

# Midwestern Values: May We Never Lose Them

I spent nearly a week in June in the flyover part of the country – Topeka, Kansas, to be exact – and found it to be a refreshing change. There's noticeably less snark, whining, self-entitlement, and virtue signaling there than in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I live and work.

Several of the friends I visited come from farm families, although none has followed that occupation. One is a highly successful lawyer and the former head of Kansas's tax agency, another is a financial adviser, while another became a bank president. A fourth became an eminent psychiatrist and then took over his father's banking business, but all have retained the small-town Midwestern values that were described movingly by Purdue University President Mitch Daniels and former Indiana governor in a recent *Washington Post* [op-ed](#):

*During a decade in elected office in Indiana, I made it my practice while traveling the state to stay overnight in Hoosier homes rather than hotels. Because of geography and, candidly, personal choice, probably a third of those 125 overnights were with farm families. There I witnessed virtues that one sees too rarely these days – hard work, practical manual skill, a communitarian ethic – woven tightly into the fabric of everyday life.*

*I saw teenagers and even younger siblings rising at 5 a.m. to feed animals or do other chores before cleaning up and heading to school. It was fun to return home and tell those stories to four suburban daughters whose idea of a tough assignment was clearing the table and washing the dishes.*

*At county fairs, I would always ask that the [4-H](#) officers be the ones to take me around. Every one of those young people*

*had raised animals for competition, and they showed me projects – artistic, scientific or community service – with the special pride that comes from creative, arduous individual effort.*

To a city slicker like me, 4-H and the kinds of chores Daniels describes epitomize the discipline and ethos of Midwestern kids. I find it unfathomable that a child could raise a calf or a pig, and then surrender it to be slaughtered. College kids at universities like Berkeley and Stanford these days are quite different from farm kids: Many are traumatized merely by hearing a “trigger word” like *meat* or *Republican*. Never fear, however: The universities provide “safe spaces” and counseling.

Daniels offers more on farm families’ values:

*At the Gerber family’s farmhouse near [Boston](#), Ind. (population 130), I learned about the year that Doug, the father, was hit and nearly killed by a train while trying to clear storm debris off a railroad crossing. He said that when he returned home after weeks in a coma, the first thing he saw was his neighbors sowing his crops and feeding his livestock so that his family would have income that year. “They wouldn’t even let me pay for the diesel fuel,” he recalled.*

I call that heroism.

In San Francisco, where much illegality has been “decriminalized” because, supposedly, “too many people are incarcerated,” it wouldn’t be a surprise to return from the hospital to find that burglars had cleaned out your house.

Daniels’ op-ed elicited a nostalgic response from one of my Midwestern friends, who was raised on a Kansas ranch/farm and recalled having done

*chores mornings and evenings (including milking cows – a virtually lost talent, believe me!), ridden a horse bareback to bring in the cows, fed all kinds of livestock, branded, de-horned, and castrated many of them. My father, my brother and I were 4-H members all our growing-up years, raised and showed horses, cattle and hogs at county and state fairs . . .*

The “social transformation” he describes – the rural sense of community and neighbors – was *real* and you could depend upon them for any kind of support. As Daniels indicates, all that will never happen again in America.

Daniels closes by suggesting that in their quest for a diverse student population, “universities should not overlook the benefits that rural students can bring to their big-city and suburban classmates.” Maybe we could also export some to big cities on the coasts, to set an example of generosity, self-discipline, and comity.

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