

Chalkboard

By

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There is a pretty wise guy in my Sunday school class. I mean “wise guy” in the sense of being wise, not his being a flippant sort. Ms. Loretta will have to be the one to say if he fits any other connotations of that expression. Our lesson was related to the upcoming Thanksgiving celebration and the lesson was taken from Psalm 65, which is a beautiful expression of God’s handiwork in nature.

The farmer’s piece of wisdom dealt with his cows and his pastures. He noted it was especially easy to be thankful for tall green grass when you could remember droughts and really short brown grass. Simple but profound?

Some of what I write now comes from talking to others; some comes from my twelve-year tenure as your superintendent.

At one time, Gentry experienced some short grass times. Some of that was before my time to work here. Then the marvel of SWEPCO’s power plant happened and it provided a boost to local taxes that brought on the tall grass. In this time of prosperity, various school boards made some good decisions, bought some land southwest of town at decent prices, built a high school, an auditorium, a football stadium with athletic track, a bus garage, and a multi-purpose addition on to what is now the Primary/Intermediate School complex.

Then came the unexpected complexities of Amendment 59 to the State of Arkansas’ Constitution and the grass turned brown again. Debt payments for all the capital improvements still needed to be paid and after that “the pickings were slim”. Staff salaries fell behind the regional average and some needed maintenance on facilities and equipment fell by the wayside.

I wish I could say that in 1992 I rode into town driving the fertilizer truck. and pulling a water wagon. (I suspect though that I have been accused of spreading some fertilizer a few times.) No rather, I probably compounded some of the problems without intending too. Since it’s a holiday, I will be easy on myself and say that most of my mistakes were from inexperience rather than avarice.

I am just thankful that I got hired on when I did. I am thankful that the majority of the school people and community were ready for a change,

worked hard to get it, and, I believe, would have accomplished it whoever the school superintendent was. I see that not as false humility but rather a good grasp of reality and a glimpse of a higher purpose than mine. If you doubt me, then count the number of millage increases in the last 10 years that our district patrons have passed for building classrooms and securing modern equipment. Look at the improvements students have made on assessments of performance. Consider how well our staff has come to work together across grades kindergarten to 12. We are no means in lush, tall green grass but we are not clumping on bare dirt either. We are not where we want to be in everything, we are not where we are going to be, but we are not where we were.

I had the pleasure the other day to converse with a representative of the company who bought the land out by the airport that the Arkansas Teacher Retirement system recently sold. I was impressed by the scope of the project and what it will mean to the City of Highfill and indirectly to the Gentry School District. I told the gentleman that what I hoped for the Gentry and Highfill areas was continued progress and growth while at the same time the retaining of the moral values and work ethic that makes ours the type community that you want to live in and raise your children.

I apologize for this rambling prose but I want you to know that I appreciate being here and working in your school district. I have said it many times and I repeat it here- If you cannot work and live in Gentry and be happy, you probably are not going to be happy anywhere.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and yours. Take a few minutes and count your blessings. Short grass or tall, I wager you have some that are easy to find.