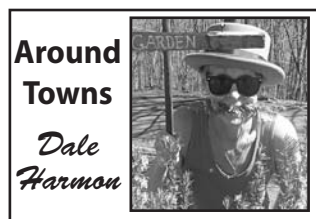


DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Fine Fodder

It's not that I'm so self-centered I think my family is fine fodder to inflict upon the readers of this paper. It's just for the most



Around Towns
Dale Harmon

part, I'm centered at home and my observations are somewhat more internal than external. My multi tasking skills, however, have risen to great heights. I can slather saltine crackers with crunchy peanut butter, brew coffee and plan the TV lineup all at once. It is so automatic my unengaged mind can be used for more vital thoughts. My father was born in 1922. As a farm boy he wore denim overalls. They were sturdy, practical and the same width from hips to ankles. All of the pants he wore were. As an adult his business suit pants were cuffed with a single crease and a nice drape to them. This was the style of most pants for many years. I believe

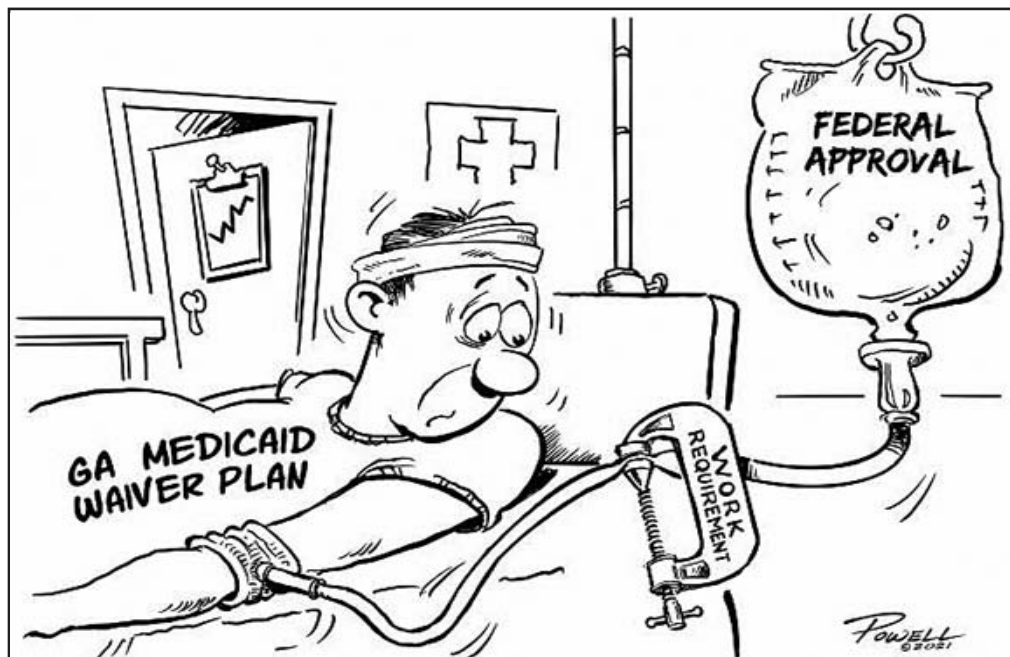
zoot suits were the exception but my daddy was not zooty. He was a conservative dresser. Even when my mother bought and persuaded him to wear an Easter egg colored leisure suit, the cut was his usual. He wore that get-up, as dad called it, once. I'll spare you what else he said about that garment.

In the early 1960s boys and young men began the fad of "pegging" their jeans. Seams were sewn to make the jeans narrow at the calf and ankle. Tom, my father, called the pants pistol-legged pants. He did not wear them.

Tom loved to be outdoors and he was no shirker of hard work. While clearing the briars for a garden, he stepped on a yellow jacket nest. The jackets were feeling inhospitable and swarmed up the easily accessible pants legs and began to punish the intruder. I don't know if Tom was jiving but he sure as heck was shucking. He ripped those pants from his body and ran toward the house, tossing an apology over his shoulder to a gaped-mouth Mrs. Strawberry, our next door neighbor.

Are flying squirrels still in existence? I haven't seen hide nor hair of one in years. My mother, my sister and I had a personal encounter with one of those flying rodents long before Rocky and Bullwinkle became mega TV stars. Tom's encounter was much more personal. Without getting too detailed I'll just say, small bathroom, uncaged squirrel, loose pant leg and my dad speaking in tongues. You can take it from there. Perhaps Tom should have worn pegged leg pants or the Velcro ones Chippendale strippers wear for quick disrobement.

I think I'll climb out of my rut today. It's creamy peanut butter and blueberry jam.
See You Around Towns!



If Everything You Say is True, I'd have to Agree with You

After the recent upgrade of my Windows operating system, Cortana suggested lighting up on the cream cheese I was spreading on my bagel, or switching to a low fat variety. I asked her how she knew, since I don't use Cortana for shopping, but she said she didn't understand the question. I think the refrigerator probably told her. I believe the refrigerator is in cahoots with Alexa and the Google Assistant on my phone. Before I could take the first bite they suggested that I purchase some different flavors besides plain for a more diverse dairy tray. Always the attentive helper, Facebook served up ads for three different brands.

It's a good thing that the spring chores around the farm are burning up all the calories I can eat. For some reason I've been craving cookies, and every website I visit wants to talk about cookies. Some sites insist on having a discussion about cookies before I can read whatever it is that I came there to view.

Of course the cookies they're talking about are the little packets of information which help track our online activity and let advertisers know the kinds of things we might be persuaded to buy. Websites used to hide their cookies or pretend like they didn't exist. It was an open secret known by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of how websites work, and a whole business model was created to thwart their exploitation.

Now the community of corporate persons seems almost proud of their cookies. Having observed how easily we are manipulated, distracted, enraged, frightened and herded; how easily we follow whatever they say is "trending," how we accept whatever rogue, thief or buffoon they choose to put on our ballot as a thing of our own creation which deserves our devotion and emotional attachment - having observed all this - they have decided that there is no longer any need to hide.

"Say 'trending' one more time!" A friend paraphrased from a famous movie. We were discussing how difficult it is to avoid the toxic narratives which propagate over the internet faster than a virus carried by a sneeze. "I hardly ever get on the internet anymore," he said. "I don't even like to check my email because if it's not junk from some company then it's junk one of my friends sent me. Here's another meme they forwarded or yet another video for me to watch to make me mad and remind me how terrible things are. And forget Facebook or any of the other platforms. Even if I never went online at all, someone would want to talk about something they saw that made them mad."

It is a challenge. The level of stress that can be induced by the ubiquitous flow of toxic narratives can elicit a Luddite reaction even in those of us who consider ourselves to be reasonably tech savvy and who depend on information technology for business and financial stability. It does take a measure of discipline not to click on the provocative headline or post, but it's even easier to avoid the website altogether when you know a virtual bait shop awaits you there.

Peace of mind in the age of the toxic narrative requires that we curate continuously, and sometimes to conserve mental and emotional energy we have to approach the problem as a medic doing battlefield triage. The first thing I need to know in the morning is the weather. That much is easily obtained by a click, a phone app or by sticking my head out the door. I can get all the weather information I need without ever submitting to the crime and misfortune reports of television and radio, which are designed to integrate seamlessly with the toxic narratives that corporate has ordained.

If I need to know how interest rates might affect my retirement account, I'm not going to find that information on the front page of a website among the outraged opinions and obligatory obeisance to social justice. Website homepages by and large are bait shops, and we can quickly bypass them in our quest for the information we need. I don't remember the last time I read an article from the front page of the New York Times, but there is usually some quality information to be found in the Tech, Science or Health sections. Even the Wall Street Journal has occasionally required me to dig deeper than the front page, though when they genuflect to the "trending," they don't bow as deeply as other publications.

If we're mindful and can wield even a modicum of discipline, we can be fairly successful in curating our information to maximize utility and minimize inflammation. Of course we're more vulnerable when we're seeking entertainment, but the same principles apply. Even so, we can still be blindsided by that friend, family member or acquaintance who is addicted to the emotional states that the narratives produce.

The simplest remedy is to refuse to engage. Change the subject. Accept the fact that you cannot use reason to counter an emotional argument. The goal of the emotional-state addict is to perpetuate the state of excitement by either getting you to share in that state, or barring that, to engage in a confrontation which accomplishes the same goal. You can gauge the level of addiction by observing how far they will go to produce a response.

When all else fails, we always have the option of distancing, pausing or ending the relationship. Many times this is not practical or desirable, but we still have some tools we can use to make the situation more tenable. In the movie, "Where the Rivers Flow North," Rip Torn's iconic character would respond to an aggressive pitch by saying, "That's a mighty fine offer," and end the conversation.

In today's pandemic of emotional turmoil, however, some addicts will not rest until they have achieved their goal. I attribute the following to my nephew who has successfully navigated the injection of politics and narrative into the corporate world.

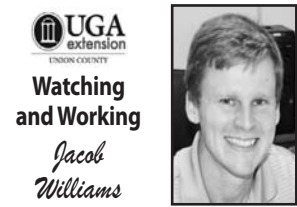
This verbal "Jedi" technique is simple and effective. It allows you to posture agreement without compromising your own opinions. When you're cornered by an outraged opinion, pause. Look thoughtful. Rub your chin pensively. Nod your head and say, "You know, if everything you say is true, I'd have to agree with you."

Walk away. If the person who confronted you is holding a smart phone, chances are they will never notice your escape.

Outside The Box
By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

Georgia Ag Week

This week is Georgia Ag Week. In the spirit of Georgia Ag Week, I wanted to write about the importance of agriculture in



Towns and Union Counties. Agriculture is the number one industry in Georgia, and has importance in many different aspects of our lives. So let's take a little time to talk about the impact and importance of agriculture where we live.

Over the years, Americans have become more and more distanced from the farmers that feed them. Today the average American farmer feeds 166 people. As the world population continues to increase, that number will only go up. 86% of the Ag products sold in the US are produced on family farms or ranches. One number that is alarming to many people is the average age of the American farmer. This number continues to increase and today is at almost 60 years old.

These days there is a movement to buy your food from a local farmer. This movement is great at putting money back into the pockets of farmers. On average farmers only get \$0.08 on the dollar of the money that consumers spend on food. The rest of the costs are taken up by transportation, wages, processing, marketing, and distribution. Many of those costs are necessary, but the farther we get away from where our food is produced the less money is going back into farmers' pockets. That means buying food directly from farmers either at a farmers market, farm store, or through a CSA will put more money back into the farmers' pocket.

In the mountains, we have a strong and unique heritage of agriculture that has changed over the years. Lately, we have seen a growth of agritourism. The growing wine industry in North Georgia is evidence of that. We also have a number of farms that take visitors, so that you can go on a tour. These too are agritourism. We continue to have many cattle as well. Cattle farms can be a benefit to the economy because they take land that would otherwise not be productive and make it productive. Cattle farms that incorporate conservation practices are great for the environment. Sweet sorghum for syrup is a crop that is unique to the mountains. It can be used for biscuits, pancakes or any number of things. Sourwood honey is another product that is unique to our area. Sourwood trees grow in a large portion of Eastern US, but in most places don't produce the nectar flow for bees to make sourwood honey. The shorter growing season that we have means that we get a higher number of chill hours, as is required by apple trees. The diversity of southern apple varieties is due in large part to the Cherokee propagating and spreading apple trees.

The food that we eat carries our cultural ancestry with it. It is literally and figuratively a part of who we are. To lose that heritage is to lose a part of ourselves. I encourage everyone support farmers because in doing so, you support the local economy, personal nutrition and health, and the culture that makes us who we are today. The next time you eat be thankful to the farmer that grew or raised it. It is my privilege to support farmers and I am thankful for all that they do for us.

If you would like to know more about farming or agriculture contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

On a Lighter Note

Our military history is very interesting, filled with many unexpected twists and turns. Many humorous, and some entertaining. How many of us remember this date, March 24, 1958, only 63 years ago and our United States Army and its most famous inductee? On January 8, 1953 Elvis Presley turned 18 and like many of us of the now defunct draft era and just as we did, he did his patriotic duty, fulfilling his legal obligation to register with the Selective Service System. Elvis got a student deferment from the ongoing Korean War, at first due to being a student in good standing at L.C. Humes High School in Memphis which prevented his conscription in the final months of that war. Then again, four years later he received ANOTHER deferment while completing filming a Hollywood movie, "King Creole". Finally on today's date, March 24 of 1958 the King of Rock and Roll became a US Army soldier. We all know the rest of this story as Elvis sure did not have to do what most of our soldiers had to do in any way, shape, form or fashion. He was an entertainer before he was conscripted and as a draftee, he had a very special job as an entertainer. The wonderful thing about his special job was morale building for our Army and you can bet he was a boost for Army recruitment. I would speculate that his job predated and maybe served as a pattern for the Army's Special Services, not to be confused with Special forces!



At age 23, Elvis had never been away from his mom, Gladys Presley for a two year stint as he was to serve in the Army. He and his mom had never been separated that long. Sadly though, he never saw her in good health again, as she was hospitalized with hepatitis during Elvis's very first week-end pass. He would be granted leave once again to be with her in August to be with her on her death bed as she passed on August 16, 1958. Four weeks later Elvis Presley was shipped out to Germany. Elvis met 14 year old Priscilla Beaulieu while in Germany. He watched from afar as newer teen idols took command of the limelight as the U.S. Pop scene took hold of America. The "new" Elvis returned home in the spring of 1960, and became King once again with many big hits in front of him as well as movies.

While we know that life isn't fair and we all cannot be an "Elvis", at least he did his service to America and served our Army as the Army needed. He was blessed with a special talent and probably could have avoided service altogether, as many with no talent or skills whatsoever did. Now for a fact that was NOT FAIR or right. Elvis went ahead and did what was asked of him and what was right.

Semper Paratus

GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

Letters to The Editor

Just a Thought

Dear Editor,
I saw this photo on FB and it reminded me that I feel the Polio disease—pandemic—whatever you want to call it, was worse than the Covid 19 pandemic. As with our current pandemic, millions of people around the world not only died of polio, but after spending time in one of these machines, (can you imagine?!) survivors were left with debilitated limbs. Many, such as our President Franklin D. Roosevelt, wore braces and had to use a wheelchair the rest of their lives. We were not told to do any of the things this current pandemic has evoked and the whole world wasn't shut down at any point. Of course, we also lived through horrific World War II, Vietnam, the Korean War and the many wars in the East, and I think that toughened anyone still alive today from that era. I hope we will thank God for surviving all the pandemics, wars, riots, assassinations and depressions we've gone through and lovingly remember and honor all that have died during any of them. Now let's get on with life, appreciating everything we have just a little bit more, especially our children and other family members that are still with us.
Joan Crothers, 87,
and proud to have lived unafraid
(but concerned) through all I have.

Iron lungs in a polio ward, 1950.
Society has a short memory.
#vaccinate



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