

## VIEWPOINTS

The Best Way ...  
to celebrate lifeBy Alan Dale  
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OK I will admit something that might make me a target for a few eggs over the next few days.

I at first (key words: at first. Keep reading) thought all the pomp and circumstance regarding the Vermillion High School Homecoming Court and selection of the King and Queen was a bit over the top.

I remember the days when I was in high school where we were handed a slip of paper in class, we voted, handed the ballot back to our teacher and a few hours later we heard who won over the P.A.

Then we saw the king and queen cruise down the high school track on a float during halftime of a game we usually were losing.

When I eventually grew up and started working I have been through a lot of these same types of processes when it came to picking a Homecoming Court. Be it Illinois, Washington, Oregon, or Montana...they always reminded me of how we did things back when I was in high school.

But not here in Vermillion and that may end up being a very good thing.

I heard a lot of stories leading up and walking away from last Thursday night's homecoming festivities at the high school auditorium.

Personally, I don't even care how right or wrong things may have gone in previous nights like these, but all I can say is that on the evening of Sept. 18, the young adults-in training of Vermillion got it right.

Big time.

Without getting into discussion here on a public platform about why the students couldn't have been more perfect in their selections of 2014 king and queen, all I have to do is write the names of Jonathan Marshall and Hailey Freidel.

Everyone has a back story and these two seniors have their own as well.

From all accounts – considering I have only been here two months I have to take account into accounts – both Hailey and Jonathan have set high standards on how to live their young lives.

Regardless of the challenges either one of them or any of the other 360-plus students at the high school have overcome, theirs were enough to warrant a tip of the cap.

Not just to them, but to the students who voted for them.

It was a nice move that exemplified bringing out the best in young people and talking about what really matters.

No matter how athletic, how popular, how good looking, it should always come down to character and what someone really does for the people around them.

For one night in Vermillion, my first one of its kind since moving here, it appears that the selection process of picking the Homecoming Court was in perfect symbiosis.

When I was in high school I just laughed and made fun of the Kings and Queens who I was probably really good friends with.

This time? I felt myself choke up for two high school students I will probably really never know, but know just enough about.

That should say it all.

Kudos, Vermillion High School and the community that supports you.

You nailed it.



## Autumn ride offers close inspection

*"Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain." – Henry David Thoreau, American author, poet and philosopher*

A lone chirp ekes from underneath a chorus of locusts buzzing into the growing heat on this autumn afternoon. All the while, I venture alone on a six-mile bike ride along the River Route through Adams Nature Preserve in Southeast South Dakota.

On the crushed limestone trail, an army of clacking grasshoppers ignites below and ahead of me, commissioning a battalion of spiny elongated troops.

Their scurrying creates a Moses-like parting of the dusty earth ahead. Quickly, they rise from lazily basking in the sun to form a zigzag entourage, bouncing high while knocking my knees and shins.

Quite suddenly, their wide spray forms new scenery – an original creation that eventually rains down in a full-on clatter, an awkward shower of wheezing and whirling bugs.

Further, I spot a lumbering woolly bear caterpillar on a slow methodical journey toward a winter place, where it will hunker down until it rebirths as a butterfly next spring.

Lush sprays of golden rod curtsies and bow to greet me – their deep ochre flowers blushing in brilliant rays of sun.

Eerily absent from the backdrop are lyrical bands of birds, save one or two remaining to speak of. It seems that flocks, which formerly announced springtime upon their arrival, already have disappeared to exotic balmy southern reaches of the Northern Hemisphere –

## MY STORY YOUR STORY

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pleasurable places that I may never know.

Batches of wild daisies form a dangling border. Or, perhaps they are an indigenous sunflower variety with brilliant golden petals and velvety brown

centers.

Fluttering about my head, migrating monarchs dress my ride with whimsical poetry. Taking frenetically feathery footsteps on cattails and sprays of prairie grasses, their fairy like narrative fancifully rises and falls in a choreographed performance for my eyes only, being the sole sojourner here.

And then all at once to my right and left, they dance and swirl repetitiously around low hanging deciduous branches of Oaks and Elms, before soaring in the general direction of the sun.

Then, in a grand finale, they disappear into a shadowy old growth stand of trees mixed with Cyprus, Ash and Dogwood, where they magically reappear, diving and darting over sweet smelling snakeroot.

Along the way, a good and noble sphinx caterpillar – bearing large lime-green armor – presents itself. Frozen in a forgotten bed of gritty leaves, his coloring is reminiscent of katydid.

Barely breathing, or not at all, his cumbersome, homely appearance may be caustic to some who are not so inclined to befriend creepy crawling creatures.

Yet, this insect is a marvel to

study with its large eyes, intricately artful markings and 16 or so suction cup feet extending from his frame.

Here is where it will rest, after a long season of becoming, only to be mummified into a tightly tailored cocoon.

And when winter loses its grip and southerly breezes let loose a spring thaw, this smooth and stout bug will enjoy a resurrection life as a fast-flying sphinx moth.

Further down the path, I spot a small sandy stretch along the Missouri River. Beyond the bank, I see whirling muddy currents hauling tree trunks, massive branches, dock parts and anything not bolted down bobbing and gulping for dear life, like waterlogged steerage on a buoyant run to slaughter.

Here is a section of the Mighty Mo, the longest river in North America that rushes more than 2,000-miles, channeling through several states.

It is a wide and sometimes raging waterway, which perennially kisses the Rocky Mountains of Montana "Good day" and briskly meanders to St. Louis, Missouri, where it eternally bids "Good night" before wryly pouring into the Mississippi.

While the call of a sharp cranky jay drowns out the deafening buzzing beat of locusts, I am taken back by nature and its alert expectancy, which does not wait for me to get ready. But rather, always poised on the verge – consummate with a program of promise – it is able to proceed without my involvement.

A slight breeze in the crystal-blue air ushers in a hint of rain, foretelling a brewing disturbance beyond the horizon.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

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In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the

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Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion, fax to 624-4696 or e-mail to alan.dale@plaintalk.net.

## Capitol Notebook:

## Mothers, Grandmothers led to a big change

By Bob Mercer  
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — South Dakota traveled a long way since Gina Score.

The teenager's death came 15 years ago, during a forced run, at the State Training School for juvenile offenders at Plankinton.

Boot camps were the fad then for dealing with many of the teenagers in trouble.

Bill Janklow was governor. It took several very hard years to realize the mistake he made.

Yes, there were letters from parents who saw improvements by their children.

There were also many days when teenagers caused violent incidents while they were in the state system.

Janklow went to the Marines

as a teenager in trouble, rather than finish high school. He thought the same treatment might make the difference for others.

The boot-camp approach erupted into a fierce political war in South Dakota that went for years.

If you looked into the faces of mothers and grandmothers at meetings where Janklow spoke, you could see he wasn't reaching many of them.

In the end he listened to his wife. Mary Dean said Plankinton's camp should be closed.

After he finished his fourth and final term as governor, a new era gradually took root.

## CAPITOL NOTEBOOK



BOB MERCER

The Legislature in 2003 revived an old panel and renamed it the Council of Juvenile Services.

The purpose was to bring South Dakota into federal compliance.

One of the first appointees was Carol Twedt of Sioux Falls. She was savvy and seasoned in politics, proven by 20 years on

the Minnehaha County Commission.

Twedt is still a member of the state council. At a recent meeting, she mentioned in passing that she wouldn't seek another year as the chairman, but she would like to be reappointed to one more term. She is a close friend of Mary

Dean Janklow and was a big political supporter of Bill Janklow. That was Twedt on stage in Flandreau on a snowy night in 1998 when he announced he would seek a third term as governor.

Another believer in the council is Arlene Ham Burr of Rapid City. She was a Republican senator in 2003 when the law was passed. She currently serves on the council.

Another is Karen Jefferies, a Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe judge, who was appointed in 2005 to the council.

Another is Doug Herrmann, who was at the Custer youth facilities during Janklow's time and now heads juvenile corrections.

The council connected with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to bring the JDAI — juvenile

detention alternatives initiative — to South Dakota. Recently the state court system took over responsibility for JDAI.

The council is helping start-up programs on prevention in Aberdeen, Watertown and Sturgis.

It's also sending money for researching why disproportionate percentages of minority youths are in contact with law enforcement in Rapid City and Sioux Falls.

Youths in state facilities are on a gradual, long-term decline, as the state court system and prosecutors divert more kids in trouble into other forms of help and care.

Numbers tell the story. Ham Burr leaned over to Jefferies as the latest meeting ended.

"It's working," she told her. "It's working."

Vermillion

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