

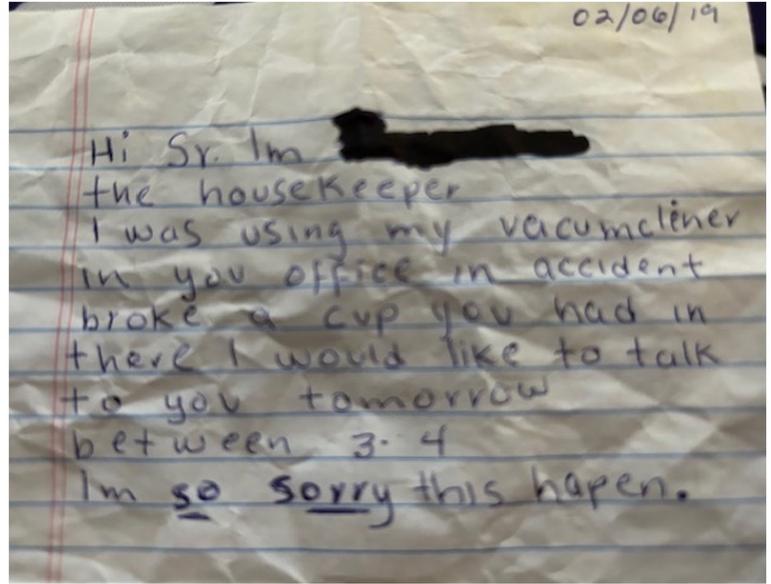


PRESIDENT'S COLUMN: HONESTY AND CHARACTER PERSONIFIED



The American author Jackson Brown, Jr. famously remarked: "Our character is what we do when we think no one is looking." That's my prelude to this month's column, and my opportunity to relate one

of the most touching moments in my 40 years at TCU: I arrived in my office one morning to find the note pictured to the right. The concern, honesty, and ethical backbone shown by this individual is commendable. I did meet with her that day and assured her it was no problem. Coffee mugs are replaceable; quality staff are much less so.



It's easy to fixate on all the negative events (e.g., getting cut off in traffic; the state of national politics) but there are also heart-warming episodes that reveal the goodness still present in the human condition. In the tail end of this holiday season, it is a particularly good time to recall and relish the intrinsic kindness present in so many humans.

Happy New Year to all,

Paul

FROM OUR DECEMBER MEETING:

A true treat is for the Grammy Award-winning Texas Boys Choir to entertain the retirees and uplift our spirits. Continuing the tradition, the Choir highlighted our December 9th meeting in the BLUU Auditorium. Directed by TCU graduate Dr. Todd Prickett, the Texas Boys Choir was founded in 1946 and encompasses boys in grades 3 through 12. We heard a rousing selection of Christmas songs.





MARK YOUR CALENDAR (upcoming luncheons):

- January 20-Dr. Bingyang Wei, Associate Professor and Department Chair, Computer Science: Artificial Intelligence
- February 17-Dr. Harry Parker, Professor and former Chair, Theatre: Engage with TCU's acclaimed Theatre program and see how we're preparing students for the profession.
- March 17- David, Kent and Trish: Performing acoustic folk and Americana music from the 50's and 60's, led by our own TCU retiree David Grant.
- April 21-Jason Soileau, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Planning, Design and Construction: Learn about the latest developments in the campus master plan and Berry Street improvements.
- May 19-Former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton (just kidding...TBA)

FEATURED RETIREE:

(We'd like to feature a retiree or two each month who has done something interesting (travel, a class taken or taught, or any other retirement activity of interest). Please email Phil Hartman (p.hartman@tcu.edu) or any other Board member with information about you or another retiree.) This month we feature Joel Mitchell, Emeritus Professor of Kinesiology. In addition to pickleball, here's how Joel has kept busy the past few years:

As a native of Alaska who lived on a homestead in a remote cabin, my many years away from the Last Frontier had left me with the desire to do something during retirement that at least partially reconnected me to my roots; sort of a nostalgic bucket list idea. My wife, Peggy, and I have always been DIY people, and I have spent years making sawdust in my shop and taking advantage of the many creative ideas she has, so building a log cabin from scratch did not seem too farfetched. Peggy's family property, out in the middle of nowhere in Central Oregon, was the perfect place to build, with the added bonus that it is covered with ponderosa pine and juniper.

The pine trees on the property have commercial value, so we focused on juniper, a tree that is considered a weed by the local ranchers.





(Peggy and Joel's Oregon adventures—continued from previous page)

Despite its less than glamorous reputation, and the fact that it is a relatively short tree that grows with a significant taper, the wood itself is durable and beautiful. Because of their irregularity, each log needed three long cuts to flatten the top, bottom, and interior faces, a job that we started with a handheld chainsaw mill. Even though we began this project in 2014, four years before I retired, we soon realized that we would not live long enough to finish the cabin using the chainsaw method. So, we purchased a portable sawmill capable of making all three cuts in far less time than a single chainsaw cut. Once the foundation frame was assembled, we began erecting the wall logs, notching the corners, and working our way to the roof peak.

Our progress up until the summer of 2018 was slow since we could only squeeze in a couple of weeks each summer to cut, mill, and assemble the logs; however, after retirement, with three to four months to work before the snow falls, progress accelerated. We got the cabin “dried in” that summer, and then spent the next four summers doing all the detail work necessary to make it livable. I have to say that with solar power, running water, and indoor plumbing, the cabin is considerably more advanced and comfortable than the ones I lived in as a child in Alaska. Nostalgia is great, but so are running water (instead of hauling it from a nearby lake), and LED lightbulbs in place of Coleman lanterns.

Aside from the pleasure of working side-by-side with Peggy on what she calls “her happy place,” we had the additional joy of having our three children, and other interested family and friends occasionally join in for a few days to help with the construction. We also added to my Alaskan connection by having the kids, and our two grandchildren out for a white Christmas in 2022. Cutting a real tree, decorating it with handmade ornaments, sledding and snowshoeing, and warming up in front of a wood-burning stove certainly brought back memories of my Alaskan childhood in the best possible way. Fort Worth remains our home base, but escaping the Texas summer heat in our dream cabin at 5000 feet in Central Oregon makes for a pleasant retirement routine.

CAMPUS STRUCTURE OF THE MONTH:

Our memories of TCU are centered around events that involve colleagues and students but of course they occurred in buildings and other campus structures. Consequently, the University's campus plays an important role in our recollections of TCU. Please let me know if you have a fav, and I'll try to include it in an upcoming issue. This month's feature is the Brown-Lupton University Union (the BLUU).





At a cost of \$49.3 million, the three-story, 145,700-square-foot Brown-Lupton University Union was dedicated September 2, 2008. The union's striking front face is highlighted by the five-story King Tower, which has the capacity for illumination in five colors, including purple of course! Food and drink options come in the venues of the ever-popular Chick-fil-A, a six-hundred-seat Market Square (featuring seven food stations) and Starbucks (replacing Union Grounds coffee shop in August 2025). There are also lounges, meeting rooms of various sizes, the campus post office, the Chancellor's dining room and the Chambers (the meeting place for the Student Government Association). The 450-seat ballroom is situated on the third floor, with The Intercultural Center, Leadership and Student Affairs occupying the ground and second floors on the south side.



But of course many of us have fond memories of the Brown-Lupton Student Center (aka "the Main"), which was conjoined to Reed Hall until its demolition in 2008. Completed in 1955, the student center housed the main kitchen and cafeteria, several smaller food service areas, the university book store, offices and meeting rooms for the Student House of Representatives, a large common study-lounge area, study rooms, the Chancellor's dining room, and a ballroom with a seating capacity of seven-hundred-plus.

The Main-to-BLUU transition also coincided with the birth of the Campus Commons. With Scharbauer Hall and Frog Fountain perched on its easternmost apex, the BLUU anchoring the south, and four flanking residence halls to the east and west, the Commons supplanted a rather nondescript parking lot. The result was not only a substantial campus beautification but also a significant step in the deliberate plan of pushing parking away from the central portion of campus to make it more pedestrian friendly.

Perhaps no portion of campus better exemplifies the physical transformation of TCU's campus than the Commons, although the pre-2008 memories still run deep for many of us retirees.

HEALTH HELP NOW *Singing and Dancing for Mental and Physical Health*

Carolyn Spence Cagle PhD, RNC-E

Singing and dancing to the rhythm of music support the human instinct for movement and expression of ideas. Both can soothe the mind, promote brain health, and connect us to others for enhanced socialization. Science indicates singing and dancing promote healing, increases valuable physical activity, and stimulates the brain's reward system via the release of dopamine, a relaxing hormone. Both activities contribute to less cortisol release, a stress hormone. An investment in music



builds cognitive reserve (resiliency, “neuroplasticity”) and decreases cognitive loss due to auditory stimulation. Recent Alzheimer’s studies indicated that affected persons experienced better quality of life after a 10-week program of singing and dancing to promote better physical and mental functioning of those people.

The holiday season often includes singing and dancing to provide joy and connection at that time. *How can you rewire your interest in singing and dancing to gain some of the evidence-based benefits?*

- Pick up a musical instrument, piano, or revisit the one you used earlier in life; learning an instrument can be initially humbling but with patience can stimulate new brain connections for prevention of cognitive loss.
- Make music with others; my sister’s retired husband revived his earlier adolescent band to play trombone, entertain others in his local area, and spread their talents through recordings of their work.
- Actively listening to music; studies show that brain gray matter, auditory working memory and short-term memory increase because of musical sounds; tap to the sounds of music to connect to others in the same space.
- Sing in groups (choirs, etc.) to increase oxytocin, a hormone important for social bonding and feelings of closeness; note that the history of humankind includes singing together; if you do not want to sing with others, sing in the shower or in your car to get benefits.
- Be kind to self with learning or revising a former musical habit: focus on engagement and not mastery.
- Know the more you invest in music or singing, the greater benefit it has for you because you are making new neural connections that support a richer sensory experience.
- Start “small:” add to your musical or singing enjoyment by increasing your involvement over time and being patient to reach your goal.

Reference:

Sime, R. (2025, June 10). Why singing is good for your brain, even if you are no Beyonce. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2025/06/10/music-brain-mental-health>.

A LITTLE HUMOR GOES A LONG WAY:

When insults had class:

“He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.” –*Winston Churchill*

“I didn’t attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it.” –*Mark Twain*

“I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play; bring a friend...if you have one.” --
George Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill

“Cannot possibly attend first night, will attend second, if there is one.” –*Winston Churchill*

“He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary.” –*William Faulkner about Ernest Hemingway*



Thanks again to Chris Manno for this TCURA-specific cartoon! And here's one from a clever student!



Finally, some Poly Sci “-isms:”

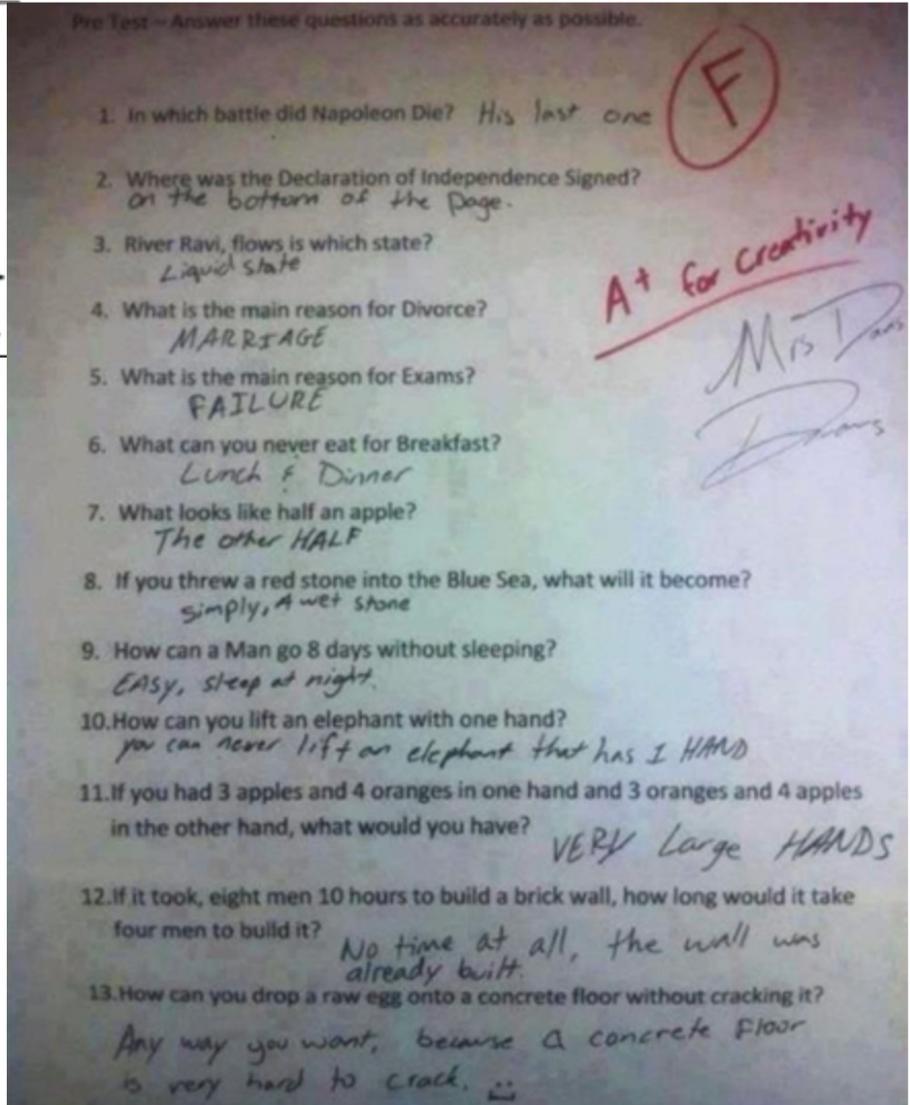
Socialism-you have two cows. Give one cow to your neighbor

Communism-You have two cows. Give both to the government, and they may give you some milk.

Facism-You have two cows. The government shoots you and takes both cows.

Anarchism-You have two cows. Keep both, shoot the government agent and steal two more cows.

Capitalism-You have two cows. Sell one; buy a bull.



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TCURA MISSION STATEMENT

The TCU Retirees Association exists to provide opportunities for fellowship, to promote lifelong learning, to advocate for fair benefits, to recognize the accomplishments of its members, and to strengthen the relationship between the retirees and the University.