

Kin who have gone on still remain close

Two of my father's siblings died recently. Yesterday another entered Hospice care. It's like someone is felling old oak trees from a backyard existing in my inner landscape.

Nan went first. She spent her last weeks in a nursing home. I brought the confused, restless woman books



Andie Brymer
Staff Writer

on gardening, her life-long love. I don't know if she looked at the pictures or was able to read the words

but I had to do something for her. She had given me so much.

Years before she and her husband designed a modern, light-filled home. I would visit and Nan would tell me about people she knew from having lived in Raleigh. She brought a larger world to my rural existence.

Paul went next. He and Estelle lived in Sanford, Florida. In the summers of my childhood Mama and Daddy would pack the old, blue Plymouth and we would head south. Our gracious hosts would take us to Disney World and the beach. Paul and Estelle laughed a lot. They invited friends over to meet us. Their home was the hub of Mohawk Avenue. Childless, friends were so important to them.

Now Bill seems next in line. He's battled cancer for several years. The disease apparently has invaded his bones.

Atlanta and Uncle Bill will forever be entwined. He worked and lived there for decades, only returning to North Carolina when he retired from the insurance industry.

Every time I see Bill he seems so happy that I'm standing in front of him. His face lights up and his booming voice greets me. I'm not sure what I've done to deserve that. I think it's more about Bill's ability to appreciate people.

I don't spend a lot of time with family members but that doesn't make their passing any easier. The knowledge that these folks are there has made life somehow easier.

I've always known that these people who share my gene pool, who have watched me grow up, have got my back. They are like an invisible army of kin.

The New Testament speaks of a great cloud of witness. I think that refers more to the saints empowering the faithful but I'll borrow the verse. I would prefer to have flesh and blood aunts and uncles but I'll take them in a vague, other-worldly form if it keeps me within the sphere of their love.

Andie Brymer can be reached at 739-7496 or abrymer@kingsmountain-herald.com

OPINION

The Kings Mountain Herald

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4A



Dwight Dixon cuts the ribbon at X-Stream Car Wash Tuesday morning. To his right is Kings Mountain City Councilwoman Brenda Ross. Mayor Rick Murphrey stands to his immediate left along with Tony Ruppe. Dixon and Ruppe own the car wash located on Cansler Street. It has six self-service bays and one automatic, touchless bay with spot free rinse and underbody wash. Vacuums for the interior are also available.

ANDIE L. BRYMER/HERALD

LETTERS

Bush misled American people

To the editor:

This past week in his State of the Union address, President Bush promised to "build a better world for our children and grandchildren" and then outlined a series of policies that would do exactly the opposite.

Bush deliberately chose to mislead the American people about his disastrous plan to privatize Social Security. He claimed to oppose borrowing money and cutting benefits, but his plan does both, creating trillions of dollars in new debt and cutting benefits up to 50 percent. He claimed that his plan will make Social Security more solvent, but experts agree that it will do the reverse.

The result is a less secure future for our children and grandchildren. And Bush's Social Security privatization scheme is just the tip of the iceberg.

Bush's proposal to make his tax cuts permanent will empty the Social Security trust fund, costing \$2.4 trillion over the next 10 years. And he is saddling future generations with trillions in debt.

Bush's health care proposals will double the cost of traditional health care by shifting the cost of medical bills to the patients.

Bush wants to extend the unfunded mandates and requirements of the No Child Left Behind while cutting its funding last year by \$27 million. This year will see additional cuts in the budget for the Department of Education.

While talking about creating opportunity for Americans, his legacy of his first term is 4.3 million more Americans now in poverty.

President Bush says he'll honor our veterans, but according to The Washington Post (10/3/04), 300,000 veterans are still waiting for necessary health care treatment.

The tab for Bush's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is currently \$277 billion and counting. Plus Bush's plans call for Americans to be in the Middle East for many more years. Is Iran next to invade? After all, nuclear weapons is under the heading of "weapons of mass destruction." Does America have unlimited tax dollars and soldiers? The answer is NO.

Does this sound like a better future

for our children and grandchildren?

I don't think so. Democrats will not stand on the sidelines while Bush pushes his plans to provide for the wealthy while ignoring the plights of ordinary citizens. Our children and grandchildren deserve better.

We shall hold President Bush and the Republicans accountable, and we'll stop this disastrous agenda dead in its tracks.

Betsy H. Wells
Kings Mountain

Social Security must be changed

To the editor:

We have known that Social Security would go bankrupt ever since antibiotics and other medical breakthroughs rendered the original premise of Social Security invalid, namely that fifty percent of the people who paid into it would die before they could collect it.

For most people, 12.4% of every dollar earned is taxed for Social Security. I know, they say it is only 6.2%. But if you were self-employed, you would find out that you are paying twice that. It is a neat accounting trick that makes you think otherwise.

The scare mongers say that George Bush wants to take away your Social Security. But Bush has already said that the system will not change for those now retired or about to retire.

The scare mongers say that the money will be gambled away into the stock market. Well, ask these people where they have their 401k money invested. Ask them if the stock market, over a twenty year span, has ever failed to yield a positive return.

If the stock market were suddenly to go broke, what would that mean? It would mean that all those companies went out of business, that most people would not have a job, and that there would be no revenue coming in to fund Social Security or anything else. The dollar itself is worth nothing if there is nothing being produced by American businesses. The government has no money except what it takes from you. If it starts printing money,

without businesses producing goods and services, those dollars will not be worth the paper they are printed on.

So if you are afraid of the stock market, you can be afraid of the dollar as well, and the only solution is to take all your money and buy real assets: land, gold, commodities, collectibles - things that you can barter. But this is Armageddon thinking. If you live in fear of economic disaster, you might want to do this, but don't forget to build a wall and a moat around your castle as well. Crocodiles are optional.

For those whose fear of the stock market is not susceptible to reason, there is the option to stay in the present system. But bear in mind that without changing the system, you may not get as much back as you put in, since there will be fewer people paying in as the number of retirees expands with greater longevity and the baby boom retirement.

What about the Social Security "lockbox" in Washington, DC? No one has ever been able to find it. At best, it is a boxful of I.O.U.'s. Your Social Security payment is paid out of Social Security recipients in real time - now. What is in excess of that amount is spent by the government as part of the General Fund. This is done by buying government debt in the form of US Treasury certificates. These will some day have to be redeemed by taxpayers. If that excess Social Security money had been invested in the stock market, it would have future value, not future liability. Social Security is a fraud.

If by some miracle the scare mongers fail, and you have the option to invest a portion of your retirement in the stock or bond market, you accept a certain risk, but you also have an opportunity for greater return than if you stay in the present system. It would be wise to listen to the public debate and let your representatives in Washington hear your opinion. They are terrified of displeasing you, and that terror may paralyze them with inaction. If the scare mongers succeed, this opportunity will pass, but the problem will remain.

Larry Shull
Kings Mountain

Wanna buy a wart?

Snow and ice have a way of making huge amounts of bread and milk disappear from grocery store shelves, and it isn't just a Southern phenomenon. It happens all over the country. Everybody knows the phenomena is driven by unreasonable panic, or at least I thought everybody knew. Turns out I was wrong.



Jim Heffner
Columnist

I am acquainted with a woman who obviously doesn't know. Let's call her Miranda.

A fellow I know, we'll call him Jimmy, is one of the county's leading practical jokesters. He has a couple of henchmen named Rick and Joel, and they have a knack for picking up on the slightest display of innocence and turning it into a farce. Actually, these three guys could produce a great reality show on practical jokes.

The other day Miranda walked into the middle of this deadly circle and made a seemingly harmless comment.

"I wonder why people always rush out and buy milk and bread when it's going to snow," she said.

Joel, ably assisted by Jimmy and Rick, immediately smelled fun and pounced. Miranda was a goner.

"That's easy," he said. "It's because your calcium gets low during cold snowy weather. I thought everybody knew that."

"Is that true?" she asked. "I didn't know that."

Rick and Jimmy sensed a live one and moved in for the kill, assuring Miranda that Joel was absolutely right. Neither of them cracked a smile.

Miranda bought the entire routine hook, line and sinker.

Jimmy, ever the opportunist, cemented the deal.

"When you go to church Sunday," he said, "ask any of the oldtimers and they'll tell you it's the truth."

Poor Miranda. She was skewered on the spears of the unholy three.

I came back to the office and told our editor the story.

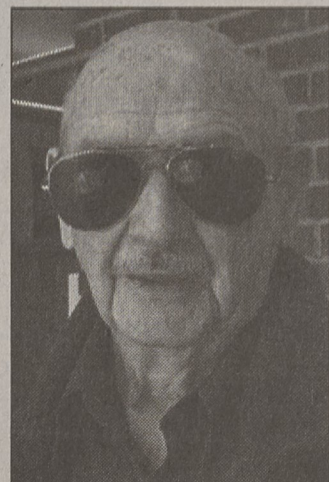
"There are con artists everywhere," he said. "When I was a boy, another kid sold me a bicycle chain with a bunch of missing links. I actually believed what he told me, that this was a skip chain, and that the sprocket just needed to engage every other link."

Sometimes I wonder if it's safe to get out of bed. See Heffner, 5A

SIDEWALK SURVEY

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
THE HERALD

Do you think female soldiers should fight in combat?



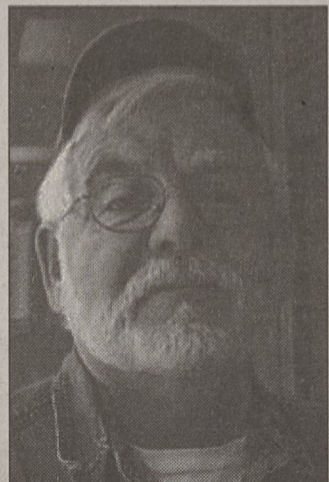
No. Any other assignment is great. I've been in combat. It's not the proper place for a lady.
Richard McGinnis
Kings Mountain



I don't know.
Pete Dover
Kings Mountain



I think so. It's their choice.
In'sombi Sellars
Kings Mountain



If they take on the job, yes.
Travis Weldon
Kings Mountain



If they have a desire to.
Maude Norris
Kings Mountain