



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic

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A *CDA Press* editorial about the value of reading (Sunday, March 17, 2019) brought back memories of conversations I had with my mother many years ago. Our talk was about her grade school years as a student in a Texas Catholic girl's school. Even though she was reared as a Catholic, her adult years (thus, my youth) were spent as a Southern Baptist.

Notwithstanding this unusual legacy, in her descriptions of her education, she mentioned that some of her brothers and sisters attended public, non-religious schools. She said she and her siblings received similar educations; that they would often exchange thoughts on what they were learning in their schools.

I was stuck by the rigor and the demanding requirements in the curriculum of her and her siblings. Regarding reading and the study of grammar, I told my mother her grade school syllabus was akin to my high school classes. Some of her arithmetic questions would be a challenge to students in high school.

The editorial also led me to re-read a report sponsored by the Smokey Valley Genealogical Society (located in Salina, Kansas). A few days ago, it was sent to me by my sister-in-law. The report describes a final exam for 8th graders in an 1895 Salina school. The exam took five hours to complete!...about the same amount of time it took me to complete the final exam to obtain my master's degree in computer systems at American University. The report reminds me of some of my mother's explanations of her grade school times.

Here are four questions that were on the grade school exam. Read them as a test and see how you fare on your answers:

Name the parts of speech and define those that have no modifications.

Define verse, stanza, and paragraph.

Define case; illustrate each case.

Give the rules for principal marks of punctuation.

I attempted answering the questions on this exam. I did not do very well. How about you?

Although she was not as specific in citing examples such as those above, my mother led me to believe her grade school education was equally rigorous. The arithmetic questions on the Salina 8th grade exam are not at my 1950's high school level, but some of them required me to actually think.

The Black family treasures copies of a huge collection of letters exchanged during the American Civil War between our forefathers of many generations ago. In 1936, one of my relatives took on the task of organizing, copying, and saving them. In 1972, another relative typed the hand-written copies.

We now have an extraordinary collection of documents that capture the beauty of the written word and the fascination of reading it. I am amazed each time I go through these letters. The care they employed with what and how they wrote; their expansive writing style; the articulate way they expressed their thoughts to each other. In today's abbreviated, fast-paced world of texting, the letters represent a language oasis.

My mother was a great story teller. She would hold our family spellbound for hours in our living room as she weaved nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs into a linguistic tapestry of beauty. The articulate nature of her narratives reflected a woman who was well-versed in the use

of the English language. This gift did not come from the absence of reading in her life. Each day, she read. After rearing six boys in the harsh cattle ranching landscape of New Mexico, she used her rare leisure time to read and tell stories to her boys.

The *CDA Press* editorial presents arguments why we should not abandon reading. The piece lists several reasons why reading is good for our health. The editorial struck home with me, especially as I observe our Twittering society and the emphasis on video games and TV.

I do not use social media. I was heartened to learn my love of reading instead of watching TV incessantly or Twittering away my life might actually prolong my life.

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My parents did not allow a television set in their home until their children had grown-up and moved away. On my first visit from college, I discovered my father sitting in the living room watching “Friday Night at the Fights” on a new television set.

Holly and I, with pup, Lilli, live in Coeur d’ Alene...along with three TVs. The three of us have our own exclusive television set. I prefer crime shows; Holly likes home improvement programs; Milli’s focus is on the Lassie and Old Yeller classics.

With the exception of Milli, this family reads every day. And I am certain we and our overall cognizance of our world are the better for it. And giving Milli some credit, she dives into any stray newspaper lying on the floor...but not with her head.