

# Commentary

*michael tidemann*

## Doing nothing about jail costs money

Some people have begun to question the figures Sheriff Chuck Eddy and the Buena Vista County Board of Supervisors have been using to show the current costs of hauling prisoners out of county.

People should take note, though, that Sheriff Eddy and the supervisors are using very real figures to show a very real problem with the current jail.

Based upon current trends for this year, it will cost the county AT LEAST \$278,000 to haul prisoners out of county due to lack of available jail space. That figure is over and above the normal day-to-day costs of operating the jail.

So what's included in this figure?

The most obvious cost is what other counties charge to house prisoners, ranging from \$40 to \$75 a day, averaging at least \$50. In addition to that cost, there is the cost for deputies' time to haul prisoners out of county. There's also vehicle cost at 50 cents a mile.

Now it's not just available space that's the problem. It's the fact that juveniles,

females, and other prisoners such as those prone to violence or who have mental disorders are required by law to be separated from the general prison population.

The current jail, which has a waiver from the state to house 18 prisoners, may not be able to

always house a total of 18 due to those classification issues.

So what happens if the jail bond issue is defeated on Nov. 8?

A couple things could happen. There will be the immediate problem of fixing the aging plumbing and air exchange system. There remains, however, the issue of prisoner classification. If county voters decided against a new jail, the state could easily pull its current waiver and it could cost even more than it currently does to haul prisoners out of county. Right now, the difference in cost between having to haul prisoners out of county and what it could cost to pay off a jail bond is well within \$100,000. The point is, if nothing is done and the state pulls its waiver and jail admissions continue to increase as has been the trend, it could cost just as much or more to haul prisoners out of county than it does to pay off the cost of a new jail.

There seems to be a lot of confusion as to figures, so let's get down to brass tacks.

A good analogy might be the difference between a term and a whole or universal life policy. The premium for a term life insurance policy increases as one gets older. If you want to continue to have, say, \$500,000 in life insurance coverage, the premiums are going to cost you more as you get older. You get insurance all right, but that's all. You have no equity to show for your money.

With a whole or universal life insurance policy, though, you are building equity or a 'nest egg' for your future. At the same time, you are locked in to a certain premium for the rest of your life. At retirement, you can choose to no longer pay your premiums and have a nice pile of cash waiting for you.

It's exactly the same thing with the jail issue. At the end of 20 years, the jail bond will be paid off and Buena Vista County will have some equity — a jail that should be good for quite a few years. If we as voters decide to do nothing about building a new jail, that's what we'll end up with having — nothing.

I've heard some statements made about non-Caucasians being a 'problem' in filling up the county jail. However, like everyone else, they sometimes find themselves through some mistake or indiscretion spending a night in the county jail.

However, Buena Vista County is doing better than other rural Iowa counties due to non-Caucasians. And you don't get growth without a few growing pains. Having to build a new jail is one of those growing pains. Just as there's an upside to economic development, there's a downside too. But we need both sides to make the circle complete.

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artist's view / By Rob Rogers

*pilot editorial*

## Reopening the Baby Doe scars

Some will question the wisdom of the Storm Lake Police Department, on the 10th anniversary of the death of the infant known as "Baby Doe," for putting out another call to the public in trying again to solve the homicide case in which a one-to-two-day-old baby boy was left to die in a cold abandoned mobile home.

"Don't we have enough problems to attend to?" they will say, and to be certain, we do.

This will rip comfortable scar tissue from old wounds for a community that could never fathom how such a thing could happen, and would just as soon forget that it ever did.

"The trail is so cold, it's the long-shot of all long shots," they will say of the case. And they will be right.

Yet we have never been prouder of our local police department.

It is unquestionably doing the right thing for the right reasons.

While people may have been happy to forget the Baby Doe tragedy, the officers who were involved have never forgotten. Every once in a while, in a discussion of the caseload, they will mention Baby Doe, with a certain haunted look in their eyes.

It is the only unsolved homicide in the modern history of Storm Lake, but it isn't that blemish that drives them to bring the case back into the news.

They want answers. They want justice. They would very much like to give that child under an anonymous gravestone back his identity.

And so it is, a full 10 years after one of Storm Lake's most horrifying moments, that police are again pleading with the public to come forward.

We suspect now, and we suspected then, that someone, somewhere, knows the truth.

A woman who carries a baby for nine months and then suddenly has none does not go entirely unnoticed. What happened to that woman? Could she also have met with a bad fate? Does this family need help today? Or do the parents of Baby Doe need to cleanse their soul and step forward with the truth?

We join the police department in its call. If you saw something that day in 1995, have heard a possible explanation, or harbored a thought of a person who could be involved, call now.

It would be easy for the police to write the case off and forget about it. To their credit, they never really stopped thinking about it. It has been considered an active investigation for a decade.

The people of this department, it seems, will never admit defeat in an important case; they will never quit. For the people on the right side of the law in Storm Lake, that is a comforting thought, and a reason for pride.

For the people on the wrong side, it is a plain warning.

There is not much we can do for Baby Doe now, except perhaps give him a name, and allow for any loved ones to know his fate and grieve for him.

Since his death, laws have been made, babies can be dropped off at medical facilities with no questions asked, instead of being discarded. A second infant tragedy in Buena Vista County some years later, eerily similar, reminds us that the job of prevention is also not done.

It is a cold trail and a cold-hearted crime, indeed. But in setting out to try again to bring the case to a conclusion, Storm Lake police are showing that their hearts are in the right place.

*readers respond*

## The case against evolution

[Referring to a guest column on Intelligent Design by Joan Ryan appearing in the Oct. 13 Pilot-Tribune.]

To the Editor:

Dear Joan,

According to you, I am one of those amazingly dumb people that don't believe that evolution is true. You called me and my kind "citizens with no ability to reason," "tender-heads," "wing nuts" and "boobs."

I don't believe the myth of the theory of evolution for two scientific reasons. First, to this day, there is not even a shred of "scientific" evidence to support it. There is a lot of what you call "corroborating evidence." That's when scientists want so badly that their theory be true that they start interpreting data in such a way that it gives the impression that the theory is a fact. But at that point they have stopped being scientific. Second, both the Mathematical Science of Probability and the Second Law of Thermodynamics tell me that the theory of evolution is a scientific impossibility.

So, Joan, from us wingnuts' point of view, to believe in such a weak theory would take a lot of faith. For the moment, we're not willing to go there. Here's the bottom line truth, Joan. The theory of evolution is doing a nosedive. The sooner it bottoms out the better. Science needs a new theory to explain this world, preferably one that is not scientifically impossible.

By the way Joan, if you can find a good course on "Introduction to Tolerance," I'd sign up as soon as possible.

One of your tender-heads,

- Bo Brink, Storm Lake

## There is life after abuse

*This is the month we mark Domestic Abuse Prevention, and with it comes with sad cutout reminders in the store windows of Iowans who have lost their lives. This is not one of those stories.*

*dana larsen*

She shakes back a cascade of coppery hair, fires a cigarette with a newly-steady hand. Slowly, a smile spreads across her freckled face, and why not?

It's going to be a damn good day.

Every day is good these days, because after 20 years Terri can now get up in the morning knowing she won't have an eye blackened, she won't be choked or raped or lashed to a post in the basement. The local woman opens her personal chamber of horrors, so long hidden, to serve as living proof that there is life after domestic abuse.

"Not everybody gets a chance to start a life all over again. The first thing on my mind after hanging up the hotline call that day was to get back to school right away. I appreciate every moment because there was a time when I didn't expect to live to see them."

Terri is among the success stories of the local Council Against Domestic Abuse's campaign to bring the most shadowed of crimes into the light of public awareness.

"I'm not comfortable living life with people calling me 'the victim,' but since I'm emotionally ready to handle this, I feel I have to talk for those who aren't," Terri says. "There might be a woman in some farmhouse who is just as scared as I was. I want her to know there are people who care."

After almost 20 years of being beaten, she hid some clothes and supplies, left a note on the kitchen table saying "Please get help, we love you," and left her home forever.

When the young mother of five speaks of fear, she speaks from experience. She met "my Prince Charming" while in high school. What she didn't tell her parents is that when her man wasn't sweet talking, he was holding a rifle to her head. "I never got over the feeling that I was the one that should feel guilty."

Minor incidents gradually became more punishing, and more frequent. "Every time I went to work with a black eye, I told them I had run into a door, and they just looked at me. I was angry at myself. If I could just do something right..."

At one point the husband went into counseling, but within a year, the beatings started again, worse than ever. "There were times I would be left tied to a pole in the basement, beaten with belts, or forced to lie in a creek through the night. He got good at hitting me in such a way not to leave marks where they would be seen."

She hid a scrawled will in a drawer, asking that her children be taken away to safety if she should be found dead.

Terri once called a national hotline looking for an escape, but at that time, was told that the few shelters that existed could not take her children. She hung up.

"The mental abuse is worse, I think, than the physical. In time, I couldn't remember how old I was. I looked in the mirror and didn't know myself. I was dying, slowly."

The sexual abuse I learned to deal with by going someplace else in my head. In the last few months, I wasn't even crying anymore."

One night, after the family had moved from northwest Iowa to an isolated spot in the southern Missouri foothills, her husband locked the door behind himself and started to choke her. He would stop when she blacked out, then start again when she woke up. She thought about the children as she hazed in and out of consciousness—who would feed them in the morning with her dead?

When she decided to run, a string of shelter groups, sort of a modern Underground Railroad, helped transport her back to Iowa.

"I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for CADA. The CADA people were waiting for me when I got off the bus, and brought me and the children straight to shelter."

For her, that day of decision is a birthday — the start of a new lifetime.

"At the shelter, it was the first time I had ever spoken a word about what happened to me, and some of the stories I heard back would curl your hair. I was a lucky one. One sweet little gal, maybe five foot tall, told me about being beaten with a gun barrel, wrapped in a rug and shut in a dresser drawer to be left for dead."

There is life after abuse, Terri finds. She devotes most of her time to her children, trying to erase the emotional marks left on them by what they had seen.

The husband was sent to jail for only 72 hours after she filed the abuse charges, then was released early. "The last I heard, he was a Bible teacher. That's a scary thought."

The healing process for Terri includes a lot of reading about the problem of domestic violence, and her volunteerism with a domestic abuse council. "It helps a lot to discover the simple fact that it's not just you. It made me stronger and more determined."

She went on to college, studying art. The first test of her skill was appropriately a portrait of the governor she created for the shelter that saved her, to be presented at a domestic violence awareness event.

What the local woman has found in her experiences is just the opposite of the claims of many experts. "I'm not so sure you can educate men not to be abusers. After all, I know a lot of men who have grown up in environments some would call sexist, bad family backgrounds or violent childhoods that grow up perfectly wonderful. I think that someday there will be a name for the illness that causes domestic abuse. For now, what we must do is educate young girls, before high school age, to see the signs I missed. We must teach them that no amount of love they can give will change a person who does not want to change himself."

Terri's is not a sad story, she stresses. She feels happier than she ever hoped to be and for the first time in over 20 years, safe.

"I still have a long way to go, but I've learned to trust people again. I have good friends, and they will sit and play cards with me on Saturday night, when it always seems to get to me worst. I've used the hotline at times when I've needed a little help. There are as many paths to a new start as there are women who go looking for them."

Terri's freckles jump to make room for a broad grin. She has it coming to her. Today is a damn good day.

