

## The roles of others

## Who I am

"An unexamined life is not worth living."—Socrates.

Warning: I am far from a psychologist, but I've had time on my hands of late to better examine my life. Accordingly, I've spent more time in quieter moments, stretching my memory as far back as possible across 75 years.

Probably a good challenge for all of us. How far back can you recall after entering his world as a clean slate?

There's nothing I recollect before age 3. At that stage, I have only unformed flashes of home with family, hiding behind chairs and being fascinated by the small TV set and the sometimes disturbing images it displayed.

More than anything, I've tried to recall the seemingly endless stream of others who've come in and out of my life since childhood. Some remain faces without names, yet more names bubble up than I expected from the past.

Understandably, there are far too many to possibly remember them all.

Being the oldest of three siblings in a military family, we were destined to transfer from post to post about every three years.

A youth under those circumstances can accumulate a wide swath of friends, acquaintances and experiences.

There was a neighborhood friend named Curtis who taught me to play marbles when we were 7. Another whose face I recall, but name escapes, introduced me to a slingshot at about 10.

I recall the sixth-grade talent show before a cavernous auditorium of parents in Hot Springs when "Clyda Ann" and "Darlene" tap-danced alongside me on stage as I was tapped to emcee the event and sing "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," complete with a hat, cane and patriotic uniform.

It would, alas, betray what a shameless ham I was in those early years before Broadway wrote me off.

The number of those who influenced my life in large and small ways has grown through decades of continually relating with, then losing track of, so many who made a difference.

You undoubtedly have countless numbers. We all do if we live long enough to reflect on how much about life we learn from others who passed along experiences and lessons they'd been taught from others.

Sharing what we know is the way this endless web of knowledge and experiences we call life works.

Our lists of family, friends, teachers, mentors and acquaintances we accumulate become as distinctive as our fingerprints in helping determine who we are as adults.

After all, without each of their contributions to our lives, we naturally social animals would have been shaped into someone different than who we've become.

That is equally true of negative influences from others whose words and actions damaged and affected our well-being and psyches as we grew. Those who spent lives in prison will become far different people than do monks in monasteries.

Consequently it's been helpful for



## OPINION

## Mike Masterson



me to pause and examine how deeply interconnected we are in this web of common existence and how I am today because of those relationships that shaped me as I grew.

## GodNod sequel

Last Sunday I told of my daughter Anna's GodNod immediately following the sudden death of her close friend and office colleague, 60-year-old John Courtney. Both were retired Navy chiefs.

Dragonflies had been among John's favorites, as evidenced by pictures of the delicate creatures he kept in his home.

So a freshly distraught Anna had been shocked on the very afternoon of his passing to return to her suburban Memphis home only to find only her front yard literally swarming with dragonflies.

Such a bizarre event brightened her spirits enormously at a time when shock and grief were so fresh. She interpreted this to be a definite sign from John that all was well with him.

After all, she hadn't seen a dragonfly in years, much less so many gathering nowhere in the neighborhood but in her front yard.

Flash forward a week. Anna organized and led John's memorial service at a large area Baptist church miles from her home.

She said that farewell could not have been more ideal as many speakers offered memories of what a kind, generous and thoughtful person he'd been. Anna told of one day during the height of covid when she watched John voluntarily cleaning the door handle of every office in their building trying to keep others safe.

Exiting the sanctuary, mourners were startled to be met with an enormous swarm of dragonflies covering the church lawn at that very moment.

"Coincidence, Dad," she said afterwards. "I think not."

Do I understand it? No, except to say I believe there is far more to our fragile presence than we can comprehend, especially when it comes to matters of spirit.

One reader asked why some people experience such events while others don't. I said that answer is well above my pay grade. Perhaps many who wonder the same thing aren't paying close attention with their limited physical senses when GodNods occur.

In Anna's case, few others knew of John's affection for these fragile insects and he knew she would be spiritually attuned to recognize his sign of approval.

Mike Masterson is a longtime Arkansas journalist, was editor of three Arkansas dailies and headed the master's journalism program at Ohio State University. Email him at [mmasterson@arkansasonline.com](mailto:mmasterson@arkansasonline.com).

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## How dare the people rule!

## OPINION

## John Brummett



"Regnat populus" my patoot. Never has a state been as afraid as Arkansas of its own motto, which means "the people rule," which they don't and which the powers-that-be fear and resist.

Ever since the people approved ballot issues by direct democracy to raise the minimum wage, spread casino wagering and permit sick people to get marijuana for medical reasons with a doctor's note, the overwhelmingly Republican bosses of Arkansas have been aghast.

They're wondering what's up with these people who don't have a lick of sense except when voting for Donald Trump and their local legislator.

In these parts, laws are to be made only by people running around in the state Capitol on per diem—or on per diem but not actually in the Capitol because they felt bad and were only well enough to go instead to a Republican Party function down the way and then to lunch with a colleague.

So we have this proposed ballot issue for November for the recreational use of marijuana.

The production and sale largely would be run through the insiders already in the medical marijuana business, and with the Alcoholic Beverage Control regulating it, and with steep taxes generating receipts going to the police and other things.

The initiative passed its first hurdle by getting nearly 200,000 signatures, more than twice the number required.

In recent sessions, however, our Legislature has made it harder to get or keep such proposals on the ballot, and it wasn't easy before with the Arkansas Supreme Court flexing its muscle by throwing off bad and good ones.

You now need more signatures in less time. The qualifications and timeline for a "cure period" if you come up short have been tightened.

And, in a non sequitur for the ages,

the state Board of Election Commissioners, which consists of Republican officeholder appointees except for one Democrat, and which oversees elections, got installed as the first review body for the appropriateness of ballot titles.

These are not judges. There is no reason to think they know any more about ballot titles than you do, or as much.

But they were just sick the other day that the recreational marijuana ballot title didn't say that the THC maximum-content allowance for marijuana would be eliminated in favor of regulations to be set by the ABC on things like edible candies that might get in the hands of children, and the child-proof packaging to be required.

That provision is in the body of the amendment. It's there for opponents to exploit and rail against to try to dissuade voters.

You can't put everything in an amendment in the ballot title, because then it would be not the title, but the amendment.

Yet the safest thing in the view of the newly empowered election commission simply was to decline to certify the proposal for the ballot on the grounds that people don't know what they're doing.

I'm fairly sure that the ABC, trained in regulating booze, knows how to design and enforce regulations against marijuana shops that would put easy-to-unwrap THC-potent gummy bears in bins by the door for kids to shoplift. And, if the ABC didn't, then I'm fairly sure the parents out there would raise serious hell.

The election commissioners also

were alarmed that background checks weren't required for marijuana-business licenses holding less than a 5 percent interest. They wondered: What if 25 criminals take 4 percent interest apiece? Would we be powerless to stop them?

The answers are that no such conglomerate would dare come forward and wouldn't be granted a license if it did.

The issue will now go to the state Supreme Court, which has that aforementioned history of not approving of people voting directly on issues.

Meantime, be advised that the Legislature gets to refer ballot proposals to you. One of those in November says a ballot issue henceforth wouldn't pass on a simple majority vote of the people, but only if 60 percent of the people were goofy.

Also be advised that another legislative referral proposes that legislators may call themselves into special session. For now, only the governor may call a special session then restrict the agenda to items of his choosing except by a legislative vote of two-thirds to suspend the rules.

So, the next time we have a pandemic and the governor comes out to a news conference and cites his or her emergency powers in declaring a mask mandate because people are dying and the hospitals are overrun, the Legislature could call itself to special session. It could pass a bill permitting all willing Arkansans to breathe hard on each other from close range as long as that was a virus, not THC, on their breath.

Surely you understand that a person's freedom is the important thing except when it comes to getting to vote on a proposal you signed a petition to get to vote on.

John Brummett, whose column appears regularly in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, is a member of the Arkansas Writers' Hall of Fame. Email him at [jbrummett@arkansasonline.com](mailto:jbrummett@arkansasonline.com). Read his [@jbrummett](https://twitter.com/jbrummett) Twitter feed.

## LETTERS

## Who would be brave?

I had never heard about Albert Einstein's statement that I read in my book—"When a Nation Forgets God" by Dr. Erwin W. Lutzer—that is quoted below:

"Being a lover of freedom, when the [Nazi] revolution came I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but no, the universities took refuge in silence. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers, whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks. I then addressed myself to the authors, to those who had passed themselves off as the intellectual guides of Germany, and among whom was frequently discussed the question of freedom and its place in

modern life. They are, in turn, very dumb.

"Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration for it because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly."

I, like Lutzer, acknowledge that some churches accepted Hitler's regime; however, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, of whom I am familiar, was one theologian who did not accept it. Which of today's prominent pastors would have the courage of Bonhoeffer? He was executed on the day that Germany surrendered.

JOHN J. EMMONS  
Hot Springs Village

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## LETTERS

## Let the people vote

Once again an unelected "board" denies the wishes of Arkansas voters. Twice in one day. First was the marijuana and then the casino amendment.

I got no dog in this fight as I haven't smoked pot or visited a casino in 55 years, but voters signed petitions by the hundreds of thousands to vote on this, and having a small appointed "board" deny their work for any reason is just not right. Stinks to high heaven. The people who signed those petitions did so with integrity. Who the hell are these "commissioners" to deny the people their rights as outlined by law?

This goes on in Russia all the time. It should not in Arkansas. The legislators should move to abolish this crap and let the people vote their will. Up or down, for better or worse, but let 'em vote. And stop playing high and mighty with their phony "board." The people knew or should have known what they were signing and about to vote on. We don't need Asa or his "board" to deny us on a technicality, or for any reason, the right to vote on a referendum. Period!

BILL KERR  
Maumelle

## Great strategic victory

Aug. 7 marks the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Guadalcanal, the beginning of America's counteroffensive against Japan in World War II. It would be a ferocious six-month struggle fought on land, sea, and in the air.

Guadalcanal might have been the Marines' finest hour, fighting almost

alone the first few months in a fetid jungle on short rations against a fanatical enemy. There were incredible blunders by American leaders, especially in the Navy, resulting in the loss of nearly half the Pacific Fleet, including two aircraft carriers. One night alone there were over 2,000 casualties.

Despite many tactical blunders nearly leading to disaster, the battle was in the end a great strategic victory. The supply route to the South Pacific was secured. The Japanese navy suffered irreversible losses. After losing two battleships in two nights, they decided to abandon the island, although it would take months more for them to withdraw all their troops. Most important, the Japanese strategy for victory was shown to be fatally flawed. They had calculated that by protracting the conflict, the Americans would be unwilling to accept prolonged casualties and abandon the Pacific War. However, the American fighting men would prove them wrong.

EDWARD TABLER  
Fayetteville

## Not how logic works

Edward Chevallier's recent letter perfectly illustrates the challenge of analytical thinking by many voters when he surmises that a well-known candidate in Georgia, Hershel Walker, simply due to his celebrity status, should easily defeat the incumbent candidate, Raphael Warnock, or the "bad guys" are obviously rigging the election.

His news source apparently doesn't show clips of Mr. Walker's

sad attempts to answer basic socioeconomic questions. His logic is like a former president, who lost, saying he was obviously the winner as his rallies drew more people. God help our country.

SCOTT SCHUH  
Little Rock

## Need to save wildlife

Wildlife continues to be killed to appease the livestock/agricultural industry; countless animals are killed by the very agencies designed to protect them; wildlife killing contests continue; and hunting on national refuges is allowed. None of this has anything to do with conservation or science. It is about greed and privatization of our public lands.

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has released its newest kill bills designed to wipe out even more wolves. This is a keystone species and states are driving them to extinction.

None of this is okay. People talk about saving our wildlife and lands for future generations. Something needs to happen now before it's gone within a few years.

MARY SHABBOTT  
Hot springs

## Knowledge is good

Wouldn't the country be better off if people holding and running for political office were required to take courses in biology and civics? Or a refresher course before holding or running for office?

MARLA J. GLADWIN  
North Little Rock