

## Where there's a Will

By: Andrea Wilson

(This article is part three of a four-part series focusing on the cultural mosaic of Columbus Community and how this small Iowa town is embracing individuals from all walks of life.)

Today, if you ask Edith Osorio if she believes in miracles, she will tell you yes. If you had the opportunity to ask her in person, you might do so at the house she now lives in just inside of Fredonia, and you might sit under the photos of her son Gus, now a graduate of the University of Iowa, or in the presence of her daughters Damaris, currently in her senior year at CCHS, and little Edith, a spirited elementary student who asks questions in rapid fire. Today the life that Edith Osorio provides for her children is one very different than that which she was facing two decades ago.

Edith was born in Puebla, Mexico. Her dreams included studying, getting an education, and becoming a nurse. But this was not to come to pass for Edith; life had other plans for her. Instead, at the urging of her parents, she would marry at an early age and soon after begin having children. From this point on, as it is with most mothers, life ceased to be about her and the focus changed to the next generation. Her story brought her into the US, unknowingly into an abusive relationship with the very person whom she had trusted to deliver her safely. She was far from home and without a support system to get her the help she needed. Life, it appeared, was not stacking the cards in her favor.

Fast forward to 1995. Edith comes to Columbus Junction and enrolls her son Gus at Columbus Elementary. Her other daughter, Damaris is still just a baby. While Gus can speak very little English, he is determined to learn and reads as many English books as he can get his hands on; Edith encourages him to study, as she once wanted to. At school conferences, Edith can understand almost nothing, but year after year hears reports that little Gus is "doing very well in school." As he grows, he begins expressing interest in furthering his studies, and one day

tells Edith he would like to go to college. Her head spins, knowing that without citizenship papers Gus cannot get the university education he desires, and even with papers, there is no way her salary at the packing plant could support his dream. She is a single mom, living in a small apartment, trying to put food on the table for her now three children.

Today Edith lives in a house built for her by Habitat for Humanity. Her son Gus was admitted to the University of Iowa, and is now unofficially known as the school's first graduate without citizenship papers. On August 27, 2011 Edith attended her own naturalization ceremony and took the oath to become a citizen of the United States of America. What happened, you might ask, over the course of a decade to so drastically change Edith Osorio's situation? She would tell you that she had angels in her life; people in Columbus Junction would tell you that her family naturally received the good that they deserved. Whatever the answer is, it's clear that Edith's determination to change her path and provide a better life for her children found a foothold in Columbus Junction, where people wanted to help them do it. And help them they did.

The 'angels' of Columbus Junction took on many different forms, as angels often do. Many of them were in the form of elementary and high school teachers, all of whom Gus paints as heroes 'who miraculously' came together to write letters to the University of Iowa Board of Admissions on his behalf. Once the letters had the attention of Admissions, it was more teachers like Georgina Buendia-Cruz and Diane Bohling, as well as then Methodist pastor, Kathy Whitlatch, who together drove Gus to his interview where Admissions officers could further evaluate his candidacy. He later received numerous scholarships at Columbus's senior award ceremony, adding names like Roundy and Littner to the growing list of anonymous and publicly-named angels who supported him along the way.

Gus was admitted to the University of Iowa without a social security number, something that Edith is still not clear on how it happened but is



happy to credit God and the army of advocates that made her son's dream a reality. The eventual acquisition of her own citizenship via immigration lawyers is something about which she is also amazed and unsure. Her angels in Columbus Junction connected her to that lawyer too.

When people of the community speak about Edith and her children, words like 'hard working, determined, and good-hearted' are spoken. When Edith reflects on her own life, it's clear she is still unwilling to give herself too much credit. Admit it or not, to the rest of community, it's clear that Edith's powerful desire for something better and her determination to climb above her current standings is what causes other people to gather round her and fan her momentum. It's this magnetic energy that may have caused Kathy Whitlatch to approach Edith about applying for a Habitat for Humanity house and what may have caused the Habitat board to award Edith the house above other applicants. Today it's Edith's desire to preserve what she has with her new residence that causes her to toil long hours at West Liberty Foods in order to pay the bills. And it's her desire for more still that drove her to learn English on her nights and weekends,

ensuring she passed the citizenship test and now starts her on a hopeful path towards new employment. Edith believes the last step is completing her GED, and it's a step she intends to go after.

As for her children, Gus is now a successful systems engineer for Cerner, a Kansas City based company that focuses on healthcare software. He describes his rise to success and his respectful nature as something good that came from hardship. He also credits his mother's love. He believes that his mother will continue to pursue her life goals, and intends to be her number one encouragement.

Damaris will graduate this year from CCHS; she shyly mentions the possibility of a career in nursing as her mom once wanted, and still harbors hope for. Little Edith intends on becoming a dentist, however in the mean time has many more questions to ask.

As for what will become of Edith, how she will pay for these next children's dreams and if she will complete her GED and finally achieve her own, only time will tell. However Edith Osorio believes in angels, and all evidence clearly supports that angels believe in Edith.

## School Board discusses bus trip issue

By: Jim Rudisill

A recent school trip to Iowa City generated a strong reaction from Columbus School District residents who met with the school board during its September 19 meeting.

According to the residents, the school bus driver who took the busload of students to Iowa City was not properly licensed. Local resident Bob Reid raised the issue during the board meeting and accused school officials of failing to properly discipline transportation director Dan Vogeler over the issue. "I think something should be (done) and not thrown in the closet with the rest of the skeletons," Reid told the board.

Others in the audience, including Tom Mendenhall, who works under Vogeler at the school, agreed. Mendenhall said his daughter had been on the bus and he challenged Superintendent Rich Bridenstine over the issue; asking Bridenstine if he would have been satisfied with the school's response if he had had a son on the bus. "It was unfortunate and it sucks even more because he is my boss," Mendenhall added.

District resident Nancy Carey also raised concerns. She said her granddaughter was on the bus and called Carey during the trip to complain about the driver. "If something had happened there wouldn't have been any insurance (coverage)," Carey pointed out. "I'm just disgusted this had to happen," she continued.

Bridenstine attempted to assure the group he had investigated the incident and had taken disciplinary action, although he declined to iden-

tify anything specific. He pointed out discipline can include actions aimed at retribution or rehabilitation of the offender; or to discourage undesired future activity of others. "I chose to take the route of rehabilitation and I think I've dealt with it successfully. It comes down to if the board trusts me to do the right thing," Bridenstine said. "It's a private, personnel matter. It was dealt with internally," he said.

He also explained that while working in the district over the past 10 years he had handled other discipline issues in a similar manner and disputed Reid's implication he had tried to cover up anything.

In other action, junior/senior high school principal Jeff Maeder reported the school had recently been notified it had been awarded a three-year, \$180,000 grant to develop ways to improve student safety and support in the district.

Maeder said the Safe and Supportive Schools grant had been awarded after students in the district completed a survey. Maeder said school officials will attend a workshop in a few weeks to develop an implementation plan for using the grant money.

In other financial news, Bridenstine asked the board to begin considering how it wants to move forward with implementing a school master plan that was presented several months ago.

Bridenstine urged the board to move forward on four components of that plan, including constructing a joint outreach building with Muscatine Community College,

building a new wrestling room, relocating the softball field at the high school site and installing a new access to Roundy Elementary.

Voters approved a new revenue purpose statement for the district's one-cent sales tax at the September 13 school board election. That approval will allow the district to sell bonds with the proceeds from the sales tax paying off the bonds.

Bridenstine acknowledged voters were not supportive of any land purchase, which had been part of the master plan, but said the initial four seemed to have district support.

He said if the board decides to move forward with those projects, bid letting could begin later this year, with construction starting next spring or summer. The board is expected to make a decision at a future meeting.

In final action, the board received an update on efforts to expand the elementary school's Beat for Peace group into the junior high. Music instructor Paul Corbiere explained he was adjusting schedules and taking other actions to insure junior high students who wish to participate in the group are not prevented from also becoming involved in other extracurricular activities. During the meeting, the board also took a short break to view the new instruments recently purchased for the group. Board member Polly Prior reported around \$3200 had recently been raised to purchase the instruments.

The board also reviewed the first readings of several board policies.

The board also voiced its support for Nicole Beckley to sponsor an upper elementary art club. Beckley's

## Briefly -

### Fair Board presents "Bull Bash"

The Louisa County Fair Board presents, "Bull Bash," on Saturday, September 24, 2011, at 2 p.m. at the Louisa County Fairgrounds. Admissions are \$10.00 for adults, \$5.00 for kids 5-11, and 4 and under are free. The Bull Bash includes bull riders, junior bull riding and wild steer riding. For more information, call Dennis Hiller at 563-260-9157.

### CCHS class of 1971 plans reunion

CCHS Class of 1971 will be holding their 40th class reunion on October 8, 2011 starting at 5:00 p.m. at the Cedarcrest Country Club in Columbus Junction. Please RSVP to Randy and Nancy Orr by September 24<sup>th</sup> by calling 319-728-3189 or email Randy\_nancy71@yahoo.com also see us on facebook.

### Fredonia City elections

The City of Fredonia will have the following seats up for election this year: Mayor and 2 Council Members. You may pick up nomination papers at City Hall on Monday 5 - 7 or call Lisa Exline at 319-750-0801. Nomination papers must be turned in by 5 p.m. on September 22, 2011.

### Cookies + Kids

COOKIES+KIDS will meet for their first meeting of the school year on Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 P.M. at the Senior Center. All high school students are welcome to attend. Hope to see you there! For more information, please contact Renea Jay at 319-530-4010. "A Taste of the SPIRIT one Bite at a Time"

### Greene Family reunion planned

The 77<sup>th</sup> Greene Reunion will be held on Sunday, September 25, 2011, in the cabin at Chautauqua Park in Columbus Junction. A picnic dinner will start at 12:15 p.m. Please bring your genealogy. Officers are: President - Joyce Hamilton; Vice President - Marilyn Goble; Secretary/Treasurer - Kathleen Sands. Please plan to attend.

### Emma Beckman Open House

On Sunday October 9, 2011 Emma Beckman Chapter #445, Order of the Eastern Star will have an Open House from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Masonic Center in Columbus City for the observance of their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Grand Chapter of Iowa granted the Charter on October 26, 1911. Friends and members are welcome for this occasion as the one hundred five members of today look forward to the future of the Chapter.

### Artists' Studio Tour

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Southeast Iowa Artists' Studio Tour will be held in and around the communities of Des Moines, Henry, Lee and Washington Counties on October 15<sup>th</sup> (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) and 16<sup>th</sup> (12 to 4 p.m.). The studio tour is a self-guided tour to 29 different artists' studios. Look for the acorn signs at the artists' studios. For more information and locations of studios, visit their website at: [iowastudioutour.org](http://iowastudioutour.org).

### St. Mary's Fundraiser

St. Mary's Church in Lone Tree will be having their annual Fall Auction fundraiser on Sunday, September 25 at the American Legion. Lunch will be served starting at 11 a.m. The silent auction is from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The regular auction begins at 1 p.m. Come and eat with us and join the fun bidding on your favorite pie, cake or craft.

### Blood checks rescheduled

The blood checks at the Senior Center have been rescheduled for Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

### "Prom" Fundraiser planned

The Columbus Sophomore Class is selling magazine subscriptions for their "Prom" fundraising efforts. If you have any subscriptions of magazines you are currently receiving that you would like to renew or if you wish to purchase a subscription to a new magazine, call Sophomore Class Sponsor Lori Beenen at the Columbus Community High School (319)728-2231, ext. 2106.

### Model Railroad Club to meet

The Washington Model Railroad Club will hold its annual train show and swap meet on Sunday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 606 West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, in Washington, Iowa. All scales represented. Admission for adults is \$4, children 6-12 \$1. Swap tables to rent: \$18 each. The food stand will be in the building. For more information, contact Mike Worley at 319-653-3782.

### This week at the Farmers' Market

Fridays from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion parking lot, now until October 14<sup>th</sup>. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, homemade noodles, jams and jellies, and plants. Some vendors accept Iowa Farmers Market Nutrition, WIC and Senior Program coupons. Buy fresh and local and taste the difference. For more information, including how to participate as a vendor, contact Nitza or Mallory at 319-728-7971.

### Fur-harvester class offered

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Muscatine County Conservation Board will be offering a fur-harvester education class on Saturday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, at the Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area near Muscatine. Class times are 1:00 - 9:00 p.m. The class will cover furbearer trapping, coon hunting, predator calling, ethics and responsibility, pelt preparation, and hunting and trapping rules and regulations. Upon completion of the class, students will receive a fur-harvester education certificate from the Iowa DNR. Minimum age for certification is 12 years old. The class will be an outdoors hands-on activity. Students are encouraged to bring a pair of rubber boots and a flashlight. Food and drink will be provided. Registration for the class is required. Students interested in participating in the class may register through the Internet at the Iowa DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov/training](http://www.iowadnr.gov/training) or they may call the Iowa DNR Central Office at 515-281-5918.

### Name that Cow

The cow is back on Main Street, and now it just needs a name. Steve Tomfeld has decided to make a contest out of it. He is encouraging anyone interested in selecting the name to write their suggestion on a piece of paper and deliver it to either bank in town. He is asking that you include a contribution to the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation along with your suggestion. Any amount will help in the fight to eliminate this disease that affects so many of our young people. So select your name, make your entry, and also help a good cause. Who knows, you might be the one who names our cow!