

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

... Remembrance

A Garden of Remembrance Blooms in Blairsville

This past Tuesday morning, as the early March sun valiantly attempted to warm the North Georgia mountains, I had the privilege of joining the Blairsville community at City Park for a moment of profound significance. The dedication of the Children's Daffodil Garden marked more than just the planting of flowers – it represented this mountain town's connection to an enduring promise: "Never Again."

Through the combined efforts of the Union County Rotary Club, the City of Blairsville, and the Daffodil Project, this close-knit community has joined a sacred mission. Each daffodil planted here stands as part of a living memorial, working toward a worldwide goal of 1.5 million flowers – one for each Jewish child murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. These golden blooms serve not only as a testament to lives brutally taken, but also as beacons of hope for children facing humanitarian crises around the world today.

As someone who regularly shares thoughts with this community through my newspaper columns, I was deeply honored when asked to speak at the dedication ceremony. Standing before the gathered residents, I shared these words:

"My dear friends, When I look at a daffodil, I see more than just a flower. Each yellow bloom represents a child – one of the 1.5 million innocent children slaughtered by the Nazis.

The Daffodil Project seeks to plant one flower for each of these children, creating a living memorial that spreads across our world. These flowers, pushing through the dark earth each spring, remind us that even in our darkest moments, hope persists.

I stand before you today not just as a rabbi, but as a fellow human being grappling with one of humanity's most haunting questions: How could anyone look into the eyes of a child and commit such unspeakable acts? How could a concentration camp guard spend his days orchestrating the murder of innocent children, then return home to embrace his own?

The easy answer would be to say that evil people exist in this world. But that answer feels hollow, inadequate. It fails to address the deeper mystery of why G-d allows suffering to exist at all.

When he was fifteen years old and a prisoner in Auschwitz, Eli Wiesel watched as three Jewish scholars put G-d on trial for cruelty and betrayal of the Jewish people. They could find no excuse for G-d, no extenuating circumstances, so they found Him guilty. After the verdict, Wiesel said there was silence, and then they all sat down to evening prayers. The boy himself would survive the Holocaust and go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature and become known as the conscience of the post-Holocaust world.

In this story lies the key to navigating the pain of seeming injustices and unfairness in our own lives, in the lives of those we care for, and in the world at large – those times that beg the question, 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'

Years later, when asked about his faith, Wiesel said something profound: 'I have not lost faith in God. I have moments of anger and protest. Sometimes I've been closer to Him for that reason.'

We are absolutely permitted to question G-d. Not only are we allowed, we MUST. Abraham modeled this regarding Sodom & Gemorah when he asked G-d, 'Will the judge of the world not act justly?' Moses modeled this as well when he asks G-d, 'Why have you done evil to this people?'

Questioning the existence of suffering isn't a sign of weak faith – it's an expression of our deepest humanity. When we cry out against injustice, when we demand answers to impossible questions, we're following in the footsteps of our greatest prophets and sages.

Think of a tapestry. We are viewing it from behind, and it appears chaotic – loose threads, knots, seemingly random patterns. That's our perspective here on Earth. We see the knots of suffering, the tangled threads of loss. But there's another side to that tapestry, one we can't yet see, where every thread serves a purpose in creating something beautiful. And that constitutes G-d's master plan.

We must cry out even though we will not be satisfied with the answer. We must challenge the existence of evil. Here's what I know with certainty: we aren't meant to be passive observers of suffering. The daffodils we plant aren't just memorials – they're calls to action. Each flower whispers to us: 'What will you do to prevent such darkness from returning?'

You can't fight darkness with a stick. But light one small candle, and darkness retreats. Each of us has the power to be that light. When we encounter hatred, we must respond with love. When we see division, we must build bridges. When we witness suffering, we must extend our hands in help.

For nearly two thousand years, my people walked alone. Through crusades, inquisitions, expulsions, pogroms, persecutions, and ultimately, the Holocaust, we looked around and found few friends, few allies, few voices willing to stand beside us.

But today, as I stand together with you in North Georgia, I am moved to tears by a profound change in history. You – the Christian community – have become more than friends. You have become family. Your unwavering support for the Jewish people and the State of Israel fills me with a gratitude I can barely express in words.

When I see Christians waving 'we stand with Israel' flags, praying for Israel's peace, sending aid to Jewish communities in need, and standing firmly against antisemitism in all its forms, my mind goes to the collective tears of grief cried by previous generations, and how they would weep tears of joy at the sight of their grandchildren living in a world where Christians and Jews walk together and work together to repair our broken world.

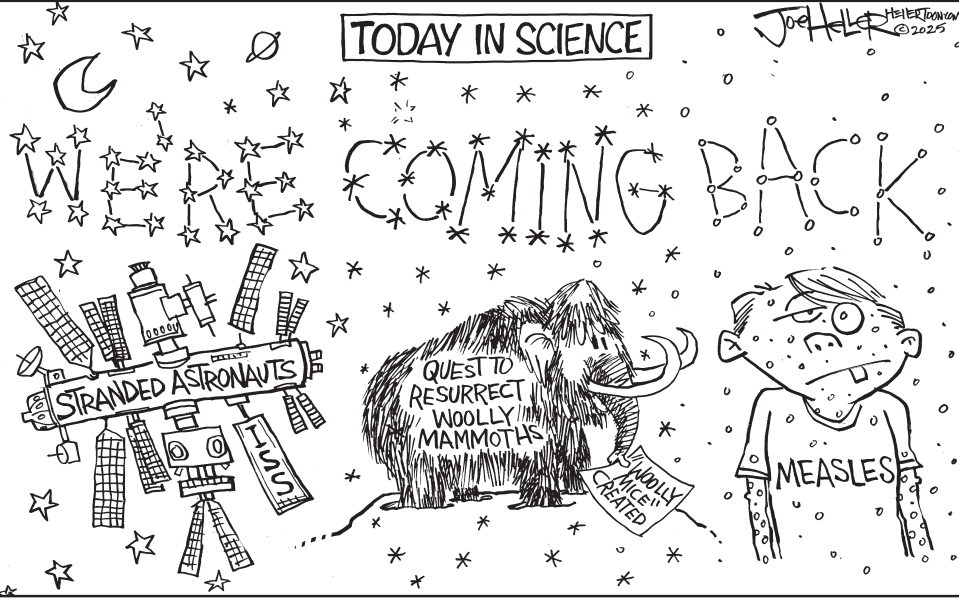
To the Christian community of North Georgia, and to Christians everywhere who have opened their hearts to the Jewish people: You have shown us what true friendship means. You have demonstrated that the wounds of history can heal, that ancient divisions can be bridged, and that love can triumph over hatred.

Your embrace of the Jewish people isn't just political support or casual alliance – it's a profound spiritual kinship that touches the very core of who we are. When rockets fall on Israel, you feel our pain. When Jewish communities face threats, you stand guard. When we celebrate our victories, you rejoice with us.

From the depths of my soul, on behalf of the Jewish people: Thank you. Thank you for your love, your support, and your friendship. Thank you for showing the world what it truly means to be your brother's keeper.

As these daffodils return each spring, let them remind us that from the darkest earth, new life can bloom. Let them inspire us to be builders of that better world – one act of kindness, one moment of understanding, one person at a time."

Echos from Sinai
"Torah for Everyone"
Rabbi Yonatan Hamburger



Spring Ephemerals

Spring ephemerals are (in my opinion) some of the prettiest native plants that we have in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Some of these plants can be quite rare or difficult to find. They usually have some unique site requirements, which makes them difficult to transplant. The difficulty in cultivating some of them makes them all the more beautiful when you find them in the wild. These plants are called spring ephemerals because they come up quickly in the spring, bloom, and then quickly die back. The suddenness that they appear and disappear with makes them difficult to find sometimes. Let's talk about some of these spring ephemerals, all of these are shade loving plants.

UGA Extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



Common Interest

If you looked out your window early on a Saturday morning and the half ton of topsoil waiting to be worked into the raised beds in the garden made you feel good, or if you derived the same sense of well-being from a pile of wood chips or gravel, I think we could have a friendly conversation waiting in the checkout line.

If there is a small stack of seed catalogs, or a large one, covering the TV remote on the coffee table, if the tip of your shovel is polished, if you are breaking in a new pair of work gloves because you wore out the old ones, if you sharpen your chainsaw before putting it away, we could have a good visit sitting on the deck drinking iced tea. No matter who you voted for.

If you would rather walk up a mountain than take a picture of it, if the tread is worn on the boots you keep by the back door, if you would rather read a book than watch a movie, you can come to the barbecue. If your chickens have names and you sing silly songs to your pups, you can bring the potato salad.

It would be a small gathering, and considerably quieter than days gone by. Time has a tendency to do that. Time changes us as we follow our careers, get married, have children, get divorced, get sick, and grow old. The longer we live, the more we lose by attrition.

The deck is stacked. We are social creatures, but our brains are designed so that we can only keep up with a limited number of contacts, and anyone outside our innate capacity for collating data is considered "the other." There is a physiological basis for the things that divide us, like prejudice, racism, social status, ideology, and political bias.

It is the latter, ideology and political bias, which has done the most in recent years to shrink the size of the circle gathered around our fire. I suspect the same may have happened to you. The things that divide us have always been there, but thanks to social media and our constant exposure to everyone's opinion about everything, our opinions about intangible things, opinions about opinions and people we will never meet, are valued over our common lot as meat-covered skeletons riding on a big rock that's hurtling through space at 67,000 miles per hour. We value "identities" over immortal souls, and the way we cast our votes every four years over common daily interests.

A wise man once told me that the secret to living well is to do the things you love and this will attract the people you are supposed to meet. Politics and ideology magnified by the lens of constant connectivity are corrosive to this natural process.

My solution to that on this bright Saturday morning is to have another cup of coffee and watch the purple finches trying to convince the cardinal to give up his perch on the bird feeder. I'll call up an old friend and have a second cup with him while we pretend for a while that we don't live 500 miles apart. Then I'll put on those boots by the back door and go out to greet the day.

Outside The Box
By: Don Perry
worldoutsidethebox.com

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.

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

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Trillium is a fairly common spring ephemeral. There are many different species of trillium, which have different colors of flowers, although white, red, and pink seem to be the most common. Sweet Betsy is one species that has a deep red flower. The leaves on it have a variegated look to it. Trillium always comes up on a single stalk that turns into 3 leaves. The flower is usually on the top of the plant, but with nodding trilliums the flower is on a stem that drops below the leaves, hiding the bloom.

Trout lily has a beautiful yellow flower. The leaves are a very attractive mottling of green and purple. This is a very low growing plant with thin stalks that support the intricate flowers. Trout lily grows in the shade. It tends to grow on drier sites. There are also white trout lilies, but they don't seem to be as common in our area.

Mayapple is an interesting looking plant that sends up a single stalk with leaves drooping over that make it look like an umbrella. Mayapples tend to grow well in wet areas. A plant will have a single white flower, that is hidden beneath the leaves. It does produce a fruit in May that kind of looks like an apple. Hence the name, mayapple. It is not recommended to eat these fruits as they are toxic.

Dutchman breeches have a unique flower. They are white and yellow. If you use a little imagination they look like upside-down britches (breeches) that would belong to a dutchman. This plant is an important pollinator for bumblebees. The leaves look a bit like fern leaves, but less glossy.

Bloodroot has unique shaped leaves that change as the plant ages. It tends to like places that stay fairly dry. It blooms early in the spring with white flowers, that look similar to daisies. The juice from the root is an orange-red color. Native Americans had many uses for this plant including dye and insect repellent. The flowers will open during the day and close at night. The leaves are deeply lobed. I think the leaves look a little bit like the bat signal.

Ramps don't have a very showy flower. They are in the allium genus, which is the genus that contains garlic and onions. They are edible and have a very strong flavor to them. Historically, ramps are an important part of Appalachian cuisine. Today they have become more difficult to find on public land so there are regulations regarding wild harvesting them.

There are many more spring ephemerals for you to discover. When these plants are found in the wild, it is best to leave them there and enjoy them as wild plants. There are nurseries where you can buy seed for these plants if you want to have them in your yard. If you have questions about native plants or spring ephemerals contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Letters to the Editor

Sorghum Festival

Dear Editor,

I really got good enjoyment out of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival back in the '70s when I marched in the parade with the High School Band. We had three or four bands from other counties participate with us in "Street Drill" competitions. Of course, we usually won First Place. Could we help it if we had one heck of a band director back then? Sadly, the bands stopped coming altogether, and it was just us, just a parade.

I remember Sheriff Harlan Duncan always leading it off on his horse. Special days and times. The old Standard Telephone float, and all of the other floats that were elaborately designed and decorated, not just thrown together. The cloggers, the covered wagons and horses. The parade went for miles and was usually 20 minutes long. The last parade I attended was sometime back in the 1990s, and I could tell it was dwindling away.

Then when they moved the festival out of town completely, I said then it was a matter of time before it would all just vanish. Thing is, once you move something from its location after many, many years, or make changes, it is never the same after that.

Just like the Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee. Once it moved out of town and on down the road to its current location, it's never been the same. Even that is dwindling away as prices soar and vendors don't come much anymore, and they changed the days and times now that they are even available.

I may not see it in my lifetime, but I say eventually that will also come to pass. In a way, I can see the point, but in other ways, it's sad this generation won't know unless they go back in the archives.

Now, if they could move the car shows and etc. from off of the square to a better location... I have almost run over kids darting across the street in front of me, and that is as dangerous as a cocked gun. I hope it won't take this actually happening before changes are made regarding that.

Anyway, God Bless the memories, and I pray you all have a great day and week ahead.

Blessings,
DeeAnne Barnes

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