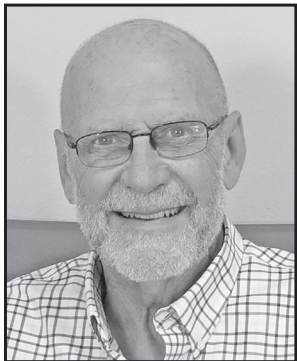


Opinion

Marilynne Robinson, Fiction Writer and Philosopher

By Curt Swarm, Empty Nest



I must be getting old. I find I can now sit down and read and enjoy high-brow intellectual, philosophical, God-consciousness books and get a lot of good out of them. It probably has something to do with me being ill with what might be a catastrophic illness and thinking about mortality. Don't get me wrong, if I go, I know where I'm going, and I'm at peace with that. If I stay it's because there is more work for me to do, people to help, God to serve.

There was a time, say 20 years ago, when I couldn't read an author like Joseph Campbell because he was just too over my head in comparative mythology, religion and big words.

When the pupil is ready the teacher will appear.

I was searching through my library looking for some books I had read quite some time ago, because I was considering writing a book sort of like the ones I was looking for. I finally found them. The author is Marilynne Robinson. She taught at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, and earned a Pulitzer Prize for "Gilead" back in 2005. "Gilead" is

a mythical town in Iowa close to Tabor. At the time, I couldn't even pronounce "Gilead." I was saying "Gi-lead." An educated friend told me the correct pronunciation, "Gilly-Ad." For a little background, Gilead is also referenced in the Bible as well as the book and movie, "The Handmaid's Tale," written by Margaret Atwood.

Anywho, Robinson's fictional books, which are some of the best fiction I've ever read, are "Gilead," "Jack," "Housekeeping," "Home," and "Lila." In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, a Robinson has won a slew of awards, like Seabiscuit and his blue ribbons. I had read "Gilead," "Housekeeping," and "Home" back when Robinson won the Pulitzer. So I read them again. "Jack" and "Lila" were new to me, so I read them also. I am stunned by her writing.

Then I happened to notice on my Kindle that Robinson also has a number of philosophical books. They include "Reading Genesis," "What Are We Doing Here? Essays," "Absence of Mind," "When I Was a Child I Read Books," "The Givenness of Things: Essays," "Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State and Nuclear Pollution," "Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth," and "Death of Adam." Robinson is the author of more than sixty books, and is also a well known public speaker, lecturer and teacher. She even teaches Sunday School. Can you imagine being in her class?

What the heck? Nothing

ventured nothing gained. With nervous fingers I selected several of the philosophical books, judging by their title. I chose "Reading Genesis," "What Are We Doing Here? Essays," and "Death of Adam." Wow, I was blown away. It's tough reading, but oh so educational and well written. How can a famous fiction writer also be an expert in philosophy and religion? It's a gift.

Here's some of her quotes I'll use as teasers: "humankind are a family. Ultimately they share a common descent, a common nature, a common enjoyment of God's grace in His covenant with all flesh." "man's free will depends not on his own free will and acts but was predestined from the beginning," "Biblical anthropology begins with an exalted conception of humanity, then ponders our errors and deficiencies and our capacities for grace and truth, within the world of meaningful freedom created for them by an omnipotent God," and "the soul of the poorest child is of equal dignity with the soul of Adam"

I'm kind of thinking that with all this downtime I'm having due to physical illness, I was led to these books. I needed exposure to the history of religion and God's plans for us, more so than what I was getting from daily Bible reading. Everything happens for a reason. I'm pleased that my mind is still sharp and creative, and I can be at peace with the world, come what may. Robinson's books help with that.

Register loved ones with new PPD program

The Pella Police Department has seen success with its new mental health unit. From that, the Loved Ones Safe and Together program has spawned to help children and those with medical conditions more easily be reunited if separated.

"It's a program where people can register a family member that maybe has dementia or autism or another medical condition that might cause them to wander or cause them to leave their primary care and maybe not know how to get

back to that primary care," Captain Paul Haase said during a recent episode of Espresso TV. "They're able to register that person, give us contact information for them, provide a picture, so that if somebody shows up in our lobby, or somebody calls us and says, 'Hey, there's, there's this person out here on the square, that maybe just something seems off,' it allows us to maybe, hopefully intervene and quickly reunite them - either with that family member or care facility."

At the time of our

interview, there were 10 families who had people registered for this program. Registration for this voluntary safety program is available on the department's website at www.cityofpella.com. Hard copies are available at the police department as well.

"It just kind of helps speed up that process - just by a little bit, but it does help," Haase continued. "Dealing with lost or missing people, certainly, time is of the essence."

County buildings to have simple names

The Marion County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to name two of its facilities as the North Annex and East Annex.

The buildings in question are located at 2003 North Lincoln (North) and 3014 East Main (East) both in Knoxville. Name changes were sought as different departments have shifted in

and out of them. "I say let's keep it simple," Supervisor Steve McCombs said. Supervisor Jim Mueller agreed.

"I'm a big proponent of 'east' and 'north,'" Mueller said.

The County's former annex building on Sixth Street in Knoxville was sold months ago.

Facilities Manager Chris Nesteby reported that the organization that purchased and renovated the building is now defunct, and he has struggled to organize the removal of the words "Marion County Annex" from its outdoor façade. Nesteby said he and his team could remove it, but they do not want to trespass.

Opioid Committee named

A resolution was passed by the Marion County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday to establish the membership of a new committee tasked with recommending use of money the County received via an opioid settlement.

Membership of the committee will include Supervisor Jim Mueller, County Attorney Jared Harmon, as well as representatives from Pella Regional Health Center,

Knoxville Hospital and Clinics, Marion County Public Health and the Sheriff's Office. A decision of how to spend any settlement funds will be left to the Board of Supervisors. In other board action, the supervisors approved resolutions to allow for property tax exemptions, including Homestead, Military, Family Farm, Disabled Veteran and Homestead 65 and Over.

City workers would be responsible for dog park

At the recent Pella City Council budget discussion, Parks Manager Chandler Nunnikhoven provided an update on the proposed dog park. The park would be located outside city limits to land controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Lake Red Rock.

"I work for the citizens of Pella. What they want me to do, I'll do," Nunnikhoven said. As of the time of the

presentation, the plan was to have City staff perform maintenance at the park.

Council members had a different understanding when they had agreed to move forward with the new park at the Pella Dog Park Association's request. The Pella Dog Park Association will reportedly dissolve when the park is completely installed.

"We were the money, they

were the muscle," Councilor Lynn Branderhorst said.

"That was my understanding, too," City Administrator Mike Nardini said.

Nunnikhoven was asked to get in writing what the Corps intends to do for the park to see if additional assistance from the City would be necessary. A council policy and planning meeting will follow.

Jim Graham Adventure Fund Exceeds \$240,000 to Support Study Abroad

The Jim Graham Adventure Fund for Off Campus Travel, an initiative envisioned by two Central College alumni and Board of Trustee members, reached \$240,240 within its first months and will support faculty-led off-campus programs and international study opportunities.

Dan De Cook, a 1995 Central graduate and CEO of Heritage Lace, and Shannan Mattiace, a 1990 Central graduate and professor of political science at Allegheny College, wanted to honor Jim Graham, former academic dean and longtime professor of English at Central. They worked closely with Kathy Cashen Thompson, a 1987 Central graduate and senior major gifts officer for Central, while Graham was living.

Since Graham's passing on February 24, 2025, the account has grown with memorials. The fund provides ongoing support for students participating in off-campus experiences. With travel and program costs rising, growing the endowment is more important than ever to expand opportunities for Central students.

"When you study abroad, you really see the variety

of human experiences," Mattiace says. "As alumni who benefited from Central's study abroad program, we believe in the power and importance of international study. We need to allow our current students to have the same experience."

Graham had served Central for 48 years, including 13 years as academic dean in the 1960s and early 1970s. He was also an associate professor of English and coached women's tennis and volleyball. As dean, Graham oversaw the launch of Central's study abroad programs, a milestone in the college's commitment to international education. His wife, Martha Betancourt, associate professor emerita of Spanish, welcomed dozens of Spanish language assistants to campus and promoted language and literature studies.

Mattiace, who was recruited by Graham to play tennis at Central, remembers his unwavering support for students.

"Whether in the classroom guiding students through American literature, on the court teaching life lessons through tennis or hosting students during Spanish Bowl competitions, Professor Graham offered a singular point of view,

always accompanied by a sonorous laugh and wry sense of humor," Mattiace says.

Fundraising efforts continue to expand the endowment. De Cook encourages alumni to contribute, emphasizing the impact of international study.

"Studying abroad changed my life, to be honest," he says. "The world is so diverse, so different, and yet so small in so many ways. It challenges and encourages your own beliefs and just develops you as a human being. It shaped and built who I am today."

De Cook, Mattiace and Thompson hope to grow the fund so more students can have these life-changing opportunities.

"We felt passionate about establishing this fund to give more students the opportunity to have this transformative experience," De Cook says.

Support the legacy of Graham by making a gift at central.edu/give or by calling 641-628-5154.

A Celebration of Life for Graham will be 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 31, Boat, Moore, Weller Rooms, Maytag Student Center on Central's campus.

City Attorney won't be at every meeting

By Steve Woodhouse
Knoxville's new City Attorney is not on retainer and will not attend every city council meeting. Ahlers and Cooney will send an attorney to meetings when one has specifically been requested to do so, which may save taxpayer money.

At Monday's regular council meeting, a statement was read by Mayor Brian Hatch, from the City Attorney, to discourage the council from

commenting on a matter brought before them.

Jane and Pat Stockton were at Monday's meeting to discuss an ambulance billing discrepancy. According to Jane, the couple needed ambulance services during a time in which the City was changing billers.

Had everything been in place, the City's agreement with Wellmark would have likely allowed ambulance transportation from

Knoxville to an Iowa City hospital to be covered for the couple. Instead, they have received statements from Knoxville Fire/Rescue at least twice for an outstanding balance of over \$900.

"We have been advised to not make any comments," Hatch said. He added when the Stocktons' presentation was concluded, "We appreciate your comments, we appreciate you being here."

Knoxville updates zoning ordinances

By Steve Woodhouse
A project that began over a year ago came to a close at Monday's regular Knoxville City Council meeting.

Economic Development Director Glenn Lyons and Zoning Administrator Nathan Parch have spent months finding ways to improve the City's zoning regulations – many of which

had not been updated since the 1960s. Lyons stated to the council that the goal was the "modernization, simplification and flexibility" of the code.

"We've made a variety of changes," Parch said.

For years, Knoxville had been labeled as a community in which City Hall made improvements

and development difficult. Parch said for those who had that impression, they have worked to address that.

In separate actions, the council approved five updated ordinances unanimously. All of these updated ordinances can be read in today's Legal Notices.

School Board approves master contract

In a one-minute special Knoxville School Board meeting Wednesday night, April 2, a new master contract with the Knoxville Education Association was approved. The new contract increases the salary base by

\$200 and the TSS base by \$212. KEA President Matt Heston had no comment, other than the negotiations went smoothly and the union is thankful for the support. Business Manager Craig Mobley said the

decision allows the board to send out contracts to lock in the certified teaching staff for next year. Teachers had 21 days to sign their individual contracts after the master contract's approval.

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