

Opinions

JIM HEFFNER

Columnist



Things to avoid in '95

It's that time of year again. The time when everybody makes resolutions for the coming year. January 1 is the first official date to start breaking them.

I don't make New Year's resolutions anymore. I try to live by the old adage, "To thine own self be true," therefore, if I don't make them, I won't have to break them.

There are certain people and things I intend to steer clear of, though, and if you want to call them NYRs, feel free.

I am leery of women with hyphenated names. It seems to me that most of these women, if not all of them, are militant feminists.

I've never understood why women change their last names when they get married in the first place, but those who place the dreaded dash after their last name, then add their husband's name, appear to me to be indecisive.

I simply do not trust people who buy Chinese food then take it home and eat it out of those little white triangular shaped cartons, with chopsticks. Learning to eat with chopsticks is a waste of time. Don't they realize that spoons and forks are part of evolution?

People should dump the cartons onto a plate, then eat the food with the proper utensils. If God had wanted people to eat from little white triangular cartons with chopsticks, he would have created Adam and May Ling. I plan to give people like that a wide berth.

"What's your sign?" Now that's the silliest thing I've ever heard in my life. I refuse to have anything to do with anyone who lives by the position of the heavenly bodies.

Astrology is not a science, it is a racket, and many people are getting rich from it. If Jean Dixon could predict the future she would be the richest rail bird at the race track.

People can believe anything they please, but believing in astrology just isn't in the stars for me.

Then there is the Elvis cult. They are to be avoided at all costs, because they are bona fide nuts.

I liked Elvis Presley. When I was stationed in Memphis with the good old USN, I used to go to West Memphis, Ark., just across the Big Muddy, to a club called the Eagle's nest, to see Elvis perform before he had hinges implanted in his hips.

These people, however, who claim he isn't dead, but living in a shopping mall in Minnesota, have all gone round the bend. Some of them travel to Memphis on a regular basis just to be in the city where he lived. They'd pay a small fortune for a sampling of his toenail clippings.

Once I heard a radio preacher chastising the Elvis cult. "Elvis is dead, dead, dead," said he, "all 350 pounds of him." I can't vouch for the king's weight, and he may not be dead in some people's minds, but he is most assuredly not among the living.

Next on my list, there are two groups of people who have a similar mental capacity. I'm talking about those dippy folks who talk to plants and the emerging net-dwellers, those who claim to have been abducted by aliens.

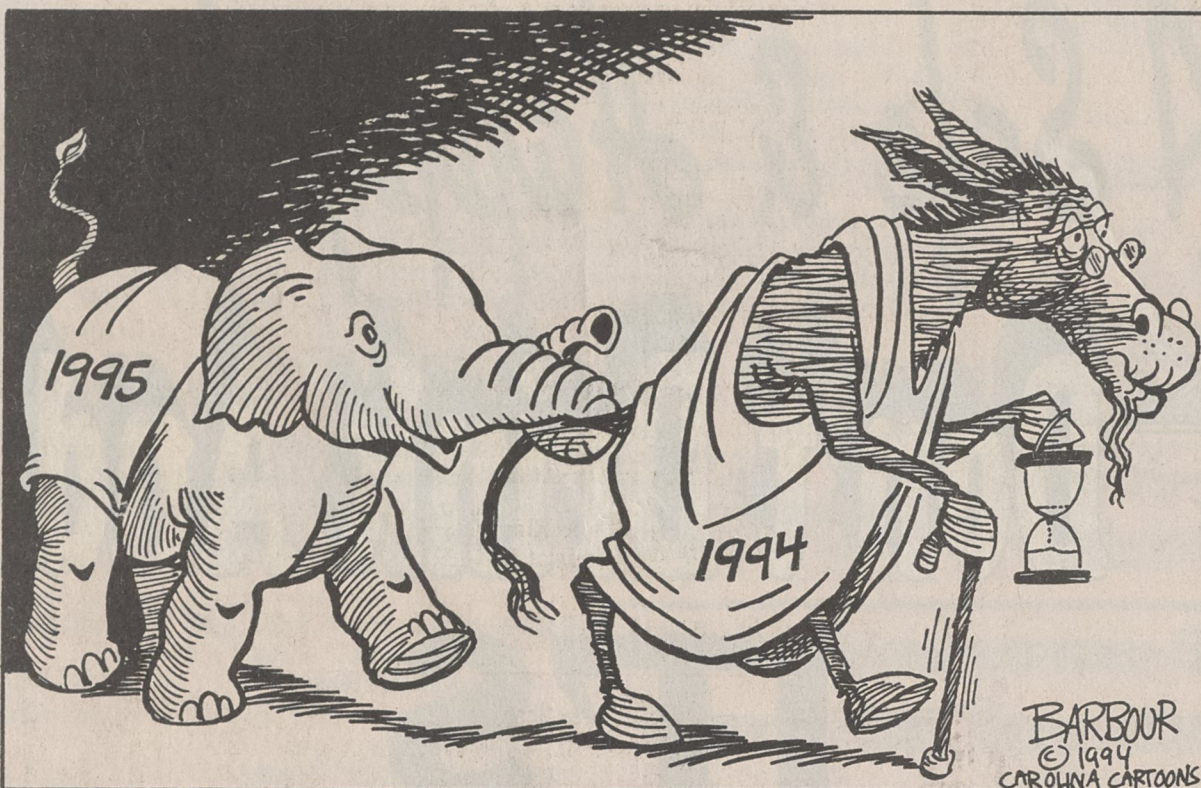
"Your house plants will thrive if you'll just talk soothingly to them," they'll say. If there is anybody out there who truly believes that, I'd like to sell them a bridge. I have found there is no substitute for water and plant food.

You've heard all those stories about two rednecks who were fishing at night in Mississippi when they got plucked out of their row boat by small round-headed spacemen? That's just Yankee hogwash.

My research tells me that most people, about 86.7 percent, who claim to have been taken aboard a spacecraft were born above the Mason-Dixon Line. That right there ought to tell us something. If any of them actually were space-napped, it was probably while he or she was absorbed in chatting with a daisy, or eating Chinese food from a white triangular box, with chopsticks, and listening to "You ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog."

As I said, no resolutions, but I'm going to be careful who (whom?) I associate with next year.

Cartoonitorial



Deer spotted on Henry Street

Short stories to end the old year and bring in the new:

■ Patricia Barrett and her 15-year-old daughter, Heather, couldn't believe their eyes.

They were taking down their Christmas tree Monday morning, looked out the window and saw a huge buck deer walking across the front lawn of their Henry Street home.

Mrs. Barrett grabbed her camera and rushed outside, hoping to take a picture, but the deer had already gone.

"It was just beautiful," said Mrs. Barrett, who had heard earlier reports of neighbors sighting the deer.

The Barretts have been living on Henry Street for 22 years. A huge patch of woods behind their home has been the home of much wildlife, but not until recently had anyone in the neighborhood seen deer. She had heard, though, that a deer was killed by a car on nearby Highway 74 bypass recently.

"I've often gotten up in the middle of the night and looked out the window to see foxes playing in the yard," she noted. "They're beautiful."

Recently, a pulpwood company began clearing the woods for a family that plans to build a new home on the site. That activity obviously scared the deer and he sought another home.

But, just in case he returns, the Barretts have their camcorder close at hand.

■ North Carolina residents who must renew their driver's license in 1995 will be in for some changes.

Beginning January 3, The Division of Motor Vehicles will accept personal checks as payment for license, and the new year will also usher in a new system for renewal of licenses. In the past, drivers renewed their license every four years. Now, a new system will be phased in wherein drivers between the ages of 18 and 62 renew their license in four, five, six, seven or eight-year intervals with the eventual goal of having each driver renew their license at ages divisible by five (20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, etc.)

Drivers age 17 will renew their license for the first time at age 20, and drivers 62 or older will be on a five-year renewal system with no phase-in.

The DMV says the new system will not only be more convenient for the public, but will result in a \$1.5 million per year tax savings.

■ State Supt. of Public Instruction Bob Etheridge blames the state's strong economy for

GARY STEWART

Editor



an increasing school dropout rate.

Just-released state dropout reports from the 1993-94 school year indicate that school systems in communities where many jobs are available in textiles, furniture making and other industries have had the largest increase in the number of dropouts.

Wilkes County, Wake County, Hickory City, Asheboro City, and Randolph County, all areas with many jobs available, have seen their dropout rates increase sharply.

State-wide, the rate increased to 3.71 percent from 3.46 percent at the end of the 1992-93 school year.

Federal data, which sometimes shows duplications, showed Kings Mountain's dropout rate falling from 3.70 in 1992-93 to 3.49 in 1993-94 (67 students dropped out in 1992-93 and 63 in 1993-94). The state data, which does not show duplications, listed Kings Mountain with a 3.11 dropout rate (56 students) in 1992-93 and 3.33 percent (60 students) in 1993-94. Both Shelby and Cleveland County systems had dropout rates of below three percent.

■ I saw something in 1994 that I can't remember seeing in 25 years or so: prisoners picking up trash along the roadside.

Years ago, chain gangs were highly visible, especially in rural areas where roads were unpaved. They were often used to cut sprouts along the road right-of-way.

North Carolinians may see more prisoners at work in the future. The Department of Correction plans to use inmate labor to build a new 500-bed prison work farm in Tyrrell County, which is one of the state's least populated counties with the state's highest unemployment rate. The project will not only put inmates to work, but will create about 143 people and pump about \$3 million per year into that county's economy. A similar work farm is being built in Caswell County with inmates from nearby Washington Correctional Center in Creswell building the farm's housing units and saving taxpayers about \$1.75 million.

REFLECTIONS on Religion and Life

Rev. Dick Newsome
Pastor
First Presbyterian Church



Have a yippee '95!

Consider the case of two neighbors.

Mind you, these neighbors are not "real" in the laboratory science, Newton's Enlightenment apple, give-me-their-phone-numbers sense of "real." You won't find them in the Cleveland County census records. But they are "real" to me insofar as I see their faces in the faces of Kings Mountaineers every day.

One is Mr. Walter McGillicutty. Mr. McGillicutty is a chief pumvirculate in the St. Aristarchus Community Church. (Some say the largest stockholder, too). He missed only three Sundays in 1994 and did so because business called. Mr. McGillicutty lives on Jefferson Avenue in the white house, the one with the crisp lawn and greaseless driveway. If you drive by his house just before sunrise, you will see him step out for his morning run. (He doesn't call it a jog because that word is too sloppy. Mr. McGillicutty "runs.") After his run, he showers, combs, neatens, goes to work, works hard and comes home. Once home, he reads the New York Times before dinner. Then he eats a low cholesterol, high fiber, environmentally and gastronomically sound dinner. Finally, Mr. McGillicutty practices on his cello for 37 minutes before retiring. And he thinks to himself, "It's good to be Walter McGillicutty."

Down the street is Sweetie. That's her real name, or at least, the one people use when speaking to her. I don't know her last name because no one ever uses it. Maybe she doesn't have one. Sweetie lives in the house which used to be purple but is now a cross between blue and orange on the west side and plain ol' wood on the other. People tell her every so often that plain ol' wood isn't fashionable these days. But she just can't seem to find the time to change it. Plus the overgrown red-tips block most of the view anyway.

Sweetie is a lovely woman whose only fault is a slightly obnoxious habit of saying "yippee" at every piece of good news. No one seems to mind, though.

She emerges from her paradise early just like Walter McGillicutty. But she doesn't run. She "ambles" down to the Crisis Ministry to lend a hand. And from there she spends the better part of the day tackling errands and lending a hand to those who need one. It is difficult to describe her schedule because she doesn't have one. But each day is plenty full. At the end of the day, Sweetie is glad for what she has accomplished. But nonetheless she thinks of all those things and all those people for whom she missed the opportunity to help. Oh well, there are more days ahead. Yippee! She sleeps soundly.

I happened to have the chance to visit Mr. McGillicutty and Sweetie a few days ago. I visited them on December 31st. And oddly enough, each of them had a new year's resolution. Mr. McGillicutty has decided to take up a new instrument. He claims that music is good for the soul so he will soon be a fine kettle drummer. I thought it admirable. Sweetie had a hard time choosing her resolution but finally decided to serve as a volunteer in the hospital emergency room on Thursdays. She is nervous about it but looking forward to the venture. I thought it remarkable.

If you are the kind of person who goes in for new year's resolutions, then I suppose you'll need to decide, too. You might vow to quit smoking, jog, run, make more money, grow petunias, wallpaper the attic or keep a neater lawn. The possibilities are endless. And no doubt, your choice will be admirable. But if Sweetie is to tell us anything, she would ask us to reach a little bit deeper and a little wider than our own life. Then, she would say, the new year will be a remarkable one for us all. Yippee!

Our View

Audrey Dickey, Betty Cloninger will be missed

The deaths of Mrs. Audrey Dickey and Mrs. Betty Cloninger removed from the community two prominent women who influenced the lives of many people.

Widow of former city commissioner Jim Dickey, Audrey Pulliam Dickey prided herself a watchdog of city activities and never failed to call attention to issues she thought important to the community.

A staunch supporter of the Kings Mountain

Police Department, Audrey was on a first name basis with most every police officer and considered them among her best friends, constantly exhibiting friendship and kindness.

Audrey's devotion to her husband whom she cared for around the clock for years before his death from diabetes was well known to a wide circle of friends who saw them together at city board meetings and various other events until they had to stop due to illness.

Betty Plonk Cloninger's tremendous fight against deadly cancer was an example of courage and faith that gives us all hope to fight our daily battles.

From those who knew Betty best came this continuing comment, "She never complained," a high compliment which many others would be glad to claim.

Don't take vote away from the people

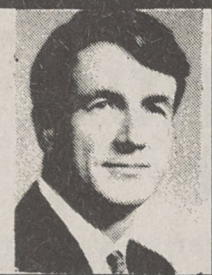
Even before the ink was dry on the election results, posting the largest conservative, Republican judicial victories in well over a century, state Democrats and special interest groups started screaming for the "merit selection" of judges. Apparently, the election of judges by common folk was just fine, as long as the Democrats and their cronies had an almost complete lock on the judicial system for more than 100 years.

Now, after big Republican election gains, story after story in the news media relates the pitfalls and problems with the election of our judiciary. Even though North Carolinians recently won the ability to locally elect superior court judges in their own districts, rather than statewide, we are being told by the powers that be that the most democratic of processes - the plebiscite - is not the best way to select judges. Rather, numerous plans have been put forward to have our judges chosen by select groups of individuals.

Whom might these select groups be? Although the plans differ, none of them include the common folk, who now apparently have no business choosing the judges to rule over them. Several of

GUEST COLUMN

THOMAS GOOLSBY
Carolina Syndicated
Columns



the plans involve the creations of new bureaucracies, known as Merit Review Committees. These committees are to be filled with all sorts of individuals representing various special interest groups. And, as is usually the case, the chances are very good that most of the committee members will be society's favorite whipping boys - the lawyers.

Do the proponents of merit selection believe that the voting public is nothing more than a mindless mass of humanity, undeserving of the right to select their rulers? Will they also be will-

ing to suggest review committees for the selections of the Governor, Council of State and General Assembly? Of course they won't, but they can give no good reasons why the voters do not deserve the ability to continue to elect the public officials in the judicial branch of government.

All of the ideas and recommendations concerning merit selection, touted as forward looking and innovative, offer nothing to the public at large. The supporters of these plans, who are mainly legal and political special interest groups, simply hope to take away the constitutionally guaranteed voter franchise and give it over to the good ole boys who like having everything their way.

It is not realistic to believe that the Tarheel state will be better served by disenfranchising the voters and, instead, creating new bureaucracies for the selection of judges. Our Founding Fathers guaranteed North Carolinians the constitutional right to elect fair and impartial judges. The system is not perfect, but it will not be improved upon by taking away the people's ability to make such important decisions.

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