

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 1993

Searching Out Common Ground

Susan Usher



"Doodlebug, doodlebug, come out and get your coffee; doodlebug, doodlebug, come out and get your tea." Chanting those magical words, all the while stirring inverted cones of gray sand under the shed out back, was an everyday occurrence during my childhood in Brunswick County. With any luck, a "doodlebug" would emerge near the bottom, looking like a small clot of dirt stuck in the bottom of a dirty, cone-shaped coffee filter.

Another childhood pastime wasn't so innocent. You could call it "Southport bashing," for lack of a better word. I don't know where this attitude came from, my parents or the community at large. But the attitude persisted among most adults and children.

It was a given in our area that Southport people thought (mistakenly, of course!) they were better than anyone else in Brunswick County, creating a cultural and intellectual

oasis among the hickdom of rural Brunswick.

Our own resentment was based in part on having to travel all the way to Southport to conduct almost any business with the county, from paying taxes to serving on a jury. The waterfront, Dasher Hospital and the Amuze-U Theater were the few redeeming aspects of Southport, it seemed.

Mutual ill feelings continued over the years, expressed in controversies over location of a county-financed hospital and relocation of county government offices to "near Boli-

via." At that point Smithville Township was threatening to secede.

Suffice it to say that geopolitical differences and distance, coupled with a lack of ready telephone communication, have helped keep Brunswick County from operating with a clarity of vision or voice. Sometimes from even trying very hard to do so.

Rural Brunswick, Resort Brunswick and the third Brunswick, the industrialized Leland area and its highly mobile population. Add to that 17 towns, with more aching to form. All wanting a better future, all with different ideas of what that means. What could they possibly have in common?

Friday afternoon a roomful of people representing most of Brunswick County's 17 municipalities, the Brunswick County Schools, Brunswick County Government and Brunswick Community College gathered at UNC-Wilmington to talk about the barriers that make cooper-

ation difficult and to find issues in which they share a common interest or concern. They reached agreement immediately on one: the need for a unified telephone service.

Beyond that, predictably, the big E's dominated: Education, Economy and the Environment, all of which are linked. Some ideas surfaced, but there's a lot more talking to be done before a consensus of direction is reached.

Times have changed; we're all growing up. My sisters both own second homes on Oak Island now, and have friends there and in Southport. I belong to a Southport club that meets weekly. If as individuals we can find such common ground, perhaps we can as communities as well.

UNC-Wilmington did us a service, provided a neutral forum for discussion and resources to seek out for assistance. What happens next is up to us, the people of Brunswick County.

Let The Sun Shine In On New Meetings Law

There's a move afoot in the state legislature to close a few loopholes through which too many elected officials have slipped. N.C. House Bill 120 would toughen the state's open meetings law (also known as the sunshine law) requiring governing boards to conduct the public's business in the public eye unless very limited criteria are met for closed sessions.

Even though it's mostly media people you'll hear advocating the new bill, the measure would serve everyone. Some public bodies' reliance on closed meetings and secret documents is an insult and a disservice to the people who care enough to try to become informed about the local government process.

Closed sessions currently are a relative rarity among many Brunswick County and municipal boards. For this we are pleased but ever mindful that it has not always been so. With every change of administration comes a change in attitude—and not always toward increased openness.

The bill under consideration would reduce from 20 to 3 the number of reasons public bodies can go into closed sessions. Those would be when a closed meeting is necessary:

- to prevent the disclosure of information that is privileged or confidential because of a state or federal statute or regulation; or
- to prevent the premature disclosure of an honorary degree, scholarship, prize or similar award; or

- to permit a public body to receive advice from an attorney concerning identified pending litigation in which the public body has a direct interest by reason of its status as a party or by reason of its status as the governing representative of a party.

The measure would require boards to keep minutes of closed meetings for the first time. Most importantly, it would restrict the most frequent abuse of closed sessions—consultation with attorneys. For instance, one town council elsewhere in the state last year claimed attorney-client privilege in going behind closed doors to raise water and sewer rates. (They said they might get sued because the increases were so high.) Another cited attorney-client privilege only to emerge and grant a business license to a pool hall.

Voters and citizens deserve better; a strengthened sunshine law would give them just that.



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Don't Change A Hair For Me

Eric Carlson



Hats off to Billy Ray Cyrus! Or "Billy Ray Cypress," as news anchor Peter Jennings called him while promoting the singer's recent TV special.

Not only has this Kentucky country boy given us the most irritating pop song since "Yummy! Yummy! Yummy! (I've Got Love In My Tummy!)" but he has sadly repopularized the silliest hair style worn by grown men in the past millennium.

You know the one I mean. That real-short-in-front, ponytail-in-back thing. Sort of a home-grown version of Davy Crockett's coon-skin cap. The perfect hair style for men who can't decide if they want to be yuppies or hippies.

As near as I can figure, this "Cyrus Cut" was originated by fancy-pants Paris fashion designers. Then those arty New Yorkers adopted it, along with all-black clothing, as the hip, urban look. After a brief fling as California's fad of the month, the short-long haircut came to the masses via MTV.

For a moment, it seemed as if this mongrel hirsute adornment might die a proper death and be banished to fashion purgatory along with the Nehru jacket, the leisure suit and (hopefully) the turned-around baseball cap.

Then achy breaky Billy came along looking like Mel Gibson in the front and Crystal Gayle in back. Now every day you see some otherwise handsome Tom, Dick and Harry with a cute little shoulder duster swishing across his back.

Don't get me wrong. I'm generally fond of unusual hair styles, the kookier the better. Weird hair is both a traditional badge of tribal membership and a great way to make a statement of non-conformity.

The English still use their primed and powdered wigs to identify officers of the court. The military shears the heads of new recruits to remove all traces of civilian past and remind soldiers that their behinds belong to Uncle Sam.

Conversely, in the 1960s, people of all ages grew their hair long as a banner of rebellion against the old order (inspiring a hit Broadway musical), while Black Americans let their hair grow into impressive "Afros" as a symbol of racial pride.

The multicolored, spiked hair of the punk rockers—like their raw, buzz-saw music—symbolized revolt against the predictable monotony of the disco era. At the same time, laid-back dropouts of the period listened to reggae and adopted the wild, plait-

ed "dreadlock" hair of the Jamaican Rastafarians.

And so it goes on today. For a while, kids had pictures and messages carved into their hair. Young African Americans grew taller and taller versions of "the fade," that cylindrical, eraser-shaped cut reminiscent of ancient Egyptian pharaohs.

White kids have their own version of this, scalping themselves around the neck and ears to leave a mushroom cap of hair on top of their heads. Pretty kooky.

So what. They're kids. I once had hair long enough to tuck into my pants. (Until I rolled it up in the car window one too many times.) And I might grow it that long again, once it finally turns completely gray.

But when I do, you can be sure it will be long all over. No chickening out with a little pony tail in back and a cop-out conservative look in front. Only legitimately balding men can be excused for that.

Or maybe I'll do like the biker I met in a central California sushi bar. He was a huge fellow, totally bald and covered with tattoos, earrings and black leather. He was a noted expert in two things: panhead Harley Davidsons and little hunks of raw seafood.

More than just a regular customer, his

opinion on the catch of the day was highly respected by all. At his suggestion, I tried yellowtail and abalone and found it far superior to the shrimp, which he warned me wasn't up to snuff that day.

Still, his popularity did not account for the fact that everyone who saw him that day immediately knew to wish him a happy birthday. When I asked about this, he explained that in the past 22 years he had had exactly 22 shaves and 22 haircuts and had not spent a dime on either.

Because once a year, in springtime, on his birthday, he would hack off the past year's growth of long hair, clip his 12-month-old beard and shave his face and head.

This left him closely shorn and cool during the hot summer, with a bit of stylish growth for the traditional Labor Day bike rallies. By February, he had a thick coat of fur to protect him on those chilly night rides. Then off it all came to mark another year gone.

The ultimate in low-cost, low-maintenance style with a different fashion statement for every month of the year.

And none of that achy, breaky, fakey look.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Calabash Problems 'An Elephant In The Living Room'

To the editor:
 During a recent meeting of the community of Calabash, it seemed that most were more interested in questioning the credibility of our guest and who said what, when and where, than in discussing the many complex and pressing issues which are facing our community.

One means of avoiding dealing with a problem is to deny that there is a problem, and this becomes "the problem". To rationalize that all of this is the result of a few discontents and an overly restrictive sign ordinance is not to see the elephant in the living room.

The majority district, whose association seems at times to run the community, seems happy and fails to understand why others refuse to jump into their "melting pot" and become like them. Some fail to understand that there is strength in cultural diversity and that cultural superiority is destructive and divisive to our community.

The "we have plans for Calabash" syndrome excludes a majority of individuals in our community. It's not just my community or yours. It's ours.

I'm concerned as anyone else about the past lax management of our community, and I agree that new management has brought many new and sweeping changes, but when the cure is worse than the disease, one has to ask whether it has been worth it.

Our community has the potential and human re-

sources to become a model and a pace-setter for our county. But this will never be realized until all share in these dreams and hopes.

It's been said that if you aren't part of the solution, you are part of the problem. Please support our community.

Anthony Clemmons
Calabash

Now She's Afraid Of Police

To the editor:
 Is it against the law to do the time-honored signal of one quick flash of your lights at another car when theirs seem to be bright?

I have been a resident of Ocean Isle Beach since April 1992 and have always felt safe until the night of Feb. 21. I was returning home from work at Sea Trail Plantation around 10:15 p.m.

About half a mile from the light at the intersection of (highways) 904 and 179, I saw the lights of an oncoming car. The car's lights appeared to be on bright so, using the signal most drivers use to let other drivers know their lights are on bright, I flashed my lights. The oncoming car flashed its lights to indicate that they were on dim and that I had made a mistake.

I continued through the flashing yellow caution lights at the intersection not giving any thought to the other car

until it whipped back around behind me. As we approached Ocean View Baptist Church on N.C. 179, the car turned on blue lights. It appeared to be a police car.

The street was dark and deserted and I was not sure if I should pull over on the spot or continue on to my residence, which was about five minutes away. One hears so much on the news today that a woman alone in a car should not pull over for a police officer on a dark, deserted street, so I proceeded cautiously toward my home.

I was only concerned for my own safety, and I had no idea as to why I was being stopped. I put my turning signal on to show that I was going down my street. As I did this, the police car turned on a siren. I proceeded cautiously to my house where I stopped.

When I reached my home, we both stepped out of our cars. I, at first, was relieved to see a woman police officer. I was sure she would understand my reason for not stopping. That relief was short lived as she began demanding to know why I did not stop. I explained that I didn't feel safe.

She was very rude and belligerent. She threatened to put me in jail because not stopping right away for a blue light is a two-year misdemeanor. She then offered me a deal: either take a ticket for not dimming my lights or go to jail. I took the ticket, even though I did dim my lights after a quick flash.

She also told me the only reason she was not taking

me to jail was because of my fiancé. I assume this was because my fiancé's brother used to work on the force with her.

The police officer is a Sunset Beach police officer. I was embarrassed in front of my neighbors. The front of my house looked like a crime scene, as two more police cars patrolled the street during the confrontation.

I used to feel safe on Sunset and Ocean Isle Beaches, but not anymore. I am not afraid of criminals, but the police. I never thought I would be threatened and treated like a criminal for putting my safety first.

Thayel Musselwhite
Ocean Isle Beach

(More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. Mailing addresses and phone numbers will not be published. Under no circumstances will unsigned letters be printed. Letters should be legible. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to *The Brunswick Beacon*, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.