

On the subject of...

The hand that rocks the cradle

By Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

The Aberdeen Advocate

In the past two issues of *The Aberdeen Advocate*, we have taken a long, hard look at the misconduct of our municipal judge in her handling of cases involving her good friend and rumored campaign manager, Alternative Learning Center Principal Willie Mae Johnson. Today I want to consider how these contemptible acts by Judge Haynes have served to compromise the education of our children.

First of all, I would remind you that I have no children in the Aberdeen School District. My children are grown and gone and their children, thanks to God Almighty, are educated elsewhere. Nevertheless, because quality of education is one of the first critical components investigated by businesses seeking to locate to an area, I take the matter of educational excellence very seriously. We must offer an effective school system if we ever hope to attract new business and industry to our community.

Last week, in a field of four candidates, Mrs. Elizabeth Clay enjoyed some support in her bid for reelection to the school board and nearly won outright. Clay has served far too many years on our School Board and, if test scores and teacher morale are any indication of success, we can clearly see that mediocrity is her mantra.

Fortunately for us, the democratic process has given us an unexpected second chance to bring much-needed change to the Aberdeen School District. Because Clay did not win by a clear majority, there will be a runoff election between Clay and candidate Loretta Braylock.

Of course, voter apathy, which was evident in last week's election by the very low turn-out, Clay may yet manage to retain her seat on the board. Ugh.

Nevertheless, because I believe in the democratic process, I am perfectly willing to give the school board (with or without Elizabeth Clay) another chance to salvage our decaying educational system. And so, I issue this challenge:

Board members, in light of the recent criminal behaviors demonstrated by Alternative Learning Center Principal Willie Mae Johnson, will you please begin this new term by requesting her resignation?

As we all know, the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world and, for my part, I have no wish to see the minds of Aberdeen's children being influenced by people who demonstrate such total disregard for the law.

Johnson's initial misconduct was bad enough. Resisting arrest and disorderly conduct are behaviors most unbecoming an educator. If you then add her involvement in an attempted cover-up in which Municipal Judge Adrian Haynes and Municipal Court Clerk Sharon Edmond "misplaced" official court documents and, through a series of delaying tactics, were almost successful in their efforts to expunge Johnson's record before word of her shenanigans hit the streets, any reasonable human would be outraged. I certainly am—the word *livid* comes to mind.

To be sure, this is not the sort of woman we want teaching our children! It is even more disturbing to note that the children in the Alternative Learning Program have challenges enough already. They need sterling examples to emulate. This is impossible with Johnson at the helm!

Of course, your District continues to employ Lady B.

Garth in the wake of similarly disgraceful charges brought against her and her alderman husband after an ugly incident a few years back resulted in the (wrongful) termination of two Aberdeen police officers.

Since justice in the Garth fiasco was derailed by the same corrupt judicial system (only this time our Judge Haynes shrewdly disqualified herself and, instead, brought in a sympathetic judge from West Point who heard and dismissed the matter behind closed doors), it may be impossible for you to dispose of Garth's militant, blatantly racial influence from your system. Her time will come. Garth's hot head and sharp tongue will eventually land her in serious trouble again. Like Judge Haynes, her arrogance is sure to hang her in due time.

Meanwhile, we have a school district to run.

Can you please all take deep breaths and resolve to change the status quo? Will you please work to re-inspire the teachers who have grown weary and frustrated with a system which seems to reward bad teachers and punish the dedicated ones?

Won't you please welcome the eager parents who have joined our revitalized Parent Teachers Association and allow their voices to be heard in your decision-making processes?

Will you, for the sake of our children, use your power, influence and example to teach our children to welcome challenges and adversity? Will you teach them how to overcome personal and academic obstacles and take pride in not only the victory, but also in the courageous effort toward excellence?

Will you do your jobs?

Issues and Answers

This week's question:

Historically, Aberdeen's aldermen have been guilty of interfering with the daily operation of the several city departments, most especially the Police Department. In your administration, what role, if any, will the aldermen play in supervising city employees and directing department heads?



Ed Rayfield, Candidate for Alderman, Ward 2:

First of all I don't know of any other city where the aldermen run the operation of any department. It is up to the department heads to run the everyday operations of their department. It is the mayor's responsibility to oversee the department heads. It is the aldermen's responsibility to see that the department heads have the tools in place to run their departments efficiently. For if the departments are successful, then our city will be successful.

We must establish a good chain of command for our departments. The chain of

command provides the control and communications necessary to accomplish the mission. Each level in the chain is responsible for a lower level and accountable to all higher levels. The chain cannot work without loyalty to every level. With loyalty up and down the chain, it is a highly efficient and effective system for getting things done. The key principle is to resolve problems and seek answers at the lowest possible level.

If I am elected, I will work very hard with the other aldermen to make sure that each department head has the resources, human and otherwise, to run his/her department successfully. I will work with the mayor and the other aldermen to make sure that we have the best department heads in place. The key to our success is every one must work together.

Issues and Answers

In our continuing effort to assist the voters of Aberdeen in their quest for a new and more effective city government, we offer to all candidates (who are not incumbents) space in this publication to address questions and offer solutions to Aberdeen's problems. Candidates, if you wish to play along, please provide a typewritten answer of 150 words or fewer to the following question:

Our board of aldermen appoints three of the five sitting school board members. What criteria will you use to judge the qualifications of such appointments and, once appointed, how will you interact with the school board to ensure that excellence is restored to Aberdeen School District?

Deliver your answers to 112 East Washington Street, Aberdeen, or email them to - advocate@vikimason.com

Deadline 12 Noon, Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Congratulations Bulldogs!



You make us all proud!

Wading ashore in Aberdeen

By Contributing Editor R. T. Mason

During these last few weeks of drab, dreary, melancholia-inducing weather that we've been having, I've been giving a lot of thought (or what my uneducated brain perceives as such) to that famous story by Charles Dickens called *A Tale of Two Cities*. Particularly, I keep thinking of the line, "It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Here in Aberdeen, we have the makings of another "Tale of Two Cities." We have the Aberdeen that now is, and we have the Aberdeen that could be.

Friends, don't expect this article to be as "a light shining in the darkness," and don't expect me to shred any of our local politicians. That just isn't my style. Sorry. You see, it is my belief that our local politicians are not to blame for our current situation. Oh, they bear a bit of the responsibility, but, for the most part, the folks responsible for the Aberdeen Circus are those who stand before us every time we look in a mirror. Here's why.

Duty. Honor. Country. To a lot of us, those are mere words. To a member of our military services, those words are the very soul of their existence. Since Election Day is rapidly approaching, it is fitting that we take some time to contemplate what it means to be an American, what some of our countrymen have done for us and why those brave men waded ashore at Normandy, at Iwo Jima and at scores of beachheads around the world.

In his Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln said, "From these honored dead, we take increased devotion to that cause, which they have, thus far, so nobly advanced." Some called the Civil War, "Lincoln's War;" some called World War II, "Roosevelt's War;" some called the Korean War, "Truman's War;" some called the Vietnam War, "Johnson's War;" and some call the Iraq War, "Bush's War." To members of the American military, every war is a War For Freedom. Those young men, who waded ashore at Normandy, Iwo Jima, and many other beaches of the world, did not do so because they would be court-martialed if they didn't go. They

took those perilous steps through those bloody waters so that their families could be free. They knew, as other soldiers have known before and since them, that freedom for the people of other countries means an enduring freedom for America.

Every year, Viki and I make a short pilgrimage to either Vicksburg or Shiloh. Although we learn something with every trip, our purpose is not to really learn more about those battles, but rather to feel. These consecrated places, where many sacrificed their lives, are dotted with monuments emblazoned with names of places, units and individuals—an epitaph to the struggles of men and the valor of service. More so, though, these hallowed lands are places where one can feel freedom and to contemplate the true meaning of such. By walking that earth, once crawled over by so many, one can better feel and appreciate their sacrifices.

Why did those brave soldiers wade through those bloody waters of Normandy? Why do our military men and women endure war? They did it for us. They do it for us. It's that simple. Every member of our military takes an oath to "defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic." They don't take an oath to "uphold the laws of the United States." Our military is sworn to defend our Constitution because it is the source of our freedom. Laws do not grant freedoms. Law takes away freedom, but the Constitution was written to protect every individual against an oppressive government. Our Constitution is not merely words on paper, it is a bold concept of self-governance. It is the unique experience that IS America.

So, what does it mean to be an American? It doesn't mean that you get to live in the richest country the world has ever known. It doesn't mean that you can have a car for every member of your family. It doesn't mean that your children can have everything they want. It DOES mean that you have the responsibility of freedom. That responsibility entails going to vote in every election. It entails voting for the best person for the position and not just the person you know best. It entails giving feedback to your elected officials, letting them know when you support their efforts and letting them know when you don't.

Those drab, dreary, melancholia-inducing days of winter will soon be gone, and the Earth will spring forth with new life. Soon, also, Election Day will come to Aberdeen, and we will have a chance to begin shedding this dismal garb that is today's Aberdeen, and donning the bright colors of the Aberdeen that could be.

Becka's Burger Shack

North Hwy. 45

369-4275

Monday through Friday

10:00 a.m. — 8:00 p.m.



But, electing new leaders will only be a small step. Real change and a truly bright future for our city will only come when all of us can gaze into our mirrors and see the images of real Americans who can, and will, work together for our collective futures in the spirit of those revered authors of our Constitution and those "honored dead" who have fought to preserve it.

Last weekend, we had a School Board Election. All registered voters who live in the Aberdeen School District and who live outside the city limits of Aberdeen were eligible to vote in this election, but only about 350 voters cast ballots. I don't know how many people were eligible to vote in that election, but the number who actually voted was a pitiful showing. To those of you who did not cast a vote, I issue this challenge: go to any cemetery where there is a grave marker for a fallen soldier and try explaining to that soldier that you didn't go vote because you didn't believe your one vote could make any difference, or that you didn't go vote because you were busy enjoying your weekend. Tell that soldier that you are a good American who values his contribution to our freedom. Do your words sound a bit hollow? Do you not feel ridiculously shallow? You certainly should!

Aberdeen, we will soon be having a chance to "wade ashore" for freedom by casting our votes in the upcoming city elections. In the last several elections, most of us haven't cared enough about our responsibilities as Americans to cast a vote. We don't have to wade through bloody waters with bullets and shrapnel flying all around us. All we have to do is care enough to show up at the polls, but most of us don't even bother. Most of us haven't, most of us won't, and that's why we are to blame for the Aberdeen Circus.

While our military defends our Constitution against foreign enemies, can't we defend it here at home by simply fulfilling our obligations as Americans?



The Aberdeen Advocate

THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

112 East Washington Street
Aberdeen, Mississippi 39730
Phone: 662-369-0449

Email: AberdeenAdvocate@bellsouth.net
viki@vikimason.com

<http://vikimason.com>

BOY SCOUTS ABERDEEN TROOP 39

**PLEASE CALL SCOUT LEADERS TO
DONATE ANY USED OR NEW
COMPUTER/MONITOR/KEYBOARD
FRANK HERNDON 662-369-5947
MATT GILMORE 205-712-6618**