

Realities Of Mental Health

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

I've recently gone back to school.

Seven years ago, I graduated from a four-year university with a bachelor's in agriculture and journalism. Now, I'm taking psychology and human services classes at a community college in preparation for a second career in social work.

Why the big change? In April, inexplicably, I found myself spiraling down into a dark depression after years of enjoying a high-flying career as a freelance journalist. I was used to working 40-60 hours a week. I was writing books-worth of articles and producing newsletters at an astounding rate. And then it stopped. And not only that, but everything stopped — taking care of a husband, kids, house, farm, myself.

At first, I thought I was having writer's block that had spilled over into other areas. It quickly became clear, though, that I had burnout — and no simple burnout, but a career-off-the-edge-of-the-race-track, somersault-through-the-area, land-in-a-pile-and-explode crash-and-burn kind of burnout.

What to do ... Going to a mental health practitioner was the last thing I was willing to do, because you know — there's a stigma about that. Wouldn't people think I was crazy? So, I went to my family doctor, and she put me on an antidepressant (gasp, another thing I thought I'd never do) and sent me to a therapist, anyway.

I'm happy to report that after two months, I'm feeling much better. But I wonder now, how many of you are feeling OK? Especially after last winter, and the spring planting season and calving and lambing that we just had?

Feeling down and out for a few days, even a couple weeks, is reasonable, especially when it seems like something goes wrong, it seems, back to back for several weeks. But feeling tired and not your normal self for a couple weeks, months, years — now, admit it, a trip to your family doctor may be in order.

I know it's hard to get yourself to go. Trust me! But you will feel so much better, and your marriage and family and friend relationships, maybe even your profession, can be saved. Isn't it worse for people to see you in a continual grumpy (in men especially, depression comes out as quick temper) or sad mood, than to try a small dose of drugs or go and talk to a therapist?

For some people, the money is the issue, but it's about what you put as a priority in your life, and if we put so much attention into our physical health, I think that mental health — after all, we're talking about a brain, our ability to think — is just as, or even more, important. Sanity shouldn't depend upon a price tag, if you think about it.

Or, maybe you think you should be able to handle your moods on your own. Yeah, I used to think this, too. But just as we can't always take care of our physical health, it's the same with mental health — especially since mental health does have a physical, biological root. That's right, your sad mood became depression because of a physical health reason, so it stands to reason, that you'd seek out medication to right that physical imbalance, just as you take an antibiotic for a bacterial throat infection.

Several years ago, I wrote an article for the *Press & Dakotan* on the quality of mental health care in rural America. I spoke with the Center for Rural Affairs as the main source for the article, and the point was that while there are less mental health care practitioners in rural areas, the main point is that people do not speak up about their need for mental health care and others do not speak up (or perhaps don't recognize the signs) that their loved one or neighbor may need referral to mental health support.

So, if you're reading this article, you may be at a crossroads. Perhaps there's a reason why God (or fate) put this column in front of you. How has your life been treating you lately? Are you happy most days? How do you react to stress — when your tractor broke down again, did you take it in stride or did you cuss and yell like usual? Agriculture is a stressful occupation — it's inherent that it may take it's toll on your mental health-wise. After all, much of this profession's success is dependent on the weather, and we all know how predictable and reliable that aspect is — "If you don't like the weather, just wait a moment and it'll change."

Maybe it's time you made a change in your life, give yourself a break, and visit your family doctor to talk about what's been bugging you lately. You will probably feel better just taking that step, and a lot better once you get some real help.

Church Project Resurrects Memories

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
P&D Correspondent

ST. JAMES, Neb. — It's been a rainy week in northeast Nebraska but that hasn't stopped the ambitious efforts of the Seiler Brothers of Sioux City, Iowa, who are working at the St. James Marketplace in St. James, Neb.

The Marketplace has been a center for rural vendors for several years because of the vision of five local farm wives. They negotiated an agreement with the Omaha Archdiocese to purchase the St. Philip & James Catholic School building and created an area meeting place. The parish church had been closed and demolished but the area residents did not want to lose the country connection between their neighbors, family and friends.

The five women started refurbishing rooms in the old mission schoolhouse to host vendors of all venues: baking, wood-working, jelly making, soap making, candle making, quilts and blankets, hand towels and crafty what-knots.

The vision has far exceeded any dreams the dedicated organizers ever dreamt.

From Saturday, June 5, to Monday, June 14, an old-fashioned barn-raising was cooking at the Marketplace thanks to the Seiler Brothers, whose mother attended the parochial school back in the 1920s.

Margaret Dumar Seiler still has fond memories of her early school days and passed the many of them on to family members who come back to the area for weddings and reunions, constantly renewing their roots in northern Cedar County. The area is near and dear to them, and lots of fun times fill their memories, too.



PHOTO: LINDA WUEBBEN
Laborers work to scrape a portion of the old St. Philip & James Catholic School building near St. James, Neb. The building has been purchased by the St. James Marketplace and will be converted into a meeting place.

In her memories, Seiler was certain her father paid the construction of a side altar when the St. Philip & James Catholic Church was built many years ago. In her mind, she thought his name had been written on the back of the altar, but when the church was closed 10 years ago and the inside furnishings

and sacred items auctioned, no writing could be found. Still, Seiler and her family keep their ties to St. James strong.

Through the years, Dave and Roger Seiler have watched the treasured schoolhouse deteriorate, and this past winter proposed a fundraiser to begin refurbishing

the exterior of the old building. They sent out 360 letters to the alumni of the old school and former parishioners. The response was astounding and plans for paint and repair were made.

No one really remembers how long it has been since the building was last painted and it definitely is showing its age. The Marketplace ladies — Mary Rose Pinkelman, Jeanette Pinkelman, Violet Pinkelman, Louise Guy and Vickie Koch — like the way it looks so it will be painted in the same colors.

"You will definitely see the difference when you drive up," said Violet Pinkelman.

Some broken sidewalks will also be taken out so walking around the schoolhouse will be easier and safer.

As the rainy week wore on and the exterior painting could not be started, the Seilers and crew started painting areas inside the building that the Marketplace women were not able to get to over the years. Two entryways on the north and side of the schoolhouse, with those ceilings that reached to the sky, were tackled and a back room that had previously been used for storage was cleaned out and freshened up.

The Seiler crew was determined to paint yet this week, and when they are finished, they believe there will still be money left from the donations to work on other areas of renovation for the old building.

The guarantee for the coating spread on the roof 10 years ago is running out and hail damage last summer is starting to show some leaky spots. When the women gaze up at the skylight in the main area of the schoolhouse covered up so many years ago because it leaked, they wish for one more dream: to restore that open ceiling.

The Time To Scout For Grasshoppers Is Now, Experts Say

BROOKINGS — Several western South Dakota counties have reported grasshopper hatchings and producers in these areas are reminded to start scouting for these pests.

That's according to South Dakota Cooperative Extension Entomologist Mike Catangui, who said grasshopper scouting efforts by the Extension Service, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, and the USDA continue, and that producers may want to prepare for possible control options if scouting dictates they are necessary.

"The hatch has started in earnest in counties including Haakon, northern Jackson, Fall River and elsewhere," Catangui said. "We are receiving reports from a number of counties, from our Extension offices,

and from producers." Catangui said the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service and the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in Pierre are collaborating on the effort to keep producers informed not only of grasshopper hatchings, but also of their possible options in terms of control.

Bruce Helbig, South Dakota Plant Health Director with the USDA, said he and his staff, including Amy Mesman, domestic program coordinator with APHIS, have hosted meetings with and fielded calls from producers who are reporting grasshoppers on rangeland.

"What we found in our meetings is that our surveys of pasture and rangeland did not

show high numbers of grasshoppers," Helbig said. "Producers who reported unusually high numbers of grasshoppers found most of them near water, along creek beds, and near rivers. Those types of hot spots are not uncommon."

Mesman said the main idea the USDA shared with producers was to keep eyes on their pastures. "We have great grass out there this year, due to good moisture, so it's not unlikely that we'll see more grasshoppers," Mesman said. "Their numbers may be a little higher than normal, but so too is the grass abundance, so in the end, it may be less of a threat to the grazing potential of pasture."

Helbig said his service's primary role is to

assist in the monitoring and control of insect pests on rangeland. He said he appreciates the role of the Extension Service because they can assist the owners of smaller acreages and crop producers to better address control options and strategies for their individual situations.

The South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service has created a statewide grasshopper outbreak preparedness group that will host a conference call on June 25 to assess the current grasshopper conditions in the state. Contact your county Extension office for more information on how to take part. All producers, crop scouts, and other parties with vested interests in the control of grasshoppers are encouraged to participate.

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