ Find out if the school is having a fair, open house, barbecue, or other event in which you can participate, and then attend it.
- ☑ Find out if the cafeteria, a classroom, or an office needs some plants or hanging baskets to give it a homier atmosphere, and then provide some.
- ☑ Obtain a copy of the school calendar and choose a sampling of extra-curricular events, then attend them. Support something else in addition to sports. Clubs, the band, the chorus, and other campus organizations are in need of your support. It is amazing what "just showing up" means to faculty sponsors and student participants alike.
- ☑ Form a parent committee and target the school courtyard, then transform that courtyard into a friendly inviting place with plants and benches. After that, target the teacher's workroom and once it's transformed hold a "grand opening" for the teachers.
- ☑ After a parent-teacher conference let the teacher or counselor know how you felt the conference progressed. Too often, silence is interpreted exactly backwards of how you really felt.
- ☑ Make your name available to all of your students' teachers. It is embarrassing to all involved when wrong last names are used on progress reports and during phone calls.
- ☑ Organize a parent /teacher breakfast or a back to school picnic and meet the teachers in a casual setting. A more informal atmosphere than that found at open house sometimes leads to a better dialogue between parent and teacher.
- ☑ Join the PTA, PTO or Citizen's Advisory Council. Be prepared to give advice (and solutions) on such far ranging topics as: dress code, assemblies, special programs and school functions.
- ☑ Ask the principal to provide parents with an annual evaluation form and volunteer to collate the results.
- ☑ Send a message for your child's teachers to phone you at home, if you do not hear from them within the first four or five weeks of school.

- ☑ Read the county policy book that every student brings home the first week of school. Being aware of discipline and attendance procedures, dress codes, and other regulations can prevent problems before they happen.
- ☑ Volunteer as a Security Parent and help watch parking lots and hallways during school and at school related functions.
- ☑ If you videotape any events where the Video Yearbook staff is not present, offer to allow them to make copies.

Everyone involved in the education of our children must take on the responsibility of making our schools inviting. While teachers, administrators, and school staff must convince the children that school is the place to come, parents must convince the children that school is the place to go.

How To Really Interpret the College Placement Test Scores

Carey Dillinger, September, 1995

The Daily Commercial

The recent publication of the latest aggregate Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for Lake County schools should bring to mind the words of Mark Twain, which we will paraphrase here: "first there are lies, then there are dirty rotten lies, then there are statistics." Statistics, properly applied, can be a great help in many areas of life. Whether you are planning the next great American sales campaign, tracking sports opponent's offensive and defensive tendencies, taking out a home mortgage, or making any large consumer purchase, statistics are your friend. However, when misused, statistics can cast undeserved aspersions towards those who have little or no control over the outcome of the events in question.

The SAT is prepared by the College Entrance Examination Board, a private test making company. Included in the administration packet of the SAT is a pamphlet entitled *Guidelines on the Uses of the College Board Test Scores and Related Data*. Contained within this document are some pertinent comments concerning the proper uses and interpretations of the aggregate results that some local commentators are choosing to ignore. Perhaps it would be wise to let the people who constructed the test tell us how we can properly apply the scores.

"As measures of developed verbal and mathematical abilities important for success in college, SAT scores are useful in making decisions about individual students and assessing their academic preparation." The key word here is "individual." Each student's score needs to be interpreted for that student. The colleges that demand a score from the SAT have a goal for each student to reach and the college could not care less whether the Lake County average for 1995 is above, below, or even equal to the state average.

Can we use the SAT scores to rank teachers and schools? The C.E.E.B. cautions, "Using these scores in aggregate form as a single measure to rank or rate teachers, educational institutions, districts, or states is invalid because it does not include all students. In being incomplete, this use is inherently unfair."

What are some of the reasons that Lake County is experiencing a decline in our aggregate scores? "In general, the higher the percentage of students taking the test, the lower the average scores. In some states a very small percentage of college bound seniors take the SAT. Typically, these students have strong academic backgrounds and are applicants to the nation's most selective colleges and scholarship programs. Therefore, it is to be expected that the SAT verbal and mathematical averages reported for these states will be higher than the national average. In states where a greater proportion of students with a wide range of academic backgrounds take the SAT, and where most colleges in the state require the test for admission, the scores are closer to the national average." Would you care to guess which category applies to our situation?

You might speculate that SAT scores are strictly a result of academic courses taken, but research does not confirm this thinking. "Other factors variously related to performance on the SAT

include...family background and education of parents." A recent survey conducted by Wertheimer and Gibson, using the standardized test results of 45 Central Florida high schools, elaborates on these two areas. "The richer the students, the better they tend to do on standardized tests." The more the students move, the more likely they are to perform poorly. The number of Advanced Placement (A.P.) offerings also affects aggregate scores. Schools where a large number of parents keep up with homework assignments, projects and general school activities have higher aggregate scores.

Obviously, the school system has no control over two of the three factors mentioned. The public schools must teach the students that live in their districts. They cannot recruit students with rich, educated parents. As far as academic course offerings are concerned, Lake County schools offer the requisite courses to prepare students for the SAT. These include Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, and the required English courses. Additionally, some high schools are offering a one semester SAT preparation course.

The means of obtaining the proper preparation to gain an acceptable SAT score is available to all Lake County high school students. The problem is that many students are not prepared for the preparation! It is impossible to pass the Algebras without a firm background in arithmetic. It is doubtful that someone will be able to comprehend ninth grade English if they did not comprehend the prerequisite course work in grades K8.

Should the SAT only be taken by those who are prepared to master it? This would certainly raise aggregate scores and make the statistics appear more favorable to the local commentators, but it would be doing an ultimate disservice to individual students with aspirations of a college education that are not ready. The current policy in most high schools is to encourage anyone who even thinks they might go to college to take the SAT as soon as possible. Then this first score can be used to council the student as to what further preparations need to be made. The C.E.E.B. offers the Preliminary SAT to tenth and eleventh graders so they can practice an SAT-like examination without contributing to the negative statistics caused by unprepared students taking the SAT.

It is the responsibility of the schools, with the cooperation of the students and their parents to make sure that each individual student is informed about the purpose and importance of these tests. The schools must publish the testing dates, costs and testing sites. Parents must encourage their children to pursue their education to the highest level of their ability and force them to read to improve their vocabulary (verbal skills) and force them take their arithmetic lessons seriously so they can successfully complete Algebra and Geometry (math skills). The SAT is not a test that you can cram for the night before. Students must realize that the time to prepare for the SAT is now.

R*E*S*P*E*C*T Find Out What It Really Means!

Carey Dillinger, October, 1995

The Daily Commercial

You have probably noticed that RESPECT is the word of the month at many of our local schools. They have it on their marques and in their bulletins. The teachers are stressing it in their daily lessons and the principals are talking about it on the public address system. What is respect anyway?

The late soul singer and composer Otis Redding wrote a little ditty that Aretha "The Queen of Soul" Franklin made into a mega-hit. "R·E·S·P·E·C·T, find out what it means to me." After listening closely to the lyrics of this popular song you will come to realize that the Lake County Schools Sex Education Committee needs to review them before we have our school children singing it in honor of the word of the month. While the song obviously is an attention getter (especially the part about Aretha getting her "propers" when she gets home), it actually trivializes a word that has at least 10 different definitions any of which is a moral lesson in and of itself.

Space will not permit an examination of all aspects of every definition of respect, but perhaps a few examples will convince you that respect is more than the word of the month, it is the word of a lifetime. The meanings of words are important. Without the meaning a word is nothing but a worthless sound. F.F. Bruce, the former professor of Biblical History in Literature at the University of Sheffield (England), said it this way: "...words, divorced from their meanings, are but empty sounds; instead of being a vehicle of thought, they become a substitute for it." In the same article, Bruce went on to quote Thomas Hobbes the seventeenth century philosopher, scientist, and mathematician: "Words are wise men's counters; they do but reckon with them: but they are the money of fools." According to Bruce: "We must know what values to attach to them (words) if we are to profit by them."

Respect can be a thing to possess or an activity. Most of us are more interested in possessing the former than participating in the latter. That's too bad, because unless we are willing to give respect, it is unlikely that we will receive true respect.

Is there any among us that would turn down "a feeling of appreciative, often deferential regard." Or how about "the state of being regarded with honor or esteem." We could stand some of that action couldn't we? Aren't there times when we all feel we deserve respect? Whether we are parents, teachers, children, students, ministers, doctors, lawyers, or Native American tribal leaders, respect is something we all want and probably need.

Instead of worrying ourselves sick about obtaining the respect of others, let's go out this week and "show deferential regard for" someone else. Pass out a little "esteem" while we're at it. There are other ways to show respect for our fellow persons without violating the Biblical imperative to avoid respect of persons (discrimination).

·First, "avoid violation of or interference with" another person's private business. Respect their privacy, their possessions, and their person. Sometimes the greatest respect we can show someone is to just leave them alone.

·Second, we can demonstrate a "willingness to show consideration or appreciation" towards somebody. The action of a Boy Scout helping an elderly lady across the street is not corny, it's respect. Catching the door for a package laden holiday shopper is not just polite, it's respect. Standing for the national anthem and the pledge to the flag is not a requirement, it's respect. Removing your hat indoors is not some left over rule from some archaic dress code, it's respect.

·Third, we can pay our respects. "Polite expressions of consideration or deference" are always appreciated. Usually, we think of the dearly departed when we pay our respects, but we cannot forget the dearly living. A wedding, a birth, a baptism, an anniversary, and a promotion, all invite us to pay our respects.

·Fourth, "a particular aspect, feature, or detail" may need to be emphasized or even ignored. If your significant other is perfect in every respect but one, forget that one and count yourself lucky. If your child's art project is perfect in only one respect (they kept the mess off of the carpet), then praise them for that.

As indicated earlier, respect has its negative connotation. A good example comes from the New Testament, the book of James, the second chapter, verses one through four: My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool,' have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" (*The New King James Version*) The words "pay attention" come from the Common Greek word *epiblepo* which literally means "to look upon" and is read by the King James translators as "have respect." Leave it to mankind to take a wonderful concept and misuse it.

What Is A Normal Day at Leesburg High?

Carey Dillinger, November 1995

The Daily Commercial

Leesburg High School had the pleasure and honor of having our local state senator, Karen Johnson, on our campus, not once but twice within the last three weeks. The second of those visits occurred November 10th, when she spoke during the Veteran's Day Assembly held in the H.O. Dabney Stadium.

Senator Johnson was a part of a rather large dais that included state representative Everett Kelly, members of the county commission, members of the city commission, representatives of the Lake County school system, and of course members of the various veteran's groups. The audience included veterans, current members of the armed services and the entire student body of the high school. Let it be said here that the behavior of the student body during the assembly is to be commended. This superb behavior was due in part to the time spent in the classrooms by the teachers explaining the purpose and the meaning of the assembly prior to its occurrence. However, the primary reason the students were so well behaved, is that by and large they are good hearted kids that are willing to cooperate if they know what is going on. Congratulations are in order to all of the participants and audience members for providing our veterans with a ceremony they can look back on with fond memories.

It was only a week or so earlier that the Senator had visited the Leesburg High campus on a fact finding mission. She wanted to see certain aspects of the school's daily operation and was given a tour that provided her with the information she was seeking. Accompanying her on this tour was an entourage that included members of her staff, members of the county school administration staff, and a member of the high school administration. It was not a normal day at Leesburg High.

It was not a normal day because a state senator does not drop in that often. It was not a normal day because the county school staff is usually not on campus in force. It was not a normal day because a breakfast scheduled for first period to recognize academic achievement was moved to third period so that the Senator might drop by. It was not a normal day because the custodial staff that generally begins work at 3:00 PM was on campus at 7:00 AM.

The school cannot be faulted for not presenting the Senator with a normal day, after all if a special visitor is coming don't we all spruce things up a bit? You might mow the lawn, pick up the kid's toys, put on your good clothes, clean the bathroom, set out the fine china, and fix some good food. The school basically did the same thing.

If our governmental officials want to see our schools on a normal day, they need to take a page or two from the handbooks of corporate America and our Armed Services. They need to visit our schools incognito and conduct surprise inspections. Just show up unannounced, check into the school office, ask for a student guide and go observe a normal day. Where should the tour begin? Why in the restrooms of course. Check them for soap, paper towels, toilet paper and cigarette butts. Then a visit to the administrative offices would be in order. Is the secretary or clerk on

duty? Is the office accessible to parents, students, faculty and visitors or is it more reminiscent of a medieval castle complete with a moat full of crocodiles masquerading as the receptionist, the clerks, the aides, and the secretaries.

Now it's time to visit the teacher's lounge to get a sense of what is going on around this place. Quite a bit of grousing, whining, complaining, and actual tear shedding goes on here. Do not discuss the obvious, the teachers know they are overworked and underpaid. Talk to them instead about your commitment to kids. Lend them a sympathetic ear as they describe how hard it is to teach the academic classes, when the emphasis is on the elective classes and the extracurricular activities. Find out from them that in education the tail actually does the impossible - it wags the dog!

Lunch time should be spent in the cafeteria, eating with the students, yes, the same food as the students eat! Spend your time there talking with individual students and groups of students. Talk to everyone, not just the honor student the principal gave you as a guide. You must talk to the academically able and the academically disabled. You need to commune with the socially in and the socially out. You need to meet the druggies, the alkies, the thugs, the gangsters, the punks and those of the pierced body and tattooed persuasion. You can explore the various world and religious cultures by consulting with black, brown, red, white, and yellow students, as well as the Christians, Jews, Moslems, Hindus, agnostics, and atheists.

After lunch it is time to visit the guidance department. Observe carefully what is taking place here. Is the counseling of students taking place? Does every counselor have a student in their office or is the counselor pushing mounds of paperwork generated by you and your colleagues?

Have you enjoyed your visit so far? It is far from over. It is time to visit some classrooms. This is what school is all about. It is not about field trips, band and chorus concerts, drill team performances, steer raising, nonacademic assemblies, fashion shows, sporting events, or the ever present public address announcements, although these things are necessary and occasionally have their place. School is about a teacher and his students spending fifty minutes together five days a week. Anything that interferes with that time had better be important. If a student is to be deprived of that precious time it had better be with the student's, parent's, and classroom teacher's permission.

Has your visit on a normal school day been informative? It has certainly been a more realistic dose of the status quo than when you announced your stopover. Come back and visit anytime. Don't call ahead, just drop by.

Isn't This My Last Column?

Carey Dillinger, December, 1995

The Daily Commercial

If you are like me, then you'll be spending quite a bit of time in the next two weeks tying up more than holiday gifts. That's right; it's time to tie up loose ends. I know you have some because we all tend to wait until the end of the year to finalize certain plans. Take the holidays for instance. Where will you be eating Christmas dinner? What gift are you getting your espoused?

According to the IRS it is almost the end of our fiscal year. Should you dump some more cash in that tax sheltered annuity or just pay for the previously mentioned gift? Another deduction would be nice, but it's just too late to make much progress in that area. Of course, you could ask your wife's Aunt Hilda to move in for the remainder of the year and try to deduct her.

Column writing generates the same sort of conundrums. What can I do with two or three half-written column ideas that just didn't cut the mustard the first time around? These are ideas that seemed like good columns at the time, but upon further inspection turned out to be more along the lines of a letter to the editor. They were ideas that sustained their importance for about 150 words or so, then just fizzled out.

For example, I was going to give out some kudos in this column in the form of a written pat on the back, to anybody that did something good for themselves that was also good for the community at large. I was going to call these awards "The Attaboys!" Here were my first three recipients:

The first "Attaboy" goes to the owners of the Gateway Plaza (formerly Zayre's Plaza) in Leesburg. Instead of going to the outskirts of town and mowing down some hundred year old oak trees to build a parking lot, these folks decided to renovate a perfectly good building with an existing parking lot, at the intersection of two well traveled city streets. Then they enticed some well known stores as lessees and now everyone is happy.

The people who chose to renovate the old Western Sizzlin' into the Bonanza Cafeteria (now known as the Dixie Cafeteria) should be congratulated on turning a public eyesore into an acceptable neighborhood establishment.

Speaking of acceptable neighborhood establishments, the Fraternal Order of Police have already been awarded a Leesburg Area Chamber of Commerce Award for the renovation and beautification of the building on east county road 44 formerly known as the Treasure Island Lounge. Not only did they beautify and renovate, but they also lowered the decibel levels on Friday and Saturday nights by about 1000 percent.

These corporations, individuals and organizations deserve to be commended for using existing buildings and parking lots to provide themselves with a livelihood or meeting place, and also for taking that extra effort to make themselves a part of the existing neighborhood.

Another idea was to use my space one month to answer questions posed to me by readers of the column. Here's an example of why that idea was deep-sixed:

Q: "How has writing for the newspaper changed your life?"

A: I wish I had some great testimonial to give as an answer to this question. If I could say, "It's cleared up my complexion," or "I've lost ten pounds," or even "I now have greater insight into the plight of the red-necked brewsucker," then I would know my life had been truly affected. Unfortunately, when I began to really think about how my life has actually been changed by this calling I realized that I actually had more in common with the cowboy called "Slim" in a poem entitled *Reincarnation*, than with great heroes of life changing experiences.

Reincarnation

a cowboy poem by Wallace McCrae ©

What is reincarnation, a cowboy asked his friend? His friend replied, "well son it's what happens when your life has reached its end.

You see, they comb your hair and they wash your neck and they clean your fingernails, and they lay you down in a padded box, far away from life's travails.

Now the box and you goes in a hole that's been dug into the ground, and reincarnation starts in when you're planted beneath the mound.

You see the box melts down just like the clods, and you who is inside, and then you're just beginning on your transformation ride.

Well in a while some rain's gonna come and fall upon the ground, 'til one day on your lonely little grave, a little flower will be found.

And say, a hoss shall wander by and graze upon this flower, that once was you, but now has become a vegetative bower.

That little flower that the hoss done ate up with all his other feed, becomes bone and fat and muscle essential to the steed.

Of course some is consumed that he can't use and so it passes through and finally it lays there on the ground, this thing that once was you.

And then say that I should wander by and gaze upon the ground, and wonder and ponder on this object that I've found.

Well it sure makes me think of reincarnation, of life and death and such, and I ride away concluding Slim you ain't changed all that much!

The Graduation Committee

Carey Dillinger, January, 1996

The Daily Commercial

Those of you that read this column on a regular basis will probably remember that the June edition contained some rather uncomplimentary remarks concerning the behavior of both the graduates and the audience at the Leesburg High School commencement ceremony this past May. In that column I urged the students of the class of 1996, along with their parents, teachers, school administrators, and class sponsor to begin to make plans so that the next commencement ceremony would be the kind of occasion that would be remembered with pride and affection.

I am happy to report that such plans are already in the works. Principal Dave Tucker, along with class sponsor Pete Bush put out a call for anyone interested to attend the first meeting of the newly formed Graduation Committee during the early part of December. Present at this meeting were parents, teachers, and prospective graduates. Everyone in attendance at this first meeting came away from it feeling that much common ground had been established between the students and the adults, especially in the area of decorum.

Both students and adults alike felt that nothing should take place during the ceremony itself to remove the spotlight from the individual speaker, presenter, or graduate. Everyone agreed that when each graduate comes across that stage, all eyes and ears deserve to be focused on that individual in their moment of glory, happiness, and honor. While the adults seemed to favor a more reserved approach to the entire event, the students were concerned that without some overt show of class solidarity, the graduation ceremony of the class of 1996 might not be fondly remembered by either the honorees or the attendees. The meeting adjourned with a feeling of accomplishment and agreement to meet again during the month of January.

The Second meeting was even more productive than the first, as the committee welcomed some new members including: two additional parents, two more faculty members, the senior class officers, the student body president, and the rarest of all species, a concerned male student. After some lively round table discussion it was decided to divide the committee into four smaller groups to study various aspects of how to make the graduation of the class of 1996 the best ceremony that has ever been witnessed at the H. O. Dabney Stadium. The four smaller subcommittees began to study particular aspects of the graduation event such as: publicity, seating, security, dress, decorum, decorations, and the printed program.

Each subcommittee was asked to make a list of what they would like to see happen at the ceremony, as well as what they did not want to see occur. First, let's examine some of the things that the committee wants to avoid at this year's commencement ceremony. The subcommittee on seating and security would like to see excessive crowd noise and crowded seating eliminated. The subcommittee on dress and decorum put on their "no-no" list such things as: casually attired audience members, a "football game atmosphere," mechanical noisemakers, and excessive cheering to the point of drowning out the speaker system. The program subcommittee submitted

that a "party atmosphere" on the part of the graduates or the audience during the dignified sections of the ceremony would be inappropriate.

Many positive ideas were presented by each of the subcommittees to alleviate potential problems and insure a successful ceremony. These included: seating in the "home stands" by ticket only and open seating in the visitors stands, to help with seating and security problems. Also it was recommended that the podium and graduate seating on the football field could be rearranged so that everyone could see the speaker's stand and the graduates. To help with audience decorum, someone would be chosen to precede the graduates to the stadium to explain the program to the audience and suggest appropriate responses from them. One subcommittee suggested that publicity through the local newspapers, the school newspaper, the school public address announcements, and a special senior class meeting would help the committee's effort to get everyone in the community to feel like they had a part in designing the ceremony as well as be willing to participate within its guidelines.

Perhaps the most interesting proposal came from the program subcommittee. They want the class to design what they are calling the "class signature." This signature would consist of some activity or action on the part of the graduates at the conclusion of the ceremony that would place a positive stamp of the class of 1996 on the occasion as well as meet with the approval of all present. Besides making the observance the unique possession of the class, the signature would culminate the ceremony and signal the audience to "storm the field."

The purpose of this column is threefold: first, to once again demonstrate that good things are happening in the local schools and students, parents, and school personnel can and will work together for a good cause; second, to put the graduation ceremony in the minds of those of you that read this paper and are planning to attend; and third, to solicit suggestions from the community at large, as well as to encourage more interested parents and LHS seniors of the male persuasion to attend the next committee meeting. If you do have a suggestion that you feel would enhance the upcoming graduation ceremony please write to student co-chairman Erin Ohnstad or me in care of Leesburg High School.

I know you're probably wondering how I became privy to the information contained herein. It was simple really; I promised the adult co-chairman of the committee that the newspaper would publish his photograph in the upper left hand corner of this column.

[The author's photograph appeared with each column, he was the adult co-chairman of the graduation committee.]