

EDITORIAL

Most important reading skill we never teach kids

We teach children to read poems and plays, recipes and road signs. We guide them to decode Shakespeare and summarize “Charlotte’s Web.” But there is a crucial kind of reading that we rarely teach — and it shows: public notices.

You have seen them. Maybe you have skimmed past them. That block of dense text at the back of the newspaper or buried in a government website — something about bids for bridge repairs or water infrastructure, estates, government budgets, or foreclosures. They do not come with colorful pictures or catchy headlines. But they do come with power.

Public notices are the legal mechanism by which governments tell the people what they are doing with our money, our land, our laws, and our property. They are how transparency happens — in real-time and on the record.

So why are we not teaching kids to read them?

We teach students how to read persuasive essays, identify bias, evaluate sources, and cite evidence. But public notices — the place where democracy meets documentation — are left out of most civics and social studies curricula.

That is a mistake. Because when no one knows how to read public notices, no one knows what is happening until it is too late.

Local garbage transfer stations close. Water rates rise. Parks get converted. Families get evicted. Industries pollute without protest. Contracts go unchallenged. Public property gets sold off.

Unelected boards make decisions behind legal-sounding language no one understands.

The goal of public notice law is noble: inform the public.

But informing the public only works if the public knows how — and where — to look.

This is an education issue, a journalism issue, and a community issue.

So whose responsibility is it to teach the next generation how to read these notices? It belongs to schools, teachers, newspapers, and parents.

Students should know how to interpret a legal notice about a school tax levy or a permit hearing. They should be shown real examples from their local newspaper or, in some cases, a website, and taught how to connect them to the decisions affecting their community.

Those who teach government, journalism, economics, or persuasive writing without ever touching a public bid ad or fiscal court notice are missing a vital skill set.

Community journalists must continue to fight for public notice access and bring attention to what those notices reveal. But they can also work with schools — offering copies, creating explainers, and even inviting students to interpret and report on a notice that impacts them.

As parents we can read those notices out loud at home, point them out in the paper, and talk about what they mean. If your child’s school is about to close, if a prison is about to be built nearby, or if your taxes are about to go up — the first sign will appear in a legal notice, not a social media post.

We are raising children at a time when democracy feels fragile and trust in institutions is in crisis. But the tools of civic protection have not changed. Public notice is one of them. It is one of the last true mechanisms of accountability we still have — printed in black and white, accessible to all, verifiable in court.

But a tool is only useful if someone knows how to use it.

Let’s make sure the next generation knows that democracy is something you read carefully every single week.

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UNCOMMON SENSE

BY DR. GLENN MOLLETTE

Fake police officer knocking on doors at night is a bad idea

The recent murder of Minnesota State Representative Melissa Horton and her husband Mark has dropped jaws across the country. The couple were gunned down in their home by someone masquerading as a police officer. Obviously, he was able to fool them long enough to kill them.

Moments before and only 5 miles away he had visited the home of Minnesota State Senator John Hoffman and his wife Yvette, shooting them multiple times, most likely thinking he was leaving them for dead. At this writing they are expected to survive.

Such an intrusion scares citizens because criminals copy the acts of other criminals. How do we know if a legitimate police officer is knocking on our door, whether it is the middle of the night or the middle of the day?

Two officers should make the visit and announce themselves as police loud and clear. They

should clearly state the reason for the visit before entering a home. Flashlights or outside lighting should be on to help with visibility and identification. Uniforms should be visible with badges and IDs. The knock pattern should be a firm knock or doorbell press, and then they should announce themselves as police again. There should be a 30-second to one-minute wait for a response from the resident before knocking or ringing the doorbell again. For a search warrant, the warrant should be shown before entry.

Your local sheriff or city chief of police may have a different protocol and it needs to be made known.

Unfortunately, this still does not keep a criminal from copying the protocol to achieve their criminal endeavor.

I believe 99% of Americans are good law-abiding people. However, no one wants to be caught off guard by a criminal invasion.

Representative Horton would not have wanted to mistakenly shoot a real police officer who might have been doing his job to protect her. Sadly, the man was there to kill her and her husband. He succeeded.

This is why door-knocking after dusk is a bad idea unless you have a prearranged appointment and everyone knows who everyone is and the reason for the visit.

When I was 12 years old, I was home alone while my parents were at church. About 8 o’clock it was pitch black with darkness and a man started knocking on our front door. He then went to the back door and started knocking. He then came back to the front door and continued pounding the door. I was terrified. I did not know who it could be. I loaded our 12-gauge shotgun and aimed it at the front door in fear he would soon be coming through.



Dr. Glenn Mollette

Like a fool, I opened the door but knew the outer storm door was locked. I had the shotgun close by. The man asked if my dad was home, to which I replied, “No. he’s gone to church.” The man then inquired if my father still had hogs for sale, to which I replied, “Yes, but you’ll need to speak to him about that.” The man said he would come back later.

To this day I do not know who that man was, but I am glad I did not shoot him.

It is too bad Representative Horton or Senator Hoffman did not shoot the man knocking on their door in the middle of the night.

Knocking on doors at night is a bad idea.

Dr. Glenn Mollette is the author of “Uncommon Sense” and 13 other books.



BY KYLE LOVERN

Kyle’s Corner

Summertime memories

It appears that summer is finally here. At least the temperatures tell us so. However, the calendar lets us know that the season does not officially start until June 20.

Those lazy, hazy days of summertime bring back a lot of memories for me. Growing up in the small rural town of Nolan, we were always excited for the last day of school. Then it was three months of sleeping late and enjoying the many things that June, July and August brought.

First there was fishing. Some of my fondest memories are fishing the Tug River with my dad. Using just a couple of cane poles, fishing line and some hooks, we caught many a fish back in the day. Back then we dug worms for the bait. We spent many summer evenings on the riverbank trying to catch catfish near the old Nolan sand plant dam.

To me we were doing our best Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer imitations. (Hats off to my favorite writer Mark Twain.)

Our shoes disappeared in the summer, and going barefoot was the norm. The only time we wore shoes was when we played baseball or softball, went to town (Williamson) or went to church. If I would have had my choice, I would not even have worn them then.

As I got older, with a real rod and reel, I spent more time fishing in the evening

hours with friends.

Then there were those days spent swimming. The nearest public pool was in Williamson, which was 8 miles away. So we hit the river. My mom did not like me to go swimming in the Tug Fork because a couple of people had drowned there. Of course, being a young teenager, I thought she was overprotective. But now after I have raised children of my own and have five granddaughters, I realize she was just being a good parent. We all worry about our children and grandchildren and it is something that never stops, even as they get older.

Another fond memory I have of those summer months was playing baseball. I grew up loving baseball. Many of my best friends, especially Bill Burgett and Andrew Marcum, and I would make a makeshift field. We also played softball at the Nolan Grade School playground, something that was popular even with the older folks after they got off work on those long days of summer and on the weekends.

Nolan entered a team in the local Boy Scout Softball League. We fielded some great teams and won a couple of championships back in the day. It was fun to load up in the back of a pickup truck and go play road games at various locations in Mingo and Pike counties.

Our home games

brought out local fans and parents. They even got chairs out of the school’s cafeteria to line up along the third baseline for some of our biggest supporters. It was a sense of pride for our small community.

If we won, which was most of the time, we all gathered at Curry’s Restaurant and were treated to an ice-cold bottle of pop. That was a real treat back in the day.

I spent many hours listening to the Cincinnati Reds on the radio. My dad and I were huge fans. Soon the team became the Big Red Machine and provided many great memories. To this day, I am a Cincinnati Reds fan, even though they have not given loyal fans much to cheer about these past few seasons.

Riding bicycles was also a great pastime. If you were lucky enough to have a bike, you got a group of friends and rode up and down what was known as the “backway” of Nolan. I guess technically it was a street because it was paved and went through much of the residential neighborhoods. I am sure we piled up many miles of riding our bikes racing, doing tricks and just passing the time.

I do not remember anyone having air conditioning back then. We had window screens in our windows and a couple of fans. They did not help much during the hot, muggy days of July and August. But we did not

know anything else. At night I slept in front of the screen window, trying to catch a slight breeze and get comfortable enough to fall asleep. But hey, we made it and enjoyed those summer nights.

I was a star gazer and can remember staring up at the night sky. Once in a while, I would see a falling star. It seems like during that time there were thousands of lightning bugs. You just do not see that many today.

Another thing families did was sit on their front porches. If neighbors walked by, they would always stop and chat. We knew everyone in our quaint little town.

What I would not give to travel back in time—to be on that front porch with my family or on that playground playing ball or riding bikes with my friends.

What I would pay for one more fishing trip along the banks of the old Tug River with my father.

“Those were the days, my friend. We thought they would never end.” Hey, I think that might be some great lyrics to a song. If not, they should be.

Or as Mark Twain said, “Good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life.”

Until next time.

(Kyle Lovern is a longtime journalist in the Tug Valley. He is now a retired freelance writer and columnist for the Mountain Citizen.)