

## THE IDLE AMERICAN

Old Folks at Home?...

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Family reunions are dwindling, going the way of the wild goose. Some, however, will hold annual gatherings soon. Littering nearby, though, are limbs of family trees that are no more.

Most of us who have seen the snow of many winters remember reunion trivia from years long since gone from the calendar. Many recollections make us smile.

Our bunch still remembers Aunt Gertie whose final trimming of the wick occurred in the 20th century. Everyone loved her almost as deeply as they detested her cooking. (Flies in her kitchen looked for holes in the window screen to get out.) We kids noticed where she placed her “covered dish,” praying that it would remain covered. I don’t think she ever noticed that during the final years of her life, she was asked to bring paper towels to the next reunion....

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Has there ever been a stranger week in the world of professional golf? Separated by a single week and about 900 miles was the bungled arrest of the world’s number one golfer and a promising upcoming links star who took his own life. Scottie Scheffler was in Louisville, KY, at the PGA Tournament when he was arrested for a traffic violation. A week later in Fort Worth, Grayson Murray withdrew from his second round at Colonial, complaining of feeling poorly. He took his life hours later.

Scheffler’s story became laughable about what may have been the most over-blown “teapot tempest” in sports history. Scheffler, age 27 and considered affable by everyone, took everything in stride when arrested, handcuffed and jailed over what was later described as a “big misunderstanding.” One wag said that Scheffler might have hoped for a hole-in-one. Instead, he was “one in a hole.” (It should be noted that all charges were dropped, and both the officer and golfer issued a joint positive statement. It remains to be seen, however, whether Scheffler will seek an alternate route when future travels otherwise might call for driving through Louisville.)

Murray, age 30, won his only major tournament earlier this year in Honolulu and was engaged to be married. Who knows the potholes he dealt with on life’s highway? How heartbreaking this must be for his family. His decision, not to be understood, underscores the problem of suicides in America....

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On a lighter note, my friend Nancy Esters continues to be an incurable optimist, though her view of life’s goings-on sometimes resembles a gyroscope that’s a bit off its “wobble.”

She’s handy with a pen, often offering “one-liners” worthy of remembering and repeating.

Nancy recently claimed to be celebrating her 1,001st birthday. I kidded her about exaggeration, suggesting that her calculations suggest that she has already outlived

Methuselah by 32 years and is still “vertical and ventilating.” She quickly responded to a response she anticipated. “Oh, him, he observed his birthdays annually, and I choose to light my birthday candles monthly.”....

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While expounding about birthdays, I figure a recent visit with my Uncle Mort is worth recounting.

He told about a precocious 10-year-old girl who lives in the thicket who posed an expansive question to her mother after blowing out birthday candles. “Mom, I’d like to know what it feels like to be the mother of the most beautiful, most talented, most mature and most lovable little girl in the world?”

Pausing, she lowered her daughter’s self-evaluation by a few notches. “I wouldn’t know, dear. You’ll have to ask your grandmother.”....

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Mort closed out by sharing an account of his bus ride during his only visit to Chicago several decades ago.

He said that a college-age guy, packed into the standing-room-only bus, noticed a beautiful young lady nearby. He boldly asked for her phone number. “It’s in the phone book,” she answered. “Okay, what’s your name?” he requested. “Oh, my name is in there, too,” was her put-down.

A serious note to end this piece: I sorely miss phone books. I really, really do....

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Dr. Newbury is a longtime public speaker and former university president who is Texas’ longest-running syndicated columnist, writing weekly since 2003.