

EDITORIALS

## Lower limits, raise fines to discourage DUI

Drinking and driving don't mix. We all know that, of course, or we should given the amount of publicity we've absorbed about the dangers of mixing gasoline and alcohol. Why then are court reports dominated by DUI arrests, many of them including accidents or dangerous driving along with alcohol abuse? The answer to that question is complex, and at this point unknown, but a partial remedy to this plague could be found in stronger penalties and lower limits on the amount of alcohol that constitutes DUI.

There is nothing wrong with the enjoyment of alcoholic beverages, whether in the privacy of a home or the comradery of a "drinking establishment." Even overindulgence in those situations isn't a crime, but getting behind the wheel after having too much to drink is another matter.

One attempt to reduce the temptation to drive while impaired is the move to lower the allowable concentration of alcohol in the blood from .10 percent to .08 percent. Fourteen states have already taken that step, and it is being discussed in the Pennsylvania Legislature. Given that in France the limit is .05 percent, and in Sweden it's .02, going to .08 percent sounds reasonable. To exceed that level, a 145 lb. woman would have to consume four drinks in two hours. A 190 lb. man would need to down about six drinks in the same time period to be illegal.


But the lower limit won't work by itself; tougher penalties are critical. What if a first offender was slapped with a \$1,000 fine, and the bar that served him had to pay \$10,000 — would that discourage irresponsible and dangerous behavior? It sure wouldn't hurt, and a second offense that carried five times the penalty would add incentive to stop unnecessarily risking people's lives.

## Let's keep history alive

Every community has at least a few people who treasure the history of their town and the families that are its foundation. Ruby Elston, who passed away last week at the ripe old age of 101, was one of them and her memory of the Back Mountain cannot be replaced. Mrs. Elston, who was Ruby Bulford before her marriage to Clarence Elston, had intimate knowledge of two of our region's oldest and largest families. Fortunately, she recorded and saved many of the records of her hometown and the people and events that make it unique. Her daughter, Nancy Schimmel, has carried on the family tradition of keeping history alive, and we wish her well as she continues to chronicle the Back Mountain's progress.

Many stories about the Back Mountain's history lie in the memory of long-time residents, not in books or the library. It would be worthwhile for an individual or organization to seek them out and record their recollections of times and ways of life that have all but disappeared, but still hold lessons for today's Back Mountaineers.

Publisher's notebook



Ron Bartizek

"Stand up and be counted." Remember that phrase, one that generations of Americans were raised on as shorthand for the right and responsibility to speak out on issues of importance to their communities and the nation? It appears the old virtue has been replaced by something that takes no courage or consideration, the anonymous comment. "Talk" radio is now a nearly universal plague on the AM dial, with faceless callers phoning in to comment on everything from Presidential immorality to poor service at the drug store. "Hi, this is (insert name) from (insert town). I think Clinton's a pervert, the mayor's a crook, judges are dope fiends and the waitress at the donut shop's stealing from the register," about sums up the content of most of these shows.

Since no one knows the callers' identity, it's impossible for the listener to determine if the charges are slanted to support or attack the defenseless subject, nor is it necessary for the caller to justify his or her comments.

Newspapers, the last holdout for accountability, have begun to crumble too, some publishing columns of anonymous slander left on answering machines by people too cowardly to put their names on their spewings. I can't for the life of me understand how this kind of irresponsibility is justified by anything other than the desire to sell papers or attract listeners at any cost to the community. I wonder if media outlets would be so quick to publish or broadcast rumor and innuendo if they could be held liable for its damaging effects.


The framers of the Constitution certainly didn't have this kind of behavior in mind when they fashioned the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They understood that for speech to have real influence it must not only be free from stricture, it must be face scrutiny from listeners, even if that means a little discomfort along the way. Is it possible that nameless callers to talk shows or scandal lines may feel they've done their duty as citizens?


Gossip will always be a form of entertainment, but one best shared with friends and co-workers, not given the false cast of legitimacy that publication or broadcast provides. Of course, if the press stays on this track, it will no longer give credence to these spewings and instead will simply reduce itself to irrelevance, removing yet another pillar of our Republic.

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Love among the snowdrifts. Photo by Monica Marzani.

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

Four years ago I was writing my first article on whales. The final sentence of that column reads "Creativity will be rewarded by viable whale populations, stable human cultures, and sustainable ecosystems." About that same time, one of the people who has done the most research on whales, Roger Payne, was completing his book entitled *Among Whales* (1995). Payne, who has studied whales for thirty years, puts it even more bluntly: "they [whales] demonstrate to us that our ancient and ignorant belief in the inherent supremacy of our species over all others is utterly wrong.... What whales offer us is a lesson about tolerance."

It seems amazing and surprising to me that Roger Payne would set out to learn all he could about whales and end up learning more about humans than about whales. But, perhaps that is precisely the point - when we dare to truly look (and listen) outside ourselves, we begin to understand our relationships with other creatures and with ourselves. It is Payne's position that if we can change our way of thinking and doing so as to save the whales we will have figured out how to live in this world without destroying ourselves.

Perhaps you saw the documentary "In the Company of Whales" that aired on the Discovery Channel last year. If so, you were treated to a small taste of what the

## Lessons learned 'in the company of whales'

book *Among Whales* is all about. "Taste" is a word I use intentionally. For, it is our senses to which Payne appeals in all of his work. He is of the firm belief that we must get to know the whales as they apparently wish to get to know us. We need to be lulled to sleep in a sailboat with the songs of humpback whales resonating through the timbers of the boat. Or, at least we need to hear Paul Halley, Paul Winter, and the whale songs together on the 1989 album "Whales Alive."

My son, Alex, actually got to see humpback whales off the Hawaiian island of Maui about a month ago. (Now I know what it feels like to live vicariously through ones children!) Whale watching has become much more economically important than whaling ever was. It is Roger Payne's view that whale watching is at least as important to the whales as it is to humans. He contends that once a person has seen a whale that person is inclined to do almost anything to protect that whale, and, by extension, all other kinds of whales. Perhaps our ways of thinking are already changing because that certainly has not been historically true (just think of all those whalers who did unspeakable things to whales in order to gain oil, food, corset stays, and other products to sell).

Some people are quite critical of whale watching and of aquarium shows that involve captive whales and dolphins. They feel that these activities hurt the animals by influencing their behavior or inter-

fering with normal wild habits. Payne believes that these people may be correct in their assessment, but he thinks that the whales and dolphins would agree that it is a small price to pay for



Betty DiGiovanni and her daughter Liz saw Humpback whales off Cape Cod last summer.



fering with normal wild habits. Payne believes that these people may be correct in their assessment, but he thinks that the whales and dolphins would agree that it is a small price to pay for their ultimate survival. He points to the fact that more people go to zoos and aquaria in the United States each year than attend all the professional football, baseball, basketball and hockey games. People really are trying to meet the animals even though the setting may not be ideal. He writes that "whales are intrinsically impressive and are therefore uniquely suited to introduce people to a feeling of awe about the wild world."

Payne also feels that it is important for us to understand that whales are not only awesome because they are large. They are also awesome because they compose and sing beautiful music which follows rules, sometimes rhymes, and is slowly changed. Among humpback males, these songs are the same within any one ocean. Other large whales stay in contact with each other by means of very low, loud sounds that can conceivably carry thirteen thousand miles! That is as far apart in the ocean as any two whales could be and still have a great circle between them. Talk about e-mail and the information super-highway! We're several thousands

(likely millions) of years behind.

And, perhaps most importantly, whales are awesome because they prove that a creature can have a complex and sophisticated brain without destroying itself and the environment in which it lives. We would do well to try to learn how this can be done. We can start by continuing and enforcing the moratorium on whaling, protecting the new reserve off Antarctica, keeping our own numbers in check so that we do not overwhelm them, cleaning up and reducing pollution to which we all contribute, and trying to resolve all disputes by negotiation so that we do not risk our future or that of the whales. Next time I hold in my hand the smooth carving of a dolphin that sits on top of my filing cabinet, I want to recall the times dolphins swam in front of the research vessel *Eastward* as it returned from the Sargasso Sea and hope that other students in other generations will also experience that thrill.

Listen again to the words of the man who has lived and worked *Among Whales*: "Remote and imperturbable, the lives of whales are somehow enough to match any fantasy humanity can create. They are what we have lost, what we yearn for. They are in some ways the last wild voice calling to the consciousness of terminally civilized humanity, our last contact before we submerge forever in our own manufacture and irretrievably lose the last fragments of our wild selves."

Are you listening, looking, tasting, feeling, and thinking?

## Library news



Nancy Kozemchak

The Book Club of the Back Mountain Memorial Library held a luncheon meeting at Pickett's Charge on Monday, January 19. Mary Lou Swingle, secretary, read the previous months minutes and the treasurer reported a balance in the bank account of \$723.99 with a total of 124 members to begin the 1998 membership campaign.

## Book Club has 124 members, welcomes more

The dues remains \$15.00 for a double membership and \$10.00 for a single and entitles the members to borrow two books from the book club shelf each time they visit the library. Mary Panaway announced the new books added to the book club shelf for January. The next meeting will be held on Monday, Feb. 16 at 1:30. Guests are invited to attend.

The library has two new student pages, Alycia Roberts and Tracy Malkemes, Dallas and Tunkhannock students. They work after school and on Saturdays to check book cards and pockets in the books for accession number matches. They check the books on the carts for matching numbers and then shelve the books.

**New books at the library:** "Charming Billy" by Alice McDermott tells of Billy Lynch who one summer years ago fell in love with a beautiful young Irish woman who had come to America to work for a wealthy family from Park Avenue.

Billy wanted to marry Eva, even gave her a ring; she went back to Ireland to care for relatives, promising to return; however, she died of pneumonia.

"Come the Spring" by Julie Garwood continues the Clayborne legend as the author weaves together a magnificent tale with a touching new love story. Adam, Douglas and Travis are each happily married, and their beloved Mama Rose is overjoyed with the ladies who have joined the family.

However, their restlessness lies with the brother, Cole, wondering which side of the law he will land.

"The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy takes place in the state of Kerala, on the southern most tip of India; a skyblue Plymouth with chrome taillins is stranded on the highway amid a Marxist workers' demonstration. The year is 1969.

Inside the car sit two-egg twins Rahel and Esthappen, so begins the tale.

"The Prince and the Prosecutor" by Peter J. Heck is a Mark Twain mystery.

This mystery, rich in humor and historical detail is praised as a thoroughly enjoyable mystery. The author solves the mysteries in a delightful manner.