

NATURE IN A NUTSHELL

Gail Roberson

A thorough "thorning"

Many years ago, as a young greenhorn naturalist, I discovered a massive blackberry thicket near the edge of an old mill pond close by daddy's farm. Knowing it attracted bear, and intrigued deeply with those massive, beautiful creatures, I hacked out a small trail in the briars just large enough to squeeze a tall homemade ladder through, and proceeded to lean it against the tree. I was assisted, somewhat, by a young man who was more interested in my wild hormones than any wildlife, but I put up with him long enough for his bulging biceps to help me lay a few sturdy boards across two perfect limbs, over which I draped some burlap bags I'd taken from daddy's packhouse.

Once I'd installed myself up there, I'd haul the ladder up until I was ready to come down. Young and foolish, to the point of dangerous, and possessing sparse common sense, I gave little thought to the fact that black bears climb trees, or that my blind should face the berry patch and not hover over it.

I was indeed lucky to make safe use of this spot for three years, but then off I went to college in the big city. Life became hectic with obtaining a good education, several lovers and part-time jobs. Eventually I returned home, took a job, met and married my husband and moved to the county next door to establish my new home. But I did not forget that berry patch, or the endless parade of bear.

One day, when the berries were about ripe, I returned to the old blind. Expecting both ladder and boards to be rotten, I took with me a new tree-climbing belt, which I had learned to use. I locked it in place around both the tree and myself, and began the slow ascent. I found the boards to be firmer than I'd expected, so I settled down on them, trying to hide among leaves, as only one piece of burlap cover remained. But I got the "figdgets" and moved too often.

My next memory was the sickening sound of cracking boards and the all-consuming rush of adrenaline. Agonizing pain seared through my body. The initial shock was quickly followed by the dread of realization that I was entrapped within the thick briars, about three feet off the ground. I seemed to be "nailed in," as millions of poisonous thorns tore into me and clutched me tight in place. I was trapped, and helpless, as few have ever been, bloody, already full of fever, and with at least a mile of deep woods between me and my vehicle.

In the hour it took to free myself, I fought constant feelings of faintness. Afraid I would die there, I used what strength and courage I could haul from deep within that secret place each person has, to finally rip my body free of clothing and flesh until I at last felt ground beneath my feet. There was so much blood in my eyes I could hardly see. By the time I'd staggered out of the woods and driven the five miles to the emergency room, my own mother would not have recognized me. None of the hospital personnel did.

It took a doctor and two nurses another hour to pick the thorns from my body; some were so deeply embedded they had to be cut out. I had a number of stitches, including my scalp, and two large shots for infection. It was then I realized the seriousness of my allergies and asthma and how my body was trying to handle the fever from the thorns. To this day, I still suffer an occasional flareup of a rare disease thought to have originated from my "thorough thorning," as if the memory of the event itself was not enough.

Eventually, I did retrieve my expensive climbing equipment, and I established a new blind that now faces the berry patch, not hovers over it. I was lucky that day. Now, when I go in the woods, I make certain that the first piece of equipment I pack is my common sense.

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Gun control challenge

No excuses

In the wake of a horrific series of school shootings, our U.S. Congress, anxious to do something to address the fears of a concerned American public, is scrambling to somehow address the problem youth. One faction, predominately but not exclusively Republican, blames decadent Hollywood and a godless, humanistic culture; the other faction, predominately but not exclusively Democratic, blames the ever-lobbying NRA and the easy availability of guns.

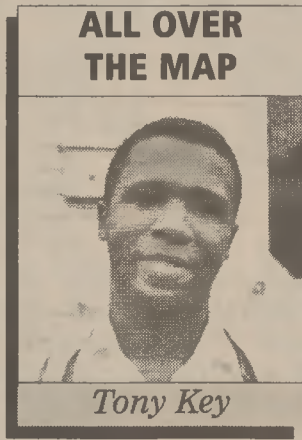
Yes, there are a lot of firearms floating around and yes, we've got to come up with some mechanism for keeping lethal weaponry out of the hands of sociopathic teens (and adults for that matter). But we've also got to come to grips with a puzzling predicament: How do we contain the violent few without overburdening the law-abiding many?

And what about the corrosive effect of repeated exposure to violent movies, television, video games and other forms of 'entertainment'? Again, the predicament. It is disturbing to see young children, young boys in particular, re-enacting with their small friends some sword

fight they've seen on Highlander or the ever-popular body slam from professional wrestling. (A good time for a parent to explain the difference between show biz and reality.) But for every crackpot who takes the stuff on the tube or screen that terrible extra step, there are countless others of us who know the real from the fantastical. Just because Buffy slays doesn't mean I should.

How do we protect ourselves from the dangerous few and without trampling on the liberties of the innocent many?

A note for those who appreciate irony: Next time, I hope to have finished reading and have a review of Thomas Harris' Hannibal, the sequel to his best-seller, The Silence of the Lambs. (Yikes.)

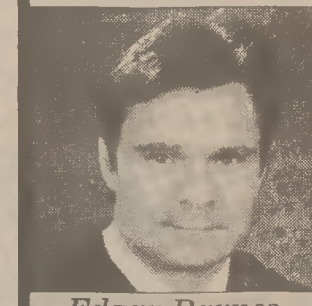


ALL OVER THE MAP

Tony Key

Life in its truest form is the glorious human behavior of being all that God created one to be. There are many virtues that make up the Art of Living. But to the artisans, we cannot live life as if our destiny is mere chance. Life is what we make it. It's what we choose, and

VIEW FROM THE BENCH



Edgar Barnes

what we give, what we take, what we avoid, what we sacrifice, what we plan, what we dream, what we promise, what we hurt, what we love, what we hate, what we forgive, what we treasure, what we take for granted, what we build, what we destroy and what we worship.

All that is good and bad in life is a choice, if not a choice to experience, a choice as to how we will respond to it. The simplicity of the truth that life is no more or less than what we ourselves make it, is unsettling because this truth eliminates all excuses and blame for not squeezing every ounce of life out of every minute of everyday.

There are no such things as fate or luck. Life is a story waiting to be written. It is a masterpiece waiting to be painted. It is a promise from God waiting to be redeemed. The Art of Living is the art of investing righteousness in order to reap blessings.

God save this State and this Honorable Court. Court's adjourned.

Edgar Barnes is a judge in the 1st Judicial District, which includes Perquimans County.



I made it!

I survived our exciting few days without completely falling apart.

Actually Drew's 18th birthday wasn't nearly as tough as I feared. It was quite like any other day except that I must admit I allowed him to skip school that Friday. With only three more days until the end of the year, I wasn't really worried that he wouldn't graduate if he missed that day.

Baccalaureate proved daunting. That was the closest I came to falling apart. When I caught the seniors marching in out of the corner of my eye with Courtney leading the way, my chest tightened considerably. I was very teary-eyed during that service, along with a whole lot of other parents.



RAMBLIN' WITH SUSAN

Susan Harris

On graduation day, I was antsy. The morning started off with the transmission on my car acting up, a car I hadn't even gotten the payment book on yet! So I scooted myself right on over to the dealer and they fixed me right up. Back at work, I was not very productive, so I left a

little early to finish fixing my treats for our after-graduation celebration and just generally "chill" as my children would say.

Time to leave arrived, and amazingly, everyone was ready and left on time. This had to be a first at our house. We got to the school in plenty of time to get seats on the 50-yard-line — hey, graduation's like football, I want good seats — and were even able to get enough for our extended family to sit together.

Courtney led the dignitaries to their seats on the platform. No tears. I saw the graduates leave the building and line up. No tears. Pomp and Circumstances started playing. No tears. The class began their march into the stadium. No tears.

Then, panic. I realized when Drew walked in front of us that he had something under his gown. I was very proud of this child, but I vowed I would ground him on graduation night if he embarrassed me in front of a packed stadium with whatever item he had chosen to cram under that gown!

After overcoming still camera and video camera problems to start off the night, we got everything straight and I filmed some. I think that and concern over what Drew was hiding kept me occupied enough not to cry all night.

In the end, I found my son had tucked the congratulations sign from in front of the school under his gown to pull out after the ceremony.

Then, a big smile. No tears.

NOTICE OF FILING FOR NON-PARTISAN ELECTION

TOWN OF WINFALL

The Perquimans County Board of Elections will conduct a Non-Partisan Municipal Election for the Town of Winfall November 2, 1999. Winfall will elect (2) Town Commissioners and a Mayor at this time. The filing for candidates will begin at 12:00 o'clock Noon, July 2, 1999 and end at 12:00 o'clock Noon, August 6, 1999.

The voter registration deadline for town residents who will vote in this election is October 8, 1999. Persons already registered do not have to reregister.

L. Paul Smith, Jr. Chairman
Perquimans County Board of Elections

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