

W04 Column writing

By Lisa Currie

Cash – an almost forgotten form of paper

March 17, 2023

Just the other day, I rushed into the flower shop to purchase a rose for a demonstration. It was one rose — nothing special. It cost less than \$5.

It was a last minute decision to buy the rose, for which I thought I could find some change in the car — you know, between the seats or in the ashtray — because just like many recent times before, I did not have any cash to pay the bill.

Paying the local florist with the card, I realized that I never have cash for anything.

And since there is never any cash, there never is any change.

There's no loose change to be found anywhere — no pennies, dimes or quarters — in any crevice in the car. There was no nickel between the seats. In fact, I realized that I do not have an ashtray in my car — a car that I have had for nearly five years — because the ashtray is where I used to keep all those nickels, dimes and quarters that were the leftovers from the dollar bills. But I never have a dollar bill to get any leftovers.

As with most people on today's modern payroll, I never get to actually touch most of the money I get paid because the money just suddenly appears in my checking account, money that suddenly disappears as fast as it appeared. Even Uncle Sam — if he wants to return any of my hard-earned money — does not even bother to send me a check.

Gosh, I remember — must be a million years ago — walking out with my first real paycheck — boldly marching to the bank and fondling the dozens of green dollars that were handed over by the bank cashier. That was the most rewarding feeling — after years of college actually getting real money for labor. After those rewarding pay days and those 10 steps to the car, three or so minutes in time, with those dozens of bills in my hand, I was rich; I had money.

Sure, in those days, that money disappeared faster than it disappears today because that cash returned from the check was not big bills — just a few dozen smaller ones.

Most importantly, in those days, I had change.

In those days, if I would stop to get a soda, there were coins on the car's ashtray, maybe a stray dollar between the car seats.

Now, there is nothing between the seats but wrinkled card receipts and road dirt.

I can see you shaking your head at my realization — old-fashioned and nearly archaic — because you know as well as I that the younger generation exists with debit card and cellphone payments.

It's rather a sad moment because with either one, the familiar clink of pennies and dimes in the car's ashtray will be as forgotten as the color of money.

Water – a resource often taken for granted

Sept. 15, 2023

It's no secret that this Valley is suffering from a drought, and it's going to take days and days of rain to restore what is lost.

Take a drive from Winchester to Harrisonburg along The Old Valley Pike.

It's dismal.

Fields are withered, as if the landscape has been charred by fire. Lawns are brown patches with trees limp; leaves are falling with the slightest breeze.

These rainless weeks have devastated crops, endangered livestock and limited water supplies throughout the Valley with even recreation affected.

We recently floated on the Shenandoah River's South Fork — a two-hour float that took four-plus hours because the river is so low; most of the floaters were walking, floats tucked under their arms as they waded through knee-deep muck. Additionally, at some places on the North Fork, a person could walk across the river, barely getting wet.

It's very difficult to find any upside in the burned and parched landscape, but looking closely there is a bit of life budding on the seared vegetation.

So often these wild bloomers — who need little water and who have few known enemies — are mowed down, never given the opportunity to show off individualized color, size, and shape, but without a need to mow, these little gems finally get the limelight, and set against the brown backdrop, their tiny petals sparkle.

The Queen Anne's lace is a powdery white platter, weaving its way between the blue bachelor button (also known as blue marigolds or chicory), and the brown knapweed is a spiky spatter of pinkish purple, its delicate petals just barely visible against the dead grass. Creeping over the parched brown earth the blue or white morning glory's trumpets greet the day.

But without a bit of water, even these flowers will wilt and fade.

Water is one of those strange resources, often taken for granted — the average home using about 100 gallons a day per person — water lost down the drain.

Think about it.

We can save money and have more later. We can even make more.

We can save our lunch and have some for dinner or create extra for later.

We can recycle paper, plastic, glass and aluminum and create an entirely new product.

Water just does not work that way.

Yes, we can try hard to recycle water, but we are not making something new. We are returning the resource to its natural environment.

We can ration or conserve water, but once the water is gone, it's gone. You really cannot get it back again.

No one is going to grumble about a few inches of rain now because not only for the flowers along the roadside, or the fields that stand charred and burned, or the river that shrinks, water — in all its forms — is the one essential. And as is obvious by the year's drought, just demanding rain does not grant the precipitation.

These summer days of drought remind us to treasure each drop, respecting the importance of a rainy day and an ounce of water.

Kudzu and meanness kill at the root

Oct. 20, 2023

We recently returned from Tennessee, traveling Interstate 81 from Virginia's southern tip to our northern destination.

As Mother Nature's autumn brush was starting to splash color, I was paying careful attention to the shifting trees, where beautiful reds and yellows flickered on the landscape, but what I noticed was the kudzu, a deep green vine twisting a choking path from the ground to the tops of tall ancient trees; the kudzu literally smothering entire swatches of the landscape.

Over 100 years ago, kudzu was promoted as a means to control erosion because the strong vine grows fast. An added attraction, the vine sprouts a sweet smelling flower after a year or so, and evidently, the leaves and roots are edible, making the plant acceptable fodder for cows and goats. However, when introduced in the late 1800s, the plant's suffocating progression was not anticipated. Once in the soil, kudzu is very difficult to control.

A real problem, kudzu grows up to a foot a day, that growth strangling native trees and grasses because the vine blocks the sun these plants need to sustain themselves. As a result, native plants die — native plants that feed and house various native forms of animal, insect and fowl life.

Marching forward without control and able to adapt to climate stressors, kudzu has besieged entire hillsides along the mountains in southern Virginia, western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, ultimately, leaving death in its path.

Yes, kudzu can be controlled; the best way is to cut the vine at the base and treat it with strong herbicides, killing the root that has buried itself deep in the ground.

This made me think how kudzu is like meanness.

We can agree that meanness is invasive and powerful in its reach often attracting people because — the same way that kudzu develops a sweet flower — meanness can wear a disguise. We might not even know that meanness is at the door, and therefore, without even realizing, people are charmed by meanness' shades. Once meanness is invited in, kindness is often unable to penetrate the nastiness that meanness grows, a malice that creeps in than chokes humankind's compassion.

Similar to kudzu, meanness can grow at a prodigious rate; one infection results in a pandemic of heartlessness on various social levels. Like kudzu that grows in any soil, meanness grows in any heart because meanness knows no gender, no religion, no race.

Just like kudzu, meanness out of control can strangle and replace just about everything it encounters, its infectious tentacles seeping into people and poisoning the heart and soul.

It's really sad that, in contrast to kudzu, meanness is native, native to just about every location on the map and cultivated and fertilized by many.

When allowed to grow, meanness swallows entire communities because meanness only has one natural enemy: human kindness.

The best way to deal with meanness: cut it off at the root and saturate the root with empathy/compassion/and kindness. The stronger the strength of these, the quicker meanness dies.

