

Stuff your turkey, not your stockings

Published on Thursday, November 12, 2015 by Gail Finch

As the end of October comes to a close, the spooky Halloween month fades into November. November marks the beginning of two months of the living nightmare that is the Christmas season. Now, you may ask, why does the Christmas season start in November? Well to tell you the truth, it starts in early October, or even earlier. Why does it start so early? It's because people think they need to feel holiday cheer before it needs to be felt.

I wouldn't consider myself a Grinch, and I don't say bah-humbug to Christmas, not at all, but when a holiday takes more than a month for itself despite there being two holidays before it and, when Christmas stuff goes up before school even starts, I have a problem. It makes me uncomfortable when I see Christmas trees go up before summer even ends, or fall even begins.

The big holiday everyone knows and loves is also just a huge marketing campaign that earns businesses more money in the months of November and December than the rest of the year. The American version of Santa Claus literally originated from part of a Coca-Cola ad from the 30's. The big fat guy in a red suit lost his sainthood in order to become a marketing scheme to keep children in check so their parents would buy them more things for Christmas instead of giving them a lump of something that goes in a fireplace.

If you hate Black Friday and you work in retail, I'm sorry. I am oh, so sorry. Black Friday gets people killed guys. Bodily harm comes to people who shop at midnight in order to get a flat screen they won't be able to afford because their medical bills will be too high after they get trampled. Retail workers everywhere miss out on precious time with their family in order to pander to people who shop on Black Friday. They also endure bodily harm due to the fact that people are rude and don't really know when to stop fighting someone for a toy that will break in of ten minutes after it is given to a child on Christmas morning. The true meaning of Christmas has been long gone, thanks to this unofficial day of mourning for everyone's dignity.

Don't get me started on Christmas movies. Don't even. I do very much enjoy the animated classics and animated shorts such as the Charlie Brown Christmas Special, The Grinch (not the one with Jim Carrey), Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer and so forth, but the overly produced Christmas movie where a little girl or boy wants to find the true meaning of Christmas via getting everyone to sing a stupid Christmas carol from the 40's and everyone magically remembering what Christmas is all about, horribly inaccurate renditions of the baby Jesus' birth, or rom-coms about falling in love on Christmas.

Some may say that preparing for Christmas early means less stress when the big day arrives, and I agree. Preparing for Christmas is a good idea, but not seven months before December even comes up. Christmas stuff doesn't need to be in stores before the end of November, no matter how much you love the holiday. I can't tell you how many times I've gone into Hobby Lobby for something random like tie-dye, and I see Christmas trees. In July.

Leave all the Santas, elves, and nativity scenes in the attic for another month or so, or at least until after Thanksgiving. That's a holiday too. It's like Christmas without the presents and all of the other things that come along with the winter holiday. Stuff your turkey, not your stockings, and wait just a little bit longer for Christmas to come.

Getting buzzed in the 6160

Community creates connections, flourishes friendships in high school

Published on Wednesday, April 8, 2015 by Robert Morgan

Presidential elections, Olympic games, and leap years – four years seem to be a popular time for new things to come about. So much change happens in four years, yet we don't realize that these changes occur until we look around and see that we are only a couple of months away from graduation and think "how in the world did I end up here".

High school is such a difficult time, partly due to the changes that happen. One of the biggest changes that students face is within their own group of friends. Many students create new friendships through organizations, such as sports and within the fine arts, because of the countless hours they put in practicing and being on the road together, but what about those students who aren't in a sport or fine art that need to find community in high school?

Electives, core classes, and community-wide programs allow students to find that support group that they need to be successful and survive high school.

Although school can be stressful, students are required to take elective classes which can help students unwind during the school day. Electives allow students to get to know others who share similar passions and build strong bonds that are rooted in a common cause. The experiences I've had in these classes have built some of the strongest friendships I have that could never be replaced.

Journalism, an elective I've taken since junior year, has not only given me a creative outlet to develop my writing skills, it has also given me a way to connect with other students who love writing as well. These friendships have gone far beyond the walls of the 6160 (Mrs. Dominy's room) – there are several seniors who graduated last year whom I am still in touch with. Because our friendships were established early in the school year, I got to know these students well and the livelihood of our relationships show just how strong high school friendships can be.

Like any other elective, journalism allows me to see these friendships grow over time. We were a pretty quiet bunch at the beginning of the year because we hadn't broken the ice yet, but our dynamic has grown so much over the course of this year because we have become open to new friends and experiences within Mrs. Dominy's (Doms) room. A time that I'll never forget with these great friends is when we shaved my head for our fall final this past semester. I let my hair grow out for about half of that semester and, as finals week approached us, we decided we were going to shave my head. I was apprehensive about this to say the least, but Doms convinced me to do it.

As Doms put the tarp under a chair and plugged in the buzzers, the Norseman staff gathered around a table and prepared to watch Doms weedwhack my hair that was beginning to look like a bush. After about five minutes, the curls were reduced to a mere #1 buzzcut and what looked like a small dog on the floor of the 6160. This might not be the most conventional way that community is built within electives, but it did help develop our friendships within the staff and gave us a pretty cool story to tell at dinner that night.

The community that has been built while we have worked together has given us a safe haven on campus where we can be ourselves and not hide behind any walls like we might have, had we not developed such a strong bond. There are many areas where students can gain this sense of community on campus, but electives serve to let students build friendships based on common interest and allow the students to support each other throughout the

trials that may come in life.

In addition to electives, students can use their core classes to create strong and lasting friendships. Core classes can be tedious and stressful, but students can find solace in those classes through study groups and even something as simple as talking to their classmates about the struggles they are going through.

International Baccalaureate (IB) classes provide a way for me to plug into a tight-knit group of students who share similar interests. Due to the rigor of these courses, we are able to come together and help each other through the tough times. Whether we're working on presentations together in Google Docs or doing math homework at a coffee shop, we have found a way to connect through completing our assignments which, in turn, has anchored strong friendships. We have laughed, cried, and danced together – as we go through life, we find that our friendships are not limited to existing between 8:15 to 3:40, but they are lifelong connections that have given us wonderful stories to tell our children and grandchildren as they go through similar high school experiences.

The first time we had to do an internal assessment for our biology class junior year, the eight or so of us weren't really sure how to tackle the massive lab report. We seemed to call or text each other every 30 seconds because we didn't want to make a simple mistake and we needed someone to freak out with. We sat on the phone as we yelled at our computers for not loading fast enough and reprimanded ourselves for not doing this assignment earlier. Throughout this long night, we were able to stick together and push each other to finish the task at hand which is such a wonderful quality to friendships and community – you never let someone fall when you have such a strong bond.

Not only are activities within school a necessary aspect to a student's success, groups that students can plug into outside of school give them a way to establish long lasting friendships and find their true passions. Young Life – a ministry organization for high schoolers that is led by college students – has given me a platform to grow in my faith and interact with other Christians that I would not normally get the chance to meet. Ideally, each high school student that comes to Young Life meets a leader that they talk to and hang out with regularly. I never would have thought that the cool college student who wants to be a dentist someday would end up being my best friend who encourages me through the tough times and cheers with me in the good times.

The first time I met with my Young Life leader was for dinner at one of the best restaurants in town – Raising Canes. I was nervous about how dinner was going to go, what questions he was going to ask me, and if we were going to hit it off immediately or if the friendship was going to die right there in the booth. Despite these fears, I was excited to meet up with my leader and, thankfully, he was excited to meet with me too. We had a great conversation where he told me his testimony and we got to know each other really well. I have never had a friend as wonderful as my leader because we have both constantly pursued this friendship which is another important aspect to bring into the community – be intentional about friendships and you will see them thrive.

Within my leader's Bible study, I have gotten to know several guys that I go to school with that I had not had the chance to know beforehand. We were brought together due to a similar interest and, because we meet regularly outside of school, we are more open with each other and have understood the struggles that we are going through and what to pray for each other about. The connections I have made with my leader and other students have helped me carry on when times get tough and has shown me how sweet friendships are when they are rooted in something so much deeper than ourselves.

Walking with my Young Life leader through these past two years has shown me the importance of having someone in your life who can deal with serious matters, like holding you accountable to lifestyle changes that you want to make, and for the simple things like meeting you for dinner or sending funny texts. This friendship that I have with my leader has helped me see what living as a Christian man looks like and has shown me the beauty

in the vulnerability of a friendship – letting your peers know what is going on in your life so that they can help you, whether it be through prayer, encouragement, or simply talking through the situation, allows friendships to flourish and strengthens bonds.

Each of these activities – journalism, IB, and Young Life – have helped me find the nearest and dearest friends that I have to this day. After looking back on my experiences at Bryan High, I am thankful for the countless teachers and students who have been there for me to help me get through the tough times. Without them, I have no idea how I would have made it this far.

For anyone who is looking for a way to connect with others here on campus, talk to a teacher or counselor and find those outlets where you can plug into. Many clubs and organizations on campus have an open enrollment policy – such as Cord of 3 and class councils – so it's never too late to join them. In your classes, reach out to someone who you haven't talked to or, on the first day of classes next school year, meet someone who you haven't seen around before. Some of the strongest bonds that I've made with my closest friends have been made because someone had the courage to step out of their comfort zone and say "hello".

Water polo club resurfaces

Published on Thursday, May 7, 2015 by Jesse Baxter

Water polo has seen a resurgence this year after a six year absence with the formation of a club dedicated to playing and competing. Coaches Jessica Bailey and Travis Kiser oversaw the formation of the club and helped students pursue their interests in the sport.

“Swimming is more of an individual sport and I wanted the team to experience team bonding,” Bailey said. “As a coach, I am able to see leaders emerge in the group that I may not have noticed during the swim season and we are able to address communication, and bond more as a team. [The students] really push each other and rise to the occasion.”

Playing water polo helps the swimmers in the off season and strengthens the bond team members share.

“[My friends and I] joined water polo because it would be a good off season training,” junior Marco Gutierrez said. “We were arguing and complaining a lot but, towards the end, we really started to see teamwork within each other.”

Kiser was able to lend his experience to the team from playing while he was in high school and for the club team at Texas A&M.

“Water polo is a great team sport that builds leadership, physical fitness, and camaraderie amongst those who play,” Kiser said.

While many swimmers are on the team, there are no formal requirements outside of rudimentary swimming skills to be able to join the club.

“Knowing how to swim is definitely important, but so is knowing how to handle a ball and knowing the field,” Bailey said. “It is very similar to soccer and I have found that soccer players, football players, basketball players, and volleyball players can adapt easily to the sport.”

While there is already a boys team, more girls are needed to form a girls team that can compete in tournaments around the state.

“We did not have enough girls to have a girls team, however we did take some girls to the tournament and they were able to play with other teams for the experience,” Bailey said.

Although Bailey is leaving next year, Kiser will still work with the club to help them compete and improve their skills.

“[My plan is] to win,” Kiser said.

If students are interested in playing water polo, they can speak with Coach Milne or Coach Kiser.

Full court press

Athlete creates kits to combat cancer

Published on Monday, February 16, 2015 by Andy Ramirez

As a shooting guard for the lady Viking basketball team, senior Jordan Lopez-Rhodes knows how to reach a goal. However, Jordan's story doesn't start or end on the court. Since last year, Jordan and her family have been striving to reach a different goal: helping to ease the suffering of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. With that goal in mind, Jordan and her family began making care packages in order to counteract some of the harsher side effects of the treatment – a reality Jordan and her family know all too well.

“Over the past couple of years my dad and uncle were diagnosed with cancer and we lost a cousin to breast cancer,” Jordan's mother Sefra Lopez said. “This project hits home for us and I thought my kids may be able to connect with and learn to do something for another child or teenager their age.”

The family took their drive to fight cancer and began finding ways to practically touch lives.

“My mom saw the idea on Pinterest and said ‘okay’ lets start it and see how it goes,” Jordan said. “I wanted to know more, so I did a little research on my own about what would help with the symptoms of chemo.”

The family wanted to help by creating a project to be representative of their values as a family, and serve as a constant reminder of all they have to be thankful for.

“We call them JAKS Chemo Care Kits 4 Kids to symbolize that each kit is from our family to them. JAKS is a moniker that plays off our first names (Jordan, Amaia, Kennedy, and Sefra) that means family to us,” Mrs. Lopez said. “This project also helps to teach my kids to give back and be thankful for their good health. Our goal is to let these little superheroes fighting for their lives know that ‘No One Fights Alone’ and that we are here to support them.”

After researching the side effects of chemo, Jordan and her family began making the care packages, consisting of items such as hand sanitizers, non-fragrant lotions, and iTunes gift cards for teenage patients, all donated by members of the community.

“Although our family coordinates the JAKS Chemo Care Kits 4 Kids project, it really is a community project that we absolutely could not do without all of the generous donations,” Mrs. Lopez said. “I would really like to see the Bryan High student organizations and clubs get behind us and collect items as a group to donate.”

While it started out as a small family project, the care packages have grown over the past year to touch more lives locally, and in surrounding communities.

“Last year, our goal was 60 kits, but we ended up making 80, and the community was really for it,” Jordan said. “Because of last year's result, we wanted a bigger goal this year, which is to make 300 kits.”

As part of reaching their goal, Jordan and her family have called upon members of the community to, again, provide their support by donating to the cause.

“We're doing a drive on February 28 at the Silver Circle from 10 AM – 1 PM, and we have a Facebook webpage with a list of items that you can donate,” Jordan said. “Whatever people can donate will be helpful and I know the

kids will appreciate it as well.”

As part of their plans to continue the project, Jordan and her family have begun to discuss ways to help collect and produce more care kits in the future.

“Jordan and I have talked about making this something we do annually or even a couple of times a year, so our hope is to keep this project going,” Mrs. Lopez said. “Maybe even create an online site where people can create a chemo care kit by selecting the items they want to include and have it shipped to the individual.”

In addition to the Care Kids project, Jordan enjoys using her experiences to coach younger kids in her free time, helping them stay fit and express themselves in a positive manner.

“I’ve been coaching kids for the past three or four years,” Jordan said. “I like helping kids, and allowing sports to be their outlet to build their confidence.”

In spite of all of the activities, planning, and work Jordan has to do, she says that the leadership skills she learned in basketball, and the support of her family helps motivate her, however, the greatest recognition she receives is from the kids she helps.

“Last year we got a card saying that the kids loved [the kits] and all the supplies,” Jordan said. “They helped them cope with the side effects of the chemo and that’s really our goal. I’m glad they put a smile on kids faces. The best part is touching families lives, and having them reach out to us and saying thank you.”

Slam dunk

Senior secures success for basketball team

Published on Tuesday, March 10, 2015 by Robert Morgan

Getting the ball off the rebound, number 11 sweeps in and sprints down the court. The other end of the court is wide open and the Viking players do their best to protect him as he preps to make an Empire State Building sized jump. Senior Quaylon Newton gets up to the basket and makes a slam dunk with a force that could break the glass of the backboard. All the while the crowd is going wild as the Vikings take the lead in the last few seconds, and win the game.

“It is always good to have a veteran player on the team,” head basketball coach Christopher Jones said. “Being our most experienced player, Quaylon is playing his fourth season on varsity and has a good understanding of what is expected of him personally and on the team. He has had individual successes and is now experiencing well deserved team success.”

At 6’ 3”, Quaylon has been playing basketball since he was in 7th grade. Growing from a middle school player to a varsity shooting guard, Quaylon’s passion for basketball has developed from a recreational pastime to a full fledged career.

“Playing basketball started off as a relief for me,” Quaylon said. “[I used it as] a way to get away and get my mind off of certain things.”

Quaylon has dedicated most of his time in high school to playing basketball. In turn, this devotion has helped his relationships with his teammates strengthen and allowed them to work more cohesively.

“Everything is really good on our team,” Quaylon said. “They count on me and I count on them. It’s a great relationship.”

As one of the few seniors on varsity, Quaylon has helped carry the team into playoffs. With the success the team had this year – going 13-1 in district – Quaylon’s teammates have seen the benefits of having a strong vanguard for their team.

“He’s a good leader and we all look up to him because he’s the best player on the team,” senior basketball player KeeKee Johnson said. “If you need help, he’ll help you out. If you need to understand something, he can help explain it to you.”

Instead of participating in off-season conditioning this past fall, Quaylon played for the varsity football team. Although football and basketball are different sports, Quaylon saw consistency within both sports and this helped him strengthen his skills as a team player.

“There wasn’t a huge difference between playing football and playing basketball,” Quaylon said. “Some of the same guys I play basketball with were on the football team. That was my main point in going out and playing football – playing with them and being with my brothers.”

Quaylon’s talents have allowed him to set up his future. With the potential of a basketball career and several offers from colleges already on the table, Quaylon will be able to pursue his passion while building community with others around him.

“I’m letting basketball take me as far as it can,” Quaylon said. “Getting into college for free, maintaining my skills, and going through life while playing basketball is what I plan to do.”

With the success that the basketball team has achieved this year, Quaylon has been able to help those around him grow. His impact on the team has reaped positive effects thus far and those who have worked with players at the same skill level as Quaylon foresee an even greater impact he will have on the team.

“The impact of a player of Quaylons’ caliber is only felt after he is gone and you try to replace him with one player,” Jones said. “His physical presence along with his versatility and ability to make plays on both ends of the floor makes him invaluable and someone every coach wants on their roster.”