

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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How Can You Be Nostalgic Over Collards?

Southerners are very peculiar about collards, which I am not particularly fond of. When a deer wanders into the garden and eats up everything but the collards, that should tell you something.

But not to a southerner. Criticize collards, okra or mustard greens and you're in trouble. I was born and raised right here in Brunswick County and have seen with my own two eyes and smelled with my own nose enough to make this condemnation of the plant.

There is a garden space behind my house now that's getting ready for the planting of fall collards. While I get all nostalgic over the clearing away of summer's dead vegetable stems and the birth of a new crop, I want you to know that this was none of my doings. It's my parents who are hooked on the plant.

I'll eat a helping every now and then just to keep my allegiance to the family, but that's about it. When they start pulling out Ziploc bags of green clumps of frozen collards



Terry Pope

from the freezer that are said to be better warmed over than they were before, leave me out of it.

There was a crisis around the house this past week. Nobody could make it to the farmer's market early enough before the bunches of collard seedlings were all sold.

Each morning a new load of plants is delivered to the market, and by each afternoon they are all gone. People are grabbing the plants by the hundreds these days. They are planting rows and rows of them now so the plants will be green and leafy when the first frost arrives, which is said to make the plants

taste much better.

All of the rain lately has set collard lovers behind in Brunswick County this summer. The plants should already be in the ground, but most gardens are still mudholes. I had cleared a garden space earlier and made it part of the yard because the two pear trees planted there have done so well this year.

The grass sure loved the rain, too, and it quickly took over the former garden plot. But in competition with the turf and pears, collards won out. They were rewarded three rows on top of my cleared space, right beneath the hanging pears.

You see, collard growers can't just have a few plants and enjoy a few cookings and let it be history. They have to have a whole field, 50 plants for every man, woman and child in the house. Just ride up and down the highway and look in people's gardens. It's embarrassing.

The collard lovers will march up and down the rows and pick a few leaves off of each one, like cropping

tobacco, rather than cut the rascals down (stem and all) and put them out of their misery.

With our mild winters, the plants will be around forever, until it's time to plant spring collards. Then the vicious cycle starts all over again. There will be more worries about getting the plants on time, choosing the right time to plant and that dreaded late frost, which for some reason won't hurt fall collards but will kill spring collards. Now why is that?

Then I'll start to feel nostalgic again over the planting of a new crop. The trees will blossom, the azaleas will bloom, the butterflies will flutter past the pear trees and, I'm afraid, the collards will be in the ground, right outside the window where I sometimes stare out—looking for inspiration to write this column.

President Bush got into a heap of trouble by criticizing broccoli a while back. I wish he had put the bad word on collards instead. He would have been my hero.

Inflated Egos Spoiling Calabash Mixing Pot

The resignation of seven planning board members last week in Calabash caught a lot of people off guard. But it really shouldn't have come as a big surprise.

As they pointed out in their joint letter of resignation, planning board members and the town commissioners who appointed them haven't seen eye to eye since the board was formed 18 months ago.

The seven planning board members who resigned said they didn't receive the support and guidance they needed from town commissioners. Also, they said there was a lack of communication between the two boards.

In my humble opinion, though, the mass resignation had very little to do with a lack of support, guidance or communication.

Those planning board members quit because they either didn't realize their role as members of an advisory board or weren't willing to accept it.

A few of those former planning board members would have run the town with an iron fist if they had the chance. They would deny it to their grave, but all of the recent problems between the planning board and town commission came down to a power struggle.

Granted, there should have been better communication between the two boards. Town commissioners should have supported the planning board and let them know what was expected of them.

But the planning board members should have been more willing to accept their role as advisors.

Planning boards are supposed to study issues, make recommendations and get out of the way. It's up to the town commissioners who were elected to take action and bear the brunt of any criticism.

If the planning board members who resigned last week care as much about the community as they say they do, they wouldn't have quit. There's no way that resigning can be in the best interest of Calabash.

It was rather crowded in the town council chambers last week when the resignations went down. It must have been all those inflated heads in one small room.

When the old Town of Calabash and Carolina Shores merged two years ago, I thought it was the best thing that could have happened for both areas.

I never thought inflated egos would spoil the Calabash mixing pot, but that's exactly what has happened.

Most Carolina Shores residents moved there after living most of their lives somewhere else. A lot lived in the Northeast.

Many of the residents were attracted to the area because of the golf courses, beaches, fishing and mild climate.

They probably didn't move here because they wanted to spend hundreds of hours in a stuffy board room wading through pages of unnecessary rules.

In fact, big government is probably one of things they had hoped to get away from in tiny Calabash. Certain zoning rules and planning are vital to a bright future.

But there's a few commissioners and former planners who need to move to New York City or Washington, D.C., for three months and realize how lucky they are to have found the place long known for its shrimp boats and seafood.

I hate to say it. But it seems that Calabash might have been better off when nobody really cared if someone put up a sign in front of their store.

Calabash survived several generations without regulations on yard sales and landscaping. I imagine it could survive several more generations without one lick of government interference.

It's time some people realized they need Calabash more than Calabash needs them.

Doug Rutter



It's Good To Drive A Familiar Road

At a recent Sunset Beach Town Council meeting, one member shared a description visitors use for some of our local roadways. They call them the "little black roads."

Seems they tend to get lost, wandering about in search of the right road to the right golf course, and miss their tee times. Apparently, that is not good if you are a golfer.

I wish some of those guys could have been on the roads Don and I traveled last week while in the Shenandoah Valley of northern Virginia.

We were in a resort area north of Harrisonburg. Talk about little roads! The interstates were nice for simply getting someplace, but once off of them, it was another story, for better or worse.

We took back roads from where we were staying over into West Virginia and to surrounding towns.

Many of the roads we were on must have been built back when motorists didn't expect to meet oncoming traffic; they were that narrow. Built up and around mountains or over cow paths, they wound over and around themselves, narrow, curvy and built for an average driving speed of 35 mph.

Some of the roads didn't even have center lines. Others had solid center lines, no passing for miles and miles and miles of curving black streamers laced with yellow ribbon.

En route from Harrisonburg to Richmond one day, my husband decided to take the scenic route instead of interstate. We took what had once been the main connecting highway between the two cities, crossing over the mountains and winding through a number of picturesque small towns.

What we had estimated as a 2- to 2 1/2-hour trip took closer to four hours to complete. I imagine we felt like a lot of folks have when traveling U.S. 17. You keep expecting Gomer to stick his head out, grin and say, "Sur-prise, sur-prise, sur-prise!"

Luckily, as on other outings, we were just riding and looking for the most part, so we were okay. And these roads offered at least one redeeming quality: sometimes spectacular views from atop a ridge.

But if we had been running late for a golf match or other appointment, any of those roads would have been a rude awakening.

While my sympathy for golfers wandering the South Brunswick Isles was steadily increasing, Brunswick County's worst roads also were looking better every minute.

It's great to get away, but gee, it's nice to get home to a familiar bed—and to roads whose curves and whims I know like the palm of my hand.

Susan Usher



Reading Opens Window Into The Universe

A door into the value of reading, a window into the universe, was first opened to me one summer afternoon when I happened upon a live snake.

I was 8 years old and soon to enter the third grade. My family lived in a small community on the east side of Fayetteville in a house minus indoor plumbing. I was of an honest, blue collar family; at best we finished high school, then went on to a career as truck drivers, carpenters or factory laborers—the backbone of America. But there confronting me was a 2-foot-long snake, the creature I had been taught from birth to fear and kill.

The snake was solid green and slender. I didn't think it was poisonous. I held the snake down with a stick, caught it and carried the serpent home where I put it in a Mason jar. Next, I walked to the public library and checked out a book on snakes and began to read.

Reading had never been emphasized in my family. My mother read us Bible verses at night, and saw to it that we did our homework, but in her toil of raising five children and stretching my father's check from week to week, little time was left for pleasure books. My father had quit school in the seventh grade to go to work, and though he could read, books were not one of his pleasures.

That first book on reptiles opened the world of words to me. Until that time, I had marginal interest in reading. In class I drifted in the middle level of readers.

But when I began reading about snakes, I slowly but surely learned that a lot of what I had been told about snakes was simply not true. They were not the incredible, vicious, diabolical creatures lore made them out to be, most no more dangerous than a rabbit or squirrel. A few species just happened to be poisonous.

From that time forward, I began to seek out the truth in other areas of life, and not to take for granted every thing I was told. By the end of the third grade I had moved into the advanced reading circle.

Today, my world revolves around books. I write books and teach writing to college students. I cannot comprehend life without reading, but sadly, many thousands of teens and adults live in North Carolina today who stumble through children's books. Thousands more cannot read at all.

My first novel was set in east Fayetteville and told a story about people much like the ones I grew up with. Many of my friends quit school, opting to work rather than suffer the humiliation of being behind the achievements of their classmates. One day I ran into a friend of mine who had dropped out of school the day he turned 16. He asked me was I writing a new book.

"I had my wife read me some of your book," he said, "and man, you told it how it was. Some of the time I could swear she was reading about me."

Tim McLaurin

He was smiling, but the smile slowly faded from his face, as he realized his admission.

"I never got too good at reading," he stammered.

I changed the subject to lessen his embarrassment.

Ignorance is a word often misinterpreted. Ignorance means simply the lack of knowledge of a subject. I like to look at ignorance of a subject as a challenge to delve into an unexplored area in life. Ignorance of reading is nothing to be ashamed of, but should become a challenge to open one's mind to the wonders of the written word.

Here in North Carolina, nearly a third of all high school students drop out minus a diploma. The reasons are various and complex, but all of us know one or several people who got behind early in school and was dragged deeper and deeper into a quagmire of ridicule, criticism and class scorn. Probably some readers of this essay were of this unfortunate group.

North Carolina is rapidly becoming a state that demands better and better reading and writing skills to get a good job. Many of our tobacco fields and forests are being paved over for the construction of factories and research centers. A non-reader misses not only the knowledge and pleasure gained from books, but is steadily and rapidly being pushed to the bottom of the job ladder where often crime or drugs become lucrative, but dead-end alternatives.

Recently I was asked to visit a 15-year-old young man who was in a camp for troubled teenagers. He had been stealing beer from convenience stores and fighting. He was failing in school, although tests showed his intelligence to actually be quite high. A counselor had told me he liked to read.

The kid was hard-muscled and cocky. One arm and shoulder sported crude tattoos. From his opening words, I could tell he was used to talking with counselors and psychologists, knew just what to say and what not.

I gave him a book I had brought, one of adventure and travel in distant lands. As he thumbed through the pages, his attitude changed and he let down some barriers.

"You know reading, man," he said, his voice taking on a thoughtful tone, "it takes me away."

"Sometimes I read about what somebody did in a book and I say I could do that. I could do just as good."

Illiteracy in North Carolina is a serious problem, but it is a problem that is being actively confronted by the government and people of this state. Libraries, schools and many civic organizations offer programs where volunteer readers are

teamed with non-readers.

Volunteers are only asked to give a few hours a week. Most find that the pride and joy reflected in a person's eyes who reads his first sentence far exceeds their own modest commitment.

Ignorance of the written word is nothing to be ashamed of. But as we move toward the 21st Century, illiteracy will become a growing blight upon the future of our state.

If you are a non-reader or marginal reader, seek help. There are many people who care. If you are a lover of books, volunteer to help another learn to share your pleasure.

The gift may seem small to the average citizen, but to a non-reader a door will be opened to them to a universe that can only be limited by the boundaries of the human mind.

Editor's Note: Tim McLaurin served as a Marine and a Peace Corps volunteer, salesman, carpenter and carnival snake handler before turning to writing. He has written two novels, *The Acorn Plan* and *Woodrow's Trumpet*, and the soon to be released autobiography, *Keeper of the Moon*. His essay is one in a series made available by the North Carolina Press Association.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR Better Late Than Never

To the editor:

The *State Post Pilot* asked that subscribers note the date their newspapers were received beginning with the July 24 edition. Since both the *Beacon* and *Pilot* arrive on or about the same date, I am providing the date of receipt of the *Beacon* in case you are in contact with the Postal Service concerning delivery.

It would seem to me that with each postage rate increase the service gets slower. I recently received a letter postmarked in Raleigh which took five days to be delivered to me in Lakeland, Florida. I remember being stationed on Saipan, Mariana Islands in 1967 to 1969 and receiving mail from my mother in Supply, N.C. in less time than that.

Here is the information showing the issue date and the delivery date:

Issue Date	Delivery Date
7-25-91	8-1-91
8-1-91	8-5-91
8-8-91	8-14-91
8-15-91	8-24-91*

I was on vacation and my mail was held and placed in my box on 8-24-91.

Before I close I wanted to add that I enjoy receiving and reading the *Beacon*, even if it is a week old when I receive it.

M. L. Sellers
Lakeland, Florida