

Halloween decorations no fun for the grieving

This time of the year, the world around us is plagued with various aspects of death. There are dummies hanging from trees, gory monsters jumping out to scare people and tombstones planted on lawns.

Some of these Halloween decorations can upset people who are surviving the tragic death of a loved one from suicide, community violence or military service.

For them, there is absolutely no lightheartedness to these images. It can anger survivors to have images of death portrayed in such a fashion.

I counseled a surviving spouse years ago. She had found her husband hanging in the garage. After months of counseling, she was coming to grips with his death. Halloween came along and her neighbors put up a dummy hanging from the gutters. This woman would sit in her favorite chair after a long day and she would have to look right at the Halloween decoration. This upset her, and I suggested that she talk to her neighbor. She did, and the neighbor was very embarrassed and quickly removed the decoration.

I don't think that people want to go around hurting grieving people. It just takes a little education and a gentle reminder and most people are going to respond positively.

This Halloween, think about the feelings of people around you who are hurting and may see no humor in a lighthearted portrayal of death.

—Rev. Charles T. Rubey, associate director of programs, Catholic Charities, Chicago

New fall rituals

Now that it's autumn, I think back on the old days when we were not so aware of our impact on the environment. When the leaves began to fall, we would just rake them to the curb and burn them.

I miss the smell of burning leaves on a crisp autumn afternoon, but things are so much easier now. We just get out the noisy gas-powered blower and swoosh the leaves over onto the neighbor's lawn.

—Louis B. Raffel, Northbrook

The right college

This is in response to "Is college worth it? With graduates earning less and tuition rising, it pays to weigh your debt against likely career earnings" (News, Oct. 14), by Tribune reporter Megan Twohey.

For most students, the answer to your question is a resounding yes, college is worth it, not only due to higher lifetime earnings but also personal growth and a greater ability to contribute to society.

The real question for students to ask is: Will the education I'm getting from this particular school pay off in the long run?

In these financially trying times, it takes planning and hard work to achieve successful higher-education outcomes.

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission—whose mission is to make college affordable for Illinois students—offers terrific tools to help families prepare financially and students make better choices about career goals, academic preparation and school choice.

Visit <http://www.knowhow2goilinois.org/> for free tips on how to best save, plan and pay for college.

Yes, college is worth it, but it takes careful planning to make sure the school you choose is the right one for you.

—Andrew Davis, executive director, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, Chicago



JOHN OVERMYER

Consumer plan

I saw a commercial recently and it showed a woman shopping for toys for Christmas and putting them on layaway.

That's what retailers need to do: Bring back layaway in a big way. There is no credit card, no interest charge and the consumer pays a little when he or she can; when payment is complete, the customer gets the purchase and is not in debt.

When I was growing up, I really loved the day that the clothes I picked out came out of layaway and they were mine.

I had the satisfaction of getting what I wanted when I saw it and then being committed to paying for it in order to have it.

Sometimes you can make great moves forward by looking back.

—Jane Sinclair, Batavia

Job training

During these troubling economic times, some may wonder if investment in a college education will pay off. But avoiding post-secondary education altogether won't pay off either. In fact it would threaten the strength of Illinois' economy.

A recent report released by the Skills2Compete-Illinois campaign showed that middle-skill jobs (those that require more than high school but less than four years of college) continue to be the largest number of jobs in Illinois' economy. This will not change. Nearly 1 million openings in the middle-skill job market are projected for the state by 2014.

To capitalize on the value of post-secondary education, Illinois needs a new vision for education and skill development. Illinois must have diverse educational pathways to good-paying jobs, and this includes college certificates and degrees.

Despite current and future skill demands, close to 60 percent of workers in Illinois do not have the education and training required to fill middle-skill jobs. These jobs are the backbone of our communities; they include firefighters, nurses, electricians, truck drivers and medical lab technicians—jobs we can't afford to outsource and we just plain can't live without.

We need to make training and preparing adults currently in the work force a key part of our education strategy. There will always be jobs that require four years of college and more, but we must look beyond traditional pathways and, at a minimum, make sure that all Illinoisans have access to up to two years of education or training past high school.

—Carrie Thomas, associate director, Chicago Jobs Council; co-lead, Skills2Compete-Illinois Campaign

Duped by Obama

There really wasn't any surprise in your endorsement of Barack Obama; the editorial pages have been leaning toward him all summer. The real kicker is your idea that he "would govern as much more of a pragmatic centrist than many people expect" (Editorial, Oct. 19). Where is the proof in this statement? Clearly Obama is the most left-leaning candidate to ever have a chance at the presidency. His deep ties to radical-left figures, his socialist economic theory and his hard left take on moral issues like abortion and stem-cell research plant him as nowhere near being center or wanting to be.

You've been duped by his rhetoric like so many others. With a Democratic-controlled Congress, four years of Obama could see some serious damage to America. How sad that the Tribune has fallen sway to his nonsense.

—Lawrence Rowe, Tinley Park

The right thing

I knew it was coming. I heard the news. The Chicago Tribune would be endorsing Barack Obama for president of the United States.

But even before I heard, I could feel it coming and was hopeful. Over the past several months, Tribune editorials leaned more and more toward Obama.

However, not until I held the Sunday print edition in my hands did I know for sure.

As a lifelong Chicago-area resident and frequent critic of your editorial board, I am proud to say the Chicago Tribune is my newspaper. Thank you for doing the right thing.

—Bill Benjamin, Evanston

The Palin factor

I strongly agree with your editorial endorsement of Barack Obama for president. My early vote for Obama, by absentee ballot, was directly influenced by Sarah Palin's lack of knowledge on major issues.

Specifically, as a U.S. Air Force veteran with nuclear weapons training and experience, I was stunned at Palin's muddled responses during the vice presidential debate, especially her lack of knowledge on the content or purpose of American nuclear weapons.

Voters must now weigh John McCain's judgment, or lack thereof, in selecting Palin as his running mate.

—Major Robert Tormey, USAF (retired), Escondido, Calif.

Thankful reader

Thank you for endorsing Barack Obama, and for the thoughtful way in which you did.

—George Wiman, Normal, Ill.

Worth celebrating

Hallelujah!

—Vincent Kamin, Chicago

Tribune error

After following your coverage of the campaign for the last several months, I was not surprised to see the Tribune endorse Barack Obama, but I hope you know you have lost your soul.

—Richard Dreger, Batavia

Editorial courage

Congratulations on the Chicago Tribune's endorsement of Barack Obama for president of the United States. To have done otherwise, in our opinion, would have meant pandering to your conservative readership base; it would have been the equivalent of John McCain's cynical choice of Sarah Palin as his running mate. It took great editorial courage for the paper to endorse a Democrat for the first time, knowing that it will receive hundreds of e-mails and letters threatening subscription cancellations. These letters will come from angry right-wingers who consider anyone to the left of them to be socialists if not communists. Try to ignore them.

—Jean and Dick Doub, Wilmette

Dangerous words

Your endorsement of Barack Obama is irresponsible and puts this nation at danger. You have endorsed the least-experienced and most-liberal candidate for president in the last 100 years. At a time when the world faces the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and the highest probability of intercontinental war since the Cold War, the people put their trust in you to make a critical and rational endorsement based on facts and data.

To make your endorsement even worse, there are serious unanswered questions about Obama's character based on his close associations with dangerous radicals and criminals.

Instead of recommending a true American hero, John McCain, with a 30-plus-year track record of honesty, independence, responsibility and ability to get things done, the Chicago Tribune went with the popular buzz based on irrational, emotional and unfounded hope based on empty words, not actions from Obama.

You have recommended a crash-course in which our welfare would depend on luck, not facts or data.

—Randy Rossi, Grayslake

New meaning to fall

A fall I can fall in love with: Gas pump prices follow in the footsteps of leaves and keep falling and falling.

—Raymond F. Stoiber, Joliet

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

260

The number of comments on the online version of Clarence Page's Sunday column, "Joe the Plumber not the guy to fix the leak." They included:

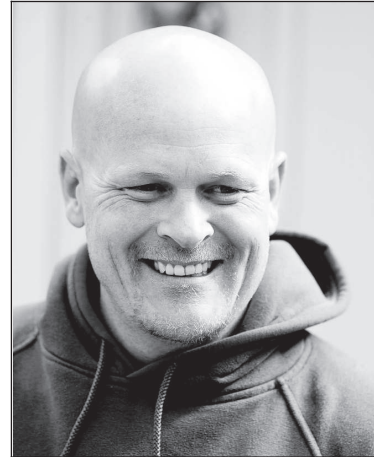
"Strange how Page omitted the central focus about Joe the Plumber. It was Barack Obama who picked Joe out, not the other way around. The main point was Obama's comment that he wished to 'spread the wealth around,' which sounds suspiciously similar to Karl Marx."

"Wake up and realize America is about working hard to achieve success, not sitting back and waiting for The One to hand it over in a welfare situation."

"Nice try Clarence, but your effort doesn't serve to shadow Obama's socialist leaning, which Joe the Plumber brought to the glorious light of daytime. I pay enough in taxes. I'd like to live on what I have left and spread my 'wealth' to my family and those charities that I choose."

"Excellent piece of writing. I think in addition to his age and hotheadedness, what's really scary about John McCain is that he doesn't do his homework, evidenced by the selection of Sarah Palin and this invocation of Joe the Plumber."

"America is greedy—not just those on Wall Street but also a lot of the people who live here. If you make more than most Americans, why not pay a little more in taxes? The fact is that those who make more will barely see any difference in their lifestyles. If you make more than \$250,000 a year, be thankful that you can go on living your same lifestyle for the most part."



Samuel "Joe" (a.k.a. Joe the Plumber) Wurzelbacher

"Tell me, liberal media. How come I now know more about Joe the Plumber than I do about Bill Ayers? How come I now know more about Joe the Plumber than I do about Barack Obama?"

"The wealthy in our great country receive the greatest benefit from society and pay a smaller percentage of their income in taxes. Why? Voodoo economics, a failed economic theory that Republicans cling to harder than their guns or religion. Trickle-down economics (voodoo economics) in theory benefits the entire economy by cutting the taxes of the wealthiest in the belief that the additional money in their pockets will be reinvested in the economy, thereby producing more jobs and more wealth for middle- and lower-income earners. The problem is there is no guarantee that the additional money will in fact be invested in the U.S. economy. With the weakening of the U.S. dollar, and the popularity of international investing, many critics now call this trickle-out economics."

"Sadly most middle-class folks try to demonize welfare moms while also still gaining thousands of dollars through Medicare/Medicaid for their own families. It is all a farce."

"Having started a high-tech business (now sold), one of the more carefully managed parts of our business was managing revenues so that we minimized profits. In our case we were growing rapidly, most of the employees were shareholders and so the best place to put the money was back into growing the business. The government got its piece when the company was sold. I'd much rather have a president who is going to invest in rebuilding our nation's strengths. I may be one of the ones who pays more taxes, but my children will inherit a stronger country."