

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Unbroken

This is still Around Towns, but the circle, is much smaller.

Now, in July, 2011, a street tar melting summer, John and I had the extreme pleasure of meeting Sam and JoAnn. Because they shared 11 days with us at our inn, we had the opportunity to fall into a natural rhythm with each other. Sam loved Blue Grass music so much that he could tolerate the heat at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds all day. JoAnn also loved Blue Grass music, but only enough to stay in the heat half a day. At first. Then she loved it for only an hour a day. After while she loved the air conditioned inn more than music and 90 degree weather.

After their visits JoAnn sent surprise gift boxes to me. It was always a thrill to open them. One box contained a plastic crab with plenty of personality. It was a little joke between JoAnn and me about husbands, but that's all I'm saying. On a black satin ribbon the crab is used as a warning for John and me. If either of us is in a "keep your distance mood" and is wearing the crabby necklace the other knows to heed the meaning. It has stayed unworn most of the time since given. That is until recently.

Working and living together, John and I have been spending almost 24/7 with each other for a loong time. Now that we don't roam, we stay home there are more than 7 days in a week and more than 24 hours in a day.

We race to see who gets to wear Crabby for the day but as I arise 3 hours before John, it is a bit unfair. I did catch him trying to sneak the crustaceous amulet under his pillow so it would be unavailable to me. The gauntlet has been thrown.

Of course I did embellish this ever so slightly. John and I do retire to separate corners at times and it has always been difficult to distinguish not being heard from being ignored. All said and done, I am grateful to have someone to help me cope, melt down, worry about adult kids and grand kids, other family and friends, living right here with me. No, not grateful for someone. Grateful for John.

Around Towns

Dale Harmon



Still Here

This week I want to talk about the crisis that we are in. I am sure that everyone knows about Governor Kemp's order to shelter in place. In this time of crisis, many organizations have had to reorder the way that they operate. The same has been true for myself with UGA Extension. The main message that I want to be heard is that we am still here. Extension is continuing to operate in these strange times, but the way that we are operating is changing. I want to talk about some of those changes, and what I'm doing to continue to serve the people of Towns and Union counties.

For the duration of the shelter in place order UGA has ordered Extension employees to work from home. This means that your method of contacting me may need to change. I am still reachable by email. Email is going to be the best method of contacting me. My phone notifies me when I have a new email, so I check it regularly, throughout the day. My email is Jacob.Williams@uga.edu. You can also contact me through Facebook. If you send

a Facebook message to the Union County Extension or Towns County Extension Facebook page, I'll see that and get in contact with you. You are also welcome to call the office number and leave a message. It will take me a little bit longer to get back in touch with you because we are only stopping by the office a couple of times a week to check messages and mail.

Extension provides testing services for soil, water, hay, radon, and a number of other things. We are continuing to provide those services, but we have had to change the way that we receive samples. Please bring samples by the Union County Extension Office in the Union County Civic Center. We have a table in front of the office door with supplies and a cardboard box to put your test into. You may leave payment for the test in the drop box in the door. We are working on installing a drop box outside the building so that you don't have to enter to drop off samples. We will come by a couple of times a week to mail off samples. If you have specific questions about testing, send me an email, and I'll help you figure out what you need.

I am still here to answer questions that are agriculture or natural resource based. You can send me emails with pictures. I am trying to cut back on the number of site visits that I do, and only leaving those for emergencies or if you are commercially involved in agriculture. If you have a question that is difficult to answer by email, send me an email, and then I'll give you my cell phone number so we can talk. I'm happy to do FaceTime or skype if need be.

I had some programs that I had planned to do in person. Look for those programs to move online if possible. I'll be doing Facebook live, Zoom, and making videos to continue getting educational content out there to you. Check this column, the Towns, or Union County Extension Facebook page for upcoming programs.

I believe that while I work for UGA, I am here to serve the people in Towns and Union counties. That service may look different but we will continue to do all that we can. Please reach out to me so that I can help your with agricultural questions big or small.



Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

Click Like for the Earth

When my father was a child, there was a remote spring in the mountains alongside a forest road traveled by horse and wagon or on foot. Travelers would sometimes water their horses at the spring, or take a drink and rest awhile in the shade of the tall chestnut trees. The spring was tiled with "pretty rocks" collected by a farmer who found them in the creek that ran nearby. My dad said that when the sun shined on the pool, it sparkled and cast dancing lights all about the shaded grove around the spring. The "pretty rocks" were actually amethysts, which can still be found in Northeast Georgia, if you know where to look.

My father understood that the spring had been dug in his grandfather's day, sometime in the late 1800's, and lined with the amethysts soon after. He estimated that the spring had been there for at least 40 years by the time he first saw it, respected and maintained by the travelers who used it.

One day my uncle, who was a few years older than my dad, came home with some amethysts in his pocket and my grandfather asked him where he got them. "At the old spring," was his answer, and sensing that he might be in trouble, my uncle added, "but everybody else is taking them." "You'll put those right back where you found them," said my grandfather, "and see that you do it quick if you want any supper."

But the magic spell of the spring had been broken, and first by ones and twos, then by pocketful and at last by the bucket, it was not long before all the amethysts had disappeared. The valley was growing. What had once been frontier to the white settlers (it was home to many peoples before them) was becoming more civilized, and greed is often a side effect of civilization.

When I was a child I went with my grandmother to visit the old homestead where she grew up. There was a chimney still standing there, and some stone works around the site where the house once stood. I remember the deep shade of huge trees, and numerous flowers and herbs surviving from plantings made a half century before. Water still flowed over a stone watercourse made by hand. The summer sun was hot, but the old homestead was cool, quiet and peaceful. Not a trace of it remains. As the property changed hands and subdivided, the trees were cut down, the stone works bulldozed under, the creek dammed, and the variety of plant life replaced by some kind of hybrid fescue over ground that cracks open during dry weather.

Another shaded grove I once knew disappeared in more recent times, during the big real estate boom that started here when the Olympics came to Atlanta. There was an avenue of giant maples and poplars that followed a meandering stream. Numerous springs fed the creek along the way. One spring was particularly intriguing, as it emerged directly from the roots beneath an ancient maple. The roots formed a grotto over a deep pool of water where mayflies danced in the summer. One might have fancied it as an entrance to the underworld guarded by fairies, though my nosy hound once found it guarded by yellow jackets instead.

The springs survived the first couple of attempts to develop the property, but then came a developer who was more aggressive than the others and decided to try and "recover" all that "wasted" land. Trees were cut. The springs were bulldozed, filled in, destroyed. Of course this was a violation of environmental regulations, and the property owner was fined a few hundred dollars. He eventually lost his land to the bank. What once was forest is now another field of fescue in a vacant lot that has been sold and resold. The mayflies are long gone, but the yellow jackets are still there.

We humans have always been greedy. We have always been prone to treating the natural world in a ham fisted manner. But as our negative impact on the earth has escalated, some of us have tried to seek comfort in the past, looking for that magical time and place and that special people possessed of a set of values that were kinder to the earth, and more sustainable.

Sadly, no such time, place, or people ever truly existed. Perhaps the closest our species ever came was the First Peoples of North America, who cultivated and nurtured field and forest. It was not a wilderness that European settlers found here, but managed land, empty, but recently occupied by a million people or more who had died from the diseases brought here by the first European explorers.

If respect for the land is not a function of culture, then what? Such thoughts seem appropriate as we observe Earth Day, and consider that many of our current 7 billion inhabitants may live to see 10 billion. We are in the midst of a great extinction event that some fear may grow to rival the Permian, when three fourths of life on the Earth was extinguished. Meanwhile our tapeworm economists worry where we will get the extra population to pay the bills we have already run up.

So far the tapeworm view is the dominant paradigm, supported by the myopic impulse to reproduce that continues to plague those parts of the world least able to afford more mouths to feed. The economy must always be growing, and we seem to lack the imagination necessary to grow it without also growing the population. Population growth (by birth) has slowed in the developed world, but it will continue through immigration in order to sustain the current economic model that is dependent on borrowing from future generations.

When there are more people, there are less natural resources to go around, and as freedom requires a certain amount of elbow room, there must also be less freedom. There will be fewer shady groves and cool springs to enjoy. When we had a choice to value such things, we often sacrificed them for short term gain. Today, separated from the natural world by the virtual, we value Nature less. Who knows what we will value tomorrow.



Letters to The Editor

Our Restaurants and COVID-19

Dear Editor,
My wife and I decided recently to go out and support one of the area restaurants we frequent. We know it is difficult for them, and what little we could do is only in patronage. We called in our order with no problem. When we arrived, we were astonished that the person waiting at the outside table had no gloves or mask. When we asked her why not, she answered, "We decided not to wear masks." When an older lady came out - presumably one of the owners - we asked her why nobody was taking precautions as stated by the CDC and every other health and governmental agency. Her answer was that God is watching over us and we have decided not to wear them!

Even though my wife and I are people of deep faith, this response startled us to no end; the ignorance of fundamental Christianity is not faith, just like those who tempt venomous vipers, saying, "The Lord shall protect me." We are flabbergasted at the lack of concern for something so dangerous that could be taken care of in a short time through the faith of common sense bestowed upon us by our Lord. Maybe people think they look stupid wearing masks and gloves, but they'll look stupider with a ventilator hanging out of their mouth for sure.

Also, having somewhat of a marketing background, it would seem to me that restaurant owners would want to display that every precaution is being taken. That would give the confidence that the owners really do care.

At this particular location, their statement that their faith in God was why they decided not to take any visible precautions hopefully does not carry over into their food preparation areas. I do wish them well and hope that the Lord's Face shines upon them and is gracious and merciful to them. However, we will not be venturing out any further to any restaurants in this area until we know that the owners take proper precautions and not chalk this thing up to some kind of conspiracy.

Unfortunately, the restaurants in this area just lost \$60 a week from us. With things as they are and restaurants trying to stay afloat until some kind of "all clear" comes about, I am simply amazed at the shortsightedness of some owners in this area. And to think that this situation may be around for a while. Do owners of businesses in this area have to see this thing up close and personal before the warnings are heeded? The stories from friends in New York that I grew up with are something between surreal and "The Walking Dead." We are blessed to still have a chance at some kind of normalcy. That is Father's grace upon us who gave us a measure of common sense and fair warning that this thing is coming. Oh wait... it is here. Do we follow prudent steps with faith in the Father, or do we just become lazy and say, "God is watching over us?"

My wife and I worked on cruise ships - it's where we met. The first thing you're trained in is what part to play when, not if, a norovirus outbreak occurs. We have seen a ship have over 1,000 quarantine cases within six hours of onset, shutting down the ship for several days. The precautions are simple: wear gloves and a mask and do not touch your hands to your face until you know they are sanitized. A simple and, yes, inconvenient task for a short time. Norovirus doesn't kill, so how much more seriously should people in this area take COVID-19? They would be amazed at what a two to three week vigilant effort would produce. Now, that's faith... the evidence seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

Keith Soltys
*Editor's Note: As of press time, the FDA was not requiring restaurant workers to wear masks/ facial coverings in response to the pandemic, and only employees coming into direct contact with "ready-to-eat" foods were being required to wear gloves. Residents can always ask restaurants what virus precautions they are taking before placing food orders.

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