

# Mayberry is real, Happy Valley is just a myth



At first blush the death of Andy Griffith and the release of Louis B. Freeh's findings and subsequent NCAA sanctions regarding the Penn State pedophilia scandal seem unrelated.

Griffith's most famous role was as Sheriff Andy Taylor in the mythical town of Mayberry where the sun shone and showers fell as needed, folks were amiable and any feuds were settled within each half-hour episode. Crime was limited to moonshiners, carnival shell game barkers and snake oil salesmen, all of whom Andy outsmarted and rendered justice upon. Even Otis the town drunk was responsible enough to lock himself up when he had his fill.

With Griffith's death some pundits have pointed out the obvious, that Mayberry was not real. It did not reflect the times in which it was made, the tumult of the '60s not descending upon Andy, Barney, Opie, Aunt Bee and the rest.

But that is missing the point.

The great movie, "A Face in the Crowd," is evidence that Griffith was well aware of the dark side of small-town life and the American dream.

Griffith and the other creators of the TV show, the writers, directors and producers were intelligent people. They knew Mayberry existed only as an ideal. But it was one based on love of family, kindness toward your fellow man and a gentle humor regarding the absurdity that is this life. Unlike so much entertainment today which sinks to the lowest common denominator, the "Andy Griffith Show" spoke to the better angels of our souls, a place in the hearts of all people of good will who long for a gentler world. There was no intent to deceive or fool the audience, but rather an effort to create a world worth aspiring to.

The creators and producers of the longest-running show at Happy Valley, the Penn State football team, were less idealistic. The Andy Taylor of this mythical place was Joe Paterno. The English major turned coach whose teams won "the right way," with players graduating on time and nary a whiff of scandal. Joe Pa set the pace, living by the same high standards he demanded of his players, residing in a modest home near campus, donating millions to the university. Maybe only John Wooden was as respected both as a man and a coach as Joe Paterno.

But as real as Mayberry was in

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terms of ideals, Happy Valley was a fraud.

It is difficult to understand how group think motivates otherwise smart people like Paterno, then President Graham Spanier, athletic director Tim Curley and now-retired vice president Gary Schultz to allegedly cover up wrongs in the name of a "greater good." Money, of course — the perennially winning Penn State football program makes a fortune for the university in the form of ticket sales, memorabilia and bowl games. Paterno's reputation for fair play and the Happy Valley mystique is attractive to tuition-paying parents and their children who see it as a safe

haven. Proud alums and others wishing to be associated with such a prestigious, well-thought-of institution donate millions to endowments. But even greed cannot explain the rationalizations that had to occur in order to cover for a predator like Jerry Sandusky. To, as Freeh stated, participate in "an active agreement to conceal."

Whether it is the Catholic Church protecting pedophile priests or a university not reporting suspected child molestation, somehow the powers-that-be lose sight of the reason their institution exists: to serve others. The "reputation" of the institution takes precedence over its mission. Unlike Mayberry, where wrongdoers answered for their crimes, at Happy Valley it appears a pedophile was sheltered from prosecution for at least a decade because of concerns his actions might damage the football team and the university. And, according to Freeh's report, Joe Pa was hip deep in the cover-up. A note from Curley indicated that he changed his mind about reporting Sandusky "after giving it more thought and talking it over with Joe."

When we moved to Hoopeston 15 years ago some of my friends, knowing my fondness for the "Andy Griffith Show," and discovering I walked

to my office on Main Street next to the movie theater, asked how things were in "Mayberry." After being raised in small towns and living in Chicago and Dallas, my wife, Yolanda, and I were looking for a slower pace to raise our kids. But we never deluded ourselves into thinking we had arrived at some worry-free nirvana. To that point, a coach at a junior high in a nearby town was recently convicted of child molestation.

Big town or small, evil exists.

Yet there are moments when visiting with fellow parishioners after Saturday night Mass, walking home along shaded brick streets, greeted by honked horns and friendly waves, that we get a taste of Mayberry. The fact these moments are fleeting in an ever-coarsening society make them all the more worth savoring.

In that sense, the ideals of Mayberry and its humble leader, Sheriff Andy Taylor, are real.

It is the Happy Valleys and Joe Pas of this world that are myth.

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