

The day the power went out all over town

It was an interesting experience.

My experience was a very positive one.

As soon as I came out of Target, by way of the side street that leads toward the former Corral West, I noticed at the first intersection, at Dell Range, that the lights were out. Not working. Not flashing. Out.

In fact, as I cautiously cleared intersection after intersection without incident, I was already thinking about writing a story in praise of how drivers were dealing with what could have been a very dangerous adventure at some busy intersections.

That's not that unusual in town so I made the right turn and proceeded westerly, heading eventually to the southside.

Had motorists not followed the rules of the road, there would have been countless accidents, great property damage and injuries. Because this was immediately after the lights went out, no intersection had police directing traffic. None.

Each intersection along the way was without working signal lights. And, generally, there were a number of vehicles queued up at each intersection. The first really crowded intersection was the three-way at Dell Range and Yellowstone.

I thought it was remarkable. I was surprised and relieved to witness that drivers actually knew the rule for advancing through an intersection when the lights are not working. It was just before 1:00 that afternoon and traffic was fairly heavy in some places. At intersections such as Dell Range and Yellowstone, Yellowstone and Central, Central and Pershing, Pioneer and 20th and Snyder and W. Lincolnway, had drivers been oblivious to the fact that the lights weren't working or ignorant to the rules of the road, there would have been mayhem. There wasn't.

I proceeded toward downtown on Central, to Pershing, then right to Pioneer, left on Pioneer to 20th, right to Snyder, left to W. Lincolnway, right to Ames and then to the southside where I live.

I have read anonymous posts on the WTE forum wherein they wrote that drivers were undisciplined and unaware of the proper behavior when traffic lights are not working. And I was told by a visiting friend that he had watched, I think he said 16, vehicles (primarily pickups and SUVs) approach intersections at a high rate of speed and proceed through them without yielding to anyone. What I saw were people overly cautious if anything.

It is possible that others had different experiences. I didn't and as readers have come to know, I am quick to criticize when criticism is warranted. It wasn't that day. Drivers did a marvelous job. Kudos.

The balloon caper

Fort Collins, Colorado, of all places.

At the time this is being written, things are beginning to look pretty dark for the publicity hungry father with the weird flying saucer Jiffy Pop floating nightmare.

If a person were sitting around trying to think of a way to pull off a stunt with a flying device that looks like a shallow aluminum bowl, how could they conclude that including another person in the plan would work - especially when the other person was a child? Three of them, in fact. *"Look, Falcon, Daddy needs you to crawl onto the rafters in the garage and hide until we finally tell you to come down. Then, you have to say you went up there because Daddy yelled at you and say no more. Got it? Even when we go to New York for the Today Show and Larry King Live, you stick with the story. Got it?"*

How desperate does a guy have to be for publicity that he would enlist a six year-old precocious little boy? And, had he forgotten that he and a friend had concocted such a plan to elicit publicity?

It takes three stern questions to get a six year-old to come clean. What a sap!

This stunt cost the public a ton of money that won't be recoverable from a couple whose only brushes with fame were two appearances on the television show *Wife Swap*. And what a piece of work that is.

What vote fraud?

I do read the letters to the editor area of the daily newspaper. Or at least glance at the headline and decide whether I want to go further.

Political campaigns do birth poor losers. Supporters find all kinds of reasons their candidate lost. Imagined, usually.

A recent letter was more interesting for its ending than its beginning. I know the writer so it didn't surprise when his words were over the top. But, this time, an accusation hit close to home.

In Bill Winney's '08 campaign, of which I was campaign manager, we were outspent 14 to 1 by Mark Gordon and 5 to 1 by Cynthia Lummis. But, they did nothing illegal. Gordon could have spent \$15 million of his family wealth had he wanted to. There are no limits on spending personal money in campaigns. Same with Cynthia. She invested a lot of her own money into her campaign. And, we lost. Badly. It hurt. It hurts like hell to lose. I much prefer winning and won't get involved in a campaign if I don't think the candidate can win.

He was lamenting how the county residents *can't* vote for city candidates (they don't *live* in the city) and city residents *can* vote for county offices (because we *do* also live in the county), and he took this job:

"There was an honest councilman, in my opinion, but he was cheated out of office by vote (sic) fraud."

But, "cheating" someone out of office? "Vote fraud?" That did not happen. Amber defeated Pete. It wasn't close. She defeated Jimmy and Karl, too. And the fact that she was the first candidate to ever finish fourth in the primary and first in the general election was the result of voters taking to her candidacy. Not cheating. Not fraud. It was bound to happen. The general election confirmed what I determined after the primary election, "this girl (sorry, Amber, you're a girl to someone my age) can win." We had a plan and it worked. It isn't the first campaign I've been a part of in this town that won.

Whoa, Nellie!

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

When I challenged the letter writer, the best he could come up with was his belief that the "general public" agreed with his conclusion - cheating and vote fraud. My "general public" did not. Just like with Jack Spiker in 2000, when so many of the so-called "experts" gave him no chance, I would have bet his store on his winning. The "general public" had come around to his side just as voters did to Amber Ash this past November.

Obviously, he was referring to Pete Laybourn because Pete was the only incumbent not re-elected.

Well, pilgrim, to allege that Pete lost his race because of vote[r] fraud did not escape my watchful eye.

"Cheated out of office?"

Amber did not outspend her opponents. She did not out-advertise her opponents. She did not appear on radio and ran no television commercials (even though she is much more attractive than any of the guys). She had no billboards and had few volunteers (I don't do door-to-door). She was not endorsed by the WT-E. But she still won the election. Decisively.

So, I contacted the letter writer by e-mail and asked him what proof or evidence he had (has) that there was voter fraud.

Of course he has none.

I thought the WT-E wasn't supposed to print libelous letters or ones wherein the writer couldn't prove outlandish claims. They do print 'em, it appears.

I know just enough about computers to produce this publication. I wouldn't know how to hack into Diebold voting machines and direct votes toward one candidate or away from another. I don't know how to rig the machines to count paper ballots wrong. So, I don't know how to "cheat" anyone out of or into office. And, on this subject, I think Amber knows even less than I do. If that is possible.

Let me remind readers that I editorially supported Amber Ash in the last Ward 1 city council election. I "coached" her to some extent, helped her with design and purchase of the few materials she used in her campaign, contributed to her campaign, and otherwise tried to help her get elected. As was said when I publicly endorsed her candidacy on these pages last October, my action was a positive one in her favor, not a negative one directed at Pete Laybourn or Jimmy Valdez, the two incumbents in the race.

And, in the campaign, the themes were Amber's education and successes at a very young age, not weaknesses of other candidates in the race. One of the first campaign statements was something like, "Yes, I'm young. But I'm prepared to serve." I mean you could look at her and know right off that she wasn't as old as any of the two incumbents in the field. There was no point in trying to run away from her youth. It was too obvious.

"Vote fraud" is a serious allegation. It is not like saying someone was "lucky" or "in the right place at the right time." It suggests criminal activity. A conspiracy. Unless the writer can produce some proof of his allegation, he needs to be careful with his words. The WT-E was reckless enough to print a goofy assertion like that, and they should be ashamed.

Her youth, her gender, her education, her success in her career, and other accomplishments at a very young age, as well as actually living on the southside and the written positions she articulated from the outset were reasons I decided to offer my assistance. She accepted and her campaign and candidacy prevailed.

Amber won the election because voters overwhelmingly filled in the oval next to her name. No cheating, no voter fraud.

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