

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Happy Birthday, America!

By Yonatan
Hambourger and
Tzali Reicher

**Echos
from Sinai**
"Torah for
Everyone"
Rabbi
Yonatan
Hambourger



On a warm summer day in Philadelphia in July 1776, a new nation was born. She was born consisting of 13 self-interested colonies and has grown nicely to now be made up of 50 united states. She is now known as the United States of America and is thriving at 248 years old. Imagine being in the Pennsylvania State House on that history changing Tuesday, July 4th, 1776, with the members of the Continental Congress. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and our other Founding Fathers couldn't have imagined what the United States would become. What was born of a dream of individual liberty has indeed accomplished so much in just 248 years.

We have so much to be proud of. It's a shame so many people today feel the opposite. Over the past decade, we've seen plunging pride, plunging faith, and plunging belief in our country and its ideals, particularly and most concerningly amongst young people. Our elite college campuses have been corrupted by ideologies that lead students to declare allegiance to foreign terrorist organizations. People have become enmeshed in the most irrelevant and most divisive elements of the American experience, getting lost in tribal politics and online discourse, instead of embracing what makes our nation great.

Gone are the days when Washington D.C. was far away and our communities felt like extended family. Today, developments in D.C. deeply impact us, yet we often remain strangers with our own neighbors.

The community spirit and sense of "E Pluribus Unum" (out of many, one) that our founders had, inspired, and drove the United States for well over two centuries. That spirit emboldened us to declare independence, overcome bitter internal strife and end slavery, bounce back from the Great Depression, go to war and free the world (twice!), courageously usher in an age of civil rights for all, recover from an attack on our shores that sought to punish us for our way of life, and lead the global fight against a global pandemic.

Yet in the present moment we are fractured and divided. But July 4th is here to remind us of the vision our Founding Fathers had for this country, and how we've far exceeded their wildest expectations. We must overcome our self-imposed differences and come together once again based on what unites us, not on what divides us.

As we mark another year of independence, it is crucial to remember and rekindle the values that forged this great nation: liberty, justice for all, an array of personal freedoms, and the relentless pursuit of happiness. These are not just ideals of the past but are the bedrock upon which our future must be built. These values have guided us through wars and peace, prosperity, and adversity.

Let us continue to hold high the torch of freedom and dispel the current darkness; and let us stand firm in our resolve to advance the cause of liberty and justice for all. On this day, as we celebrate our collective achievements, we renew our pledge to uphold the timeless values that define America. May our nation, under G-d, have a renewal of spirit and continue to flourish for generations to come.

Happy Birthday, America. Keep being you. Please reach out to us with your comments and questions at y@tasteof Torah.org. We'd love to hear from you!
Yonatan Hambourger and Tzali Reicher are rabbis and writers serving communities throughout the regional South.

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 SHOULD BE E-MAILED OR MAILED TO:

Towns County Herald, Letter to the Editor
P.O. Box 365, Hiawassee, GA 30546
Our email address: tcherald@windstream.net

Letters should be limited to 200 words or less, signed, dated and include a phone number for verification purposes. This paper reserves the right to edit letters to conform with Editorial page policy or refuse to print letters deemed pointless, potentially defamatory or in poor taste. Letters should address issues of general interest, such as politics, the community, environment, school issues, etc. Letters opposing the views of previous comments are welcomed; however, letters cannot be directed at, nor name or ridicule previous writers. Letters that recognize good deeds of others will be considered for publication.*
Note: All letters must be signed, and contain the first and last name and phone number for verification.

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month: School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday: Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month: Hiaw. City Council... City Hall YH City Council... YH City Hall	6 pm 6:30 pm
Second Wednesday of each month: Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month: Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month: Commissioner's Mtg... Courthouse City of Young Harris Planning Commission... Meeting Room in City Hall TC Water Authority Board Meeting	5:30 pm 5 pm 6 pm



Mind the Elbows

Here's a word you can drop at the next family gathering and watch the eyebrows rise. The word is "weenus." The weenus is the loose skin at the end of the elbow. It's also known as the olecranon skin, but that's not nearly as fun to say.

That skin at the end of my elbow itches a bit this morning, recently injected, as it was, by a bit of venom from a baldfaced hornet. It was just a love tap and could have been much worse, believe me. A full injection feels like being punched by a spiked fist over and over again.

I've been punched by that spiked fist and I've also been love-tapped several times during my tenure here at the edge of the wilderness. It is my strong opinion, subjective and based entirely on anecdotal evidence as it is, that a love tap comes from a hornet that knows you accepts you as part of its environment, doesn't perceive you as a threat, but hey, buddy, you're about the cross the line there.

In this instance I had mowed recently within a foot of the nest without seeing it, and walked that path many times, unaware and unmolested. The "hey buddy" moment came when I decided to drag a garden hose through the weeds, which disturbed the cantaloupe-sized dwelling. A single hornet targeted the elbow attached to the arm attached to the hose to inform me of my error: Hornet Defcon 5. You never want to see Hornet Defcon 1.

This was the exclamation point to end the chapter of a very strange and sad week in our relationship with the natural world. We're still puzzling through the meaning of it all, the meaning we will ultimately assign to it.

It all started with Buddy, the Carolina Wren Tracey rescued from the gentle jaws of our pup, Peaches, who had retrieved it from the not-so-gentle claws of the cat. Carolina Wrens are famously shy birds, but Buddy would answer his rescuer when she whistled and often visited when she was sitting on the deck. From time to time Buddy would sit on the corner of the railing and sing his song while Tracey sat quietly and listened. Buddy and his mate moved into the birdhouse at the end of our deck and were raising three hatchlings there. It was a joyful time.

A couple of weeks ago Tracey was returning from town and as she came up the hill below the church, she saw a black snake in the middle of the road, stretched out his full length and just sitting there enjoying the warmth of the pavement. It was just after 5 in the afternoon and she thought the snake was on borrowed time considering the traffic that would soon pass that way.

Sadly, some folks will go out of their way to run over a snake, any snake, that they find within the range of their front tires, so she got out of the car, picked up the snake and drove him home wrapped around her arm. We have mice sufficient to feed a black snake, and where the black snake goes, the copperhead goes not. It seemed like a win-win. She named him Sssydney, and released him near the barn about 200 feet from the house.

Saturday afternoon Tracey sat with Buddy on the deck and listened to his song. Then she walked to the mailbox with her dog, Max, and when she came back about 10 minutes later, Buddy and his mate were in a panic. She called me to come quickly to the deck. Sssydney had climbed the deck, the railing and the corner of the house and found his way to the birdhouse.

Snakes are strong, and it took some effort to remove him from the little dwelling, but it was too late for the little birds. Crushed and terrified to death, their little bodies lay lifeless inside the birdhouse. They were just shy of being able to fly out for the first time.

We were horrified, and the sadness lingers to this day. What meaning, what wisdom can we extract from this tragic event? If the snake had been left alone, the birds would probably be alive, but the snake would most likely be dead. The snake was doing exactly what snakes do to survive.

We know that nature can seem cruel in the inescapable truth that all creatures must eat to survive, and many must kill to eat. There is no denying that. But our sadness does not come from there. You see, for a moment in time we were allowed to interact with a wild creature that trusted us and accepted us as a part of its environment. We felt like proper stewards of the land, endeavoring to coexist with the birds, the bears, the bees, and even the snakes. It was a precious moment in time, a bubble of shared experience, shattered in an instant.

That coexistence can seem crowded at times. Everywhere we look, humans have elbowed out, dissected and destroyed and pushed the creatures of the wild into ever shrinking spaces. A healthy ecosystem is an intricate network of delicately balanced relationships and dependencies. It does not long endure fragmentation and subdivision, yet here we are as well, and like many who came here seeking the same things we sought, wanting to close and lock the gates behind us.

The sad week wasn't over yet. It's almost as if nature wanted to make sure to drive the lesson home, whatever lesson that was, and this time it came on the wings of bats.

For years we've accommodated a pair or two of little brown bats in the gables. Screens keep them out of the attic, and there is a bit of pressure washing to be done, but nothing eats more mosquitoes and gnats. In recent times we have seen more of them. Aside from the core group that stays here, we've seen as many as fifty at a time. The gables are too small to accommodate that number for long, so we've often wondered what disturbs them that they take temporary shelter here.

This year several pairs raised their young in one of the gables. Believe it or not, bats are very loving parents. The mothers hold and comfort their pups, and the community helps care for the young. If you've ever been close enough to a bat to be hissed at, you'll know that these endearing behaviors are best observed from a distance, and I was eager for the pups to be old enough to leave the roost so I could complete the yearly pressure washing ritual.

On the morning of the day of the hornet-stung weenus, I walked out of the shop to find a juvenile bat face down on the wet concrete, some distance from the roost. I carefully collected it and put it in a shaded area under the roost so the mother could find it on the next emergence that evening. Unfortunately, the colony had left to seek residence elsewhere and abandoned the pup. It did not survive.

If there is a lesson in all this, I think it might be that humans like it or not, are part of nature too. We have to eat to survive, and that survival, like the survival of every living creature, comes at a cost. That cost grows exponentially when our wants far exceed our needs.

We are a greedy lot, and addicted to our conveniences, distractions and instant gratifications. We think nothing of destroying an ecosystem to replace it with a mimicry of nature we call "landscaping," which we then mow and spray to keep it sterile and free from the unpleasant features of the natural world, the tooth and claw and eat-to-live aspects we prefer to think don't apply to us.

Those of us who believe ourselves to be more attuned to nature also have to mind our elbows. We have to accept that when our efforts at stewardship are inconsistent with the balancing equations of nature, nature will correct the error in the most expeditious manner.

The good news is that Buddy and his mate both survived. They abandoned the nest on the deck and moved into the meadow close by. As wrens do, they will likely raise another brood this year to replace the one they lost. We can still hear him sing in the evening

New Agriculture Laws

The Georgia legislature passed a number of laws this year that affect agriculture. I will attempt to discuss some of them here. Please keep in mind that my discussion of these new laws is aimed at educating people on what is happening. I'm not going to wade into a discussion of what is right or wrong. Also, don't take my discussion of these laws as legal advice. If you have further questions regarding these laws it would be best to consult an attorney or contact your representative in the legislature.

HB 1172 relates to property rights and the access that the public has to streams. This has been a particularly thorny issue that the legislature is attempting to navigate. The last couple of years have seen some lawsuits and a rushed bill from the previous legislative cycle to attempt to clarify the law. This bill has been a continuation of that. Essentially, this law makes it so that the public is allowed to pass through, hunt, and fish on waters that are navigable. In the past it could have been considered trespassing if you were fishing or kayaking down a stream that you did not own. Usually, in Georgia property ownership extends to the center of the stream. This law makes it so that the public can hunt, fish, or pass through a stream that is navigable. So, what is navigable and what is non-navigable? Everyone has an opinion on that. The House has created a committee (HR 1554) to do a study on that topic this year. The hope is that HB 1172 and HR 1554 will be able to create clarification in this argument that is trying to balance property rights and public access. HB 1172 does not grant an individual the right to trespass through private property to gain access to a navigable stream. They would need to put in a place with public access or property owner's permission.

SB 420 regards the foreign acquisition of farmland in Georgia. It prohibits a person or entity who is not a legal resident or American citizen from purchasing farmland, if they are considered an agent of a nation that is a foreign adversary. The goal of this law is to keep farmland in the possession of Georgia farmers, thereby protecting our domestic food supply. It also similarly restricts the purchasing of land within a 25-mile radius of a military installation, unless that land is residential. This bill is in response to concerns over China's acquisition of farmland across the USA. Several other states have enacted similar bills.

SB 340 has added DEF (diesel exhaust fluid) to the list of products that farmers can purchase with a GATE (Georgia Agriculture Tax Exemption) card. Possession of a GATE card removes the sales tax from a purchase. You must meet some minimum agricultural standards to qualify for a GATE card, such as producing an agricultural commodity.

HB 827 increases the penalty for theft of livestock. The possible prison sentence was raised from two to 15 years and a potential fine of \$10,000.

SB 494 is called the Georgia Hemp Farming Act. In 2018 the Farm Bill made hemp a legal crop in all 50 states again. Many states scrambled to enact laws to regulate hemp production as required by the federal government. SB 494 is a further refinement of that so that Georgia has a more functional law regulating hemp and its production and usage.

SB 436 expands the definition of "farm use vehicle" so that more farm equipment can legally be driven on any highway. This excludes interstates.

I wrote this column with help from the Georgia Farm Bureau News Vol. 86 No. 2 article by Adam Belflower.

Letters to the Editor

Say No to College Loan Bailouts

Dear Editor,

Many people did not go to college. In my home, college was never mentioned. We were expected to graduate from high school, get a job and move out on our own. That was then. I had friends who went to college, and for some it made a difference in their lives, and for others it didn't.

College isn't for everyone, and vocational training is a great option. Even those who earned a Masters or a Ph.D. will need their plumbing fixed or their cars repaired at some point in time. My main issue with the college loan bailouts is this. You made the loan, you pay it back. End of story.

What does a person learn when someone else bails them out of a situation they created for themselves? Absolutely nothing! If the government pays off all or some of these college loans with our tax dollars, the very least the government can do is to let all of us who didn't get to go to college, go now, and at no cost to us. We are retired and have time on our hands, albeit possibly very little. All the government has to do is increase the deficit a little more. The colleges would appreciate their enrollment increasing with the tuition guaranteed by Uncle Sam. The amount of time between classes may have to be increased to allow extra time for all the seniors citizens to get to their next class on time. And, the professors will definitely have to speak a little louder.

Gene Vickers

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