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**Mockery of justice:** Why is Carthage mortician Bernie Tiede, who killed his 81-year-old companion, getting such special treatment? Tiede, serving a life sentence, was portrayed in the 2012 film *Bernie*. Now he's been released into the filmmaker's custody after a Texas judge heard testimony that he was sexually abused as a child and this played into the killing of the verbally abusive Marjorie Nugent. I want judges to weigh extenuating circumstances when meting out punishment. But there are hundreds of other cases that deserved to be placed ahead of Tiede's if, all of a sudden, we're going to go back and retry the facts that preceded serious acts like the one he committed.

Tod Robberson, editorial board member



**Bad business plan:** The city's equestrian center, known as the Texas Horse Park, is shaping up nicely despite the fact that City Hall is basically going it alone on building the project. But the city has to rethink the decision to partner up with Wayne Kirk, a convicted horse abuser. Council member Scott Griggs called the deal with Kirk shameful, which it is. Council members Carolyn Davis and Vonciel Hill jumped to Kirk's defense, blaming an unnamed staff member at Kirk's ranch for the animal's poor condition. So did Kirk manage his property so poorly that he had no idea the animals in his care were badly underweight? Is that who we want managing a piece of our city's horse park?

Rudolph Bush, editorial board member

# Shell of a former self

Gordon Keith explores the paths and treasures of mothers

I was 6 years old when my heart broke for the first time. I was walking away from squealing kids who weren't my friends. Recess, especially for first-graders, should be the day's highlight, but for me it was a painful stretch where every second was two seconds too long.

Moving to a new town in the middle of my first school year was tough. Tougher than my mother advertised.

"You'll make new friends and have lots of fun," she said. Kiss on the nose. I took her at her word. But as that first week bled into the second and my recesses remained unsweaty and wordless, I doubted her judgment and, worse, her honesty. I'd harbored that fatal assumption, common with lavished kids, that the world outside the nest is much like the world inside. It never occurred to me that I would be invisible or that love outside had to be earned.

I shuffled along the pine straw path where the schoolyard edged into the woods with a loneliness so blistering I thought I couldn't endure it. I kept my eyes down. When you're young and sad, you learn the ground.

"I have something for you," I said to my mom after school. I handed her an eastern oyster shell, common to the Gulf Coast, but so uncommon in my experience that I thought it was treasure.

My chattiness overtook me. I explained all the symbolism in the shell. How the shape represented my small foot. How the dark muscle scar was my big toe. How the narrow part where the shell trailed off into a channel of ridges represented the lonesome path I was on when I found it.

"It's beautiful," she said. "What is this gift for?"

"Because I miss you so, so, so, so much." She cried slow tears I misunderstood for years.

Motherhood is not a thankless job. Most of us thank our mothers in small deeds when we're young and in easy words when we're old. But the immeasurable depth of motherhood is only felt when you enter the bittersweet suffering of parenting. A caring parent understands the crushing impotence of watching your child suffer the world. Those paths you have to let



Laurel Eden

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him go down alone.

I don't know what makes one woman become a good mother and another one of similar circumstance a bad one, but I do know that every bad mother thinks she's a good one and every good one thinks she wasn't good enough. When I look back over my life, I'm ashamed of the adolescent that didn't appreciate the sacrifice of the dark-haired

woman who was once my world.

Six months ago, just before Halloween, my phone buzzed with my mother's ID. I answered nervously, customary since my father's health has become more fragile.

"Hey, son. Where are you?" She had that layered tone. Ominous bulk in a carefree envelope.

"A salvage yard. Looking for old light fixtures. Why?"

"Well, I just wanted you to know that I went in for a CT scan today. And it looks like I probably have cancer. I didn't want to tell you until I knew something."

Sometimes, a boy harbors the fatal assumption that the world cannot exist without the mother who created it.

"I'm so sorry, baby," she said. "I'm so sorry to put you through this. We'll find out more after a PET scan. Then we can choose the best path after that."

That night, on my couch, I cried longer and louder than I have since I could count birthdays without reusing fingers.

My mother has responded well to treatment, but she is thin, weaker-voiced and concerned with loose ends.

When I was planning a Mother's Day column, I went to my mom's house to ask easy questions: What was the hardest thing about motherhood? What was the easiest? What is your favorite age? Did you always want to be a mother?

Then I asked her, of all the artwork and flotsam we've given her over the years, what is she most sentimental about?

She hobbled back to her vanity and came back into the room and gave me an eastern oyster shell.

"This."

"Why?"

"Because you hurt so much and I couldn't fix it."

She asked me to keep the shell after she was gone. I agreed. But someday I will be gone and the shell will go back to being just another oyster shell dumped in a landfill or the woods. Maybe some other boy or girl will find it. They might even think it's treasure, but they will never know the loneliness that shell represented to the boy who lost his mother once and is unready to lose her again.

The woman who clutched a rough shell to her breast and cried slow tears that I now understand.



Gordon Keith and his mother, Christmas 2013. Keith is a Dallas writer and broadcaster whose columns appear regularly in *The Dallas Morning News*. He may be contacted at [gkeithcolumn@gmail.com](mailto:gkeithcolumn@gmail.com).

## Toyota feels big welcome from Texas

Quality of life and simple geography played into decision to move here, says **Jim Lentz**

Since we announced plans to establish our new North American headquarters in Plano, all of us at Toyota have been humbled by the show of support we've received from customers, dealers, elected officials and community leaders across the Lone Star State. This is an exciting time for our company, and I appreciate how welcome we've already been made to feel.

Of course, Toyota is no stranger to Texas — we are proud to have been building Tacomas and Tundras in San Antonio since 2006. We also have a long history working with Gov. Rick Perry, who was instrumental in securing our San Antonio manufacturing facility back then. We appreciate all that he and his team did to put together such a highly competitive proposal for our new headquarters site, which included support from the Texas Enterprise Fund. When considering an investment of this size and scope, incentive programs like TEF can make a real difference.

With this upcoming move, we look forward to strengthening our ties with the state even further, which I know will help drive Toyota's success for years to come. Bringing our major North American businesses from California, Kentucky and New York together in Plano will allow us to collaborate better, innovate faster, make decisions more quickly and use our resources more efficiently. As a result, we'll be better equipped to serve our customers and build cars and trucks that always exceed their expectations.

Many people want to know why we chose Texas for our new headquarters. Frankly, there were many factors behind the decision. In fact, we picked North Dallas/Plano after evaluating more than 10 locations against a wide range of criteria.

As we looked closer, though, the advantages Plano offered our company and the quality of life it offered our employees became clear — including the cost of living, access to top-tier schools and cultural offerings, low tax rates and a wide range of affordable urban and suburban living options within a short commute of our headquarters site.

Another reason we chose Plano is simple geography. Locating there will bring us closer to our manufacturing footprint, in a time zone that allows us to communicate more easily with our North American operations, with direct flights to all of our operations — including Japan.

Throughout our search, it was also important that we chose a location without an existing Toyota presence, one where we could build a new culture from the ground up, based on our core values. Plano offered a business climate that we believe is the most ideal for bringing our sales, marketing, manufacturing and corporate cultures together as one for the first time.

As I noted, the support we received from Texas' elected officials throughout the selection process was invaluable and much appreciated. We are also grateful to Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, House Speaker Joe Straus, Mayor Harry LaRosiere of Plano and the Dallas Regional Chamber, whose engagement and encouragement made us feel very welcome.

Today, Toyota has about 6,000 direct and supplier employees in Texas. I want to thank all Texans in advance for welcoming thousands more of us to your communities over the next few years and for your continued support as we embark on this exciting transition. Bottom line, we are confident that Texas is the right place to start the next chapter of Toyota's history in North America, and we are excited about our future together. We look forward to a long and fruitful stay!



Jim Lentz is chief executive of Toyota North America.

## Oberstar skillfully steered transportation laws

Late congressman's work benefited Dallas, says **Eddie Bernice Johnson**

It was a great honor to sit on the House Transportation Committee when Jim Oberstar was its chairman.

Chairman Oberstar, who passed away Saturday, served on the committee from the beginning of his congressional career in 1974 until he left Congress in 2011.

He was a personal mentor and a devoted friend to me. Even more important, he played a critical role in nearly every piece of transportation legislation enacted into law during his tenure. Transportation programs, railways, highway, water infrastructure, the Coast Guard and maritime projects all have the imprint of Chairman Oberstar on them.

Of particular significance to North Texas was a victory he helped orchestrate in 2007. President George W. Bush had vetoed a water resources bill that contained funds for repairing infrastructure in Dallas necessary to prevent serious damage if the Trinity River flooded. It was Chairman Oberstar, despite being absent from the chamber because of surgery, whose passion fueled our efforts to lead a bipartisan movement that culminated in Bush's veto being overridden.

Chairman Oberstar was a thoughtful policymaker — one who spoke six foreign languages fluently — and his impact on transportation and infrastructure issues reached beyond the shores of our country.

While chairman, he appointed me to chair the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. With that appointment, I

became the first woman and the first African-American to head the subcommittee. I learned much of what I know about the difficult and arduous issues that the committee concerns itself with while serving under the leadership of this man, who was one of the most thoughtful and fair-minded committee leaders in congressional history.

Minnesota sent Chairman Oberstar to Washington for 18 terms, and his long tenure afforded him exceptional power and influence. An unwavering Democrat, he was nonetheless able to work with members on both sides of the aisle. His personal friends included Democrats and Republicans alike.

He credited his way of doing business and his ability to work with others of divergent views to his mother, a former factory worker, and his father, a mine union organizer who devoted much of his time to fighting for worker safety and

increased wages.

Chairman Oberstar never lost the common touch. He believed that at the core of the American economy were the people who needed to travel safely each day from their homes to their places of employment and back. Those people needed safe roads, tunnels, highways, bridges and modes of transportation that they could rely upon.

He worked very hard to ensure that safety. And for that, all Americans, whether they knew him or had never uttered his name, owe Chairman Oberstar a tremendous debt of gratitude. He served all of us, and he served us with distinction and grace. May God rest his soul.



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