

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Left-Handers and Aggies....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

Column #1,088 for Release Week of April 21, 2024, or Later

The Good Book's Chapter 6 of Matthew provides challenging specifics on living the good life, but verse three seems most daunting. It concerns the importance of maintaining a chasm between the works of the left and right hands, perhaps as far as the east is from the west.

In essence, God knows, and that's what counts. As my old mother would often say, "Don't go around 'showing out'."

Maybe I was drawn to that verse early on, what with my being left-handed. From time to time, I still gaze at a now frayed certificate I received at graduation in 1956 at Early High School. It decreed--by vote of my 25 fellow students--that I was "most likely to remain left-handed." Needless to say, all graduates were voted most likely to be something....

Anyways, in this space the other day, I wrote of the current paucity of Aggie jokes. Most of us lament this omission, and--down deep--I think most Aggies do.

One of 'em--a respected veterinarian who has practiced since 1965 and is still at it part time--called me with a new take on an old joke I've repeated hundreds of times over the past half century.

I've told it because it is a "can't miss" joke that invariably draws hearty laughter, even if some of it is muffled, perhaps even gratuitous. It's about an Aggie who allegedly studied both veterinary medicine and taxidermy at Texas A&M. Upon graduation, his business card read, "Either way, you get your dog back."....

I have meant no ill by it. As old Foghorn Leghorn used to say in the movie cartoons, "It's a joke, son."

My friend wisely chooses anonymity. Probably he's not the only one who doesn't want others to know he reads my columns.

"I've heard that joke countless times, often from you," my friend began. "Most of my colleagues have heard it, too, and still laugh, even if out of courtesy."...

His primary purpose for calling was to let me know that upon his classmate's completion of vet studies, he was indeed both a veterinarian AND a taxidermist. At first, I thought he was teasing. Or, maybe he was setting me up for another Aggie joke.

No sirree, he was hand-on-the-Bible serious. "He was an older student, and he brought his taxidermy skills with him to vet school," my friend said. "What I most remember is that he slept through most sessions of a dairy course. Admittedly, it was a course that few of us were interested in, since most of us were more interested in small animal practices. His sleeping in class didn't set well with the prof, so he had to repeat his senior year."

His call set me to wondering. Reckon the doctor/taxidermist had a card advertising both services? Was he ever asked to turn a prized pet into a mounted den trophy? Finally, my mind flitted back to Matthew 6:30, about "each hand minding its own business."...

On the matter of serving two masters, Dr. Kenneth Ashworth, former Commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, could well have been kidded unmercifully if details of his part time teaching in retirement had been widely known.

He taught graduate classes in higher education at two locations--in the same semester. One was at Texas A&M University in College Station, the other at The University of Texas in Austin. His business card was printed in maroon on one side and orange on the other.

The 92-year-old educator has written numerous books. Two of my friend's titles are Horns of a Dilemma: Coping with Politics at the University of Texas and Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug. Bright and witty, Dr. Ashworth served Texas boldly and masterfully. No doubt his "fireplug" book helped him to decompress after dealing adroitly with both governmental and educational politics....

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