

# Responses come in after recent columns



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One of the complaints I often heard as a reporter was that we wrote stories that asked you to care about something – a person, a place, a struggle, an idea – but then failed to follow up.

“Whatever happened to that guy?”

people asked. “How did that thing turn out?”

Or you wanted to share your own thoughts on a subject.

Let me update you on three topics from recent months.

Sally Hoffman writes from Colorado to pay homage to Grue Evangelical Lutheran Church in Buxton, N.D., whose congregation reluctantly moved to close it last summer, citing the costs of upkeep.

Named by immigrants for their home church in the Hedmark region of Norway, it was built in 1891 for \$3,000 on a quarter section of land in Stavanger Township.

The congregation had formed in 1879, Hoffman reports, when 63 people met at the home of Knut Rauk.

Borre Mikkelson made the altar and baptismal font.

The good news: A nonprofit in Buxton calling itself “Buxton in Bloom” is looking for

funding to preserve the historic church.

Hoffman was responding to last week's column, my musings on the old "beacons on the prairie" that for decades have been disappearing, one by one, due to fire, storm and dwindling congregations. She wasn't alone.

"I think about St. Mary's near Dazey, N.D., built by hand by German Catholic immigrants in the middle of donated farmland over 100 years ago," wrote Patricia Lowe Horgan. Judith Hammer wanted simply to record "Hjerdal Lutheran, rural Voltaire, (McHenry County, N.D.), 1909-2011."

Ila Simpson Marvel said the column "takes me back to High Prairie Lutheran Church near LaMoure, N.D., that my great grandparents helped establish in 1897." Only the cemetery remains, she wrote, and her family moved away when she was just 5. "But I remember ... being a flower girl in a wedding at that church."

Gary Holm wrote to say, "I have the steeple column from my grandparents' and parents' country church ... torn down 50 years go ... built by my grandparents and other Norwegian immigrants in 1910."

And Robert Seabloom underscored the importance of those early steepled sanctuaries, for physical and social as well as spiritual life on the prairie. "Those churches provided a foundation for the early arrivals, helping them to make it through the tough times."

From feeding the spirit to feeding the body: Back in October, I lamented the absence of Campbell's Chicken Gumbo Soup from local grocery shelves, due most likely to COVID 19-inspired hoarding. I needed that ingredient, critical to the sloppy joe recipe I've turned to for comfort for more than 50 years.

A good many people commented on that one, saying it recalled home and youth – or snorting at my daring to call the end result "barbecue."

One fellow said the grains of white rice in the soup looked like maggots, an unfortunate image that has given me pause the three times I've made it since.

But Sheryl Bartlett wrote that she had been searching for Campbell's Chicken Gumbo Soup online when she stumbled on my column.

"I'm in Texas and have never heard of a BBQ recipe that uses this soup and ground beef," she wrote. "Sounds intriguing, so I'd really like to try it now."

"Great article. I thought I was the only person suffering the injustice of the gumbo shortage!"

I sent Sheryl my recipe, noting variations that folks have shared with me. But I'm not sure that she, being in Texas, ought to call it barbecue, lest she be shunned by neighbors.

Nor, being that close to Louisiana, should she call a can of soup "gumbo."

Finally, you may recall my mea culpa column on Dec. 26, where I confessed to making my share of mistakes over the years. I ended by telling about an error of judgment I made while reporting on the 10-year anniversary of the abduction and murder of Julie Holmquist, taken while roller-blading outside her home in Hallock, Minn.

I was leaving Hallock, driving along the road where Julie had been taken, when I spotted a young woman riding a bike, all alone. I wanted to talk to her, to see if she knew about the crime and whether she felt safe out there.

What happened, as I should have known, was that she ran off into a field and pulled out her cell phone.

I asked Sheriff Kenny Hultgren, who was on the scene within a few minutes, to apologize to the woman for me. Last month, as I recounted the unhappy incident, I wrote that if she was still in the area, I apologized again for scaring her.

Well, Peggy Pemberton of rural Hallock is still there, and she eased my conscience with a gracious note.

“Thank you for calling me a young woman,” she wrote. “I was far from young. So that made me smile.

“That day, as well as every time I was out biking, I kept a watchful eye out for anything suspect and reacted as I saw fit. So that day as you drove by slowly, and as I watched you turn around, my instincts and imagination went into overdrive. I escaped as fast as could, calling 911.”

When she emerged from the field and started back home, “Sheriff Hultgren pulled up beside me and told me who you were and that during your interview with him, you had asked, ‘Do you think people are still afraid?’ Kenny said to me, ‘I think he just got his answer.’ “Maybe we will cross paths again, and I will not run away into a field.”

I’d like that. And maybe we could invite Kenny to join us.

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