

GUEST

Red pens did me good

BY TOM PURCELL

My second-grade teacher, Sister Mary, would be shocked that I turned out to be a writer.

Please allow me to explain.

In recent years, many schools within the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have barred teachers from marking student papers in red.

Their thinking is that correcting young students with red pens is too confrontational and upsetting for the children. Many teachers prefer to grade in more soothing colors, such as green, blue, pink and yellow.

Red ink surely wasn't banned at St. Germaine Catholic School in the '70s. That school was all business, and the wonderful sisters who taught there were too busy ramming knowledge and values into us to worry about our sensitive little egos.

It's true that the sisters were more favorable toward the more engaged students. Who could blame them?

We had 40 kids or more packed into each class. The sisters, many of whom entered the convent during the Depression and were getting on in years by the 1970s, were exhausted. They had little patience with daydreaming runts like me.

Whereas the better students were always attentive and eager, I was always staring out the window, thinking about the hills I would ride with my Murray five-speed - or plans I had to put an addition on the never-finished shack my buddies and I built in the woods.

I was a continual disappointment to Sister Mary (we called her Sister Mary Brass Knuckles) and, boy, did she let me have it. When she called me out of my daydreaming world to approach the chalkboard and complete an equation, it was humiliating.

"Are you lost in left field without a glove, Tommy?" she would say.

"Sister," I'd say, "I don't even have tickets to the game!"

Sister never let me or anyone off easy - and certainly didn't worry about our feelings.

She knew the only way to improve our self-esteem, ultimately, was to teach us how to be accurate and correct.

She marked up my English compositions as though she were being funded by the red-ink lobby.

She was ahead of her time. The educational emphasis on self-esteem and emotional comfort over the past 30 years is producing dismal results.

The latest Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results (2022) show that the math scores of U.S. 15-year-olds are well below those of other developed nations.

PISA concluded that "America's infatuation with the 'happiness factor' in education may be misplaced, and could, in fact, be hurting, not helping, American students when it comes to maintaining an international competitive edge."

In other words, America has some of the most smug, self-assured students on the face of the Earth.

Since they were babies, caring adults and educators assured them they are intelligent, attractive and wonderful - everybody gets a trophy - even though nobody asked them to break a sweat earning their wonderfulness.

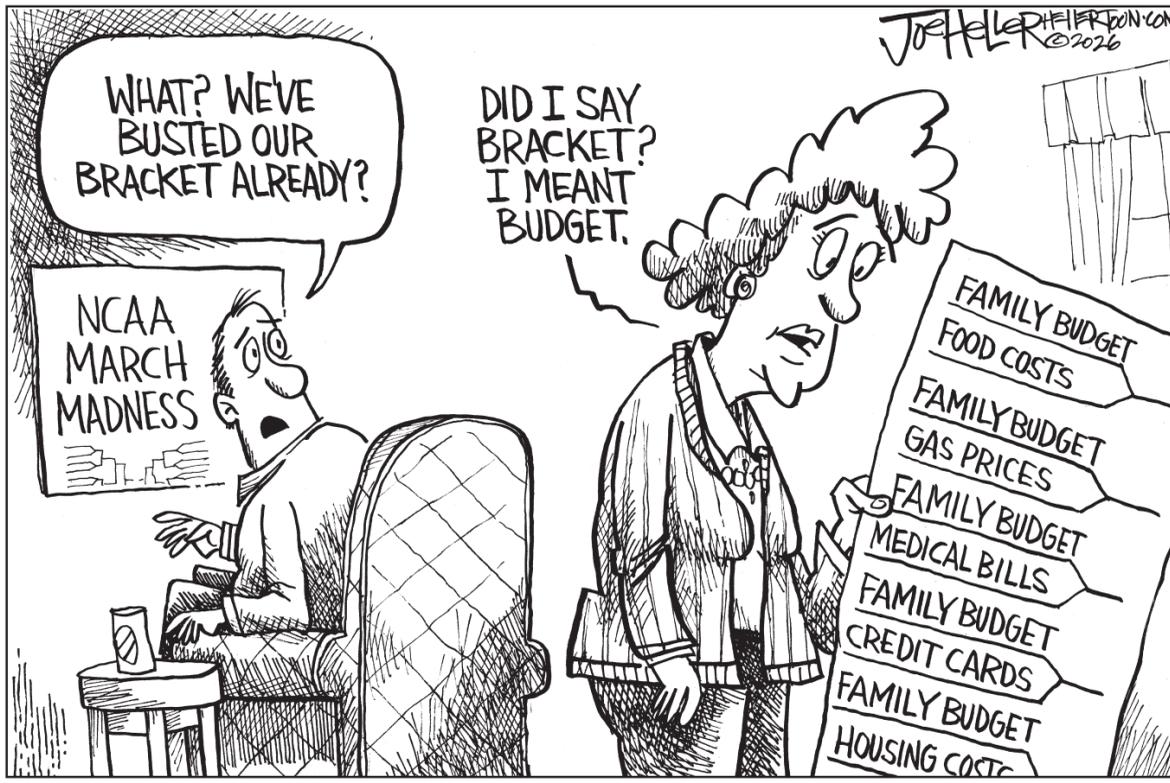
So it turns out the proponents of the anti-red-ink mindset have it wrong. The good sisters at St. Germaine had it right.

All those red marks on my second-grade composition papers were unpleasant at the time, but they did me good in the long run.

As I said, Sister Mary Brass Knuckles would be proud to learn that this daydreaming pupil eventually applied himself and has been writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column for 20 years.

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Find Tom Purcell's syndicated column, humor books and funny videos of his dog, Thurber, at TomPurcell.com. Email him at Tom@TomPurcell.com.



UPSIDE DOWN UNDER

Let's all take a history lesson

BY MARVIN BAKER

When we take a look at our history books, we see a lot of different things have happened since territorial days here and in South Dakota.

One of the biggest events to take place was the announcement and building of railroads across Dakota Territory.

Straight line rail across the northern tier and across the southern tier made it possible for settlers to come to the area, homestead and make a living.

Had it not been for the railroad, and government subsidies to help build said steel rail, our state's residents would have all settled near bodies of water.

Taking another step back, before the railroads existed steamboats were the mode of travel, and three ports that were popular in territorial days remain today; Fargo, Grand Forks and Edwinton, which later became known as Bismarck.

On more of a local level, I've discovered that numerous small communities and settlements existed in what

is now Emmons County, long before the railroad reached Bismarck. That, of course, was on a small scale, but these tiny hamlets like

Glencoe, Livona and Winona, were often established to trade with like-minded individuals on the west side of the Missouri River, i.e., Glencoe to Cannonball, Livona to Fort Rice and Winona to Fort Yates.

Well, the railroad changed all that. Finally, people could settle wherever they wanted, to include areas far removed from any lake or river. And in Emmons County, that gave rise to communities such as Strasburg, Linton, Hazelton, Hague and Braddock.

There's no doubt the railroads, most notably Northern Pacific and the Great Northern, had a major impact on this state, as did the immigrants who rode the steel rail to come to a new home they had never imagined.

From 1880 to 1910, floods

of immigrants came to North Dakota to settle, many not knowing what to expect. Some had family members already in the United States, many did not. And for those folks, life was often difficult.

We have German, Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic, Ukrainian, British, Dutch, Danish, French, Russian, Croatian, Polish, Greek, Swiss, Italian, Hungarian and many others from eastern Europe and parts of Asia.

Yes, North Dakota is a melting pot, just as the United States is as a whole.

What is your heritage? Mine is German, Swiss, Danish and Ukrainian.

All those people came here for a better life and opportunity from what they had in "the old country." Most were farmers. Others were merchants, lawyers, teachers, doctors and engineers. They all contributed something to the growth of the early days of our state.

If you look at statistics, that immigration influx continued beyond 1910. The numbers of people dramatically shifted, starting in 1932. And, as a double whammy, many who settled

the northern Great Plains packed up and went west to California, Oregon and Washington, as was so well described in John Steinbeck's novel "The Grapes of Wrath."

Since the latest oil boom, the trend was once again reversed and although population has stabilized, the population of North Dakota has surpassed 800,000 for the first time. Fargo has become a vibrant city and Bismarck is pushing toward 100,000 in its own right.

Dickinson, Williston, Minot, Grand Forks and Watford City have all grown, while many smaller communities have also seen subtle growth.

We're doing well, but we could do better. No doubt, oil has had its impact, but rather than putting all our eggs in one basket, we should create numerous other incentives, especially to bring young families here, just like the immigrants from Europe.

Marvin Baker is a news writer for the Kenmare News and formerly Foster County Independent.



- Weekly Crossword -

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. "Bird of Paradise" constellation
- 5. Red Sox WS winner Bronson
- 11. Whirl
- 12. The State Dept. has a notable one
- 16. Energy, style and enthusiasm
- 17. Part of the mind
- 18. Mountainous country
- 19. Type of beverage
- 24. Atomic #109
- 25. Opposite of falsities
- 26. Female sheep
- 27. Rocky peak
- 28. Sensitive information sharing environment
- 29. Ethnic group of Thailand
- 30. Patron saint of Rome Philip
- 31. Psychedelics
- 33. Japanese pine
- 34. Have an impact on
- 38. Violent disorder
- 39. A French river
- 40. Early Mesoamerican civilization
- 43. Messenger ribonucleic acid
- 44. Musician Clapton

- 45. Ancient Greek sophist
- 49. Largest English dictionary (abbr.)
- 50. Valley
- 51. A way to unwind
- 53. Atomic #93
- 54. Recommending
- 56. Indigo bush
- 58. Larry and Curly's pal
- 59. Off-Broadway theater award
- 60. Fencers
- 63. Small Eurasian deer (pl.)
- 64. Relating to songbirds
- 65. A way to assign

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