


OPINION/COMMENTARY



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COMMENTARY

Remembering Ele

Remember the emotion in her voice as she spoke to me on the phone more than a year ago now, a passion for teaching that was evident in the way she advocated for her kids at the Satellite After-School Program.

When the news came across my desk last week that Eleanor Hamill had passed away, I was saddened.



THE MINOR DETAILS
ADAM MINOR

Although we had never met face-to-face, we had several telephone conversations about her after-school

program. You see, the last time we spoke several months ago, we didn't exactly see eye to eye. We had covered an event the Satellite After-School Program had run, and we had taken several pictures. The event itself escapes me at the moment, but I remember getting a call from Ele after we had run the photos from the event in the following week's paper. Certain portions of the event, it turns out, were not covered as much as other parts of it, and Ele felt quite strongly that we had dropped the ball.

Although I disagreed with her, I came to understand that she just wanted to see the best for her kids, and she was upset that certain events were excluded. Fair enough.

As someone who has worked with an after-school program before, I understand wholeheartedly how important looking after kids can be. It is a physically and emotionally challenging job, and over time, you develop a bond with those kids, and you only want to see the best for them.

Ele — I may not have known you very well, and although we disagreed over the phone that day, I can't help but respect the way you did your job. You gave it your all, and by all accounts, you were very good at it. You will be sorely missed.

A quote from Ele in a May 2008 edition of the Auburn News:

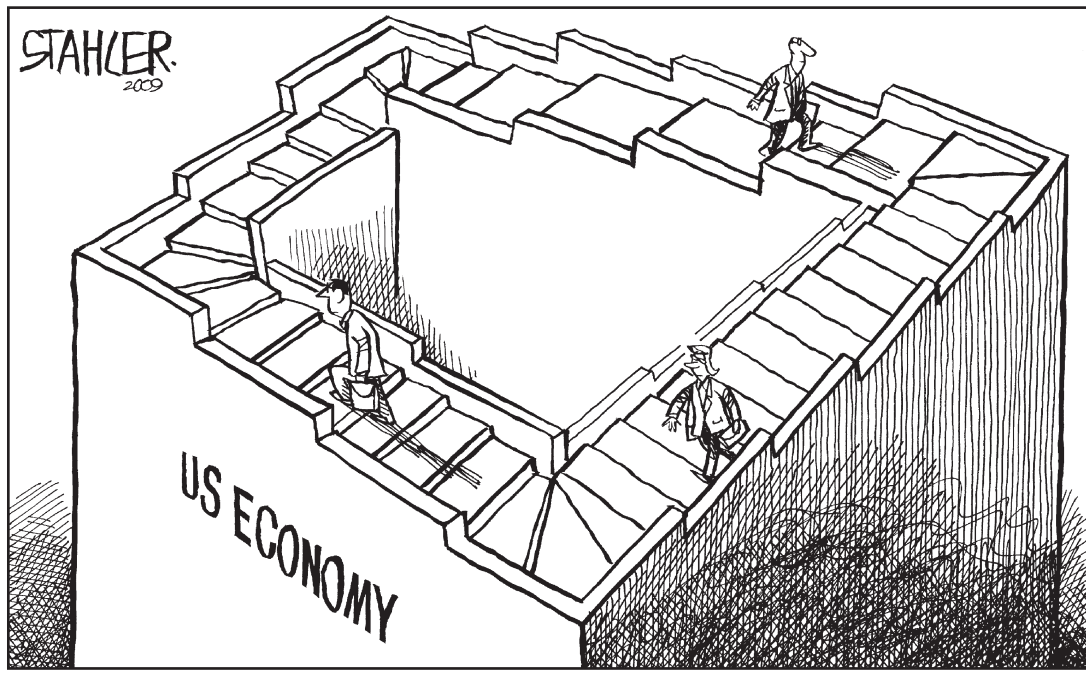
"We teach them to do things they have never done before and they learn they can do them. They get to have a place where they can relax and do what they want to do outside of the school system ... There is not a child here that doesn't want to come."

Indeed, I'm sure Ele's presence was a big part of that.

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LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor are always welcome, and may be sent to: The Auburn News, 25 Elm St., Southbridge MA 01550 or via e-mail at aminor@stonebridgepress.com. Be sure to include a name and residence. Please refrain from sending letters via fax, and be sure to supply a home address and phone number to allow for confirmation. Allow at least 48 hours for a response. Letters must be submitted by noon Monday to ensure publication in the following week's issue. Every effort will be made to accommodate late submissions, but inclusion can not be guaranteed. The rules of good taste and libel will, of course, apply to all submissions. Personal attacks will not be published. The editor retains the right to edit all letters.



Join us in a free celebration of our community

We've recently devoted these columns to discussing broad, national issues like senior driving, the healthcare initiative and its potential impact on seniors, and other matters that really seem far removed from our normal day-to-day lives. Many of you loyal readers have told me that they want to know more about what's happening closer to home and hearth.

So in this column we're going to return to our community and to the concept of simply getting out of your house and enjoying activities right here in our neighborhood — like the 2nd Annual Auburn Fall Festival, this Saturday, Oct. 17, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., at Lemansky Park.

Like most of you, some of my earliest and fondest memories of growing up in what was then rural Massachusetts involve going with my whole family to county and town fall festivals. Something about the crisp fall smell in the air, the joyous shrieks of kids on carnival rides, the beautiful flashes of fall colors, and the random meetings of neighbors we haven't seen for a while helps me recall simpler times. Plus with the imminent threat of colder days ahead, you won't want to miss the chance to get outside and "Celebrate Life."

These days when I visit clients I often hear their frustrations about not feeling safe outside of their homes, or being unable to drive, or just not having enough life-sustaining social interactions with friends and family. Well, Auburn's 2nd Annual Fall Festival is shaping up to be an event you'll really enjoy with your whole family — and an opportunity to visit with some local organizations which give back to the community every year by helping to make the Fall Festival possible. Best of all: It's free.

Sponsored by the Auburn Recreation & Culture Department — which supports many excellent community-oriented services and

BRING YOUR HEALTH...HOME

KIMBERLY HARMON
RN, BSN

activities — the 2nd Annual Fall Festival will include all those activities that we fondly recall from the fairs of yesteryear: A costume contest, a pie-eating contest, a paint-a-pumpkin contest, and even a scare-crow contest.

There'll be a tug-of-war for bragging rights between Auburn's finest — police versus firefighters/rescue — and a bike race to increase awareness of and support for the fight against ataxia, a debilitating neurological disease that robs people of their motor skills. For the older kids there'll be a demonstration of skateboarding prowess and a rock-climbing wall run by the U.S. Marine Corps.

For the younger kids, there'll be face painting, a moon bounce, and traditional field games like a 3-legged race, ring toss, and my personal favorite, the sack race. Plus of course there'll be plenty of food like Piccadilly Pub Chowder, a Farmer's Market, craft vendors, and of course that sugary, sticky and pink concoction we love: cotton candy.

Because we at Harmon Home Health want to encourage you to come to the fair with your whole family and celebrate our community — and those who serve it — we're sponsoring a D.J. who'll play the fall festival tunes we remember from the good old days.

We look forward to celebrating our community with you on Oct. 17 at Lemansky Park!

Remember, the essence of home healthcare is to provide individuals, families and loved ones with services that promote maximum comfort and independence in the home.

Kimberly Harmon is the founder and CEO of Harmon Home Health Inc. She may be reached at kharmon@harmonhomecare.com or 508-791-5600, and welcomes any questions, comments or concerns about any specific health issues you have.

A not-always-so-noble prize

The high irony of the fact that President Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize this past week is that there is little peaceful consensus in the United States about whether or not he deserves it.

Only a few months into his term as president, Obama hasn't had much time to accomplish any major initiatives on the national or international stage. And while there may be some disillusion brewing on both sides of the political landscape, he has, in general, maintained a decent image here and especially abroad.

It sort of makes me think about where our last president was popularity-wise, when he was only this far into his first term. Back in 2001, President George W. Bush was slowly gaining momentum after his response to Sept. 11. I was a sophomore in high school, and I remember frantically e-mailing my cousins in Croatia to tell them what had happened, in a state of shock and disbelief.

"I know, I know!" my cousin wrote back to me just a few hours later. "We saw it on the TV! Now we are scared — we wait to see what the U.S. will do next."

Talking to this same cousin eight years later, when I met him face to face this summer as I traveled to the former Yugoslavia, he reiterated what he'd e-mailed back in 2001.

"I remember watching Bush on T.V.," he said. "Outside the U.S., we were scared — not of the terrorists, but of your country." This was back before it was commonplace in the U.S. and abroad to mock every move Bush made or every speech he gave. And my cousins in Slovenia and Croatia still enjoyed poking fun at him this past summer — if only to see what my reaction as an American would be.

But the point I'm trying to make is that when Bush was as far into his first term as Obama is now, he was one of the most popular presidents the U.S. has ever had. His approval ratings were very high, and the nation had banded together behind him.

Fast-forward eight years, and even the speeches he gave on Sept. 11 are being criticized for one reason or another. In less than a



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KRIS REARDON

decade, his image has shifted dramatically. And I'm not sure his image is done shifting; maybe only in 20 years, or 50 years, or a century will our history books be able to give a more objective picture of his actions.

I can't help but wonder what Obama's legacy will look like eight short years from now, once he's had time to enact policy and once we've had time — as both American citizens and world citizens — to see how that has impacted our lives and our world. Will it be for the betterment of our nation and our world? Will he have worked toward peace, intentionally or unintentionally? It is simply too soon to tell.

That idea — that only the distance of time can help us to see the true impact of our actions — is what makes the awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize while someone is still living problematic. And all Nobel prizes are given to individuals who are alive; they never award posthumously.

On the literature side of things — the side of the Nobel Prize with which I'm most familiar, given my history studying books and language as an undergraduate and graduate student — the Nobel committee has historically overlooked some of the world's greatest writers. Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf never received awards, though their names came up in nearly every college class I took in literature that was written after 1880. And other winners — such as Pearl S. Buck — never showed up on a single college syllabus of mine.

Of course, no system of giving awards is perfect. That is a given.

So in a lot of ways, the only thing more shocking to me than the fact that President Barack Obama was given the Nobel Peace Prize was that he dared to accept it, on the hope of a promise made on a campaign that hasn't yet come to fruition one way or the other, no matter how much the Peace Prize committee argues that he has improved the image of the U.S. abroad.

Kristina Reardon is a Stonebridge Press correspondent, and contributes a column to the *Southbridge Evening News*.

Curiouser and curiouser

What a strange and complex world we live in.

Last week we bombed the moon looking for water, and President Barack Obama won the Nobel Prize for Peace. In totally unrelated matters, the Shroud of Turin was declared "man-made," and the U.S. House of Representatives (at least the House Energy and Commerce Committee) held hearings on a bill that would prohibit TV commercials from being "excessively noisy or strident."

Yes, at least our priorities are all in order. Where to begin? Well, in our household we've longed noted that the sound on the TV certainly jumps as soon as the screen goes

from program to commercial. This is one of the reasons we try to keep the "clicker" (a.k.a. the remote control) close by. But is the modern sneakiness of advertisers in seeking to grab viewers' attention by way of shouting at us truly worthy of lawmakers' attention? Technically, the FCC oversees such things and already has in place a mandate that "commercials can be no louder than the loudest parts of the programming they accompany." Unfortunately, every other TV show today has loud gunfire, bombs bursting on air, and characters shouting at each other maniacally. This, in turn, gives Billy Mays commercials free reign to be aired at their (his) natural speaking level.

While California Rep. Anna Eshoo's bill — the Commercial Advertising Loudness Mitigation (CALM) Act — is cleverly acronymed, it is also ultimately unnecessary. Helpful technologies are already in the works to automatically "flatten the sound spikes of commercials," and as long as we have "clickers" and fingers, things will remain in hand, so to speak, in the world of TV viewing.

As to our recent bombing of the moon, I realize it was a scientific venture, seeking water, preparatory to setting up camp for future lunar explorations. What was disturbing was not the actual bombing, but that the viewing of the action — touted as something Earthlings could observe their homes — turned out to be such a bomb. The satellite pictures I witnessed on Friday's TV news showed about as much visible activity as you'll find at Congressman Charlie Rangel's tax preparer's office. As of my column deadline (way last week), no water had been found at the moon's south pole, and no credible explanation was given for why the dramatic explosion was not properly witnessed. Perhaps the CALM Act technology was being tested at the time.

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As to the news from Rome last week, scientist there announced that they had "reproduced the Shroud of Turin — revered as the cloth that covered Jesus in the tomb," thereby proving the ancient relic was man-made. Say what? Just because 21st-century scientists can "reproduce" something, how does that debunk the origins of the original? (For the record, I haven't a clue as to the validity or origins of the Shroud. Nor does it matter to me whether it's exactly what those who believe in it believe it is. It is an article of faith for some people, who draw a measure of spiritual strength from attaching it to the author and finisher of their faith.) Nevertheless, last week a group of scientists used materials and methods "available in the 14th century" to reproduce the relic, thereby demonstrating that the sacred linen "is a medieval forgery."

OK, so chalk up a victory for the Italian Committee for Checking Claims on the Paranormal (ICCCP). Will they next set a bush on fire on Mount Sinai without matches and explain Moses' parting of the Red Sea as a meteorological microburst, thereby debunking even earlier miracles? The truth is that science itself changes every 50 years, and medicine even more frequently. Faith, however, is eternal. Faith is belief in something hoped for but not seen. Amazingly, it can often trump "facts" — even in the strange and complex world in which we live.

Speaking of hope, the Nobel Prize Committee in Norway may have fulfilled one of President Obama's fondest wishes last week by awarding him its Peace Prize for 2009. The nomination was made only 11 days into his presidency, and the prize comes after only nine months of "accomplishments." Perhaps the president's trips around the world to apologize for America and his recent speech at the U.N. declaring no nation or religion or people superior to any other earned him the award.

The award is nevertheless baffling. Past recipients have included Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa. These were, and are, true peacemakers, worthy of commendation and emulation. President Obama's inclusion only reduces the world's most prestigious prize to meaninglessness and irrelevance.

Mark Ashton writes a weekly column for Stonebridge Press publications.