

Opinion

By CLEO ROBERSON

One of the things that always fascinated me about my mom was how much she loved children—any children—small, large, dirty, clean, fussy, snotty, pristine, well you get the idea. She thought they all were precious and beautiful. She may have always been like that. I don't know but I suspect the lack of love and nurturing from her parents led her to giving it unconditionally to the children who crossed her path. Regardless, my brother, sister and I were the blessed recipient's of that kind of love. And you don't always appreciate it until you are a parent yourself.

I remember the first time my mother held my first born and examined his tiny body. She kept rubbing his little hands between her fingers and kissing them. Then she looked at me and said, "I always wonder what these little hands will do." She said that over every pair of little hands she ever held. And I found myself doing the same thing from that time on. That's a lot to wonder about.

When Mom held her last great, great grandchild, she said the same thing as she kissed his tiny hands. "I wonder what these little hands will do?" And so far, every child's hands she has held and wondered over has done well. I think that's because the heartfelt wondering that came from her lips were also unspoken prayers for a safe and successful journey as they navigated life.

I took a lot for granted about my mother's hands while I was growing up. I took for granted they would bring me a cool cloth for my fevered brow along with an aspirin and coke when I was sick. I took for granted all the Merthiolate and bandages



Cleo Roberson



My mother's hands

she would apply to my wounds. I took for granted hearing the sewing machine humming into the night as she finished an outfit for my little sister or me to wear the next day. I took for granted the sound of the pressure cooker jingling into the night and hearing her counting out loud as the jar lids sitting on the counter during canning season sealed with that secure popping sound.

Mom's life started out on a farm where she hated milking the cow. Most of the chores she performed on the farm were mundane to her but she didn't trust the cow with the wild eyes that kicked at her while she milked.

I wonder what she wondered about doing as she was growing up. I know I asked her a thousand questions about what she wanted to be, but I always got the same answer, "Oh, I didn't know, but the one thing I knew was I didn't want to live on a farm."

She might not know what opportunities awaited her, but she for sure knew what she didn't want to do! So as soon as she could close that barn door behind her she and my dad stole away got married right before Christmas.

Those hard-working hands loved and cared for their first baby who was born with brain damage and lived three years. She thought he was a beautiful angel. He was blessed to have her as his earthly mother. Those hard-working hands were holding him every day until he left this earth. Then she went to work at a factory 'to keep from losing my

mind', she said.

A few years later she and my dad bought a service station with an attached trailer park. She pumped gas, added oil to motors, cleaned windshields, aired up tires, cleaned restrooms, kept the books and helped give perms in the main room of the station where the ladies from the trailer-hood gathered. She loved it.

Then dad went to work for an oil company and mom took a job as a secretary and bookkeeper for a trucking company. She changed her blue jeans and t-shirt wardrobe for dresses, suits and high heels. She was no longer washing and waxing cars.

And then my little sister was born and not long after that my grandmother had a stroke and my mom became the caretaker for a mother that never once told her she was pretty, smart or loved. But mom took care of her anyway with gentle hands and patience.

I think back about all the things my mom's hands did in her life and I am astounded at her strength and love. She raised huge gardens, tried hard to teach her children the Bible, held my dad's hands until he took his last breath and in general did whatever was needed with those capable hands of hers.

I see my hands now in photos and they look like my mom's. I smile because I like that, but there's one thing I know for sure. My hands will never be able to do all that my mother's hands could do.

We were blessed to have her as our mother and we never left her or hung up the phone without telling her we loved her too. Though her parents never told her that, she made sure we heard it every day.

My little sister Sandi and my mother were together this Mother's Day. I have to say I would've loved to have seen them standing there side by side, smiling, all shiny and new holding hands. But for now, it's like the song says, "I Can Only Imagine".

Depriving research institutions of higher learning leaves us to the whims of fate

By EMILY BURTON SHERMAN

You can't wrap up the cure for cancer with a bow, but you certainly can appreciate what a gift it truly is. Every extra year of cuddles is nothing short of a miracle when your child has been diagnosed with such a life-threatening disease.

Given the rates of cancer in our commonwealth, what mothers really wanted for Mother's Day this year was assurances that the richest country in the world would continue its crucial cancer research so that a pediatric oncology diagnosis is not a death sentence for their child.

Instead, mothers last week woke to the news of continued cuts to the very centers of research and education that have given so many moms the scientific breakthroughs that turned their child's fatal diagnosis into a fight they could win.

When our nation's leaders bankrupt some of our best institutions of education and research, they were not cutting costs but rather reaping blood money. Suddenly depriving research institutions of higher learning - and the young scientists they teach - of billions in federal funding throws all of us and the people we love to the whims of fate.

Cornell faces a loss of \$1 billion. Princeton reportedly lost grants from NASA, the Department of Energy and the Defense Department. Columbia University will lose \$400 million.

Harvard faces a loss of \$2.2 billion.

The school that helped give the world a treatment for AIDS is now facing unprecedented cuts to its federal funding for refusing to bend a knee to the White House.

The president's pernicious and personal attacks against research universities, home to some of the world's best and brightest, have put millions of our futures on the chopping block.

It throws into jeopardy any hope that scientific

breakthroughs will save the people we love in the years to come, wrote retired oncologist Dr. Jennifer Obel recently in a moving column for huffpost.com. It threatens the progress we've made against childhood illnesses, such as leukemia, which now has a survival rate of more than 90%, up from about 50% in the 1970s, she noted.

These cuts "don't just threaten the future of cancer care," Dr. Obel wrote. "They erode hope for every family facing a devastating diagnosis. It's an auction of America's future, with each university's lifeline going once, going twice, gone."

Researchers are not flotsam that naturally gathers with the tide in clumps of substance against the dock. Like the specimens they study, researchers require a precise environment in order to flourish, highly specialized and dedicated spaces for their hard work to give birth to life-saving breakthroughs that give all humanity better odds of survival. A lack of funding destroys this environment.

A quick review of the scientific advances at Harvard Medical School alone makes it clear we are all indebted to their program: a smallpox vaccine, surgical anesthesia, the identification of appendicitis and its treatment, the causes of scurvy, life-saving heart valve surgery, the invention of the iron lung and a new hope for polio patients everywhere.

And this was all before 1930. According to Harvard's self-published timeline of medical school advances, in the 1980s they made major breakthroughs in the international fight against AIDS. In the 1990s they performed the first liver transplant from a live donor and still found the time to identify a specific gene - for which we can now screen - that can lead to a form of colon cancer.

In the early 2000s, Harvard Medical School helped identify treatments for drug-resistant tuberculosis and identified the source of the deadly pregnancy disease, preeclampsia. They've since identified ways to restore hearing through gene therapy, found the "Achilles' heel" of herpes, found a new drug to help restore normal contractions in a human heart suffering from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, identified a new cause of breast cancer and found ways to improve immunotherapy cancer treatments for oncology patients.

Billions of lives have been made better by the ed-

ucators, scientists and medical students who study in such institutions of higher learning.

Therefore how does gutting medical research that saves American children somehow put America first? You don't have to like the alleged insult of inclusion and equality championed by these universities to appreciate the cold fact they might just be the reason you, or your grandchildren, survive a devastating diagnosis in the next decade.

According to research published in the medical journal The Lancet, almost 10 million people were killed by cancer internationally in 2020. Another 19 million cases of cancer were reportedly diagnosed. Low-income and middle-income countries account for 80% of the cancer burden, wrote Stuart A. McIntosh and his fellow researchers in their journal article, "Global funding for cancer research between 2016 and 2020."

When considering this fact it becomes clear that what the president is doing is not punishing respected establishments for allowing their frats to become too diverse, inclusive and outspoken.

It is an act of war against anyone not wealthy enough to buy a million-dollar miracle cure for their child when disaster strikes. It is a cruel culling of a mother's greatest resources - hope for their children's future and faith their elected leaders value that future more than political grandstanding.

We are long past the point of shaking our heads, clutching our pearls and praying for a miracle. The nation's universities are ripe with researchers working on making those miracles a reality every day.

All they ask of us is the common decency to fund their life-saving work, not just for our families but for the generations to follow.

Emily Sherman is a columnist and educator who resides in Muhlenberg County with her family of miscreants, saints and the odd stray cat.

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