

A Dirty Old Man On Wheels



John Cowart's 2012 Diary



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Bluefish Books



**Cowart Communications
Jacksonville, Florida**

www.bluefishbooks.info

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To Ginny



The Brains Behind This Dirty Old Man

2011 Summary

Before starting my 2012 Diary, it may be good to review the high points of my life in 2011. ...jwc

January, 2011

January 1st of 2011 started with Ginny and me fighting in a big hissyfit over a closet. We learned that when you can't kiss and make up, it's best to kiss and move on.

On January 15th, we saw a pair of eagles from our back garden.

On January 16, my friend Wes conducted the funeral for a severely retarded and deformed woman. He spoke on ***The Value of a Diminished Life***.

February, 2011

February 1st, My dying friend Barbara White won Volunteer Of The Year Award.

February 4th: Ginny and I joked about us being God's Weebles. A lot of nit-picking things have befallen us. Again and again we have taken hits—O nothing that taken alone would amount to a disaster, but each little thing rocks us, wobbles us, knocks us about, breaks our spirit, squelches our hope. throws cold water on our passions, disappoints our dreams, shakes our foundations.

No biggies. Just life's little things.

If a whale attacks you, you can harpoon the sucker, but what can you do when you're being eaten alive by minnows?

God's Weebles, that's us.



February 6th, I helped Jennifer format a book about perfume solids.

Also in February I wrote about a woman giving birth to rabbits and about Desperate Housewives of the 18th Century.

February 18th an e-mail informed me that the Russian translation of the profile I wrote about Madam Guyon was published.

March, 2011

March 7th brought me both hate and praise mail.

On March 8th, a snake bit me.

March 9th Donald and Helen gave Ginny a new laptop computer.

March 12th: An earthquake in Japan generated a Tsunami wave that swept over large city with almost a million residents. Wave up to 33 feet high and moving at about 500 miles per hour, traveled miles inland sweeping away people, buildings, cars, boats. Early reports say three nuclear plants were damaged and safety procedures failed.

March 15th saw me conflicted about praying for Japs because of my father's WWII experiences.

On March 18th, my daughter Jennifer and I overheard strangers in a Kingsland, Georgia, restaurant quoting from one of my books.

My March 22nd entry reveals my sin of covetousness relating to Barbara White's impending death.

April, 2011

On April 4th a giraffe tried to eat Ginny's hat.

April 6th Wes and I met a distraught young woman.

On April 11th, Ginny's lovebird, Fancy, died.



On April 21st, my friend Barbara White died just days after she wrote her final newspaper column. Ginny, Helen, Lyn Lazarus and I managed to published Barbara's *Lenten Diary* at her deathbed request just in time. My family published *Barbara White's Prayer Diary* soon thereafter.

By April 25th, my middle son, Johnny had moved down from Maryland to help us out. He and I saw a manatee up close.

May, 2011

May 4th my daughter Eve won a Hootie Award.

On May 17th I learned of a German translation of my book on prayer; I had not known it existed.



May 22 Ginny and I experienced the adventure of seeing **Thin Jesus/Fat Jesus**.

June, 2011

June 15, smoke from forest fires covered Jacksonville with a layer of ash.

On June 20th the kids took me to Hooters for Fathers' Day.



July, 2011

July 6th I started writing *Rope*, a pioneer novel set in 1840s Jacksonville. Same day, our refrigerator broke and we had to buy a new one.

July 12th I wrote *If God Were A Pirate*.

July 17th I rescued a damsel in distress and put out a fire.

August, 2011

On August 1st, Ginny said that the call of God inevitably comes at the most inconvenient moment.

On August 3rd, Ginny began proofreading *Barbara White's Prayer Diary* because I was sick of that manuscript.

On August 11th my writing was censored by the Taste Police.

On August 21st and days following, a reader of my blog identified a location for a Jacksonville photograph of a 1947 murder/mutilation victim. Here's a photo of her body in Los Angeles:



On August 26th, I think I saw a demon.

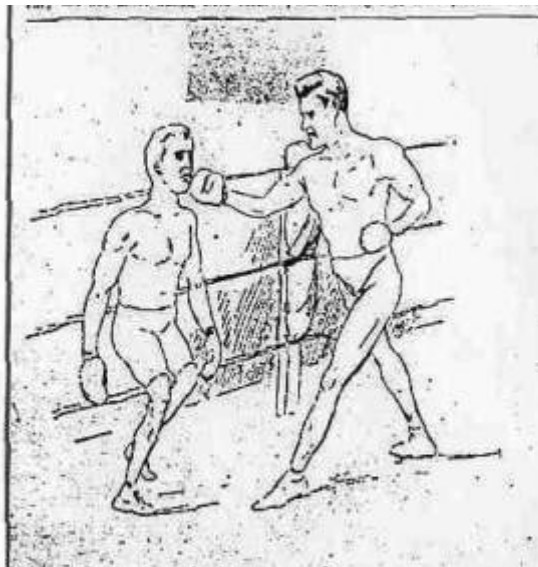
September, 2011

On September 2nd, Fred, my eldest son, arrived in town.

On September 6th a beautiful young woman flashed me a dazzling smile—

Little did she know what I was thinking!

On September 11th I searched for a 1902 photograph of Harry Mason.



September 26th I lapsed into a deep black depression.

October, 2011

On October 2nd I wrote ***Theodicy With Two Dogs***.

October 12th was Sexual Preference Day.

To overcome my depression and writer's block, on October 22nd, I began seeing a counselor, Michael Swanhart, who proved very helpful to me.

On October 23 I watched the Orionid meteor shower.

On October 31, I posted ***Stephen King Horrified!***

November, 2011

November 4th I reveal my binocular trick.

November 7th was the day for a fun zoo trip with Donald and Helen.

All Things Bright and Beautiful



All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.



Each little flower that opens,
Each little bird that sings,
He made their glowing colors,
He made their tiny wings.



The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset, and the morning,
That brightens up the sky;



The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden,
He made them every one.

He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell,
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.



November 6th I began a Twitter account. I don't know what to do with it.

November 10th I wrote about my viewing ***A Virtuous Bikini***.

November 16th I was tempted to steal a horse.

November 19th I prayed a bad prayer.

November 23 Ginny and I visited the Burnsed Blockhouse, a wooden fort surviving from the Second Seminole War of 1842. That was a fun research trip related to the pioneer novel I'm working on.

November 28th We enjoyed a second Thanksgiving with our friend's Rex and Chris; I greatly admire Rex.

November 29th I wrote about ***Ninja Giving and GAHOO.***

December, 2011

December 1st I remember the ***Year I Stole A Christmas Tree.***

December 2nd, a young person asked me about masturbation.

December 7th I tell about my adventure in the lesbians' bathroom.

December 8th I realize I am a possum.

December 20th was Luminary Night and I hurt myself bad by walking too much. But the beauty and fun was worth the pain.

December 21st, a poor man on the street gave me a precious gift.

December 26th Amrita in India posted an Internet video which she credits me for inspiring her to do.

December 29th I just finished reading 849 pages of Stephen King's latest novel ***11/22/63***, a tale about President Kennedy's assassination—America's best writer gets better.

December 30th Spent from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at doctors' offices finding out that I'm as well as can be expected for a man of my age and condition. After all tests came in, what might have been serious, wasn't. They referred me to another doctor next week.

At the beginning of the year I set a goal of reading the books I've hoarded on my own shelves for years. This afternoon Ginny sat down with her calculator and added up my reading diary for the year.

In 2011 I have read 29,784 pages in 110 books.

The subject matter of my reading has ranged from a report on Archaeologist Leonard Woolley's *Excavations Of Two Mounds Atchana and Al Mina In The Turkish Hatay* to a memoir by a mortuary attendant. From A.W. Tozer's *Knowledge Of The Holy: The Attributes Of God: Their Meaning In The Christian Life* to . Charles Schulz's *Complete Peanuts: 1979-1980*.

I read James Robinson's 777-page long *History Of Western Europe From The Dissolution Of The Roman Empire To The Opening Of The Great Way Of 1914* to a book of dog cartoons.

I read John Manningham's 1602-1603 Diary and a business management book called. *Juggling Elephants*.

I read a biography of President Grover Cleveland and Stephen King's *11/22/63*, a novel about President Kennedy's assassination.

I read a book surveying Florida cemeteries and a book about birthing rabbits.

I read Kenneth Grahame's charming *Wind In The Willows* and a book on how to avoid being killed in a war zone.

I read original transcripts for the 1648 Salem Witchcraft Trials and a book of Dilbert business cartoons.

Yes, in 2011, I have lived an exciting life both in real time and in the pages of my books.

I can't say I've walked with the Lord this past year, but I have more or less stumbled along in His general direction as I've had such fun.

Thus ends the Year of Our Lord 2011.

And now begins 2012—Welcome to the New Year Babe:



2012

January 2012

**Friday, January 6, 2012
But Lord, It Doesn't Offend Me**



Over the holidays, I lost vision in my left eye.

This knocked Ginny and me off balance.

Our healthcare community played medical ping-pong with us. In the past week we've visited seven different doctors, techs, clinics and medical machines.

Dr. Woody sent me to Knife Lady who sent me to Boom Boom who sent me to Magnito who sent me to Dr. Firstman who sent me to Dr. Sailor... and I left out one I don't have a nickname for. (I avoid using the real name of any person in my diary who has not given me specific permission).

Loosing sight is a pain in the ass.

Being an observant Christian gentleman, I did notice one significant thing—two, actually. One of the young ladies who treated me is magnificently stacked. I did not need two eyes to see that.

And when she positioned me for testing, those beauties dangled close enough to touch. But I didn't touch her because I'm a fine, moral, upright, pure-hearted Christian gentleman.

And besides, she kept this silver tray full of scalpels and sharp surgical instruments right at her elbow.

One doctor checked me out for stroke or a possible brain tumor—negative on both counts. Tests show I do have a brain and that it does eat enough blood to function.

They eventually sent me to the Retinal Clinic which adjoins the Rectal Clinic. Believe me, I squinted hard to make sure I walked though the right door for testing!

Yesterday Dr. Sailor (I nickname him so because he has the bearing, complexion and demeanor of a yachtsman) told me that a blood vessel popped in the back of my eye causing the vision loss. With treatment he said there's a 30 to 40 per cent chance that my loss may be slowed or halted before it increases.

Pending approval by my insurance carrier (who never looks anybody in the eye) Dr. Sailor plans to begin treatment next week.

Funny thing, when I realized I was going blind in that eye, I started to pray that Jesus would cure me.

But I stopped.

I recalled the Gospel which says;

Jesus answered and said unto him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee"?

The blind man said unto him, "Lord, that I might receive my sight".

And Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole".

And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way"

Yes, Jesus cured that man.

Can God cure me?

Yes.

Is He likely to?

No.

There's a reason they're called miracles.

Don't recall Jesus ever curing anybody of old age.

The reason I stopped praying about my sight was that I recalled another passage of Scripture:

"And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see".

Yes the Patriarch Isaac went blind in his old age. He could not even recognize his own children.

"Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him"

And the Lord God let Isaac live out his days blind.

"Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him".

Nothing wrong with that.

Now, get this. About 500 years later when Moses encountered that Burning Bush and asked God to identify Himself, God said, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob".

Yes, the mighty Lord God identified Himself by His relationship with a befuddled old blind man

And, here's something even odder, about a thousand years after that when some guys asked Jesus about the resurrection, Jesus said, "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living".

Old blind Isaac, buried by his sons, still lives in the presence of the God who never cured him of his blindness.

How cool is that!

As long as none of my kids show up dressed in goat skin, things are fine.

Maybe there are more important things for me to see than the impressive breastworks of the young woman testing me.

The Prophet Isaiah said in wonder, "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him".

Brighter visions gleam afar!

You know what bothers me most about this whole upsetting affair?

Being on edge about my vision loss and about being ping-ponged by doctors and by co-payments eating up every cent we have—the thing that bothers me most is this experience brought out a nasty streak in me.

One of my goals in life is to become the most loving person I can be. Yet this past week just one little poke in the eye made me grumpy, irritable, grouchy, snappy, complaining—a miserable prick to be around.

I even behaved churlishly to Ginny, the love of my life.

For me, adversity works like castor oil—it bring out what's already inside.

There's a reason I need a Savior.

You know, once Jesus said something that I'm sure He must have meant figuratively--"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched".

I'm sure He meant that figuratively. But even if He didn't, I've got to say my eye does not offend me at all, Lord. I'm perfectly fine with it.

But the Scripture says, "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness".

When your eye is single.

That is focused. Single-minded. Not two-faced.

That blind man Jesus cured that I mentioned at first; Mark's Gospel says, "He received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way"

Followed Jesus in the way.

Same as Isaac walked with God sightless.

You know, I have seen a few yucky things and many, many, many beautiful things in the course of my life.

And, whether the treatments help my vision or not, I look forward to seeing much beauty ahead.

In Handel's *Messiah*, in my favorite Christmas aria, the one which comes right before the *Hallelujah Chorus*, the soprano sings a verse from the book of the Patriarch Job:

"I know *that* my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at the last day upon the earth; And though my skin and body be decayed, yet I know that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself—My own eyes shall behold Him...How my heart yearns within me for that day!"

Sunday, January 8, 2012 Fun, Fun, Fun, and a Fall

Because Ginny and I have been under such stress from all the medical stuff last week, I decided our Saturday ought to be a fun day.

For my own fun I engaged in a bit of historical research I've been meaning to do for months; I constructed a time-line linking local events with happenings during World War II.

I dovetailed Greer Garson's Academy Awards speech, the Battle of Midway, the invention of Duct Tape, the development of the Atomic Bomb, the spread of instant coffee, and Bing Crosby's singing *White Christmas*--all into one timeline.

What fun!

For hours I relished being in my element.

I thoroughly enjoyed working on this project especially in sight of my pending eye operation--wanted to get it done while I'm able.

This is my idea of fun.

For Ginny's fun and amusement, as a surprise, I took her out to breakfast at a new place then across town to an Abyssinian Cat Show sponsored by the Cat Fancier's Association--a show she had not heard about.

Though otherwise sane, my wife is a cat lover.

To her delight, we wandered for interminable hours amid cages filled with--cats.

Soon I found a vacant chair and sat to rest. The area around me filled with cat fanciers. A bevy of Girl Scouts, who acted as ministering angel assistants to the cat officials, filled the cages in front of me with cats. A crowd gathered and a judge came on stage to judge the cats.

This man had such fun displaying each cat and talking about its qualities.

I so enjoy watching someone do something he really enjoys doing.

The judge placed each cat front and center on a platform. He talked about five minutes about each cat--yes, he had that much to say about cats.

He pointed out each cat's best features as he talked about rectangular bodies as opposed to tubular bodies, leg extension, underhair coats, ear and tail length, coloration, facial features, temperament, origins, etc.

Who could imagine that there is that much to say about a cat?

Ginny sat on the edge of her chair eating this stuff up.

Then the Judge evaluated each cat as 7th Second Best Cat, 6th Second Best Cat, etc.. Then he named 7th First Best Cat, 6th First Best Cat, and down the line till he arrived at # One First Best Cat--which to my eye was not discernibly different from any other cat in a cage.

People applauded and cheered the winning cats.

The Judge awarded fancy ribbons to each winner

The Girl Scout ministering angels whisked losing cats away to wherever they take losers.

Nobody paid any attention to the losers.

Cat fanciers clustered around the winning cats. They made over winning cats, praising them, stroking their tails, talking about their virtues, admiring their features, appreciating their qualities, comparing them to other winners in an impromptu spontaneous cat victory party. They served cokes, cakes, cookies, and catnip.

As I watched, I thought of that Great and Terrible Day Of The Lord when we will all stand before the Righteous Judge to be evaluated.

He will praise qualities we are not even aware of having; He will point out defects.

Great rejoicing will break out among those accepted in the Beloved.

Ministering angels whisk losers away to wherever.

Something to think about.

Ginny had great fun at the cat show. I loved watching her smile, relaxed, over seeing all those cats. She looked so beautiful.

Now, usually she packs away our 45-year-old Nativity Scene on the day after Epiphany. But because of our attending the cat show, she did not pack it away yesterday.

Therefore, what happened later at night was all a cat's fault.

In the small hours of last night, unable to sleep, I came out to my computer to play more with my time-line.

As I started down the hall, I tripped over me.

I fell crashing into two end tables, knocking over a lamp and ashtray on one table, scattering our Manger Scene off the other.

On the floor, wedged between the two tables and covered with camels, donkeys, Joseph, wise men, and sheep, I lay there getting my bearings and trying to figure how to get upright without breaking any more figurines.

I eased forward to a doorframe, used it to lever myself up.

Upset, I could not figure out what had happened to me. I did scrape my knee a bit, but I worried more about breaking Manger figurines. Too wobbly to do much else, I

crawled back into bed where, as a delayed reaction, I began crying and shivering uncontrollably.

My antics woke Ginny who led me back into the living room and comforted me with hugs, kisses and coffee for an hour or so. Then back to bed.

Fortunately, I woke early this morning and finished constructing my historical time-line.

Unfortunately, my fall broke one of our little animal figures, but just one.

All things considered, thanks be to God, yesterday proved to be a great fun day.

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

Six & One

In his most recent novel, *11/22/63*, one of Stephen King's characters observes, "Life turns on a dime".

In 1667, Simplicissimus, a soldier in the 30 Years War, observed, "When a thing is to be, all things shape themselves to that end...So wondrous is fortune and so changeable the times!...Things do happen in different fashions...Nothing is so certain in this world as its uncertainty".

As two ancient kings prepared for battle, the defender told his taunting challenger, "One who puts on his armor should not boast like one who takes it off."

King Solomon, wisest of men, said, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth".

He also said, "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing....A man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way"?

My, but I'm contemplative this morning.

The recent problem with my sight and my fall the other night combined with my finishing the text of *A Dirty Old Man Tells All* last week--all these factors encourage me to contemplate my own goals and work plans for the coming year.

Yes, I know I'm overly ambitious, but if you aim at nothing, that's what you'll hit.

If God gives me life and strength, I've set six minor goals and one overriding major goal for myself.

1. I want to finish writing the movie script for the animated Gideon video Donald and Johnny intend to make.

2. I'd like to edit and publish a charming old diary I have in hand written by a local high school girl.

3. I'd like to finish writing *Worshday*, a collection of 25 of my own short stories.

4. I want to finish writing that Florida pioneer novel I started last year.

5. I plan to continue reading the books I've accumulated on my own shelves but never got around to reading yet.

6. Come next December, I'd like to publish another in my *Dirty Old Man Goes Bad* series of books...

But, life turns on a dime.

I may not get all--or even one--of these projects done. Like the 89-year-old guy who marries the 19-year-old girl, my reach may exceed my grasp.

But I have one overriding goal, one expressed by King David in a Psalm. This is an attainable goal, come what may in life, fortune, and dimes:

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I diligently seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple".

Wednesday, January 11, 2012
Pearls. Mercy Pearls On A String

"I have a problem that you've never ever heard of before in your life". That's the first thing I said to the office manager when I phoned her at the doctor's office yesterday.

Cautiously she asked, "What problem is that, Sir"?

"I don't have enough money to pay my bill," I said.

She broke out laughing. We arranged for me to pay next month a bill due this week and we signed off good friends.

* That was the first nice thing in a string of nice things that happened to me yesterday.

* Next, I met a young Christian man who will be blowing leaves off our roof, cleaning rain gutters, and tending our yard--chores I'm no longer fit for myself. One of my children arranged for this kindness.

* Moments later, I spoke with the owner of that antique school girl's diary and she gave me permission to publish the diary. We've talked about this off and on for months and it makes me happy to get the go-ahead.

* I wrote the first draft of the first section of the movie script I mentioned yesterday.

* Then a friend pulled in the driveway bringing me a huge amount of cash as a gift; my friend realized that I've been troubled about money and came to my rescue.

I want to digress a moment here from my string of pearls:

Here in the South, we have a term I don't believe is used elsewhere; it's called **poormouthing**--that is to talk about how little you have in order to manipulate sympathy in your hearer and guilt him into giving you money. That's poormouthing.

When my friend brought that gift of money, my first thought was, *Have I been poormouthing God?*

Pride dictates that I try never to let anybody else know when I need anything.

Some folks call that living by faith.

Not for me, it isn't.

I'm proud, but poor. But I don't want folks to know I'm short of cash because that means i don't work hard enough and I'm sorry, lazy and no account.

So, recently with all the medical expenses, wild living and bad management, Ginny and I have been having to eat our hurricane supplies to get by. But we did not tell anybody. We're proud.

A Bible guy name Agur-- and his name is all I know about him-- prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and

deny Thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain”

Wise man, Agur.

If I am short of cash, that means God is not taking care of me in the style I have become accustomed to, and He ought to be ashamed of Himself for letting me be so damn poor. Therefore, I don't ever want people to know how bad things are. That's a reflection on my spirituality-- Good guys ain't poor. Are they?

So, my first reaction was to turn away my friend's gift. My need is none of his business.

In seconds the thought flashed in my mind, *John, the most important thing you can ever do in life is to receive.*

That's right.

Giving makes me feel important and happy--Big Daddy John swooping in to bless the poor downtrodden wretches who are not blessed like me.

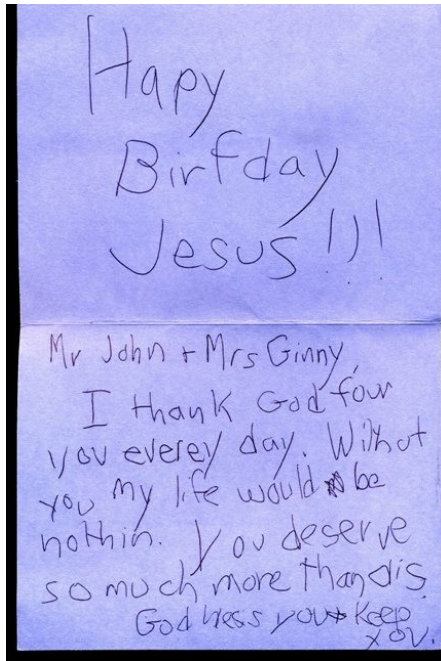
Receiving, on the other hand, can make me feel thankful, or resentful, because I'm not the big dog but on the receiving end of mercy.

But being on the receiving end of mercy is the keystone of being Christian: "To as many as received Him, gave He the power to become the children of God".

I said thank you to my friend and put the money in my pocket.

* Here comes the mailman bringing an envelope postmarked as being mailed in Jacksonville on Monday but with no return address. It contained two generous gift cards to a major department store.

Fan mail from someone who appreciates the great literature I write? I think not. Here's a computer scan of the unsigned note:



Again I am on the receiving end of mercy, giving, and generosity.

This morning, when I clicked on the link to [Felisol's](#) blog in Norway, the first thing I saw was my own name and a photo of a stack of my books. What a surprise.

And she wrote such nice things about my work. Again, I am on the receiving end of kindness.



So, like a string of pearls, good after good after good has come to me in the past 24 hours. And yet I feel apprehensive about the impending eye operation tomorrow. Will it hurt? Will God be good to me? Has He got it in for me? Why did this happen to me? Is God good? Does anybody care about poor me? What's on tv tonight? All these questions plague my mind.

I am not a very good receiver.

Salvation by works ought to work.

If God owed me, then I could hold Him to it and get my just due.

If I own Him, then all I can do is receive mercy, take it, and be thankful.

King David wrestled with this same dilemma, "What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD".

Me too.

Thursday, January 12, 2012
Look Into My Eyes, Deep Into My Eyes

Yesterday, business took Patricia, Johnny, and me to the Duval County Courthouse in downtown Jacksonville, Florida. .

As we left the building, we noticed a memorial plaque near the front door; Johnny photographed it with his cell phone.

The kids asked me, a Noted Authority on Jacksonville History -- I wrote a book about it-- they asked me why there is a memorial plaque to Daniel Boone at our courthouse? Was the American hero ever even in Jacksonville? And why put up a memorial to a pioneer hero made of metal from the Battleship Maine?

Don't they teach history in schools anymore?

As a local history authority, I explained that in 1493 Daniel Boone sat on that very spot in front of the courthouse and a raccoon fell out of a tree and landed on his head. He placed his musket in his ear and pulled the trigger, thus creating the first coonskin cap.

Immediately afterwards he sailed aboard the Battleship Maine with President's Teddy Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. The three of them charged up San Juan Hill and removed all Soviet missiles from Cuba.

As the heroes smoked Cuban cigars on the deck of the Maine celebrating their victory, a stray burning ash landed in the powder magazine, caught the sails on fire and blew up the battleship in Havana Harbor starting the Spanish-American War.

Jacksonville would have put up plaques to Teddy and JFK also, but there wasn't enough metal left over from the battleship after the explosion.

Any historian who disputes my interpretation of things is a fraud and is just making it all up.

I'm The Authority on Jacksonville Pseudo-History. I wrote a book which is just as accurate as my telling about why Daniel Boone stuck a rifle in his ear on the steps of the Duval County Courthouse.

Does anybody know different?



Friday, January 20, 2012

Beauty Lies In The Mind Of The Beholder

On an Easter egg hunt when I was five, while crawling on my hands and knees in the park, I came nose to nose with a beautiful creature, a tiny grass snake, its emerald scales blending with the grass, tiny bead-black eyes, red tongue flickering in and out as curious about me as I was about it.

Never before had I seen anything so beautiful.

I ran to get my Dad to show him this wonder, but when he came, the little snake was gone, disappeared into the grass. Its beauty remains only in my memory 70 years later.

While I've been recuperating from my eye surgery, mostly I've sat in a darkened room with my eyes shut. Unable to read or even watch tv, I occupied my time by making a mental list of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.

What a happy way to pass dark hours!

I think the most beautiful place I've ever seen was Florida's Ichetucknee Springs. Back before the state acquired the springs as a park and imposed all sorts of restrictions, we Boy Scouts often camped at the spring head. Because the water flows from deep caverns of the earth at a constant 72 degrees, in winter, as the warm flow hits the cold air, columns of steam form. Like wispy ghosts of Spanish Conquistadors, or water nymphs in diaphanous gowns, the steam clouds rise, fall and dance on air currents.

Beneath the crystalline waters you can clearly see from bank to bank as fish, turtles and gators go about their business amid red, blue and green water plants. The water flow washes fossils out of the limestone banks, and once I found a Paleo-Indian flint spear point amid a pile of black mastodon bones. An archaeologist estimated my find was over ten thousand years old.

My mind's eye still beholds that beautiful sight.

In fact, a vision of Ichetucknee Springs is my centering place, the place I envision to calm down when I am tense and under stress--such as last week when a doctor prepared to stick a needle in my eyeball.

Not a pretty sight!

The most beautiful room I've ever seen was the old Prints And Photographs room at the Library of Congress where once mosaic floors stretched beneath gilt scrollwork, classical paintings on the ceiling and medallions of the Four Seasons in each corner of the room--that was before some bureaucrat thought how efficient it would be to add gray cubicles and a drop ceiling.

Alas, beautiful things have a way of getting away from you like little green snakes in the grass unless you deliberately treasure them.

Now, there's a tie for the most beautiful furniture I've ever seen:

One, also at the Library of Congress, in the Music Room, is the desk of composer Sergei Rachmaninoff., an exquisite museum piece.

But topping that as most beautiful furniture was in the home of Miz Sidney, an ancient lady I once moved. I pulled the van up to an unpainted share-cropper shack with a rusted corrugated tin roof in a Mississippi cotton town. To get in the house, I had to walk over two wooden planks spanning an open ditch.

I wondered if I had the right address.

Once inside I found marvelous furniture. Most beautiful I've ever seen. Rosewood tables, chests and chairs inlaid with filigree vines and birds and flowers. Exquisite craftsmanship. Art works of incredible beauty.

As was my custom with any shipper, I asked Miz Sidney if there were any particular item she valued most. She led me to her kitchen and showed me four flat irons, the antique kind you heated on top of a wood burning stove to iron clothes.

She explained that she'd sent her eight children through college by taking in ironing, and although her children were moving her from the shack to an ocean-front condo at Playa Del Ray, she wanted to keep her irons handy.

She said as one child graduated from college, he'd help the next in line get through. One of her kids was a dentist, one an attorney, one an airline pilot, etc. She'd helped them in their careers taking in ironing, now they all chipped in to buy her lavish furnishings and move her to that condo.

A beautiful lady, beautiful furniture, beautiful family, beautiful story.

I have seen and handled a Guttenberg Bible, as well as 12th Century illuminated manuscripts. White velum pages with pictures and borders inlaid with gold foil and lapis-lazuli, their covers encrusted with precious stones--

perhaps the most beautiful things created by human hands.

In my younger days I made model clipper ships and felt wonder at the beauty and ingenuity of the men who built the originals. As the models took shape under my hands, I wondered at their beauty as though someone else had created them.

Once hiking near Albuquerque, New Mexico, Ginny and I watched a sunset over snow-covered desert from the mouth of Sandia Cave.

Once when camping at Port St. Joe on Florida's Gulf Coast we did not see another human being for five days. One night of a full moon we walked to the beach, undressed and danced naked in the moonlight.

I once saw beauty in an auto mechanic as Mr. Floyd worked on some mechanical problem beneath the hood of my car. He focused with intense concentration whistling under his breath as he solved the problem to his satisfaction, a man who loved what he was doing and pleased with his work.

In western Pennsylvania at dusk I watched a family of beaver emerge from their lodge, gnaw down saplings and work on their dam. They moved with such grace and purpose that I felt inspired to worship their Creator for making such magnificent creatures.

I remember the first time Ginny took her tits out for me to admire.

I saw a sky full of shooting stars in Arizona.

Once driving near Arcadia in South Florida on a night of the full moon, I encountered the aroma of orange groves in full blossom. In the small hours of the night, I turned off the truck's headlights and drove mile after mile, meeting no other vehicle on the road, through the moonlight and scent of orange blossoms.

A few days before one Christmas I had a shipment from Petersburg, Virginia to Atlanta and crossed the Blue Ridge mountains in heavy snow--again I was the only vehicle on the road, while some radio station played the full score of Handel's *Messiah*.

Once a nurse shark, longer than our boat, surfaced and rolled just yards away from where I sat on the gunnels.

Many times I've glanced up from what I was doing to see Ginny gazing at me with a look of utter adoration on her face--nothing more beautiful than that sight.

I knew a girl named Rusty, a bush pilot in Alaska, bright red hair--after a long absence we ran into each other and her face brightened with happiness. That was so beautiful. And I remember Trish, a Marilyn Monroe look-alike, the most beautiful woman I've ever known; it was a joy to walk with her--both Rusty and Trish, my good friends, not lovers, but the most beautiful women I've ever seen.

Walking at dawn in a dark hemlock forest where rays of sunlight slanted through gaps in the trees to spotlight patches of forest floor, I saw a red fox step out of the forest to pause in one of those spotlights with the sunray behind her. She burst into color, the color of a new minted penny. She lifted a forepaw and looked at me then moved on into the shadow again. I felt I was seeing the kind of beast Eden knew.

I've seen my daughters all preened up to go out on a date; and my sons head to head solving some computer glitch. I've heard the hum of my children doing homework; I've seen them happy together in some activity that does not involve dad--hardly anything in the world more beautiful than that.

Once my Aunt Hazel and I explored Fort George Island when I saw a bone sticking from the earth. Realizing it was a metatarsal, a bone in the foot, I ran and got a whisk broom from the car. Brushing sand away and working my way up the legs, I uncovered the skeleton of a man, an ancient Moundbuilder. The symmetry of his bones, the grace of his posture, the color of the amber-brown bones against the gray sand--Beautiful! We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made.

Of course I covered the skeleton, marked the spot, reported it to archaeologists and later a team from the university excavated the mound. I did not get to work that dig, but I've never forgotten the beauty of that Indian's skeleton.

Yes, as my eyes adjust from my operation, I've been contemplating beauties I have seen in former years. There are so many that spring to mind.

I have seen the orange eyes of shrimp glowing in the net as I draw them snapping to the dock. I have seen lynx running through the snow. I have seen deer bounding over fallen chestnut logs covered with lichen. I have seen painted bunting, Florida's most colorful bird. I have seen a nuclear submarine cruising on the surface. I have seen a circle of wood storks dancing in the green marsh. I saw my father's body moments after his death....

The Bible says, "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

The Lord is too big to see.

Hard to see Him when we and the whole universe lie in the palm of His hand,

So, no, I have never seen the beauty of the Lord God... but sometimes I feel I have come close.

And I look forward to seeing more and more beauty ahead.

As Isiah prophesied in wonder, "Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him".

Well,, while I wait to see how this eye thing settles out, I may not be posting as much or as often in my on-line diary as I have in the past.

Not to worry. I'm still here and still happy... but a bit limited. For the moment

And I still see beauty in the world around me

Brighter visions gleam afar!

Tuesday, January 24, 2012
Simplicissimus And Me

I read a book.

Finished it yesterday.

The first book I've read since my eyes went wonky over the Christmas holidays.

Considering that normally in the past I've read a couple of books a week, this eye thing cramped my style. But fading sight and hands shaking too much to hold a book steady, proved only part of my problem in reading Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's *Adventurous Simplicissimus*.

I picked this book up because of the picture on the cover:

What is that all about?



This German novel, written in 1668, tells the adventures of Simplicissimus, a soldier during Europe's 30 Years War. Moved here and there by the vicissitudes of war and fortune, the young man encounters pillage, rape, witches, demons, water spirits, card sharks, fake doctors, loose women, corrupt army officers, and Gypsies as well as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptist, Orthodox and Moslem religious ideas as he switches from side to side during the fighting—during which Christian soldiers on each side hang other Christians from the nearest tree.

War takes the 15-year-old soldier from Germany to Sweden, to Poland, to Paris, to Rome, to Austria, to

Moscow, to the center of the earth, to Turkey, and to Madagascar.

After being slave chained to an oar rowing a Turkish galley, he ends up shipwrecked on a desert island where in his old age—he was 40 by then—he survived using clever ways to gain salt, food, drinking water, make dishes, and even palm wine. There he wrote of his life-long adventures—and his book appeared 50 years before Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe*.

Also, in his old age, Simplicissimus reflects on the sins of his soldiering days when he killed, stole, raped and pillaged.

And he also repents to reflect on Christ's forgiveness.

Not having a copy of Scripture, Simplicissimus lets natural things remind him of truth. He said:

That little island must be my whole world, and in the same, everything, yea, every tree, an incitement to godliness and a reminder of such thoughts as a good Christian should have. Thus did I see a prickly plant, forthwith I thought on Christ his crown of thorns; saw I an apple or a pomegranate, then I reflected on the fall of our first parents and mourned therefore; when I did draw palm-wine from a tree, I fancied to myself how mercifully my Redeemer had shed His blood for me on the tree of the Holy Cross; when I looked on sea or on mountain, then I remembered this or that miracle which our Saviour had wrought in such places; and when I found one or more stones that were convenient for casting, I had before mine eyes the picture of the Jews that would have stoned Christ; and when I walked in my garden, I thought on the prayer of agony in Mount Olivet, or on the grave of Christ, and how after His Resurrection He appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden. Such thoughts were my daily occupation; never did I eat bread but that I thought on the Last Supper, and never cooked my food without the fire remind me of the eternal pains of Hell.

The passage strikes a cord with me because, as my blog header says, I am “a befuddled ordinary Christian who looks for spiritual realities in day to day living”

Maybe so but the above quote from Simplicissimus is only about a third of its full paragraph which runs almost two pages! And the book consists of 398 pages of such humongous long paragraphs!...Maybe my eyes can focus enough to watch tv for the rest of the year.

Saturday, January 28, 2012 These Things Did Happen

Joe Bracewell wrote a book.

It tells about a life which fascinates him—his own. My eyes have adjusted enough that Joe’s book became the second one I’ve read so far this year

The title of the book is *These Things Did Happen: The Story of Major Joseph C. Bracewell, Jr. (USAF-Retired)*. He wrote it with the aid of publisher Susan Brandenburg. Published earlier this month, the ISBN is 978-0-9833848-1-6.



Joe is the stepfather of my friend Wes—who is identified in the book as a Man About Town!

Wes told me about the book signing his dad hosted to launch this book: over 200 people attended, Joe hired a band, buffet appetizers served by a buxom cocktail waitress in a skimpy outfit.

I’m envious. Buxom girls in negligees hardly ever even read my books much less promote them to throngs of book buyers.

Joe could not help being the star of the show at his signing; he’s the star whenever he’s around because his enthusiasm shines so brightly.

I’ve only met Joe once and found him unforgettable. A former everything—real estate tycoon, Air Force officer,

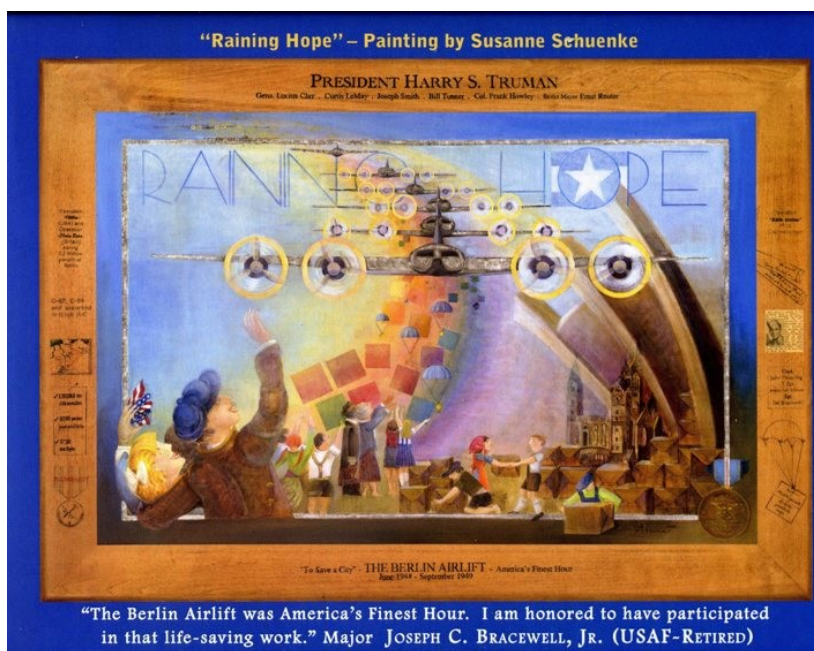
insurance salesman, singer, tour leader, Gandy Dancer, Donald Duck impersonator, cook, fisherman, gift shop owner, contractor—Joe has a tale about everything.

And as the raconteur tells his exuberant stories, he's likely to break into song at any moment and before you know it, he's got you singing along too.

If you don't know the words to "My Father Knew Lloyd George" Joe is not shy about teaching you—all 87 verses.

Joe's book captures some of his joy de vie even as he tells about the dimensions of every house he's ever lived in, or his role in testing Atomic Bombs.

But a high point in Joe's life was his participation in the Berlin Air Lift. This phase of his career influenced his outlook so much that recently he commissioned artist Susanne Schuenke to paint *Raining Hope*. Copies of that art work hang at the Air Force Academy and at the Berlin City Hall. It also provides the back cover for Joe's book:



Joe attributes his long and happy love of life to the blessing of God Almighty. He testifies:

I've learned that God sent His only son, Jesus, God to live as a man with the same temptations of man. At His age of thirty-three, He was crucified, died, and buried in a

borrowed tomb and three days later He arose and was resurrected and sits on the right hand of God the Father. At the age of eleven I was baptized and came to believe that Jesus was my personal savior and I shall be resurrected after my death and go to live with Him in Haven, where I will see my loved ones again.

God has His own timing for my death.

Otherwise, I would have died on a mountain top in Wyoming, or at the hand of my cousin, F.B. Bracewell, or died in the crash of a WB-50 in Japan. If not for God, I would have died in Vietnam when a bomb was planted so near my head, or in the collision of a horse and crew vehicle in Ethiopia, or in a typhoon named Lorna in the sea of Taiwan.

Joe's book recounts in detail these stories on his life.

Tuesday, January 31, 2012

A Simple Pleasure

I've spent the weekend enjoying the simple pleasure of watching my wife read. That's all. Watching her read.

Last Friday Ginny began reading the unexpurgated, 1153-page-long edition of Stephen King's *The Stand*; so far, she's read the first 739 pages of the book.

I love to watch her read. Her facial expression changes from chapter to chapter in her book. She smiles over incidents I know nothing about. She looks so intense over some passages. She is so interested in her book, so focused, so enthralled.

Occasionally household duties pull her away from the printed page and she runs to switch a load of clothes from washer to dryer—moving as fast as she can so she can get back to the story. Occasionally she raises her head to ask me, "Don't you feel sorry for Floyd?" or "Trashcan man wasn't crazy till he got to Vegas, was he?—crazy maybe but not evil".

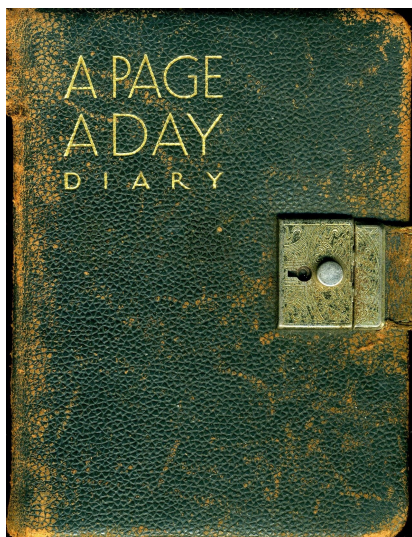
I love to watch her grope for her pack of cigarettes without looking up from the page. I love to watch her nod and fight to stay awake to read a little more. She's so beautiful. So intense. So engaged.

I have my own book to read; in the same time frame as Ginny has read 739 pages, I've read 273 pages of the *Letters Of C.S. Lewis*. I nod off to sleep quicker than she does.

So we sit reading in our chairs. Hardly saying a word to each other for the whole weekend—very happy and blessed.

Thanks be to God.

Wednesday, February 1, 2012
Quotes From Two Diaries



This week I await proof pages from the printer of an old diary I've been editing for publication as a book on my Bluefish Books site.. Although I've worked intently on this recently, I actually began accumulating materials for the book three years ago.

In a couple of weeks, God willing, I plan to release *My Most Amazing Year: The 1942 Diary Of Eleanor Law Scruggs*. I'm excited about this new paperback; it's taken me many happy hours of browsing Library of Congress, State Archives and local library resources to produce it.

After my friend Ann's mother, Eleanor, died, in sorting her things Ann found this diary which she had not know existed before. Ann recently gave me permission to go ahead with its publication.

Here's an entry telling about my first encounter with Eleanor's 1942 Diary; it comes from page 73 of my book *A Dirty Old Man Goes To The Dogs: John Cowart's 2009 Diary*:

One happy note:

Wes brought me a typescript diary which a young Jacksonville woman wrote in 1942, the first year of World War II.

After Wes left, I read the whole text in one sitting. Fascinating! Filled with zest and breathless energy, innocence, and curiosity.

What a delight!

She was 17 and a college freshman when she wrote:

"This morning I did the most awful thing that I have ever done—I'm still mortified to death & I still don't see how I managed to let it happen!

"Something happened to my sense of time 'cause at 10:10 I heard Tish coming up from her 9:00 class & realized that I should have been in English class at 10:00! You should have seen me dash! I got there 15 minutes late... That's no way to act!"

On July 12, 1942, she describes her first-ever kiss:

"Charlie kissed me tonite for the first time! I mean, on my lips. I got all kinds of tingles all over me & I almost felt like crying! It was awful & wonderful & everything all at the same time. I had really not intended to let him do it 'til the end of the summer, but I just could not hold out any longer".

She and Charlie married and lived together for, I believe, over 50 years.

I knew them as an elderly couple; she survived him by a few years before her own death. I wish I'd known them young.

Last night, as Ginny and I were praying after dinner, the telephone right beside us rang. So we put God on hold while I answered the incoming call.

The young lady on the phone said she'd called to let me know that she'd read my March 1, 2009, diary

posting (about the chicken-headed potholders) on her computer at work and started laughing. A coworker came up to read over her shoulder and started laughing too. Soon five ladies clustered around the computer to laugh at me and those potholders.

That news gave me such a lift. So often I feel as though no one reads my stuff and I'm just typing on air. I wonder why I bother writing. It makes me happy to know that there are a few readers out there.

After I hung up the phone, Ginny and I resumed praying—the Lord God was still on the line waiting patiently for us.

He always is.

Thursday, February 2, 2012
Word From Two Big Guys

Yesterday my friend Wes treated me to breakfast at Famous Amos where he gave me a verbal beating on the head to such an extent that some guy at an adjoining table joined in to add his two cent's worth.

I make such an appealing victim—sort of like one of those Bop-A-Moles in a penny arcade, an appropriate image for Groundhog Day.

In what grew to a five hour conversation my friend explained that I missed God's will back in 1957 when I graduated from high school and that since then my whole life has been off track, useless and wasted. And it's too late to ever get back on track now.

He said I've lived according to an heretical false premise espoused by an evangelical, pietistic, mystical mindset growing out of 19th Century revivalist adventist false doctrine— that's the cause of all my troubles in life.

Wes explained that what I should have done back in 1957 was learn a trade, get a job, a real job, earn a living to support my family and then, if I had a bit of change or time left over, then I could do goody goody Christian volunteerism. He added that my pipe dream of writing is naught but a pipedream and that my writing is not really work.

The bald stranger at the next table volunteered that all religious people are frauds out to bilk the gullible out of their money and that I am one such fraud.

Didn't think of it at the time but I should have offered to pay the guy double his money back for every cent he's ever given to me. That might have shut him up.

Unfortunately I did not see my shadow so I sat there being the Bop-A-Mole groundhog—besides Wes was paying for breakfast.

I asked how I can tell if God is punishing me or if my woes are just the result of being in the world.

Wes says I am suffering the natural consequences of having acted a simplistic, gullible, pietistic fool years ago. Actions have results and these are mechanical and inexorable. God's intervention in this process is so rare as to be termed miraculous.

Now Wes is the most charitable Christian I know and my best friend; his consistently kind actions belie his harsh Calvinistic theology. He's a reverse hypocrite in that he lives better than he talks.

Understand please that I'm condensing a long conversation into a few paragraphs and I may have heard wrong—but I think the foregoing is an accurate summary.

My only defense of my wasted life is that of the wheat and the tares: A farmer planted wheat, bad guys sowed tares, a sort of sandspur, in the same field. The farmhands wanted to pull up the tares but the owner said to wait till Harvest when all would be reaped and sorted, the wheat into the barn, the tares into the fire.

Or, as soldiers said, "Kill 'em all and let God sort 'em out".

I do what I do because I do it.

So, I trust the Lord, at the end of the age to harvest the events of my life and sort out the good and the evil to His satisfaction—or not.

I mentioned that I hate to read the Bible because I so often shut the book feeling guilty. And Wes said that we only recognize the love of God against the backdrop of His Wrath and indignation against our rebellion. And that apart from His redemption we stand rightly condemned.

I find comfort in the words of St. John when he observes that, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things".

Wes and I retired to my house to smoke our pipes and talk for another three or four hours.

To cheer up in the afternoon after Wes left, I began reading Matthew White's *Great Big Book Of Horrible Things*, which catalogs the 100 worst atrocities in history detailing the most gruesome things people have ever done to other people.

Fascinating reading, a real pick-me-up when you're down

Now, my friend Wes is a big guy, and later in the afternoon another hefty friend of mine, Ken, called to tell me about a book he's just finished writing and to ask my advice about getting it published.

Ken e-mailed me a copy and I sat up reading it most of the night. Ken's novel celebrates what he calls Huge Eaters, i.e. big men—I mean really big, Sumo wrestler big guys. And Ken's novel conveys an almost sensual celebration of eating to the point of gorging on rich, plentiful food.

I've never read anything like it before.

I've e-mailed him a few suggestions earlier this morning and I wish him well in placing it. His larger-than-life (in many ways) hero proves to be an interesting character and I think readers would get a big kick in reading his exploits.

Now I'm going to stop writing and go see if there's any Danish left in the kitchen.... and... and for some reason I've been thinking about my mother, and about my first wife.

Friday, February 3, 2012 Heavy Day Ahead

Tracking software leads me to believe the proof pages for the 1942 Eleanor Scruggs Diary will come in today and I need to get them to Ann so she can approve (or not) so I can make needed corrections before another scheduled eye operation. And...

And the new yard men, who I expected yesterday, should show up today. And...

And, I'm putting finishing touches on my Super Bowl ad. And...

And two of the girls plan to come in early. And...

And, I need to get to the bank. And...

And, I expect several phone calls from an author related to a different book. And

And, here's the biggie, this evening my eldest son, Fred, graduates from the Clara White Culinary Arts Program and most of the family plans to attend. Ginny and I are still working out travel logistics to coordinate with everybody.

In graduating, Fred has accomplished a major feat through difficult circumstances. For a while he lived underneath a downtown bridge, yet he managed to finish this course and graduate. Wow!

And, of course, I have my normal day's work lurking unfinished in the computer. This is the day the Lord hath made... but it's looking to get out of hand.

Saturday, February 4, 2012 Penthouse, Please

Over the years, counting self, kids and neighbors, I've attended 25+ graduations; the one I went to last night at Jacksonville's City Hall was the finest.

My eldest son, Fred—through enormous difficulties—graduated from the Clara White Mission's Culinary Arts Program.

I divorced his mother when Fred was about ten years old. I caused him pain.

Before he finished high school, Fred began working for a company in Maryland and stayed with them for well over 30 years. Then...

He lost his job. A fire destroyed his home. He refinanced and rebuilt only to lose his home again recently through foreclosure. When he started driving south to join the rest of the family in Florida, his car and all his possessions were stolen.

When he first arrived in Jacksonville with little more than the clothes on his back, for a time he lived under a downtown bridge. And Fred, who has long had an interest



in gourmet cooking, enrolled in the Clara White Mission Culinary Arts Program. Just after class started the mission van on it's way to cater an event was in a traffic accident; Fred and a number of other students were injured and taken to the hospital emergency room. But even with a broken ankle, Fred continued and finished the course.

"It's no big deal," he said about his accomplishment last night. That's a typical remark from Fred who tested at genius level as a child.

Folks who know us both say that I am more like Fred than any of my other children. I suspect that I taught him my [binocular trick](#) early on (in my diary entry for November 4, 2011, in *A Dirty Old Man Tells All*).

Here are two photos, one with me, one with his sisters, from last night's graduation ceremony:



Jacksonville's Clara White Mission began in 1904 as a soup kitchen feeding the homeless; it is now 107 years old. Dr. Eartha White, who named the mission for her mother, thought that teaching people how to cook good food related well to feeding people good food. Fred's graduated in the 33rd class from the missions Culinary Arts Program which has national recognition for turning out superior chefs. The students prepare meals for at least 400 homeless people each day as well as providing catering for some of Jacksonville's classiest upper crust social affairs.

“Food for today. Skills for life” is the mission school’s motto.

Last night’s keynote speaker, the Rev. Lena Thompson, pastor of New Creation Church Of Jacksonville, delivered the finest commencement speech I’ve ever heard.

She challenged us, “Dare to be different’ And she explained how we are each different and can serve the Lord and humanity through that difference.

“The elevator goes all the way up to the Penthouse,” she said, “Don’t get off on the second floor”!

She also cited my own favorite Bible verse:

“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a hope and a future” — Jeremiah 29:11

Hope and future—that’s what last night’s ceremony was all about.



Sunday, February 5, 2012
Watch For My Super Bowl Ad

At 6:30 tonight 115 million television viewers worldwide plan to watch the Giants and Patriots play football in Indianapolis on NBC. Because of having such a massive audience, the television company charges Three Point Five Million dollars for a 30 second ad aired during Super Bowl.

I want to reach the 115 million viewers so they will buy my books at www.bluefishbooks.info .

So, I wrote a check for \$3.5 million.

My bank balked.

The killjoys!

They do that every time I write a check for anything over \$3 million. That's unreasonable. I mean it's not like they don't have cash in their vaults. They're just being stingy.

But, when you don't have resources, you must rely on ingenuity.

Like that time in the year 1366 A.D. when the Rajahs of India sent a massive army with war elephants to fight against the Mongol bandit Timur who only had a small band of followers who rode ponies and carried their equipment on camels.

What could Timur do against Elephants?

Timur had his men strap loads of dry wood to the backs of the camels. When the Indian army approached arrayed for battle on their elephants, Timur set the camels on fire and chased them into the line of elephants.

Ever smell a burning camel?

Neither had those elephants.

They didn't like it. Imagine a flaming camel charging right at you—the elephants panicked, turned, and trampled their own army.

And Timur got what he wanted.

What's that got to do with placing a book ad on Super Bowl television tonight?

Like Timur, when I don't have cash, I have to rely on ingenuity.

So, I bought a six-pack.

I went to the locker room where the cheerleaders were undressing for a rehearsal.

I picked out the prettiest, most vivacious, most gorgeous, most well-endowed girl there and told her I had a six-pack in my car.

She immediately shoehorned herself back into her clothes and came with me.

It's my boyish charm, good looks, deep Christian spirituality, and animal magnetism that beautiful women find irresistible.

If you don't believe me, just ask any NFL Cheerleader you know.

She'll tell you all about how crazy they all are about me

Anyhow, after the prettiest cheerleader finished off five of the six, she agreed to let me place my [Bluefish Books Super Bowl Ad](#) before the 115 million television viewers.

We went next door to a storefront tattoo parlor where she had my Bluefish Books Logo permanently affixed on a prominent feature of her anatomy.



So tonight, Guys, when your wife asks you why you are leaning so close to the tv screen when the camera focuses on the prettiest cheerleader on the field, tell her that you are only looking to see John Cowart's Bluefish Books Super Bowl Ad.

She'll understand.

I'm so excited about having my website logo appear during Super Bowl. My web address is www.bluefishbooks.info

I'm sure that during half-time computer lines will clog as 115 millions viewers all try to order copies of my book *The 1854 Diary Of William Short or Heroes All*, my history of the Jacksonville Fire Department, all at the same time.

If the lines are busy and you don't get through the first time, keep trying. Operators are standing by to take your order.

And remember to watch the prettiest cheerleader closely for the whole game to see my logo. She's going to show it off.

Hey, my plan beats setting a camel on fire or paying \$3.5 million for 30 seconds of air time.

Monday, February 6, 2012
My Ad—sad!

Did you see my Bluefish Books Super Bowl ad last night?

I didn't either.

Hardly anybody did.

Small glitch—Remember yesterday that I'd picked the prettiest cheerleader who agreed to have my Bluefish Logo tattooed on a significant portion of her anatomy so whenever the tv camera zoomed in on her, viewers would see my ad?

Well, she is the prettiest cheerleader, but she is also the most energetic, most enthusiastic, most dynamic, bounciest cheerleader ever.



That's the problem.

When she ran onto the field...

She strutted. And she juttet.

She danced. And she pranced.

She whirled. And she twirled.

She wiggled. And she jiggled.

She flounced. And she bounced.

She did splits. And She showed off her cheerleading skill.

This girl moved so fast and furious, with such passion and action, and enthusiasm for her team—never still a moment—but she moved with such energy that the tv camera could not keep her in focus; and my poor logo showed up only as a blur as she spun past..

Nobody could read her tattoo showing my ad!

That's sad.

It was a very good ad.

However, all is not bad news though, her performance won her a Hollywood film contact; she'll be starring in a movie called "SpeedFlash—She'll Move You!". We have to wait till her movie comes out to see my Bluefish Books logo.

Something like this happens every year, year after year, when I try for a free Super Bowl ad.

Alas, next year I suppose I'll just have to pay the \$3.5 million .

Tuesday, February 7, 2012

Missed Adventure

Jack and Jill went up the...

No. No, they didn't.

In the first place, their names aren't Jack and Jill, but they ask that I not use their real names because what they did was illegal.

In the second place, they did not go up a hill, but crawled under a fence to trespass in the ruins of Jacksonville's Public School Number Four, near my home. They went in to take photos of the crumbling building.



The city built the school in 1918 and used the classrooms until 1960 and it was eventually abandoned as derelict. Time, vandals and a fire in 1995 caved in the auditorium roof. Long ago, tree roots cracked the foundation and vines now cover the walls. The place was fenced to keep people out, but, about six weeks ago, Jack and Jill broke in because they wanted pictures inside the ruins.

They were especially interested in the basement boiler room where legend says the janitor murdered little children, cooked them in the boiler and ate the flesh off their tiny bones.

The same thing happened in my grammar school when I was a little kid.

In fact, I think that happened in every grammar school back then. I believe that janitors spread that rumor themselves to keep pesky students away from their basement domain.

Jill said, "I didn't see any ghosts but that place was really spooky".



Alas, about two weeks ago, after Jack and Jill's visit, arsonists set the building on fire again and gutted it.

Jack and Jill did no harm to the building, but they crept in a second time after the fire to take more photos.

They invited me to go back inside with them.

O but I wanted to go explore that magnificent old building. I wanted to go so bad I could taste it. I have long admired that ruin from outside the fence but never been inside.



However, pesky common sense prevailed. I have to walk with a cane and I have trouble standing to browse library shelves or to shop in a grocery store. Could I realistically expect to climb piles of rubble and crawl under fallen roof beams?

I reluctantly passed on that adventure.

However, you can see plenty of photos of the old school ruins in an article in *Metro Jacksonville* magazine at <http://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2009-oct-ruins-of-jacksonville-annie-lytle-public-school>

Getting old is limiting.

But, if I were not decrepit, I'd be just plain crepit.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He told Peter, "I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go."

Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, "Follow me."

Yes, Peter wanted to know what some other guy was supposed to do and Jesus told him, What is that to you? You follow me.

That's what Jesus always says—pay no attention to what others are doing, you follow me.

Exploring the old building was not the only adventure I missed recently. My daughter Eve and her husband, Mark, invited me to go with them to a Confederate Civil War encampment at Olustee Battlefield.

Two of my ancestors fought to repel the barbarian invaders of our homeland there in February 1864. One survived and I still have the home-forged sword he used in the battle; the Yankees killed the other one who bore the same full name that I do.

I wanted to go to the Confederate encampment, but again age, pain and decrepitude prevented me from doing what I wanted to.

Just the other day on her blog, Of Cabbages And Kings, Eve wrote a poem. She told me that part of it is

about her little sister who is in methadone therapy, and the other part refers to me:

Eve's Poem

I held a girl of smoldering fire to my heart
today.
My breath makes swirls of her ash and soot.
Inside she is a girl of molten gold,
free to be molded into her dreams.
Yet this girl choses to set herself alight.
To embrace the pain, to destroy all that hides
within.
My tears to steam turn before leaving traces
on my heart.
My embrace tastes of nothing but agony.
My burning prayers of faith for phoenix and
not failure
mingle with flakes of ash in the morning air.
How do I burn yet hold fast?
Pain upon pain upon pain
Sweetens her kiss.
Release and hold true somehow I must.
Seams have not the same bond as I.
They scream in freedom.
Could I not learn to love that scream?

I held a man of vanishing mist today.
Aching with all my being to clasp that which
slips away.
Broken and rightly so he believes
his pain to be well deserve for some
imagined offense.
I curse the wind ever changing
to blow him back in my direction.
Back into form and forgiveness.
The wind merely snatches my breath like
an unruly child running from parent.
Reflections of my love are all that remain

in this wild swept gale.
I suck in sweet air but not he.
Sunshine has coveted him for long
and thus reclaimed the mist.
Misty eyes now mine
as sorrow courses out of every pore.

Wednesday, February 8, 2012
Writing For Fun And For...Well, Just For Fun

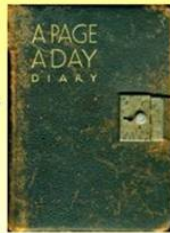
I'm scheduled to go to the eye surgeon again later this week, so beforehand I've been trying to catch up on various writing projects.

Yesterday I posted to my [Bluefish Books Catalog](#) a little book that pleases me greatly. It's called *My Most Amazing Year: The 1942 Diary Of Eleanor Law Scruggs*.

Eleanor began her diary just 24 days after the enemy attacked Pearl Harbor. At the time she was a 17-year-old high school student in Jacksonville, Florida, my hometown.

Like all diaries, Eleanor's diary reflects personal interest—grades, dances, movies and her boy friend. Yet the opening days and events of World War II—air raid drills, rationing, school programs, friends going off to war—intrude more and more into her life.

My Most Amazing Year



The 1942 Diary of Eleanor Law Scruggs

In breathless, school girl fashion, she relates the happenings of her life in a way that captures my heart.

For instance, on April 16, 1942, she laments:

When I grow up I'm going to be a hermit!

I think that would be the most enjoyable existence possible! I'm supposed to spend tomorrow nite with Lu & I don't want to go at all! I've promised Mrs. Hawkins to go to the dance at St. John's Saturday nite. & I don't want to go at all!

And I haven't done my homework - & I have scads of it! - so I don't want to go to

school tomorrow at all! So there I am. I would, in the state of mind I'm in now, enjoy a completely solitary existence.

I'm weeping right now & I hate the whole human race— particularly the male of the species!

Her diary captures the joys and frustrations of a young girl in love in a time of war. To her everything is amazing! Especially—*sigh*—Charlie, the young man who signed up in the Navy, but eventually returned to marry her. Through good times and bad, the couple stayed together for 51 years.

But Eleanor did not know that future. So she frets – will he call—will he write—does he love me—do I love him.

And while this deep personal drama evolves, a Nazi submarine torpedoes an oil tanker within sight of Jacksonville, another sub lands spies who disperse from Jacksonville's Union Station, and FBI raids net over 30 spies in the city.

Seeing the charm of this girl revealed in her diary—which she hid in her doll house to keep anyone from finding—I find it no wonder that her Charlie fell in love.

Anyone who reads her diary will.

My Most Amazing Year can be found at www.bluefishbooks.info

Another writing project I just finished is a movie script on the life of the biblical Judge Gideon. I wrote this for a video my sons Donald and Johnny are preparing as first in a series of Bible story videos for adults.

Then, I also updated the free e-book in pdf format link in my blog sidebar. The current offering is the second of my “Dirty Old Man Goes Bad” series; this one is called *A Dirty Old Man Gets Worse*—

You know who the dirty old man is, don't you?

You can find out for free by downloading my pdf link; it's right under the picture of the librarian standing on the ladder getting hit by lightening.

That's my picture on the cover.



One other writing note of interest to me consisted of 20 to 30 phone calls I've fielded recently from a young lady asking for advice about publishing a book she wrote.

As she explained her dire circumstances about her starving children, her demanding boss, her failing health, and her dog having fleas, I, moved with stupidity under the guise of compassion, I offered to help her get her book done for free.

Later this week she called once again to tell me that she's found another editor who offered her a better deal.

Better than free?

I'm glad she found a publisher that suits her. Maybe she'll stop calling me.

Anyhow, now I'm skipping and singing on my way to the eye surgeon who intends to puncture my eye ball with a needle or something.

If I survive (and he does) I'll post more happy news about my fascinating life in a couple of days. See you soon—Maybe....Or not.

Thanks be to God!

P.S.: By the way, folks who've never had it done tell me I'm a big baby, that it is not really **Eye Surgery** but

merely “a procedure done by an eye surgeon”. Maybe so, but as I lay there strapped down in that recliner with my eyes shut tight and I hear Dr. Sailor pull the cord to start his chain saw, or whatever that thing is, my mind screams, **Major Surgery! Major Surgery!**

Tuesday, February 14, 2012

Guts, Feathers & All

While I recovered from my recent poke in the eye, I’ve spent a lot of time sitting in a darkened room with both eyes shut.

I haven’t felt much like praying.

So—as a true Christian gentleman—I’ve spent a lot of time remembering every picture I ever saw of a naked woman—a pleasant way to wile away time while I’ve not been able to read, write or even watch much tv.

Yesterday, a friend confused me a little when, on one hand, he said I have no idea how greatly my life has influenced people toward worshiping Christ. Then, on the other hand, he said what I ought to have done with my life is something altogether different!

He asked if a young Christian man with a modicum of zeal came to me, wouldn’t I advise him to structure his life differently from the way I’ve lived mine? Wouldn’t I advise him to learn a trade, get a job, get himself stable, then, once he’s established, do religious stuff in his spare time?

“No! Absolutely not,” I said. “I’d tell him to throw caution to the winds, be lavishly generously, pay no attention to anything anybody else says and—unlike me—to follow Jesus with every ounce of strength in his being. Too many practical, common-sense Christians in the world already, who needs another one?”

Yes, I’ve screwed up monumentally which led me to being in the sorry shape I’m in today, but I’d advise a serious Christian to outdo me in pious impracticality.

If Jesus Christ is not true, then nothing matters.

If Jesus Christ is true, then nothing else matters.

After my fiend left, I reflected on my life and troubles and triumphs and failures. I recalled that back in February of 1996, a group asked me to give an

autobiographical talk about Christ being Lord of life ... I looked up my talk to see what it was I'd said:

Hello.

My name is John.

I wear size 11 shoes.

My birthday is July 15th.

My blood type is A Positive.

I weigh 224 pounds. and when I stand straight I'm 5'11".

I've been married twice and I'm the father of six children, three sons and three daughters. Ginny, my present wife, and I have been married for 29, 30, maybe 35 years... something like that. I am a native of Jacksonville, Florida, where I've been a member of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd for about 25 years.

When I first came to Good Shepherd I was working as a grave digger in Evergreen Cemetery. My latest job has been working as a sitter, taking care of an adult invalid with severe neurological impairment from being hit by a car. So recently I spend most of my days changing diapers and wet bed linens and teaching him how to swallow because his injuries knocked out his swallow reflex. My work is a lot like taking care of a large strong toddler.

Other jobs I've worked at include several years working on the religion deck at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., flipping hamburgers at an all-night burger stand; and being a night watchman at a city dump....

For a few years when Ginny and I were first married we drove a tractor trailer, a Mayflower moving van, all over creation. I've been to Mexico and Canada and all the continental states except Maine, Washington and Oregon.

For eight years I worked for the Duval County Florida Mosquito Control Board where I grew mosquitoes for test purposes. Back then I could identify on sight most of Duval County's 53 species of mosquito -- Here's an inside Mosquito Control joke:

How do you spell Psorophora?

B...U...G.

When a cutback in funds caused 18 of us to be laid off from the board, I discovered that a 40-year-old white male who knows how to grow mosquitoes can write his own ticket in the job market...

Well, not exactly.

For months and months I could not even find a job as a security guard. Nothing. Zilch.

What was I to do?

Well, I figured that I was not the only person in the out-of-work boat so I wrote a magazine article about coping with unemployment. It sold! But not for much. So I wrote another article about coping with poverty. Eventually I wrote and published a couple of hundred newspaper and magazine articles and I also wrote three little paperback books which got published but didn't sell worth diddly-squat. Virtually all of the great literature I produced disappeared without a ripple.

For a few years I also worked part-time for the *Florida Times-Union* newspaper as an editorial assistant -- that's the job title for a mail clerk who can be blamed for a lot of things that go wrong at a newspaper.

When my writing career finally went belly up for lack of sales, I got the job of night janitor for a church where I scrubbed floors and cleaned toilets until I began the job I have now as a sitter.

My hobbies over the years have included hiking, camping, karate study and building model ships. In fact one of my proudest accomplishments in life was building a model sailing ship inside a beer bottle.

My besetting sin, the one I have to struggle with most all the time, is petty theft -- too sorry and lazy to be a bank robber I guess.

The third hardest thing I've ever done in my life was to kill my dog.

Sheba, a black lab, lived with our family for over 17 years. She did as much to raise our children as Ginny and I did; she considered us all as her puppies. No better natured animal ever lived: she even got along fabulously with the three family cats and my daughter's bunny. I recall laughing as this huge dog, the three cats and the bunny all gathered head-down in a circle to eat out of the same bowl at the same time!

A few years back Sheba suffered a stroke. For months she could not walk or even sit up to eat. Ginny and I soaked bread in milk and hand-fed her till she got well enough to resume her role as family dog.

After a few years Sheba suffered another stroke. She went blind and appeared to suffer a dog's equivalent of Alzheimer's Disease. For weeks I postponed the inevitable. I'd go out to her shed several times a day to check if she were still alive.

Poor feeble thing hung on.

I suppose I could have taken her to a vet but I felt that no stranger's hand should do it; it had to be someone who loved her.

One day I dug her grave and led her to lie beside it in a sunny spot. I cooked her favorite meal of meatballs for her. I poured some campaign in her water bowl. When she passed out and I was sure she slept, I was so afraid I might bungle the job and merely hurt her. I had visions of my mangled dog clawing her way out of the grave in frantic pain.

I prayed for God to give my arm strength.

I lifted the ax.

I bashed her head in.

I buried her with her favorite dog toy.

Then I sat beside her grave, drank the rest of the campaign and cried.

Killing Sheba was my third hardest thing. The top two hurt me too much to want to talk about just now. Is that Ok?

Let's see ... What else?

My blood pressure is finally down to 120 over 90. On the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test I come out as ISFJ; and folks who keep track of such things tell me that I have a character profile which they call a "dishonest passive aggressive personality". I have only a vague idea of what those facts mean -- functionally sane but wobbly, I guess.

As you can see from this fascinating account, I'm just an ordinary person. I get up. I go to work. I come home, click on the TV and put my feet up. Nothing unusual. Nothing special. I just plod along through life making it as best I can. Not bothering anybody. You know: John Cowart, human manatee... Want to see the propeller scars on my back?

Now you have a pretty complete picture of my entire life except for one element:

Jesus Christ is my Lord.

And because He is my Lord, He has done certain things to me.

And for me.

And through me.

And, mostly, in spite of me.

At 3:30 in the morning on November 12, 1957, while driving a car down Phillips Highway on Jacksonville's Southside, after months of struggle to avoid the conclusion, I decided that Jesus Christ is actually God come to earth in the flesh.

Before that moment, I regarded Him as only a human teacher who had the bad luck to bug the wrong people and get himself killed, a nice guy but certainly no more divine than Socrates, Buddha, Mohammed or any other important human teacher.

I considered myself an intellectual, too smart to be taken in by the common ordinary Christianity taught in every little church on every other street corner in town. No. That stuff was for people who had never given comparative religion much thought. You know, Believers.

None of that for me. I investigated the esoteric faith patterns of the exotic mysterious orient. I dabbled in theosophy. I read the scriptures of other religions, The Koran, the Vedic Hymns. When asked, I identified myself as a student of Hinduism, praying to Siva and Vishnu, the gods who create and destroy in perfect balance.

A Christian missionary who was in Jacksonville on leave from French Equatorial Africa told me about Jesus. I regarded that message as dribble. But being an open-minded person, I decided to disprove the ridiculous claim that Jesus made to being the exclusive way to God. So I read the entire Bible -- looking for loopholes. The missionary later told me that she'd given up on my ever being converted because I was such a hardcase.

However, something about the claims of Jesus disturbed me.

Follow this thought process through with me quickly:

In one Gospel alone Jesus constantly went around saying odd things like:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father..." (John 14:9)

"I and my Father are one." (John 10:30)

"Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)

"I have come as light into the world..." (John 12:46)

"I have come down from Heaven..." (John 6:38)

"I am the bread of life..." (John 6:35)

"The hour is coming... when all who are in the tombs the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and come forth ..." (John 5: 25-28)

"I am the way, and the truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by me..." (John 14: 6)

Well, these statements of His are either true or false.

If they are false, then Jesus either knew they were false or he did not know they were false.

If he knew what he was saying was false but said it anyhow, then Jesus Christ was deliberately deceiving people, he was a liar.

If he went around saying that he was God and he did not know that what he said was false, then he was as crazy as a bedbug. Like the guy who goes around saying he's Napoleon.

So if what Jesus said was false, then he was either a liar or a lunatic.

However, if what he said is true, then he is LORD.

Now, if Christianity is false, then there is no reason in the world you or I should pay it any attention whatsoever. It doesn't matter that nice people think that way or that it's customary to attend church or that Christianity upholds high moral standards; if it's false, then it's false. Nothing to it.

But if it's true... What then?

If Jesus Christ is neither a liar or a lunatic, then He is the Lord God Almighty, murdered by men but risen from the grave as Lord of Life and what He says counts for everything. Nothing else on earth matters but following Him.

Now as I considered these claims that Jesus made, as I read the whole Bible cover to cover; remember, I was looking for loopholes. I wanted to escape the conclusion my own mind had arrived at because that meant that if He were Lord --- then I wasn't!

And I wanted to be Lord of my own life. I had my life mapped out. I'd won a small academic scholarship to Florida State University and I intended to devote my life to the study of archaeology, I planned to get my master's at the University of New Mexico because of the availability of Pueblo ruins there, then study for a doctorate in Germany then spend the rest of my life digging up ancient ruins. Yes, I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. It's my life and I'll live it exactly as I please. I am the lord of my life, the master of my fate, the captain of my soul -- and I like it that way.

Who does Jesus think he is, intruding on my well-thought-out plans? Does He think he's God or something?

Well, yes.

That's exactly who He says He is.

He says He's God and that He cares about me.

"For the love of God is commended toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us".

Now, here's an old Cowart Family joke:

When I was about five, my father came home with a chicken for Sunday dinner. A whole live chicken. He rung it's neck in the back yard, then cleaned it over the kitchen sink -- a process I found fascinating. As he worked I stood at his elbow full of questions and comments:

"What's that gooey lump?"

"The gizzards."

"Yuck. You don't eat that do you? What are those stringy red things?"

On and on I babbled till finally, my daddy got so exasperated at my pestering him that he said, "John, if you don't shut up I'm going to make you eat this chicken -- guts, feathers and all!"

In our family that expression became a byword to stand for "the total thing, all there is, completeness, nothing held back".

Well, that night in the car on Phillipps Highway I prayed my first Christian prayer, "Dear Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God and I want you to take complete charge of my life guts, feathers and all".

Not much emotion was involved, just a settled conviction that Jesus, the murdered and risen God, was now my master, my boss, my Lord.

One little problem...

At the time I was taking a civics course called Problems of American Democracy. One segment of this class was for every student to give a report on his or her

particular religion. A few days before I'd already given my report on Hinduism. My talk had been acclaimed as outstanding by classmates and the teacher gave me an A+ grade...

What do you suppose I should do about that?

My stomach crawled when I asked the teacher if I could give an amended report. She said I could in a week or ten days, after everyone else in class finished their turn.

What a long week!

When you know that you absolutely positively have to eat a live frog, it's best not to spend too long looking at it beforehand.

But I had to eat that frog. Jesus was now my Lord and I'd publicly discounted Him. I had to retract just as publicly as I had denied.

Having Jesus Christ as a Lord is not all peace, security and joy.

I spent a miserable ten days waiting to eat the frog I'd hatched myself.

It's a shame that the only way I can learn humility is by being humiliated. But that was the deal. I'd said guts, feathers and all; and God took me up on it. If He is Lord, then He is Lord -- and John Cowart's precious sense of dignity can stand a little humiliating now and then.

Using a Bible passage from the Book of Joshua, I backed down from all my former statements... "Chose you this day whom you shall serve, whether they be the gods of your fathers which lay beyond the flood, or the gods of the Ammonites in whose land ye dwell... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord".

At the end of my recanting from my former idol worship and admitting that Jesus is the Son of God, I asked if anyone else in class wanted to ask Christ to be their Lord too. Seven people came to kneel weeping at the front of the class. Word spread all over the school that something strange was happening in civics class. Some of the people who came forward were Jews, some Roman Catholics,

some Baptists. It created a furor as the ranks of those confessing Jesus as Lord grew to 13 students.

The Lord was doing something. Claiming His own.

Well, I ended up in the United States Army as a private E-2, the lowest creature on the military's earth.

Word came that an old lady -- she must have been at least 30 -- got burned in an apartment fire and she needed blood. I had blood. I gave some for her. As I did, I felt that God would also have me give the nurse \$10 to send her.

Word came down that General so and so wanted to see Private Cowart. Now in my lowly eyes a sergeant ranked as the forth person of the Trinity so I was scared to death to be called into a general's office...

Somewhere in Scripture it says words to the effect that when we follow Jesus we'll stand in the presence of kings; well, that may be so but we sure don't stand there as equals. I actually felt queasy waiting to go into the general's office. What had I done wrong enough to warrant the attention of a general?

The old lady who needed blood was a friend of his and he wanted to know why I'd sent a woman I'd never meet \$10 out of the \$78 a month that I was earning at the time as a soldier?

I told him that it was because Jesus is my Lord.

The General and I ended up kneeling on the floor beside his huge monogamy desk crying and praying together.

Now, I hope you realize that I'm compressing a lot of time into a brief presentation. All this stuff did not happen on the same day but over the span of my life as a Christian. In Scripture David the shepherd King only killed one lousy giant and that's the story that's told; but while he tended that herd of 30,000 sheep, David spent 99% of his time scraping his shoes. That's how I spend 99 % of my time too, but it's just the high points of a humdrum existence that make for a story.

Because I was an active scout as a boy, I felt God would have me serve him as scoutmaster of a troop in one of the worst slums of Washington, D.C. That's where I was the night Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated./

Mobs smashed liquor store windows and got rip roaring drunk. Thugs threw bricks. Looters grabbed tv sets and stereos. The mayor called out the military. Tear gas choked the air. The government closed down. Fear choked the city as rioters set fire to hundreds of stores..

The real trouble with the burning stores was that thousands of people, most of them poor elderly, lived upstairs over the stores. In a few days they were homeless and starving.

Christians and socially conscious people from all over flocked into the riot areas to help. So one day I found myself with a Quaker friend shoveling dead fish.

I mean really dead fish. Aromatically dead.

What happened was that when rioters burned a fish market, the wall to the freezer room partially collapsed cascading tons of fish into the alley. An old blind man was trapped upstairs over the smoldering ruin. He was trapped because some citizens had tried to steal the refrigerator out of his apartment but when they tried to get it down the stairs, the flames got too intense so they abandoned it wedged in the narrow stairwell. To get to the refrigerator, we had to shovel these rotting fish out of the way and the more we shoveled, the more fish cascaded out of the breach in the wall.

Serving the Lord is so glamorous.

And dangerous.

A gang of looters with rifles came into the alley. One punched his gun into my belly button. "What's you doing here fat boy," he said.

I said the first thing that came to mind: "I'm serving God. What are you doing here?"

Right then, a squad of National Guardsmen appeared at the end of the alley. A gun battle erupted between them

and the rioters. As the bullets from both sides zipped over our heads, the Quaker and I both hit the ground -- except it wasn't ground underfoot. It was rotting fish we burrowed in... My friend said, "Do you suppose this is what Jesus meant when he said He'd make us fishers of men".

And we lay there in the dead fish laughing with pure joy as buildings burned around us and both rioters and Guardsmen shot at us.

O the joy in serving Jesus.

Incidentally we did get the refrigerator moved and rescued the blind man... but was that why Jesus my Lord placed me in that awful spot? I doubt it. I think He had something even better in mind for me because it was in connection with the riots that I first met Ginny. And she is without doubt the best thing that ever happened to me in my whole life!

Lord, if it's all the same to you I'd prefer picking up girls at Club Med next time, OK?

Now I am just a common, ordinary, garden variety Christian. I hope you understand that practically all of God's dealings with me have simply involved my obeying the same obvious Scriptures that every other Christian does. You don't need a burning bush to tell you to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, or to comfort the feeble-minded. A huge part of obeying Jesus as Lord means just doing the obvious duty right in front of your eyes; you don't hear any voice from Heaven, or see any beatific vision, or get a visit from an angel -- you just follow the Standing Orders posted on the wall we call the Bible.

There have been a few rare exceptions to that kind of divine instruction in my life; here's one of them:

One afternoon I was driving my tractor trailer across Ohio on Interstate 80 when I felt an urgent impression to take the next exit and drive north. That was crazy. My delivery schedule called for me to be in New York the next day and I was pressed for time. But the urge came on stronger and stronger. So I exited and drove north through miles and miles of nothing but miles and miles of nothing...

I came to a crossroads diner with a big parking lot and decided to stop for supper. I sat down and began my meal. Another truck driver entered the diner. He walked straight over to my table and said, "Hey, Driver, I'm going nuts and I've just got to talk with somebody. Would you mind if I sat here and just talked?"

It turns out that he had a wife in one town and a girlfriend in another and his marriage was breaking up and his girlfriend was making demands and the conflict was tearing him apart. (Neither woman sounded like a prize to me).

I listened for a long time then said just a few words about Jesus. The man accepted Christ as his Savior and Lord right on the spot.

As we left the diner he told me that he had been driving south on Interstate 75 when he felt an urge to exit the highway and drive east. He had no idea why he was to do this but the urge felt overwhelming. We thanked God for our meeting then turned our rigs around and drove back in opposite directions to the two Interstates we had left in the first place.

Here's something that strikes me as even odder:

Back here in Jacksonville every day I rode a city bus to school changing busses at Hemming Plaza. The drab unhappy faces of people in the park began to haunt me. I thought, Somebody ought to do something to tell these poor people about Jesus...

Well, in my experience anytime you think the phrase, "Somebody ought to... whatever", that's often the voice of God saying, "John Cowart, YOU ought to... whatever".

Who? Me? I thought. Look God, you may be Lord, but You are also crazy as a bedbug. If you expect me to get out there on the street corner and preach the gospel like some religious fanatic... then... then... Hey, I'm an Episcopalian, for Heaven's sake! We don't do stuff like that.

Even as I thought this, a Scripture popped into my mind:

"And at that time some of his disciples turned back and followed him no more. And turning to the twelve he said, will ye leave me also, But Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom should we go, You alone have the words of eternal life..."

Well Lord, if you absolutely insist... But I need a crutch. I can't go out there cold turkey, You're going to have to show me how...

Soon afterward in the park I met an evangelist from Australia, an Anglican evangelist with a group called Open Air Champagnes, sort of an Australian Salvation Army. He was in town for one afternoon and he preached in Hemming Plaza using an easel with simple line drawings to tell Bible stories. Something clicked. Immediately I understood that I could do that. So I made an easel (I didn't know you could buy them ready made) and I figured out how to do three or four Bible stories in drawings...

Can you imagine me preaching on the street? I sure can't.

My first story was about King David featuring a voluptuous stick-figure Bathsheba in her bathtub. A woman came up to me crying after I told the story and said she was waiting for a bus to take her to an abortion clinic. She'd decided to think it over for another day or two. Poor heart-broken child, whatever she eventually decided to do.

For several years after that, since I worked nights I went out to various parks and such places often.

As a rule I never spoke until someone asked me what it was I was drawing. They had to ask me and I'd never raise my voice, yet I spoke with hundreds of people about Jesus.

Once, I was painting my stick figures near Friendship Fountain on Jacksonville's beautiful Riverwalk when two prostitutes off a party yacht asked what I was painting a picture of; it felt odd to waste a picture on an audience of only two girls but I told them the Bible story and they walked away in tears.

A few minutes later, a man in work clothes walked across the park straight at me. "Say mister," he said, "I'm

foreman of a work crew, a dozen guys, putting a roof on that building across the street and from up there we saw you drawing a picture for those girls. The guys sent me down off the roof to ask if you'd come over and draw a picture for them during their lunch break!"

How about that!

Once after the bar closed at 2 a.m., I ended up in the far corner of a bar parking lot painting a Bible story under a street lamp. A gang of guys in black leather jackets noticed and came over to ask what I was doing.

"Painting a picture that tells a story," I said.

"Painting in the dark. That's the dumbest thing I ever heard of," said one guy. "You can't see shit in this light. Wait a second before you draw anymore."

He and several of the guys wheeled over their motorcycles in a semicircle and cut the engines with their headlights pointed at the easel. I drew Bible stories for them the rest of the night. We held an impromptu prayer meeting at dawn with 18 motorcycle people holding hands and praying in a circle.

Sometimes, Sam Thompson, a Christian friend of mine who was born blind, used to go out in the parks with me and read his Braille Bible aloud, a thing which fascinated people. But more than anything Sam wanted to be able to draw a picture to illustrate a Bible verse. The idea obsessed him. Sam, who had no idea what a color was or what anything looked like, wanted to draw a picture. Ridiculous. Impossible... but the two of us prayed to do the impossible.

God sent us a simple idea.

Sam could not see but he had a sharp mind and he could feel things. So we took different colored strings of knitting yarn and tacked them to a long board in a certain order. Then we nailed short nails into the board leaving the nail heads sticking up. The nail heads formed patterns so that Sam could take a strand of yarn and weave it among the nailheads to form simple pictures!

I was amazed. Who but the Lord God could use a blind man to draw illustrations of Bible verses?

As a volunteer for several years I taught Bible lessons at a sort of half-way house for drug addicts at Jax Beach. The great parades held on the day the beaches officially open for the summer draw thousands and thousands of people; Someone ought to...

For five years running I designed parade floats illustrating Bible verses: Four years in a row our floats won trophies as outstanding in our division; and one year we won the "Most Outstanding Float in the Parade" award.

Each year we'd park these floats along the beach and use them as platforms to give out tracts and for me to draw the Bible pictures and tell stories.

The odd thing about this venture is that we were competing against commercially sponsored floats with huge budgets. Operating on a shoestring we constructed our floats out of materials found in the city dump. The float named "Most Outstanding" cost a total of \$5 cash.

That brings me to the fact that Jesus is also Lord of my money -- or He would be if I had any.

For whatever reason -- I'd prefer to think it's because of my commitment to Christ rather than because of my own ineptitude -- Anyhow, for whatever reason I have spent most of my life in abject poverty. I don't mean not having enough cash to pay my bills; I mean in actual want. Not knowing if there'd be anything for supper.

Incidentally, right this moment I'm in better financial shape than I've ever been in before in my life, so I'm not poor mouthing but trying to accurately convey information about this side of Jesus' Lordship in my life, OK?

But for years I supported a family of six on less than a third of what the U.S. government says is poverty level for a family of four. just so you'll know we are talking about -- that's an income of less than \$7,000 a year.

Because of the grace of Jesus Christ we have never lacked for anything... 247 pounds -- Do I look like a guy whose missed many meals?

Not hardly.

But once Ginny and I had to get up at 4 a.m. and go along the road collecting beer cans to turn in at the recycle center for cash enough to buy the children milk and cereal for breakfast.

Once we went without lights or water in the house for months because I could not pay the utility bills. To get water, at night I would take a beach towel and strung empty plastic milk jugs by the handles to carry water home from a public fountain on my back.

Public fountain? Yes. Because of some 18when-ever law, the city of Jacksonville is required to keep open a certain number of public water spigots -- blue stand pipes you see on certain street corners; I'd learned of their existence when I worked for Mosquito Control. Because I felt ashamed to be seen in such poverty by my neighbors, I'd sneak out late at night and fill our jugs with water for the next day.

Why did God put me in such awful straights?

I really don't know except that years afterward one of my neighbors told me, "Thank God for that time your water was cut off. When ours got cut off I remembered seeing you sneak out to that fountain at night so I knew where it was and I could go out and get water just like you did!"

And here I thought that no one had seen me.

Even though I'm fat now, getting basic food loomed large in my thoughts for years. Some gentle soul once helped us out by giving me a five pound bag of rice. Praise God!

When Ginny opened the bag, she found the rice full of weevils, tiny black lobster-shaped bugs.

I did not like it but God had prepared me for this. Remember that my hobby was building model ships and that I had once worked sorting mosquito lava? Well, talents

gained in those activities proved handy now. I poured the rice out on the table and used a magnifying glass and tweezers to pick the weevils out of the five pounds of rice so we could eat it.

Got all of them...

Most of them...

Many of them...

Some of them?

For several summers recently I fed my family by going shrimping practically every night to catch food for the following day... We're not talking *Forest Gump* here, but hand casting a net to glean eight or ten shrimp at a cast. That's me: John Cowart, a food-gather in our High-Tech Society.

Why would the Good Lord treat His servant in such a shabby manner?

That question made me mad at God.

I'd be out there in the dark of night on a dock casting my net and raging at God. *"Hey, Lord, other men have to drink heavily to get in such sad straights. What are You trying to do to me?"*

Well, a servant is no better than his Lord, is he? Foxes have their dens. Bird's have their nests. But the Son of Man had no place to even lay his head, did He?

Why would God have me out there covered with shrimp meal, that's ground-up fish guts which shrimpers use for chum. So tired I could faint?

One night as I raged at God, a man came out on the dock and after a while he revealed to me that he was up late worrying because he'd been in a law suit gone bad and planned to shoot his lawyer the next morning. I talked to him about "Forgive me my sins, just as I forgive those who sin against me". He changed his mind about killing the lawyer.

Another night a policeman arrived at the dock. After we talked, he told me that because of trouble in his

marriage, he planned to eat his gun at the end of his shift. He left the dock with hope.

One summer night, I borrowed our church van to drive to the dock. A different cop saw the words on the side of the van and stopped me to tell me that he'd been sitting in his patrol car just wishing that somebody would happen by to talk with him about God and about the problem of evil. So when he saw the words "Church of the Good Shepherd" (that's all it says) on the side of the van, he just knew God had sent him someone. We talked all night and when I finally got to the dock, I caught more shrimp in an hour than I usually would catch in eight!

What I'm saying is that when Jesus is Lord, He uses us for His own ends, for His own convenience... and that joy is a by-product of His Lordship, not the purpose of it.

No matter how great or tough things are for us, He accomplishes His own ends. Our life has purpose and meaning. Nothing about it is haphazard.

Before I leave the subject of finances, let me mention briefly that about six years ago our pastor, Jim Dannals, , told me and Ginny that we ought to buy a home near the church.. On that particular day, we were living in HUD housing and our cash assets totaled 79¢.

Today, through the goodness of God and His people, we are living in our own 3-bedroom home with new appliances, a huge lawn full of flowers and a swimming pool!

But for about 20 years we did live in HUD housing in a slum area. Rent ranged from \$59 to \$107 a month and we were hard put to raise that much.

Here's something odd:

Most of the time we were living in the HUD housing, I was writing newspaper and magazine articles and selling one now and then.

I recall writing by candlelight when we were without lights. I also recall writing on a yellow legal pad while laying on my belly on the floor beside my father's bed as he died of

cancer in St. Luke's Hospital; I was writing a piece on St. Patrick of Ireland.

That particular article (and a few others I wrote) was translated into 11 foreign languages and transcribed into Braille. It was also used as a radio script.

Through articles and books written in that HUD housing, about 12 million people world-wide have had the chance to wrap coffee grounds in my work.

While my writing never achieved any financial success -- for instance, an article that took me six or eight weeks to research and write would pay about \$50 -- some of that work does appear to have touched people; I have letters from readers in Germany, Japan, Tiawan, all over.

A death-row inmate wrote to me from Uganda; a discouraged missionary from Costa Rica; an oil company geologist read one of those articles 3 years after it was published while he waited in a dentist's office in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (he called me long-distance), A lonely kid wrote to me from a farm in Nowhere, Kansas...

So... Was it worth following Jesus' direction even though it cost me and my family a little personal inconvenience?

Sometimes I honestly don't think so; but then again, sometimes I think it was.

Jim Elliot, a missionary murdered by Auca Indians in Equator, once said, "No one in Heaven will have one word of complaint about anything he lacked here on earth."

So you don't have to worry about having to give up this or that trifle if you allow Jesus to be absolute Lord of your life.

I think Jim Elliot was right. Personally, all things considered, I have never given up anything for Jesus; it's all been gain.

Now, don't get the idea that making Jesus your Lord automatically inducts you into an order of Saints, giving you a life filled with peace, obedience and freedom from sin. It doesn't.

Even though Jesus is my Lord, I have committed, am committing right now, or am likely to commit before all the returns are in, every squalid, nasty sin that takes my fancy.

I still say "No" to God Almighty more often than I say "Yes".

That brings me to two final incidents in my life with Christ that I need to tell about in order to give you even a hint of a balanced report:

While working at the Library of Congress, I met a young woman named Lucille. She was a clerk there.

One Friday, Lucille told me she wanted to talk over a problem that was bothering her. I knew I should make the time to listen to her problem; I just knew I should. But I did not want to. I was working through some problems of my own and I put her off. I told her that we'd have lunch on Monday and we could talk then.

Monday, a co-worker said, "John, did you hear about Lucille? Yesterday at the shopping mall she had a heart attack and died. Yep, between one step and the next she just dropped in her tracks. Such a young woman too."

I did not obey God's prompting when it came. When the LORD give you an order to obey, it's not subject to discussion and negotiation for obedience at your personal convenience. Could something I would have said helped Lucille be prepared to step into Eternity? I'll never know till my own Judgment Day...

I don't know the other woman's name. She was elderly. Ancient. I saw her as I walked to work one morning. I'd left home early so I could have a time of prayer in my work area before anyone else arrived.

This white-haired old lady tottered along carrying two heavy suitcases. She was headed in the direction of the train station a few blocks away.

I knew I should go up immediately and carry that woman's bags to the train for her. This came to me as an urgent impression. There was no mistake about what I ought to do.

"But," the devil whispered in my ear, "If you go off doing Boy Scout stuff like that, you won't have time to pray. It's only two blocks to the station, she'll make it ok. You have more important things to do than..."

I turned and went on to work. My prayers were ashes because I knew that I'd come to an irrevocable turning-point in life and I'd chosen the wrong thing. I'd missed something of unimaginable importance because I'd chosen not to obey God.

One Prophet tells us that, "To obey is better than to sacrifice".

Why is that?

We chose the sacrifice. We decide what and when and where and how much. We initiate the whole thing.

On the other hand, when we obey, the Lord God initiates the action.

My normal course is to make my plans and then pray, "God bless what I have in mind"

When Christ is Lord of our lives, there is only His plan and our question is the same as Saint Paul's, "Lord, What will You have me to do?"

Think about it: Is there any reason that you should not allow Jesus Christ to become the absolute Lord of your life -- Guts, feathers and all --right now, today?

Thursday, February 16, 2012

Lost Florida Words

Yesterday, I worked rewriting a short story titled *Worshday*.

Last year, while hunting something else in my files, I stumbled across a copy of this story, handwritten in pencil on loose-leaf notebook paper from the 1960s. I believe it was the first story I ever tried writing.

It was not terrible.

Yes, I have learned a few things in the past 40 years of freelance writing—active vs passive voice, subject/verb tense agreement, active verbs—but, on the whole, my first story was not terrible.

Prowling through old files, I recovered other old stories—some got published, some never even submitted—but on the whole, I think they were not terrible reading. So I decided to collect about 25 of my stories into a little book which I hope to publish in a month or two.

And the title for my collection will be *Worshday & Other Tales*.

Worshday is an old Florida Cracker word meaning the day on which ladies wash clothes. Traditionally that fell on Mondays but with the advent of washing machines and dryers, nowadays people wash clothes any day, even when they are doing something else.

But in pioneer times, Worshday was an all day affair involving making your own lye soap, chopping wood, boiling clothes outdoors in a huge cast-iron cauldron, wringing things out by hand, applying heavy starch, and ironing each piece with an iron which you heated on a wood-burning stove in the kitchen.

That's the way my grandmother "worshed" clothes, and her grandmother before her—and my short story involves a tale that actually happened to one of my lady ancestors who wielded a broom to fight a panther that grabbed her baby on a worshday.

That's the way we pronounced the word here in Florida's Cracker culture—Worsh, as in, "You boys go worsh up before dinnertime".

My grandparents used a lot of words and terms which have passed out of use.

For instance, once when Ginny and I visited her house overnight, Grandma asked me, "Johnny, do you sleep with a highheader".

She meant a large heavy pillow. That is not what I thought of first when I heard that word *highheader*.

And Granddaddy used to *cipher up* his accounts instead of adding or subtracting. And he always used the word *naught* to mean zero.

Granddaddy spoke mule.

He'd call *Gidup*, *Whoa*, *Gee*, or *Haw*. And his mule knew exactly what he was telling it to do—start, stop, turn left or right. He used other mule commands but I've forgotten them.

He'd trained ox teams in his younger days and he once tried to teach me how to do it because, he said, that when he died, hardly anybody would know how to train oxen. And what if cars and trucks was to go out of fashion? What then? How would farms get produce to market?

Alas, the country will be in trouble if I were ever to have to train an ox team to haul freight to replace 18-wheeler trucks.

My Grandmother acknowledged only four health problems. Kids got *Whooping Cough* (she dosed us with a mix of kerosene and sugar to cure it). Adults got the *Creeping Corruption* or the *Galloping Corruption* or they got caught in a saw mill accident. Other than those four, health prevailed. But on rare occasions a person might admit to *feeling right poorly today*. Get well or die was the accepted HMO of the times.

Oddly enough, though the epidemic swept the country when I was a boy, there was one forbidden word—Polio. I do not recall ever hearing anyone say that word until in 1955 the radio announced that Dr. Jonas Salk had developed a vaccine to prevent polio.

That word conveyed a disease so horrible, so worrisome to parents, that no one ever used it in any child's hearing. I suppose there were euphemisms grownups used, but they went right over my head.

Speaking of forbidden words, Black people were *Coloreds* and you'd better never use any disrespectful word in regard to them; use of other words classed you as sleazy. To this day I prefer to speak of Colored People by name, George, Bubba, Dolly rather than by any racial designation even by politically correct travesties.

Ginny feels the same. In fact, for years she spoke of various individuals in her office by name and I did not know that person's skin color until I met them at an office party. I think that's the way it should be.

But, in my boyhood, *Japs* or *Nips* referred to any oriental person. I think that word arose from the old name, *Nippon*, for the Japanese island, which was pronounced *J-pan*—and that's the way everybody I knew referred to our World War II enemy, two words, *J-Pan*.

I was visiting Granddaddy's farm the day President Truman declared war in Korea. On hearing that on the radio, we boys climbed on the roof to watch to see if Nip airplanes would bomb Graham, a town with a filling station about 15 miles away down the hard road.... A shame they didn't. We boys were disappointed.

In those days we did not go to church; we went to *preachin'*

I recall that a preacher of whatever stripe called people *Sinner-Man*.

"Sinner-Man, the time is short. You better flee the Wrath of the Lamb and that Great and Terrible Day of our God," he would exhort.

The community church building down at the hard road in Graham, hosted different denominations on different Sundays. Sometimes you'd hear a Baptist preach, sometimes a Methodist, and occasionally a Holly Roller—that's what Pentecostals were called back then.

They earned the nickname *Holy Roller* because they felt physical manifestations of God presence among them in worship and they would raise their hands, shout, jump, fall to the floor passed out, speak in tongues, and sometimes jerk.

Getting the jerks was a sure sign of the Holy Ghost. The worshiper would flex and convulse and move in snaps before often passing out and falling into a trance.

Some scholars say we Florida Crackers got our name from people catching the jerks in protracted meetings—long religious revival camp meetings in the woods during pioneer days. Some worshipers in the Spirit would jerk so hard that their waist-long hair would snap forward and back so fast that their hair would crack like a whip—hence the name Crackers for us native Southerners.

Incidentally, my Grandpa, John L. Moody, plated his own horse whip and he kept it by his place at the long

trestle table in the kitchen. He sat at the head. Grandma's place was at the foot near the stove, and we kids—Grandpa and Grandma had at least 12 kids that I can remember—we kids sat on benches to either side..

Woe be to the kid who misbehaved during a meal. With his horsewhip, Grandpa could flick a fly off your nose without ever having to look up from his plate! I never saw him actually whack anybody. But we behaved at the table

Grandpa taught me how to grub worms.

When you plan to go fishing, take two 18-inch long stakes and an ax. Drive one stake partway in the ground here; drive the other in about 20 feet away. Now rub the flat of the ax-head on one stob to scrub it into vibrating. The grubbing sound and vibrations travel underground from one stob to the other driving any earthworms in the area up to the surface where all you have to do is pick them up and put them in your bait can.

Of course, if you needed food fish in a hurry without foolin' around all day, Granddaddy said the best way was to toss a stick of dynamite into the spring. The concussion brought stunned fish to the surface where you could scoop them up. He never let me go with the men to do that, too dangerous for kids. Darn!

Another characteristic of Florida Cracker speech that is disappearing is the use of the word *to* in places where other people say *at*.

For instance I recall my Grandmother welcoming visitors to her house by saying, "Welcome. I hope you is to home. If'n you ain't to home, you ought to be".

Never mistake our colloquial speech patterns for ignorance. I saw again and again that my grandparents were resourceful, cleaver, practical people who solved problems with ingenuity using whatever materials at hand. Farm life made you smart or made you dead... It's just that they developed colorful speech that said what needed to be said.

For instance, the *Gozunda*.

Refined folks might call it a chamber pot. We crude boys called it a piss pot. When nature called in the night, that outhouse was far away in the rain and dark and cold.

Therefore every bedroom featured a *Gozunda*.

Where would you find it?

Why, as the name implies, it goes under the edge of the bed.

Saturday, February 18, 2012
Mardi Grai, Lent, & A Happy Diversion

The best way to live in love and charity with your neighbor is to build a really high fence.

I can do that.

Centuries from now tourists will visit the Great Wall Of Cowart and marvel at all the energy I expended and all the work I did to build it. And they'll say, "Dumb bastard fenced the barbarian inside"!

Ah, yes. Next Tuesday is Mardi Gras, party time as we now approach Lent. Lent, that season of the year when many Christians pause for internal examination, reflection on their relationship with God, and soul searching.

Not me!

I did some soul searching once. It was so yucky in there, I never want to go again.

My friend Barbara White, who died about this time last year, used to say that I spend too much time in the game of life arguing with the Referee.

I want God to change His mind.

Not gonna happen.

Theologians talk about God's immutability. That means He never changes. They say that for God to change, He would have to get better than He already is; and that's impossible because how can Perfection get better? Or, to change, God would have to get worse than He already is (does that sound right?) and that's impossible because then He would not be Perfection, not be God.

So, He does not change.

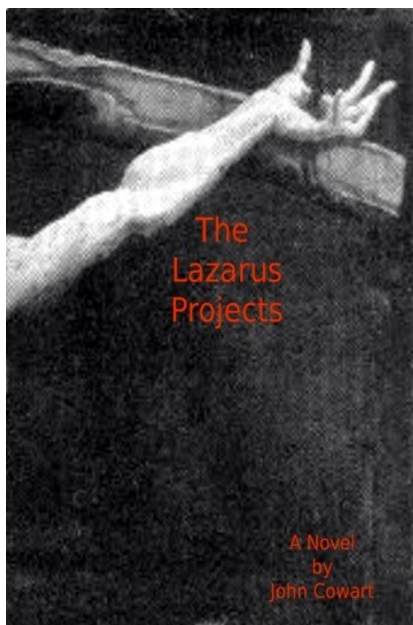
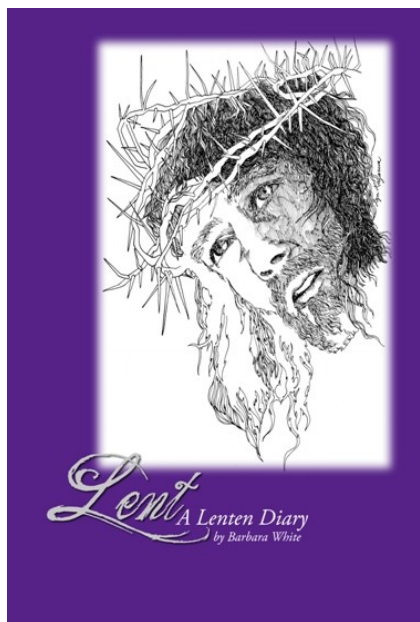
But, I can change.

If I chose.

Rats!

OK. Before I go deeper into this search for my soul down in the sewer, let me recommend two books for Lent. Both of them can be found in my online catalog at www.bluefishbooks.info .

On her deathbed my friend Barbara gave me the text and asked me to publish her book *Lent: A Lenten Diary*. She won many awards as a newspaper editor and thousands of readers have drawn inspiration and help from Barbara's meditations.



The other book is one I wrote myself. It's called *The Lazarus Projects*. My book is a science fiction adventure tale in which a team of modern investigators, led by Miami businessman Eli Rosen, travel back through time to observe the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and to see whether or not the resurrection is true.

So much for plugging books—now back to soul searching.

What got me thinking along these lines was that yesterday I accomplished so much work!

Working on my next manuscript, *Worshday*, I produced almost 40 pages of text, clean text, mind you. That's a record for me. Of course, I worked about 22 hours to produce that amount of copy, but none the less, I did it and I felt so proud of my accomplishment. And, not

only that but I also encouraged a friend about a novel he's been working on for ten years

Yes indeed. Yesterday was one of my most productive days ever.

Then, for our after-supper devotions last night, Ginny read the Bible's Love Chapter.

Crap!

I hate that chapter.

That's one Bible bit God ought to change. Here's how it starts:

If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but have no love, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal. If I have the gift of foretelling the future and hold in my mind not only all human knowledge but the very secrets of God, and if I also have that absolute faith which can move mountains, but have no love, I amount to nothing at all. If I dispose of all that I possess, yes, even if I give my own body to be burned, but have no love, I achieve precisely nothing.

But doesn't God realize that I did move a mountain of work today? I got a lot done and I got it done without loving any damn body! Doesn't that count for something?

Instead of working I could have just sit around luvvvvvvng everybody and feeling warm fuzzies.

Bull!

In my experience, warm fuzzies are like lice, bedbugs or a herpes infection. People who have them ought to get treated before they infect the rest of us.

So, God wants me to love more than He wants me to work.

That's sure gonna pay a lot of bills.

I mean God ought to change His standards. Why does He expect me to repent, to love, to change direction?

Hummm... recently I ran across this thing from Canada. It's not religious, but I think anyone can see something about this Lent thing in this radio conversation:

Divert Your Course

This is the actual radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995. Radio conversation released by the chief of naval operations, 10-10-95.

CANADIANS: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.

CANADIANS: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

AMERICANS: This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

CANADIANS: No, I say again, you divert YOUR course.

AMERICANS: This is the Aircraft Carrier US LINCOLN, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic Fleet. We are accompanied with three Destroyers, three Cruisers and numerous support vessels. I DEMAND that you change your course 15 degrees north. I say again, that's one-five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

CANADIANS: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

Monday, February 20, 2012

Be Kind To Others. See What It Gets You.

When you see the SWAT team with their ninja suits and assault rifles surround my house, please ask them not to step in Ginny's flower beds as they raid to drag me off to jail.

Yes, apparently I am subject to arrest, conviction, and probably hanging over something that has virtually nothing to do with me.

All I am guilty of is trying to be decent, and having an interest in history, and writing a diary.

But try explaining that to a police attack dog.

For a guy who doesn't do anything in the world but sit at my desk and write, I lead an interesting life.

For background on the present situation, it might be well to read my blog archive postings for August 5th, 14th and 15th of 1910—those relate to my burying a dead Indian.

In a nutshell: when a man up north died and his daughter cleaned out his house, she found a box of human bones that he had dug out of an Indian mound near Jacksonville back in the 1950s.

She wanted to see the bones returned and decently buried with respect. As a reader of my blog, she felt free to ask me to bury the dead Indian and she mailed the bones to me (my postman wonders just what goes on in this house).

From my youth I've known the location of several area Indian mounds—most of those have been plowed under in road construction now, but I checked and located a suitable one. I gathered my family and one Sunday we re-buried the Indian with the most appropriate dignity we could think of. A typical Cowart family outing.

There are photos in those 1910 postings of mine.

Recently however, somebody told somebody whose cousin's dentist's friend told her hairdresser who told her cop brother who told... and Authorities got wind that John Cowart had buried a human person without authorization.

They want to dig him up.

They want to check his DNA to see if he is not a dead Frenchman instead of an Indian. They want to know exactly where he is buried.

You'll notice from the photos that I was scrupulous about camera angles not to reveal any identifiable landmark or location; my photos and information could describe any coastal location from Miami to Maryland.

I did that deliberately.

Now, those bones were entrusted to me. I'm no forensic anthropologist, but I have enough experience that I am satisfied that the bones are those of an Indian who died over 500 years ago. I treated them with respect and dignity...

And DAMN if I'll ever reveal the location so some authorities can dig them up again. That would not be a decent, proper or respectful thing to do.

I am indecent about a lot of things but I intend to be decent about this.

I do not intend to tell anybody precisely where I buried the Indian.

I was given a trust.

And I hope no one in my family tells either...(do prisons give group rates for accessories after the fact?)

Of course, all this has nothing to do with me. I did not dig him up. I did not box him and drag him up north. All I did was re-bury him at the request of a woman I've never even met. It was the right thing to do.

I've got to stop trying to do the right thing. Doing the right thing has a way of turning and biting you in the ass.

Long ago I took in some Moslem students from Iran who were in trouble—no money, new baby—and they told me a proverb in Pharsi; I don't remember the words but it translated as "I only suffer when I am good and kind to other people".

Rest easy, Dead Indian, I'll never tell where you are.

I've never been to jail before. Tell me, can you request a room in Solitary Confinement?

While waiting for the SWAT team I intend to keep on editing Ken's book (that's another story) and writing *Worshday* (Up to 98 pages now) and preparing for my next eye surgery (was that the counterfeit medicine I got last time?) and advising Ginny about our taxes (she ignores my input) and thinking over my role in that documentary movie on local history (yes, the movie folks contacted me again), and...

And I think I'll check the kitchen to see if we happen to have any doggie treats for me to give the attack dogs.

Isn't it fun to be a Christian!

Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Never Mind...

The cops are not after me.

Apparently, I misunderstood the whole situation I wrote about in this on-line journal yesterday. The authorities who want the Indian's bones exhumed are not police authorities but university authorities.

When I learned about it I may possibly have overreacted a tiny bit.

The news about the bones came to me garbled either in my hearing or the phone caller's speaking. Either way, the news came at a bad time for me and I came unglued.

That's so unusual.

Ask anyone in my family.

Thing is moments before the call came in I was trying to reestablish contact with an estranged family member, and at the same time trying to reassure a difficult and demanding author, and trying a delicate computer formatting job and these little black lines appeared on my screen and I had not put them there and they would not go away and they were screwing up 98 pages of text and I did not have a backup copy and ...

And, just before that someone I've been trying to help without getting paid for it, someone who has looked at my websites exactly one time—count them on one finger—One Time, called to tell me that my Bluefish Logo is wrong, my book presentation is wrong, she can get a better deal elsewhere, that I do not know how to run a business properly (It was like hearing from my first wife again) and how I should change this or that to have a better blog and...

And I tried to listen and respond in a calm, courteous, reasonable, Christian gentlemanly fashion while hypocritically in my mind and beneath my breath thinking appropriate responses to the constructive criticism of the caller and wishing for worms to eat out her eyes...

However, on the good side, as I listened to her evaluation of what's wrong with me, I had this wonderful idea which will make me rich.

Too late to do it this year, but next year, I can publish ASH WEDNESDAY CARDS—black-bordered cards you can mail to family, friends and neighbors telling them everything that’s wrong with them and why they need to repent!

Then the phone call came about the Indian’s bones. And the caller asked me, “What is this I hear about you burning some boats?” As we talked, it became evident that he meant “What is this I hear about you burying some bones”.

So, in my calm, courteous, reasonable, Christian gentlemanly fashion, I discussed the matter with him before I checked a flurry of e-mails about the subject.

And that set the tone for my intended romantic evening.

As the poet says, “The best plans of mice and men to get laid oft times go awry”.

But the good news is that those little black lines disappeared from my computer screen. I have no idea why they appeared or why they eventually, after a half hour, went away of their own accord. Just a marvel of the communications age I guess.

Reminds me of one time when I was writing a Bible study thing using my heavy *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance To The Holy Scriptures*, a study tool on steroids. I propped the book and my Bible beside my keyboard as I looked up passages to quote.

I worked away happy as a clam...Then, suddenly my computer acted strange.

Odd symbols appeared. The screen jumped from one drop-down menu to another. The whole system went crazy. Looked like I was typing in the Cyrillic alphabet.

What is wrong with my computer?

I tried this and I tried that—nothing changed the screen from doing crazy stuff.

I grew a tiny bit frustrated. Desperate, I tried to pull up a help menu—you know how much good that does.

I blew my top!

I cursed Bill Gates and Steve Jobs as frauds, hucksters and closet members of the Hitler Youth Corps!

Then I looked at my computer from the other chair as I smoked a pipe to calm down... from a distance I saw the right-hand corner of the huge heavy *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* rested on top of the keyboard's control key.

Every key I typed became a Control+Key command.

That explained everything.

All I had to do to correct the craziness was to back off and look again....

Never mind.

Anyhow, today the cops are not looking to pick me up.

However, if you see a van slowly cruising the neighborhood looking for an address and it's being driven by men in white coats...

My name is John.

Thanks be to God.

Friday, February 24, 2012

Chained Reactions And Internal Combustion

Thank God, Ginny and I lost \$400!

You see, in figuring our taxes, we find that last year we earned \$200 above the poverty line; this year, we earned \$200 below the poverty line. That means, by the government's logic, that this year we pay \$700 less in taxes than last year.

In other words, because we are \$400 poorer, in the end we come out \$300 to the good on our property taxes... By golly, I ought to sign up to become a Republican!

Life, like taxes, makes less and less sense to me.

For instance, recently I've been thinking about my reactions to things as a Christian because I can think of myself as a pretty good Christian—unless something rocks my boat.

As an active Christian I can plan my religious activities. That's the attraction of faith by works and legalism for me. I can say, if I don't smoke, drink alcohol, go to movies, drink fluoridated water, chew tobacco and spit on the sidewalk; if I do attend church, go to Wednesday night prayer meeting, tithe, volunteer, give blood—then I am in control of my religion and I can get pretty good at it.

All that crashes when I realize that I am a reactive Christian.

Case in point, I blew my stack when the phone rang and the caller told me someone questioned my judgment about burying the Indian. I groaned and cursed when the phone rang and it was that pesky old lady calling again. I cursed when I turned right and realized that construction blocked the road at the railroad tracks. And last night when the waiter let our food sit on the steam table while he chatted up this cute girl, I reduced his tip by half!

I want my way. And when I don't get it, I react.

When something, any little thing, thwarts my will, I lose my veneer of religion and my true, easily pissed-off, self emerges.

My reactions gauge my level of commitment to Christ more than my actions.

Actions can be conscious; reactions, unconscious.

Actions are voluntary; reactions, involuntary.

Actions can be faked, reactions can't.

Now it's easy for me to dismiss my ass-on-my-shoulder reactions by saying I'm just blowing off a little steam.

Although He was talking about food at the time, Jesus said that nothing that goes into a person defiles him; it just passes through the system and gets flushed. But, he said, it is what comes out of a man's heart, our reactions, that defile. Here's Mark's account of what Jesus said:

Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught?....

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Over the past couple of weeks, I, by promise, chained myself to a situation of helping someone who has made it harder and harder for me to help. Going in, I thought I was committing to a matter of hours; it's been a daily drain for weeks now. With my will thwarted, my expectations torpedoed, I've undergone a chained reaction!

And daily, resentment, bitterness, and anger have welled up inside of me.

This is not to be dismissed as getting hot under the collar, but internal combustion is taking place that generates heat for that "Little Steam".

How can I walk with Christ while reacting in such an unchristian manner?

Here are a couple of things I'm working on:

1. I try to realize that, while I am a project-oriented person, the other person is not. I want to get the job over and done with. NOW! The client wants to linger over details and project future problems which are unlikely, in my opinion, to ever arise.

2. Therefore, the situation is not about what I thought it was about. This is not a physical project, but a spiritual one. I did not realize that going in.

3. I think of St. Peter who was also a reactive Christian. He wanted to build huts on the Mount of Transfiguration because he did not realize what was going on there. In Gethsemane, he drew a sword and chopped off a guy's ear; and Jesus had to repair the damage. After Christ rose from the tomb, Peter jumped out of the fishing boat and swam to meet the Lord. Yes, Peter did all that reactive stuff, but he eventually grew up. I'm glad for his example.

4. I am trying to realize that my Christian life is out of my control. Walking with Christ is making me different, but not all that different and not all that fast.

Christianity is not something I do, but something that rubs off on me from hanging around Christ.

My good reactions—and there have been some, like years ago in an industrial accident, without thinking I rescued a guy in danger without having even thought a second about risking my own life—My good reactions are an indication of Christ within me. My evil reactions are an indication of me within me. My bad reactions point up how much more I need to depend on the Living Christ and not lean on my own understanding.

So, while all these thoughts percolate, how am I going to spend my windfall \$300 profits from having achieved a status below the poverty line?

Maybe I should e-mail my good friends Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, we could do lunch at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club and talk over our financial strategies.

I now have enough cash to leave the tip.

Monday, February 27, 2012 **Kudos & Kicks**

As I worked on *Worshday*, my collection of short stories, over the weekend, I chanced across an article I wrote years ago which may well be the most important thing I ever wrote. That article is called *The Ugliest Picture On Earth* and it's on line at <http://www.cowart.info/Monthly%20Features/Ugly%20pix/Ugly%20%20pix.htm> .

I think it makes good reading for this Lenten season.

Friday I received two kudos and one kick.

Two firemen contacted me to tell how much they enjoyed reading my books *Heroes All*, a history of firefighting in Jacksonville, Florida, and *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, moments in Jacksonville history.

These gentlemen enjoyed my history books so much that they asked if they could bring their copies by sometime this week for me to autograph.

That is really flattering.

I preened.

Friday afternoon, Ann Pridgen called to tell me how much she and everyone she shows it to enjoys my edition of *My Most Amazing Year*, the 1932 diary of Ann's mother; I just edited and published that diary earlier this month.

Ann said, "John Cowart, you are a treasure"!

Wow. I don't think anyone has ever said that to me before.

Very flattering. I preened.

To balance the firemen and Ann, I also got a call from an author I've helped with his book. He told me how disappointed he is with my work. The front cover is wrong. The back cover is wrong. The Scripture reference is wrong. The font is wrong. The paper size is wrong. The paragraphing is wrong. The spacing is wrong. The indentation is wrong. The font size is wrong. The ...

So much for preening. I bristled.

I told him to write it all down and I will change anything he wants changed, but that I intend to spend no more than one more day on his book. Then it is his baby right or wrong.

I was tempted to offer him double his money back for giving him such shoddy workmanship, but since he is paying me nothing at all for the work I'm doing for him, I can't very well do that.

He is to call me with his list of corrections sometime during business hours today.

The thing I need to keep in mind is that this is not about publishing another book; it's about aiding a troubled brother in Christ.

I loose sight of that when I bristle over criticism.

As I anticipate his call, I try to reflect on Paul's concluding words to the Ephesians:

Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith,

one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Thanks, Paul. I needed that.

Wednesday, February 29, 2012 (Leap Day) One Hell Of A Thing

Yesterday a herd of bird, robins, titmice, cardinals, doves and wrens, fluttered into my backyard. That means our long hard days (all six or eight of them) of Florida Winter are over—maybe. Winter has a way of snapping back here in North Florida.

I was out in the backyard raking leaves while working on a knotty writing problem.

Before my next eye surgery, I hope to finish *Worshday & Other Tales*, a book collecting about 25 of my short stories.

One story remained unfinished for years.

I started it back in the late 1970s, ran into a plot difficulty, and tabled it all these years in the back of a file drawer. Off and on over the years, I think of it and again run into the same plot difficulty. I gave up on this story—it's called *A Hell Of A Thing*—again and again.

It's the story of a guy who wants to seduce a girl who resists his advances.

Do I want him to get the girl? Should she repel him? Do they fall in love? Do one or both end up frustrated? And can whatever happens between them fit in with the backdrop of an erupting volcano?

I have outlined and worried and focused and pondered and plotted and prayed for years without solving the story problem—but I want to include this story in my *Worshday* collection.

I've been putting off facing the problem but yesterday I came to the place where this story needs to go in my book's table of contents. Now it became unavoidable. I had to solve this plotting problem—or scrap the story.

I gave up.

I left my computer to go outside and watch the birds and rake leaves.

And as I raked leaves thinking of nothing more serious than what to fix for lunch...All of a sudden there appeared in my mind a solution to the problem.

Maybe not the best solution, but a workable one.

I hurried inside and finished the rough draft of that short story in an hour.

And as I worked I reflected on how often the solution to a knotty problem comes when your doing some mundane, routine duty which has nothing to do with the problem.

And I thought of how often God calls us, not while we are at prayer or in church, but while we go about some totally secular duty—Gideon was thrashing wheat when the angel appeared. Moses tended sheep when he saw the Burning Bush. Peter, James and John were fishing when Christ called. Matthew worked in a tax office when out of the blue, Christ appeared.

Sometime, I've been know to try to force God to appear in my life when I want Him. Sometimes, I've tried to force a solution to a writing problem. Those Let-Go-And-Let-God fanatics may just be onto something.

Now, isn't that a Hell of a thing?

Thursday, March 1, 2012
AT&T Loves Me Not

Once again our phone service (Ha!) is out. Has been about 24 hours now. I'm sure the Florida Lottery people have been calling and calling to let me know I've won millions—or maybe not. Oddly enough, this time my internet has stayed on line.

A pox on all their houses!

However, I've been having great fun working on my book, *Worshday*, a collection of my short stories—old ones that have been in a file drawer for ages. I think the date on the earliest is 1968.

And what I have found is that I was a better writer then than I am now.

I mean, though I have learned a bit over the years about passive voice, etc., back then I was a better storyteller. I envy what I was. Too damn bad life intervened. I could have been a good writer.

For one thing, as I've re-written and corrected pieces, I find that the fiction stories encapsulate my major beliefs and world view better than my nonfiction writing does. Those early stories tell the truth, but they tell it in fictionalized form.

That strikes me as odd.

In between working on my own book and on *Stoker*, a novel I'm helping format, I've been plotting a Florida pioneer novel of my own. By and large, I'm having fun writing. It's what I was meant to be. So, I frolic in words like an otter in the river...

Good thing my family, especially Ginny, subsidizes my career.

I thank God for her, poor girl.

Must be a bitch being married to Peter Pan.

Friday, March 2, 2012

A Right Fir Piece

Ask for directions from one of us Crackers here in North Florida and he may tell you, "Go on down the road a right fir piece till you come to a dog leg". That means keep on the road a far way till you come to a ... Well, a dogleg.

I suppose a dogleg is a wiggle in the road shaped like the crook of a dog's leg.

If the dog leg is not too far away, he'll just say, "Go down the road a piece".

Any of us Crackers knows the difference between a piece and a right fir piece; one's a mite longer than the other.

This came up in a conversation Ginny and I had last night about How Long Is A Second Mile?

We were talking about that place in the Bible where Jesus said that if someone forces you to go with him one mile, go with him two miles—That's in His Sermon From The Mount in Matthew 5.

I don't know if it's true or not, but I've heard that back in Bible times when Roman soldiers occupied Israel, that a law said any Roman soldier had the right to requisition any peasant and force him to carry his pack and equipment for one mile.

And that Jesus referred to that law when He said to go a second mile.

In other words, don't just do the minimum.

Go all out to do more than is expected or required of you even if you're having to carry the load of a hated enemy-occupying soldier.

Let me digress here to say that we waited for hours and hours yesterday for the AT&T repairman we were told to expect about one in the afternoon and he never did come. Talk about minimal service!

But, I digress. I am not responsible for AT&T; I am responsible for John Cowart's behavior. And I go the first mile. Then I go the second mile...just because Jesus said to. But I get to wondering just how long is that second damn mile? Can I quit now?

Is it a piece, or is it a fir piece, or is it a right fir piece?

Being me, I get exasperated after the first hundred yards. I want to drop the load in the road and run off into the bushes.

But Jesus said, "Don't be like John Cowart".

And St. Paul said, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him".

I am not to carry the pack of the enemy because of legal compulsion, but because Jesus Christ is my Lord and He deserves the best service possible. Not the minimal, the best. Because He is worthy.

But I balk.

Somewhere I've been infected with the idea that I have "Rights".

Says who?

Well, I do. And my rights are self-defined. I set limits on what I'm willing to do for others... a piece, a fir piece, or a right fir piece.

Jesus has been giving me a talking to about that stuff.

I've told Him that I don't have any problem that winning Lotto wouldn't fix.

But does He listen to me?

Enough deep thinking. I haven't told a joke in a long time. Here is one sure to appeal to readers of discriminating taste, culture and refinement:

In the nursing home geriatric unit this old man and old woman fall in love and decide to marry.

They have to discuss things beforehand. Will he move into her apartment or she into his? Will they spend Christmas with her grown children or his? Do they keep her furniture or his?

Finally he asks, "What about sex? Do you like it"?

She said, "I like it infrequently".

He ponders for a moment then asks, "Is that one word or two?"

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Phone Service Restored & The Closet Demon Strikes Again.

Today, all across America, in the Philippines, in Taiwan, in India, in Puerto Rico, scores of bill collectors rejoice! Once again they can call me to gently remind me that I owe them money.

Yes, my telephone and internet service has been restored.

The phone guy showed up yesterday afternoon only 24 hours after we were told he would be here. In only three hours he climbed poles, dug holes, attached wires, and put me in contact with the world again.

Eve, Jennifer and Terri encourage me to drop our phone service and go with cell phones and a different internet company; but we've had the same phone number for about 20 years and it's better to stay with a demon I know than go to a demon I don't know.

My daughter Eve, who just returned from a Caribbean Cruise, snapped this photo of the bucket truck across the street:



It is a great relief to have the system working again.

Since my internet has been spasmodic, and I've been in the final stages of publishing another book (I'll tell about it soon) I've been walking on eggs daily. So many things bumped my elbow as I've built this house of cards with a published book balanced on top.

Shortly after the phone guy fixed everything and drove away into the sunset, a machine called me. Not a human being, a machine from AT&T. Since we have lived without reliable service since last Tuesday night, this machine wanted me to complete a Customer Satisfaction survey in English and Spanish.

Question: Can you be rude to a machine?

If so, I was—in English.

As I hung up on the thing, I tried to remember: in the past 40 years have I ever anywhere, at any time in any place ever heard any person say anything good about the phone company?

I felt bad about being rude to the poor machine. Without me to call, all those scores of bill collectors, and people who solicit donations for charity, in third world countries would be thrown out of work and starve. In many parts of the globe calling John Cowart must be regarded as a cottage industry

Leaving the subject of AT&T, lets talk about demons.

That's a jump in topics—or maybe not.

Anyhow, Ginny has to work overtime today and she needed a piece of equipment from our front closet.

Remember our front closet? If we ever get a divorce, you can bet that closet will be named correspondent. I wrote about my last encounter with that closet in a post called “Out Of The Closet” on December 31, 2010. That's on page 466 of my book *A Dirty Old Man vs The Coons* (www.bluefishbooks.info).

Jesus reputedly once said, “When thou prayest, enter into thy **closet**, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly”.

Now, why on earth would a loving Lord tell innocent disciples a thing like that?

Must be one of those textual errors scholars are always talking about. Jesus would not really say a thing like that would He?

Oh, by the way, as a side note, every year about this time, twix Ash Wednesday and Easter, somebody somewhere reveals startling new scientific evidence that Jesus did not really rise from the dead. If you care, check your Google news as far back as it goes to see each year's discoveries.

The Resurrection really bugs some people; they don't know how to handle it.

Jesus rose or rotted.

What's so hard about that?

This year's Resurrection news flurry: an archaeologist in Israel claims to have discovered a tomb with inscriptions; he made this startling new discovery in

1981 but waited till now to announce his proof that Jesus is dead and stayed dead.

Yes, Jesus Christ either rose or rotted.

All I have to say is that these discoveries crop up every year about the same time and that, in time, all of us dead (and we will be) will hear the voice of the Son of God and we will all know of assureity which is true.

Anyhow, Ginny asked me to find the equipment she needed in the front closet.

And here I thought she loved me.

Opening the fatal door I found a shelf had collapsed on top of stuff. I got a flashlight to search the disaster debris field for her thing and I pulled stuff while I searched..

It ain't there.

I go to tell her, and the thing is on her lap as she sits at her desk! ...She had not told me that, while I searched, she'd already found it in her room.

We said those loving words which can only be generated by 43 years of happy marriage—and one closet.

Later today I may stuff stuff back into the closet. Not right now.



So, to all you little kids who read my on-line diary: don't let anyone ever tell you that no demons live in your closet. They do! They really do. And they're out to get you. Beware of the closet demon—and. Listen to Uncle John, when you grow up, think long and hard before you install a telephone.

Monday, March 5, 2012
I Am Right!

Let's think about being right.

In the movie *Groundhog Day*, the insurance salesman character, Ned, punches Bill Murray in the ribs and says, "Am I right or am I right"!

To me, that line immediately marks Ned as an ass. He is right, but he is a right ass.

I've been in a situation recently where I have been right; the lady involved, (not Ginny Thank God) has been wrong. So, being in the right, what am I supposed to do about it? That presents me with a quandary. Yes, life is hard on us righteous.

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Thanks to Alonzo Myers (See Romans 12:2)

10-25-2005

BE YE TRANSFORMED

St. Paul addressed the problem of being right in his letter to the Colossians:

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of

mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

I have been pondering the meaning of that word *forbearing* as it applies to my situation. It's not an everyday word, but nevertheless, it's a word I hear all too often.

You see, I owe this company money. Lots of money. Money we borrowed years ago when we fell for the lie, "To get a good job, get a good education". Well Ginny got the good education, graduated just a point short of academic honor, but the job she got—well some folks doing that same job do not appear to know the alphabet.

That's neither here nor there, point is that I owe the Student Loan program big-time money... and sometimes I have not kept up my payments.

And sometimes... they give me a forbearance.

They are in the right. I am in the wrong. They would be perfectly within their rights to clamp down on me without mercy—yet they chose to exercise forbearance, they put their rights on hold and work with me to resolve the problem.

The loan company acts more Christian that I do.

To me, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another" means that even when I'm right and within my rights, I am not to act on my rights, but to exercise forbearance toward the person who is wrong.

Why?

I'm right!

Why should I be the one to give way?

"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye".

You see, even if I am right in a given instance, I am not RIGHT on a global, universal scale.

Being right is so much a matter of being in a temporary, transient, punctiliar situation. And so often it is just a matter of personal taste. For instance, compare

my kids' idea of the right music and my idea of the right music.

Or, Ginny has a right way of washing dishes. I also have a right way of washing dishes. The only thing our two "right" ways have in common, is that both involve water. How do we resolve the issue? Either she washes dishes, or I do—we've learned that our marriage runs smoother when only one of us is in the kitchen at a time.

It's much more important to be loving than to be right.

Being right is a temporary condition. Mr. Lot was a man *Saved By The Grace Of God* and who actually saw real live angels—then he went out, got drunk, screwed his daughters, knocked 'em up, fathered Amorites and Moabites—great track record for a guy who was, at least at one point in his life—Right.

So much for the most righteous man in Sodom.

So, why should I exercise forbearance?

Because being right is a snare to my soul.

I get to thinking, I am right and you are wrong; I am right and they are wrong; I am right and everybody else is wrong! And I pray, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men..."

Jesus said He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

I am to forbear and forgive and to be longsuffering and merciful and humble and kind and charitable and ... CRAP!

I can't do all that!

Trying to live Christian drives me nuts.

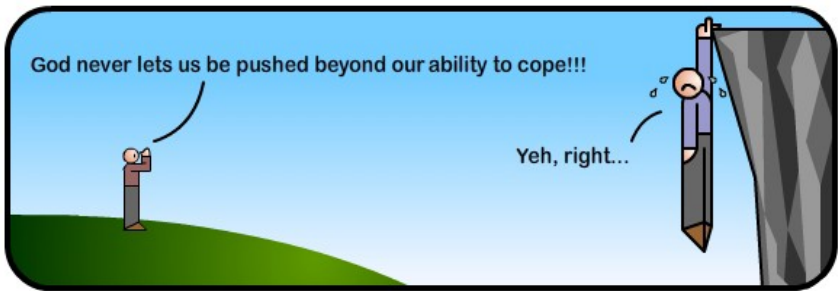
God's standards are just too high. I can't jump that next hurdle. He is unreasonable! What does He want from me?

The Prophet Micah answered, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"?

Oh, is that all?

Do. Love. Walk.

I though it was more complicated than that.
That I can do.



Tuesday, March 6, 2012
The King Cake & other stuff

I'm late writing this but some folks from my wife's office hail from New Orleans.

As part of their traditional Mardi Gras celebration, they serve King Cake at their office party.

The King Cake recipe includes cinnamon and nutmeg and pecans and orange segments and... God only knows whatallelse.

The cook sprinkles the top of the confection with colored sugar; Purple sugar represents Justice; green sugar represents Faith: and gold sugar represents Power.

Mixed in the batter and baked somewhere deep in the cake is a tiny figurine representing the baby Jesus.

Tradition has it that only a person who has exceptional piety, faith, honor, courage and good looks will get the slice of King Cake containing the baby Jesus.

(Another tradition says that if you get the baby, you'll have a baby within the next year—forget that one!)

You can judge the validity of this tradition by the fact that...



Yes, this year I bit into the baby Jesus!

Did it no harm because I lack most of my teeth—another old southern tradition. My Father had few teeth; my grandfather had few teeth—so I suppose bad teeth are genetic. Or, it could be that I own my missing teeth to following another fine old southern tradition--For the first 18 years of my life, till the army sent me to the barbaric north, every day I poured a packet of Tom's Roasted Nuts into a bottle of Royal Crown Cola and drank the mixture.

Anyhow, Jesus suffered no damage from my bite, having supernaturally designated me as King with all the rights and privileges thereunto—asking around I find that I, as King, have no rights or privileges only the obligation to bake next year's King Cake—and it must be cooked with my own hands. Store-bought cakes are not acceptable.

Yes, I get to cook a King Cake next Mardi Gras.

I've never heard of anyone choking on Jesus... Er, not in that way anyhow... but just in case, the Nation Poison Control 24-Hour Hotline number is **1-800-222-1222**.

Two other recent items of interest to me:

First, Yesterday after breakfast, Wes, Donald, Johnny, Helen and me talked for close to six hours on deep matters of Christian theology and practical piety.

Our conversation began with a detailed examination of the Scripture about the bears who ate the kids who teased a prophet, to the majesty of God's glory, and the living application of John's Gospel, chapters 14-17.

We also discussed whether or not five guys sitting around my living room smoking cigars, laughing insanely, and looking up Bible passages (Where two or three) constitute a church meeting or a bull session.

We also talked about what questions we would ask God. Someone in the group (you'll never guess who) raised the most burning biblical question of the day—Delilah? Bathsheba?—What size bras did they wear?

Second thing from yesterday:

Last night, in a phone conversation with a fan of my writing, he told me that his father died earlier this year. While he was in hospice care, the old man started reading my history of Jacksonville, *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, and he would call his son to tell about funny or interesting things he was reading in the book. He died before he finished reading it, but he had enjoyed what he did get to finish.

You know, I often feel discouraged because so few of my books sell. I question whether or not it's worth the effort to write the things.

That phone call last night gave me a lift.

Wednesday, March 7, 2012
Ten Days From Now & A Year Ago Today

Ten days from now, on March 17th, many people intend to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Here in Jacksonville, Florida, many observe the occasion by drinking green beer and attending the Green Bikini Contest.

I'm no expert on St. Patrick but I'm pretty sure he never drank green beer or actually wore a green bikini in his life.

But, it takes all kinds of people to... Er, well, it doesn't really take all kinds, but there are all kinds.

Anyhow, as St. Patrick's Day approaches every year, I always think of the time once when I had to write an article about



him on a strict editorial deadline that if I missed my family would not have food on the table. My father was dying of cancer in a small hospital room with no place for a chair. I wrote that article on St. Patrick while laying on my belly underneath my father's deathbed.

That article later became a chapter in my book *Strangers On The Earth*.

A month after Daddy died, my youngest daughter was born; Ginny and I named her Patricia, the feminine form of Patrick—the name means Noble.

As I have worked as a free-lance writer for 35+ years, I've written scads of articles which I've forgotten. The St. Patrick biography is not one of them.

Now here's a funny thing... last year, 2011, on St. Patrick's Day, my eldest daughter, Jennifer, and I drove up to Kingsland, Georgia, for some errands and... Well, I want to re-tell that incident. It's repeated here. from page 87-90 of my book *A Dirty Old Man Tells All*.

A Conversation Overheard By The River

Yesterday Jennifer, my eldest daughter, accompanied me on a business trip up to Kingsland, Georgia. I go up there about once a month and usually make five stops at various businesses—the most important one is at a place that sells my brand of pipe tobacco, which is not available here in Jacksonville.

After spending money here and there, Jennifer and I enjoyed lunch at the Riverview Café. As the name implies, this restaurant overlooks the expanse of the St Marys River, the river which marks the state line between Florida and Georgia.

When we drive up there, Jennifer and I always stop at the Riverview. Our favorite table on the open-air balcony gives us a view of the ferry landing where the boat takes visitors out to the Cumberland Island National Seashore. We see all sorts of waterbirds soaring above the expanse of tidal marshes or fishing in the river or preening on old pilings left from long-abandoned docks.

Here's a photo I snapped on another trip of a schooner at anchor just off shore from the restaurant:

Jennifer and I talked for close to two hours as we lingered over our lunch, sipping iced tea for me and lemonade for her.



A family of three, obvious tourists from the north, took a table close to ours. In the midst of our own conversation, we overheard snatches of theirs.

I think I detected some tension between parents and teenager; nothing heavy, but the tension when you drag a teenager who wants to be elsewhere to historical sites in the company of those embarrassing parents!

For a while, they talked about the Submarine Museum down the block, and the ferry ride to Cumberland Island—tourist stuff.

Then the three began talking about the date—March 17th, St. Patrick's Day.

Soon their conversation deepened and the teenage boy gave his parents more and more information about St. Patrick—Jennifer and I immediately recognized the words.

The young man held one of those telephones with a screen that gives internet access—he had found an article I wrote about St. Patrick, a chapter from my book *Strangers On The Earth*. The family discussed various aspects of the article as they enjoyed crab cakes for lunch.

That stuck Jennifer and me as so funny—to hear my words quoted as authoritative by complete strangers in a town 30 miles away from my hometown.

For one moment, I considered turning around and introducing myself. Glad I didn't. I realized that this family had found a neutral subject to talk about. Heads together, they discussed a mutually agreeable subject, one about which there was no conflict.

And the boy talked to the parents. And the parents listened to the kid.

I was not about to interrupt that.

Their communication was much more important than the ego boost I'd get by intruding to introduce myself as the author.

Nevertheless, overhearing that exchange puffed me up a bit.

And I think my daughter felt proud of me.

It was a good day.

For that family of strangers.

For my daughter and for me.

Thursday, March 8, 2012
Ken Merrill's *Stoker*

Years ago Ken Merrill impressed me as he told me about his yearning for God. Ken had caught a glimpse of the majesty and grandeur of the Almighty and that taste whetted his appetite for more.

A few years later, Ken again impressed me by writing a little book, *Why Jesus?*, an apologetic of his faith.

Social, financial, and cultural differences, as well as world-views, politics and mind-set, separate Ken and me. Yet a mutual yearning after God and a love for chocolate milkshakes bind us.

Back when I could not even afford a car, Ken used to drive his Rolls Royce to my house to pick me up to run errands and go to Wendy's for chocolate milkshakes and long talks about church stuff. Ken has also joined my family for the Thanksgiving feast with homeless guests.

About six weeks ago Ken called me to talk about *Stoker*, a first novel he has written. Ken had run into problems with another publisher which apparently cheated him and I volunteered to help him get his book published in my Bluefish Books Catalog.

The book opens with a quote from the Prophet Malachi:

"To you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; And

you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*," Says the Lord of hosts.

Did you catch that phrase about *You shall grow fat*?

Stoker Hoff, Ken's title character, is a husky man—think Sumo wrestler, only fatter.

He works out at the gym and developed 25-inch biceps. Stoker relishes a hardy appetite, exotic cars and his friend Babe, a husky girl herself who has to shoehorn her ample bosom into her bra.

Ken's book opens as Stoker returns home from his stint in the Navy during World War II. His mother is a Broadway actress who tells him about the disappearance of the wealthy man producing her latest play. With big belly, big muscles, big money, big cars, big fists, and big faith, Stoker sets out to solve the mystery.

Here's a scene following a car crash as Stoker comforts a dying man who says:

"I'm scared. Don't leave me, Stoke. Pray for me. I've done some bad things, . and I don't want to go with them on my conscience.

Stoker said, "I had a devout Christian roommate back in school. He was real tough, and he was a real strong churchgoer. He believed in prayer, and he taught me to pray about everything. Yes, I can pray for you, but only as a Christian."

"Please."

"You're asking for forgiveness, and Jesus explained that for God to forgive you your sins, you have to forgive others what they have done against you. Confession can be lengthy, and we need to get you to a doctor."

"I'll make it brief....With you as my witness, I forgive everybody all the bad things they ever did to me. Why should I die with that on my soul, anyway? Vengeance is useless. Even against Tuffy. Can't do any good. Vengeance is God's."

"That's a shotgun approach, but it should do it. Now ask the Lord to forgive you, and He will. The blood of Jesus Christ is the sacrifice for our sins.

“Yes. I know the story. It all seems so impossible. But God can do anything, even a thing like that. I just never got around to thinking about it very hard. Lord, I forgave everybody every bad thing they did to me, and now I ask You through the blood of Jesus Christ to forgive me likewise.”

Ken finds his first novel so exciting; I published it last week.

On Friday he asked me, “John, is this the best book you’ve ever published?”

I said, “Don’t be silly, Ken. Anything I ever wrote is twice as good as anything you ever will”.

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Routine Blessings

The eye surgery last week did not go as well as the doctor had wished. He plans a more invasive procedure next month—although what can be more invasive than a poke in the eye, I don’t want to imagine.

The worst result of the surgery is that I broke my favorite coffee mug because the table top was not where I thought it was! The sneaky table moved. I’m sure of it.

At the moment I am not able to read because I have trouble seeing anything smaller than a shovel. That being so, I’ve been doing a lot of large tasks in the garden. Transplanted two bougainvillea vines and a small tree yesterday. Raked dead leaves out of flower beds. Dug up bromeliad beds.

I think God showed His love for humanity in that from the word Go, He put Adam to tending a garden—relaxing, simple, mindless work. And the thing I like best about it is that I “see” immediate results. A weed is there, now it’s gone. That’s satisfying.

So, where is my Lord while I smash coffee cups and stomp flowers and sit long hours with my eyes shut against the light? Have I gained any deep spiritual insight or thought profound thoughts? Nope.

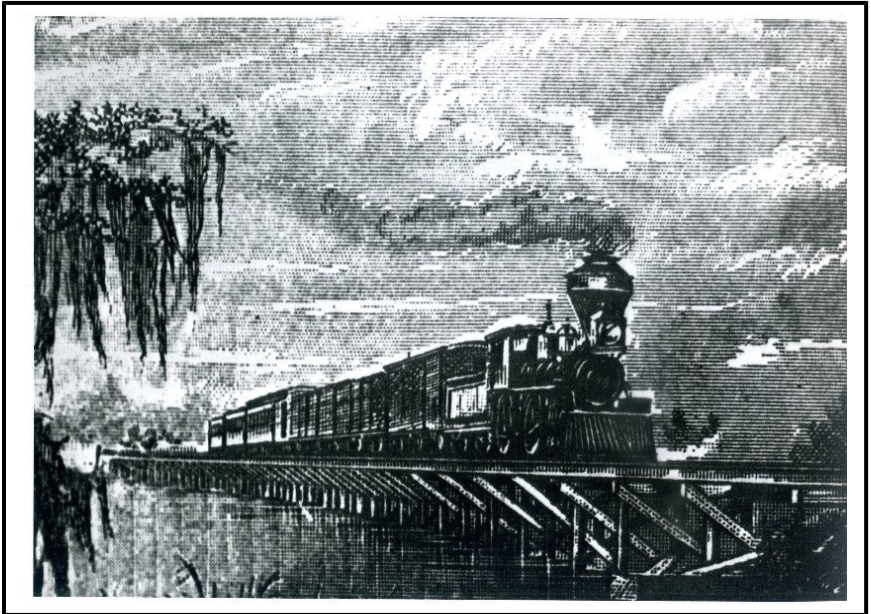
I am enjoying a time of routine blessing. You know those things I normally take for granted and enjoy without a thought as background noise in my life. Air. Water. Food

—an advantage of being limited is that Ginny's been cooking my favorites. (If ... Er, when I get well, will she continue to pamper me?).

Anyhow, I enjoy simply living in the presence of Christ without having to think about it much—I think they call that faith.

Thursday, March 15, 2012
If I Know The Answer

The day before I went in for eye surgery last week I ran across a great picture in a library book:



This 1880s picture from the Florida State Archives helped me answer a question.

Last September a reader named Chuck e-mailed me for information about the Florida Railway & Navigation Company. He'd read a piece I wrote many years ago about Jacksonville's railroad history and thought I might know more about the company.

I didn't.

But, in one of those God-directed moments we all encounter from time to time, I reached for a reference book and it fell open at random to a section devoted to this railroad. I e-mailed Chuck:

The railroading in Jacksonville piece you read is a chapter from my book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers* www.bluefishbooks.info

The only thing I can uncover about the Florida Railway & Navigation Company was that it started as a consolidation of four railroad companies in March, 1884. The company went into receivership and was sold at public auction in Jacksonville on February 6, 1888 to Mr. W. Bayard Cutting for \$1,210,000.

In July of that year, Cutting sold his interest to the Florida Central & Peninsular Railroad Company. That company was eventually owned by Seaboard Coast Line.

Doesn't that make it sound like I know what I'm talking about?

All the time readers or callers or visitors ask me questions.

Since I present myself to the public as a writer, I feel that courtesy and professionalism dictate that I answer as honestly as I can to the best of my ability.

For instance, as the 100th anniversary of the *Titanic's* sinking approaches, I expect folks will be asking about Dr. Robert Bateman, a Jacksonville minister who died aboard the ship

All the time young writers ask me how to make it as a writer.

The secret, of course, is to marry rich.

Often questioners ask my help in proving they are long-lost relatives of a local multimillionaire. My answer: "If you are referring to Uncle Al—No, You are not one of us—Unfortunately, neither am I".

Questioners have asked me about the spiritual implications of masturbation? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh"—and that's all it is. Your concern is biological not spiritual.

Questioners have asked about my own sex life—Only been with my first wife and my second. No other experience. Anybody can plunk out *Chopsticks* on any old piano, but when you practice with the same instrument for 40 years, you're bound to get better at it.

Folks have asked me about plant care—plants eat dirt.

About old buildings, legends of local treasure, race cars, ancestors, a clue to a cold-case murder investigation, Florida shipwrecks, and my belief in God's intervention in human affairs (Sometime He does, sometimes He lets things just take their natural course).

My most common answer to all questions is: I don't know.

The more I question things myself, the less I know.

One thing I've noticed in the Scripture: no where in the Bible does God ever answer any question that begins with the word *Why*.

The question I myself ask most often is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do"?

Hardly ever get an answer. Mostly, I wing it.

My second personally most asked question is—Awe. Lord, do I have to?

Anyhow, seven months after Chuck asked me about the Florida Railway & Navigation Company, I ran across that great picture of their train crossing a trestle.

So, now that my sight is getting a little more stable, last night I e-mailed Chuck again:

Last September you e-mailed me about the Florida Railway & Navigation Co. I knew little about it.

However, last week at the public library I chanced across a old engraving of one of their locomotives. I scanned it and It is attached.

The picture comes from page 104 in the book *Historic Photos Of Florida Ghost Towns* by Steve Rajtar (c. 2010. Turner Publishing Co., Nashville, Tenn. Library call # 975.9 R).

I just thought you might be interested.

**Saturday, March 17, 2012
Happy St. Patrick's Day**



St. Patrick driving the snakes out of Ireland.

Monday, March 19, 2012
A Donut For Sisyphus

Two sure signs of Spring:

1. Mosquitoes again swarm in our back yard
2. Prostitutes again stroll Post Street wearing miniskirts.

Ah, yes, Spring has come to Jacksonville and this past week I've enjoyed many happy hours working in our backyard refurbishing flowerbeds, pruning bushes, raking leaves, and carting yard trash to the curb.

That last project I could have done without, but the two young men my daughters hired to do yard work for their feeble old dad quit without notice. I had prepared everything for their arrival—cleaned out flowerbeds, edged the yard, raked leaves into neat piles, and laid out coffee and donuts—but they never showed up when

they'd said they would. Later, they said it was too far to drive to get to work, so they quit.

Being ever resourceful, I ate all the donuts myself.

I also carted 13 black plastic leaf bags and four trashcans filled with sticks to the curb myself for the trash men to pick up. My arthritis complained with every step.

After that, Ginny and I relished planting new bromeliads, petunias, snapdragons, impatiens and marigolds around the sundial. We enjoyed that so much.

My other weekend activity consisted in outraging an author I've been trying to help. Yes, Ken called—again. For the past six weeks he's called or e-mailed me anywhere from three to six times every day. He finds the free work I've done for him unsatisfactory. In one of last night's conversations he used the word "outrageous" between six and eight times.

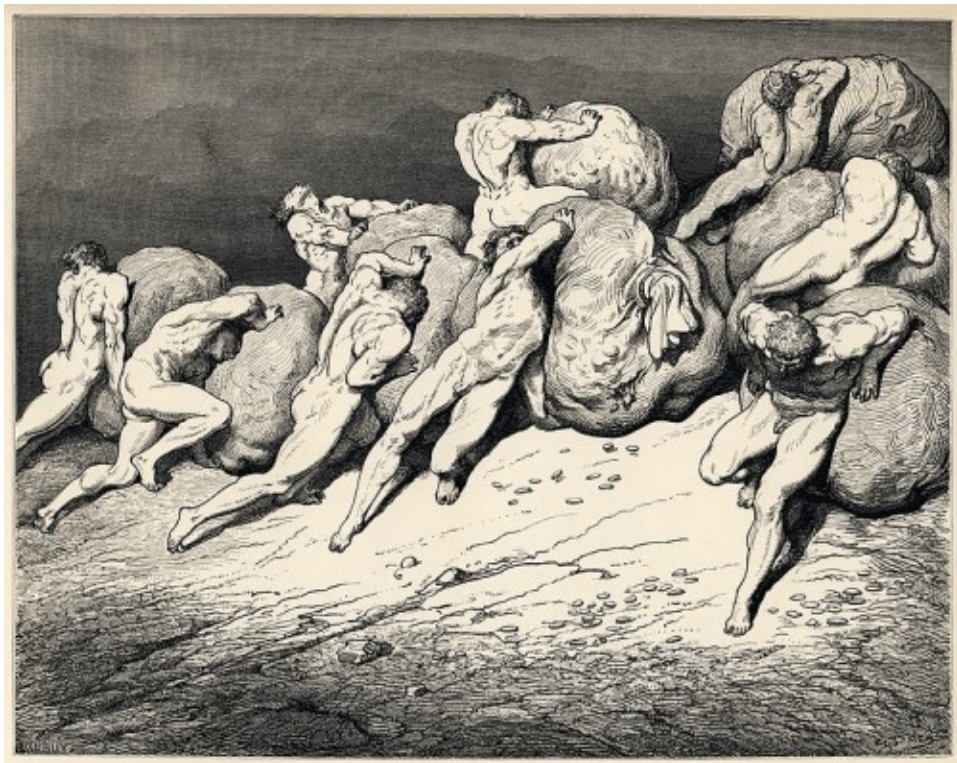
For the past six years I have used Lulu Press as the means to publish about 30 books which I have written, edited, or formatted. Except for editing, I treated Ken's book the same as I would one of my own. But he expected to sell thousands of copies the first week his was in print. It sold one copy—the single one he bought himself.

But yesterday he tried to order another copy; he said he wants to send it to someone he knows in the movie industry.

He could not place his order with Lulu because... he forgot his own password.

First, he wanted me to discover his password. The password he set when he first ordered a book protects his account information. I do not have access.

Frustrated, poor Ken compared himself to Sisyphus, in Greek legend, king of Corinth, condemned in Hell to push a bolder up a hill only to have it roll back when he got near the top—like these guys in Gustave Dore's engraving of Dante's Fourth Circle of Hell In *The Inferno*:



All along, practically everyday, he's urged me to go with different vanity press venues which he feels would give him a better deal than I do with my Bluefish Books. I have no intention of changing from Lulu where I know the ropes. He may change to one of these other publishing houses any time he wishes.

Then last night he wanted me to give my credit card number so he could order his book.

I do not feel that prudent.

He got upset that I would did not know his password and would not let him use my credit card. He said, "You have ruined everything for me". I think at that point he was referring to his sure-fire movie deal.

As I promised Ken weeks ago when he first called asking for my help, I have given him an acceptable book for sale on line in my Bluefish Books catalog without charging him a penny. I'm sorry that's not enough, but I've done all I can for him..

All this turmoil upsets me and distracts my mind from my own work.

This morning I've drawn comfort from this latest brain-eating encounter by mis-applying (my friend Wes would say) Psalm 15 to my own life:

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, ... He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. ... He that doeth these things shall never be moved".

I wish I had not eaten all those donuts the yard men missed.

I could use one this morning.

Tuesday, March 20, 2012
A Few Little Mistakes

I hate proofreading copy!

Hate it! Hate it! Hate it!

Here last week I get sample pages from the printer—pages I was sure were perfect. Then on page one, paragraph one, sentence one, word one, LETTER ONE—was wrong! A tyop! When I had inserted a drop cap in my pristine text, I hit the wrong keee and screwed up my my very first word.

Yes, I made a mistake. Then another one. Then another.

Yesterday I proofed the first 60 pages of my book manuscript *Woreslday & Other Tales*, a manuscript I thought was perfectly ready to publish. Now, red check marks and proofing symples and corrections obliterate those lilly white perfect pages.

I hate to be reminded of my mistakes.

They condemn me.

Proofing does have one mentally redeeming factor—the activity reminds me of my need of a Savior. As a card-carrying Pharisee, I get to thinking I live a pretty good life; I am one of the good guys—Awww, shucks, folks, I'm damn near perfect.

In my own mind.

Remember, in his own eyes, no man is an asshole.

So when those nagging little reminders pop into my head showing this or that tiny flaw—like on the first page,

first paragraph...of my life. And red marks fill my margins, and there are strikeouts and hashmarks and misspellings and evil deeds and evil thoughts and proofs that I am me—then I'm thankful that The Eternal Publisher plans a revised edition of John Cowart, corrected and amended and re-issued in Resurrection.

Different subject: Yesterday during my prayer time I read the first chapter from Jesus' Sermon From The Mount and as I read I suddenly thought of a way for Ken, author of *Stoker*, to work around the password he lost. I left my mental gift at the altar and ran inside to e-mail him a suggested solution. He later replied that it worked. He was able to do what he wanted... But then he... Never mind. I won't go into that worry at the moment.

Different subject: Last night, a friend of Helen's sent me a nice e-mail me about Indian mounds at Mayport:

What a wonderful story about the return of the Indian bones. You did a wonderful thing. I have been doing research in the area over the last eight years where you took the pictures but I thought the mounds were gone. My property extends out to Boat House Island. Two days ago we just found several pieces of Swift Creek Pottery in our front and back yard....I have been working with Beaches and St Augustine Historical Society...

I recorded the incident she refers to in my 2010 diary, *A Dirty Old Man vs The Coons* (www.bluefishbooks.info) page 338ff. Or you can check my August, 2010, postings in my blog archives.

Different subject: Today I anticipate a drive up to Kingsland, Georgia, with my eldest son, Fred. Haven't talked with him in months and I'm looking forward to renewing acquaintance.

Then, it's back to proofreading *Worshday*—I'm sure the remaining 261 pages of my text will be perfect—like me.

Wednesday, March 21, 2012
Right? No. Rewrite. Then Rewrite Again!

Once an editor stabbed his blue pencil completely through a six-page article I'd submitted to his magazine.

I don't think he liked it.

Yesterday as I drove up to Georgia I enjoyed singing to myself—my eldest son did not make the trip—and reflecting on my 35+ year career as a freelance writer and, more recently now, as a minor book publisher. I've come to appreciate the frustrations of an editor a bit more now that I sit on that side of the desk.

In a long phone conversation with Ken Merrill, author of *Stoker* (www.bluefishbooks.info) last night I got a tad snappish and I had to e-mail him an apology earlier this morning. Incidentally, as a result of our conversation, we've set a 10% discount on any purchase of Ken's book reducing the price by two dollars.

Writers and editors/publishers enjoy a cobra/mongoose relationship.

Here's a For Instance.

Back years ago when I was gainfully employed, for a brief stint I filled in covering religion news for the local newspaper.

A local religious group had published a survey they compiled to determine spiritual needs of Jacksonville. Factoring in things like the number of bars compared to number of churches, the divorce rate, the presence of religious groups that taught false (according to their lights) doctrine, police violent crime statistics, malnutrition, homelessness, etc. this religious group titled their survey as *An Evangelism Index*.

They produced their *Evangelism Index* as an in-house tool to help them best allocate their resources to help our city. But word got out.

The *Evangelism Index* concluded that only 25% of Jacksonville's population was "saved". About 75% of the rest of us were going to Hell.

Not everyone agreed.

My editor assigned me the task of writing an explanation of the *Evangelism Index*.

I interviewed religious leaders, community spokesmen, city officials. I read the *Evangelism Index*. I questioned the compilers. I interviewed divergent religious leaders—and I wrote an article which I submitted to the editor under the title "Evangelism Index".

The editor did not like my copy and told me to re-write it.

I corrected typos, polished quotes, revamped paragraphs and sent it back to the editor with the title "Evangelism Index 2".

"Unsatisfactory. Rewrite it, Cowart".

I rewrote it and sent it back titled "Evangelism Index 3".

"This makes no sense. Rewrite it again," the editor said.

By now the cobra/mongoose relationship between this editor and me gained the attention of the 15 or 20 other editors as well as the regular staff reporters. They all watched with interest.

I rewrote the article and submitted it again; this time under the title "Return Of The Evangelism Index".

Rewrite it, said the editor.

I did and submitted, "Bride of the Evangelism Index".

Rewrite, said the editor.

I sent in "Son of Evangelism Index".

Rewrite!

I submitted, "Abbott and Costello Meet The Evangelism Index".

The article never did get into the newspaper.

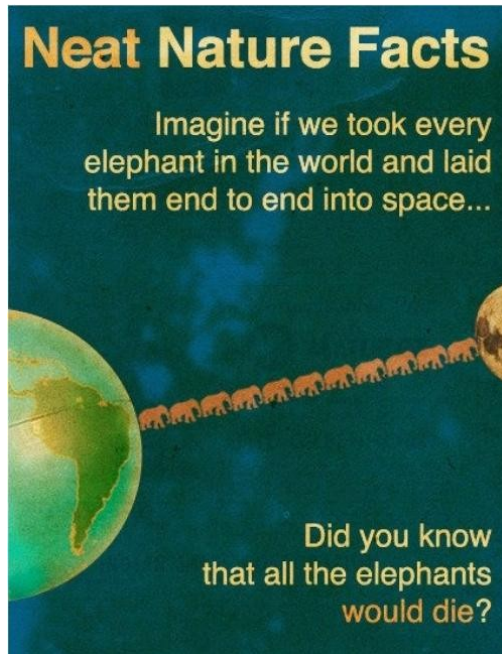
Soon afterwards I was demoted to writing obituaries; the editor was promoted and moved to another paper.

Not much profit in arguing with the umpire.

At least that editor did not stab my Evangelism Index article completely through—Maybe that was because by then editors were using computers instead of blue pencils.

Thursday, March 22, 2012
Ginny bought a new loveseat

Moving furniture: no diary posting today. Here's an inspirational poster instead:



Monday, April 2, 2012
Observing My 30th

I am not celebrating, but observing, my 30th.

My 30th wedding anniversary? No, That's long past.

My 30th birthday? No. That's even further in the past.

Last week I observed the publication of my 30th book. Yes, after proofreading the ms and making corrections, I posted *Worshday & Other Tales* at www.bluefishbooks.info This is the 30th book I have written, edited or published—not counting some foreign language translations.

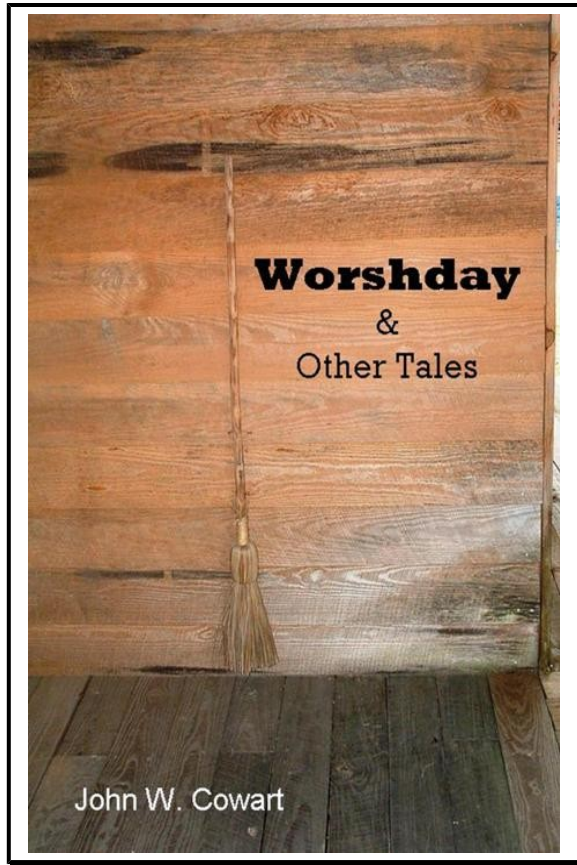
I'd planned to preen and rejoice a bit on my accomplishment, but immediately after I posted the book to Bluefish books, various circumstances intervened sucking all the joy out of me. I think they call it life.

A book I'd felt inordinately proud of—I think it my best—became just another book on the pile.

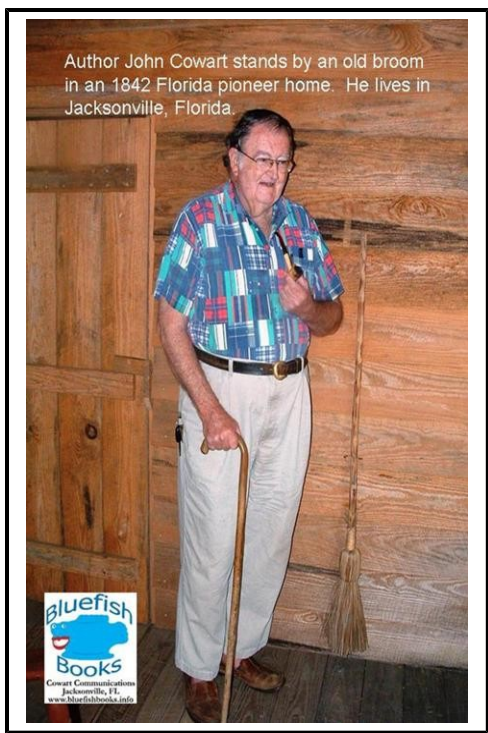


Part of that feeling, of course, was the ordinary backlash you feel upon the completion of any project, like the way you felt the day after final exams in school. That's normal and to be expected. I think that letdown serves to prevent too much vanity and pride over accomplishments. It also signals a release of tensions, a tight-stretched rubber band relaxing..

Be all that as it may, *Worshday* is the first title in my collection of 25 short stories. It's a tale told by my grandmother about her grandmother during Florida's reconstruction days after the Civil War. It was the first story I ever wrote... and it's not terrible, if I may be allowed to preen. The tale involves a twig broom and here is the book's cover picture:



And, here is my author's photo on the back cover. Note my authentic corncob pipe; my great-grandmother smoked one of these too:



Aside from writing great literature, I have spent the past ten days doing heavy yard work and moving furniture by myself—a dumb thing to do. I could have waited for my grown children to be free to help me, I know they would, but vanity tempted me to do it all myself thus proving I am not a feeble old man... Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!

Here are my three tips for moving heavy furniture:

1. Let somebody else do it!

2. Use a blanket. Spread a blanket on the floor. Stand the sofa, bookcase, etc on end in the middle of the blanket. Grab a corner pull to glide the piece of furniture into place without messing up furniture or floor.

3. Use a humpstrap. A humpstrap is a wide canvas belt or length of rope. You bind the heavy load tightly to your back while squatting, then stand with it. Thus you can carry much heavier loads that you can pick up otherwise. Here is a photo of a young man using a humpstrap:



I would have been smarter to let my grown kids help but, being vain, I hate to ask anybody for help. So I moved and reorganized our home without adult supervision—No, Ginny was not home while I did this.

I foresee an aluminum walker in my not too distant future, and I felt the need to clear pathways wide enough through every room so I will be able to get around when my arthritis gets worse. But I wanted to take my time and do the job myself. That was unnecessary but I wanted to feel a bit useful around here and not merely decorative.

So, what spiritual lessons have I gained from writing, editing, publishing, moving, lifting, raking, hoeing, chopping, digging, toteing and aching from all this?

I've come up with a new three-point motto for my Christian life:

Deal with it.

Live with it.

To Hell with it!

Wednesday, April 4, 2012
**Odds & Ends While Preparing For A Needle In
The Eye**

I thank God for my grown children and friends who help me in many ways.

Our telephone conked out again for the umpthteenth over the weekend. Jennifer and Terry opened aggressive negotiations with AT&T to get it fixed again. Don't know what the girls said, but the next day the repairman worked five hours rewiring our house.

In the past I've been told the phone outage was caused by tree branches on the lines, thieves stealing copper wire, underground flooding, DSL problems, living too far from a relay station, and whatever. This repairman said squirrels ate the insulation.....Chose one of the above.

Anyhow, our phone works today. Who knows what tomorrow holds?

I appreciate the girls handling this problem for me; I just could not face the company phonetree of mechanical voices.

I thank God that Donald and Helen sent a team of plumbers to repair our toilet, sink and tub. These plumbing aggravations bugged me for weeks. But the kids called in professionals who solved the bathroom problems quickly.

Is it properly religious to thank God for a working toilet? Try getting along without one for a while and see how thankful you are when it gets fixed.

I thank God Johnny is looking into a walker for me to use and he plans to help me with maintenance chores around the house after Easter.

My friend Rex measured a broken window in our house and plans to replace it as he does repair work at his own house.

Eve and Mark agreed to let me store some furniture in their garage; we don't have room for it, yet feel reluctant to let it go.

Again and again my family and friends have rescued me from annoying difficulties over the years.

My left eye stripped another gear Saturday as Ginny and I ate salad at Kosta's Italian. Between one bite of antipasto and another, the black spot enlarged and changed shape. Damn!

I go in tomorrow for another treatment, so I doubt if I'll be posting diary entries for a while. I'm thankful that I was able to get my book *Worshday & Other Tales* published before I shut down.

For the April Bluefish Books' Free E-book in my blog sidebar, I posted *The Lazarus Projects*, my time-travel novel about the Resurrection of Jesus.

Another fun thing I did involved alerting a local radio station to a Jacksonville connection to the *Titanic*. Each morning I listen to [Arthur Crofton's Morning Show on WEJZ, Jacksonville](#). Here's a copy of the e-mail I sent him:

Hi Arthur,

Earlier this morning I heard you mention events related to the 100th Anniversary of the *Titanic*'s sinking. I thought that you may be interested in a Jacksonville connection.

Only one Floridian died aboard the *Titanic*, Dr. Robert Bateman, a Jacksonville minister.

Local newspaper headlines proclaimed, "Bateman Died A Hero" and the New York Times quoted a *Titanic* survivor as saying Dr. Bateman was, "The most popular man on the *Titanic*".

A letter from a prostitute led the minister aboard the *Titanic*.

Bateman founded the Central City Mission, a rescue mission in the notorious Jacksonville Tenderloin where children as young as eight worked in the whorehouses.

A girl's letter begged him to establish a home for "us girls". In response, he traveled to England to study the innovative methods of George Muller of Bristol, founder of several orphanages. Bateman planned to establish such orphanages and a "home for fallen women" here in Jacksonville.

The wreck of the *Titanic* intervened.

Survivors testified unanimously to Bateman's heroic acts in the ship's final hours.

Days afterward, his body was recovered floating in the Atlantic and returned to Jacksonville (after a dispute



with other cities for the honor) and buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

If you are interested, my chapter about Dr. Bateman, *Jacksonville's Titanic Hero*, is on line at : <http://www.cowart.info/Monthly%20Features/Titanic%204%20web/Bateman%204%20web.htm>

Photos related to him can be viewed on my website at <http://www.cowart.info/Monthly%20Features/Transfer%20Copy%20of%20Titanic%20px%204%20web/Titanic%20pix.htm>

I hope you find this information interesting and useful.

John Cowart

A nurse at the eye clinic just called to remind me of my appointment tomorrow—as though I'm likely to forget a date to get a needle stuck in my eyeball. (Remind me why I wanted phone service???)

Anyhow, I'm as ready for the procedure as I'm likely to be.

See you next week... or not.

The Lord Is Risen. Either way.

Happy Easter



Tuesday, April 10, 2012
Looks Like Cheerios

Later this morning I go in for my fifth eye surgery.
I really do not need it.
Except sometimes.

For instance, Sunday Ginny and I ate cereal for breakfast. At one point she asked me what I was doing. And why was I getting so frustrated. I explained that I had spilled some of my Cheerios on the table and I was trying to pick them up, but couldn't.

My macular degeneration distorts vision so that things are not exactly where I see them to be—like reaching for a stone underwater; it's there, but slightly displaced from where you see it.



Ginny laughed and said that I had not spilled my Cheerios.

Alas, our tablecloth has this floral pattern and the little circles I was trying to pick up off the table were not Cheerios but parts of the flower design in the cloth.

Maybe I do need this next eye surgery.

While filling my tobacco pouch yesterday, I apparently bumped the telephone and knocked the receiver off the hook without seeing I'd done it. I waited for an important call I expected for about three hours without realizing that the caller would get a busy signal.

Yes, maybe I do need this next surgery.

Everything looks like Cheerios.

Again this morning, Dr. Sailor will punch a needle in my eyeball to inject glop which is supposed to seal the blood vessels leaking behind the eyeball distorting my vision. The first four times, this procedure did not take. This time, he will supply extra added attractions in a three-part process which means two needles in my eye followed by laser cauterization, and a dye injection which will make my piss green. Then I have to live in the dark for a coupled of days wearing an outfit like Bella Lousgi in his role as the Count.

The FDA does not approve of this treatment method.

Neither do I.

But it seems like the thing to do.

If this fifth procedure fails too, I think I will stop further treatments and let the disease run its course.

The Lord managed to use Isaac without sight.

Funny thing, this past week herds of people passed through our house to help me. Telephone repairmen, plumbers, neighbors, the guys building a house next door, friends, family.

Mark and Eve brought me a CD player and about 50 audio books to listen to.

Jennifer and Terri sent casseroles for our supper.

Donald recorded a science fiction book for me.

Johnny spend hours yesterday leveling a brick walkway to eliminate stumbling blocks. And he sawed up and removed a pile of lumber, staked a tree, and pulled up a nail I could not get myself. He made our home safer, more convenient, and more attractive.

The other day as a young man from the neighborhood came over to help me, the phone rang—some poor bastard in trouble needing my help. The young man listened to the conversation and said, “Looks as though you have problems enough of your own. Why should you try to help this guy”?

The question surprised me.

Just because I have problems of my own does not preclude my acting in Christian charity towards others. Just because I try to pick up Cheerios that aren’t there, does not excuse me from trying to demonstrate the love of Christ to a person in trouble.

In fact, all my life, if I’d waited till my own problems were solved first, I’d would never have acted with charity toward anyone ever.

Just because we are to pick up our cross daily does not mean we can drop everything else. Following Jesus involves more than dealing with my own troubles.

He said, “The poor are always with you”.

Yes, there are always hungry to be fed and feeble-minded to be comforted.

And there are always Cheerios to be picked up.

So what?

Thursday, April 12, 2012

Titanic Letter From Florida's Governor

Yesterday, while unable to see much because of my eye surgery, I sat in a darkened room nursed by my daughter Jennifer.

Too early to tell how the eye thing is working out, but while I did nothing but listen to audio book CDs, an advanced copy of a letter from Florida's Governor, Rick Scott, appeared in my e-mail in-box.



Last month my e-friend Harvey had written to Governor Scott advising him about the contribution of Dr. Robert Bateman of Jacksonville to the story of the Titanic. Harvey pointed the governor to [an article I wrote about Dr. Bateman](#) (It's a chapter from my book *Strangers On The Earth*) and to [photos](#) related to Jacksonville's titanic Hero on my website.



Here is an advance copy (dated April 15th) of Governor Scott's response:



RICK SCOTT
GOVERNOR

April 15, 2012

Dear Friends:

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the RMS Titanic, we pause to reflect upon the lives that were and are still affected by one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history. One of the passengers on the Titanic was Reverend Robert J. Bateman, an Englishman who moved to Jacksonville in 1904.

Reverend Bateman founded the Central City Mission in Jacksonville in 1904 to combat poverty, hunger and destitution. He was well-known and revered throughout the city for providing food to the hungry and shelter to the homeless. Reverend Bateman's faith drove him to protect and comfort those who were most in need.

His dedication to his faith was never more apparent than when he led several people in the Lord's Prayer as the Titanic sank. Reverend Bateman's actions in the face of death are inspiring testaments to his character and fine examples of courage and strength.

It is appropriate that we remember those who perished when the Titanic sank. It is a story rich in tragedy, triumph, despair and sacrifice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott".

Rick Scott

Robert J. Bateman

THE CAPITOL
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32399 • (850) 488-2272 • FAX (850) 922-4292

I'm happy that Dr. Bateman's life and sacrifice is receiving such recognition even after a hundred years have gone by.

Sunday, April 15, 2012
My *Titanic* Tee-Shirt



About ten or fifteen years ago, at a yard sale near Tallahassee, I bought this tee-shirt. Apparently some college fraternity hosted a Titanic party and printed such shirts.

Each year I wear my shirt on April 14/15 as a commemoration of the Titanic disaster. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the *Titanic's* sinking and my article on Dr. Robert Bateman, the Jacksonville minister

who died saving others from death in the icy waters, generated more internet traffic than usual. (see my previous postings for links, etc.)

I imagine the college boys laughed over the double-entendre of their party shirt, but their party slogan reflects the words of an official of the White Star shipping company, the *Titanic's* owners. Just before she sailed, he boasted, "God Himself can not sink this ship".

Oh, Really?

Wednesday, April 18, 2012

My D-Cup Runneth Over

Last night Ginny fastened our freezer door shut with duct tape.

Runway models, I understand, use this same duct tape trick to hold things inside a strapless gown.

Imagine a 38D stuffed into a 32A cup—our freezer resembles that. Here's how that over abundance came about:

Ginny plans our menu at least a week in advance, more often two weeks—from payday to payday. She spreads out a calendar marked with upcoming activities—doctors appointments, holidays, library visits, etc—and pencils in which meals we'll be forced to eat out in a restaurant, like after a late afternoon appointment across town.

She coordinates at-home meals with activities using a form she developed and printed out years ago. This form contains not only projected activities, but also contains a shopping list which she marks to insure that she has the proper ingredients for specific meals to cook at home. She also factors into her menu and shopping list the times she will cook, and times when I will cook; she's better at some meals, I'm better at others.

Although our menu is not engraved in stone, it's worked for us for years... Unless...

Last week my eldest daughter nursed me as I recovered from eye surgery (too early to tell if it worked or not). When Jennifer went to the refrigerator for something for lunch, she found it nearly bare—her visit

fell two days before payday and grocery shopping, so naturally our cupboard was bare.

It was supposed to be at that point in the cycle.

Poor Jennifer concluded that her aging decrepit parents were starving.

I assured her we are ok.

She doubted me.

Saturday morning, Ginny shopped for two weeks worth of groceries. Brought them home and filled the frig.

Jennifer had spread the word to siblings. So two hours later Terri came to the door with bags of groceries—chicken and chops and corn and cabbage and carrots and cake and coffee and—two weeks worth of groceries!

We thanked her and stuffed this extra bounty in our frig.

Then Mark appeared at the door with a handful of money saying it was for us to buy groceries.

Then Johnny called saying he was on the way to our house with a big pot of chicken & dumplings; I asked him to store it in his freezer at home.

Thus our refrigerator bulges and Ginny had to duct-tape the door tight to keep it from springing open every time you walk through the kitchen.

Thank you Lord for such attentive children.

Truly, our D-cup runneth over.

By the way, to any runway models reading this, I still have half a roll of duct tape left over, so if you ever need a hand, I'll be glad to help.

Thursday, April 19, 2012
Bittersweet Writing

Yesterday I saw a photo of a self-supporting dome built entirely out of books by artist Miler Lagos at New York's Magnan Metz Gallery.



Looking closer I thought I could see a copy of my own most recently published book, *Worshday*, built into the wall. I think I see the spine of my book in the eighth layer from the bottom, 14th book in from the left.

If you ever want a copy of my book, all you have to do is ease that copy out of the wall without toppling the whole construction.

On the other hand, if you fear being squished amid falling books, an easier way to get a copy of my book is to click on www.bluefishbooks.info and order a copy

That's something I did yesterday myself.

It proved a bittersweet experience.

Back on April 2nd, I published *Worshday & Other Tales*. It is the 30th book I've either written, edited or published. After months of writing, rewriting, editing, formatting, proofreading—I finished the book. I felt so pleased with myself. I think *Worshday* is one of the best books I've ever produced.

I preened like a kitten that's caught its first mouse....

Then I discovered that I did not have enough money to buy a copy of my own book. What a kick in the head.

But, with my eye problems and her diabetes, Ginny and I have visited more than a dozen doctors since Christmas. Our insurance covered most of the expense, but what with co-pays, prescriptions, etc. Property taxes also came due this month, and this and that happened till our discretionary funds ran short and I could not buy a copy of the book I had written till yesterday.

Don't get me wrong, we are not in need at this moment; our mortgage is paid, all bills are current, the car is full of gas, pipe tobacco fills my humidor, the lights are on, food stocks the frig—we enjoy all the comforts and conveniences of this life. And I did finally order two file copies of my book yesterday.

It's just that it took most of a month to scrap up cash to spend on my own proud book. That took the wind out of my sails for a bit.

Not the first time this sort of thing has happened either.

I've written as a freelancer for about 35 years. Once back in the mid 1970s, I sold an article to a national magazine. The editors liked it so much they recommended it for a prestigious national award. It thrilled me to walk into the drug store or grocery store and see the glossy magazine with my article displayed on magazine racks everywhere... but you cant eat prestige. The magazine cost \$3.50 at a time when I had to chose between buying breakfast cereal for the kids or buying the slick magazine.

I remember standing in a grocery store aisle reading my own article—but not having money to buy the magazine... painful. (Later I did Xerox a library copy of the magazine).

One of my first books published commercially carries a similar story. The religious publishing house printed a 7,000 copy press run. About 5,000 copies sold here and there before the book went out of print and about 2,000 copies remaindered.

The publisher offered to sell me those remaindered copies at only 50 cents a copy—if I would buy in bulk all those left in stock. They said I could sell the books myself at full price when I spoke at churches or historical meetings.

Not having a thousand dollars handy, I had to pass. The publisher reduced those copies of my book to pulp—mushed them into paste to make more paper to print better books on.

Oddly enough, as recently as last week a reader wrote telling me how much that same book helped him in his Christian life.

Odd.

King Solomon said, “My son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh”.

Do I feel that God called me to be a writer?

No. I feel God has only called me to follow Him where I am, in whatever I’m doing, day by day.

I write because I can, because I like to, and because it beats working for a living.

While I reminisce on my bittersweet writing experiences, I remember the first article I ever sold to a newspaper, a local history piece. This was in the early 1970s.

Oh but I felt proud. I had arrived! My by-line appeared in the newspaper and they were paying me \$50 to publish my work. My career as a writer was launched. My talent recognized. I was on my way.

Like an idiot, I bought an extra copy of that day’s paper and took it to show my mother.

“You’d better not have written anything to embarrass this family,” she said when I told her I’d sold an article.

I handed her the paper and told her my article was on B-1.

“I want to read *Dear Abby* first,” she said.

And she did.

While I stood there.

Then she read her horoscope. And the tv program listings. And...

I’m not sure if she ever did read my first newspaper article.

I never showed her another one.

Should have know better than to show her that first one.

When I was a child my parents constantly complained about my reading so much. “Johnny, get your nose out of that book and go outside and play or do something useful”.

I suppose if I had done something useful, I’d be able to afford to buy my own books by now. But, *Worshday* is my 30th book. Over the years, portions of my work have been translated into a dozen or so foreign languages and even used as radio scripts— but none of my stuff has ever sold worth diddly-squat.

As I recall the most cash my writing ever earned was \$18,000 one year when I sold scores of business articles.

I think it was John Steinbeck who said, “Compared to trying to earn a living by writing, betting on race horses is a sane, stable occupation”.

Maybe so, but here’s a sweet thing:

Back in the early ‘70s I lost my job and wrote an article called “The Unemployed Christian”. Wrote it longhand, in pencil, on a yellow legal pad; I had not learned to type in those days.

Problem—I did not have enough money to buy stamps to mail my manuscript to a publisher.

Now, when she was a little girl, my wife had collected stamps. Ginny browsed through her old stamp albums and tweezered out postage stamps in mint condition. She used those 20-year-old mint stamps to mail my first magazine manuscript.

It sold.

Ginny believed in me then—and still does.

But, I have an idea: if I ever need another copy of my book *Worshday*, besides the ones I ordered yesterday, what I’ll do is sneak into Miler Lagos’s book dome in New York. I’ll count eight rows up and 14 books from the left. I’ll grab the spine and jerk my book out of the pile and...

Tuesday, April 24, 2012
A Happy Day... with reservations

Rejoice!

Happy Day!

Today Ginny and I pay the final payment on our car.

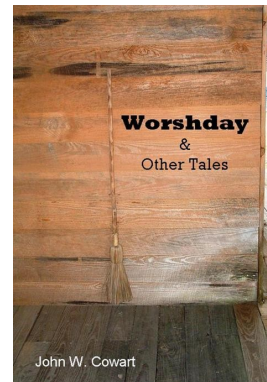
We now own it free and clear.

How will we spend the cash we've been using for car payments?

Friday, with the help of an additional gift from Mark and Eve, Ginny takes the car to the garage for new tires and about a thousand dollars worth of needed preventative maintenance work.

As my dad used to tell the cashier when handing her money to pay a bill, "That's the last of my money, but don't worry about it; there's plenty more where that went".

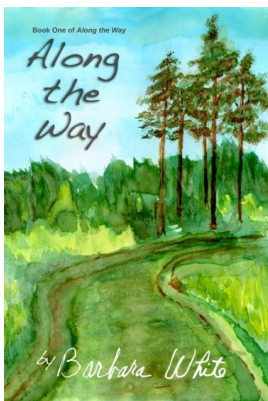
Yesterday, the postman delivered my copies of my most recent book *Worshday & Other Tales* (www.bluefishbooks.info). It's not terrible.



Of course, as I imagine most writers do, I worry that the book I am writing now will not be as good as this one I wrote in the past. I'd like to think my writing improves. But work done looks better than work in progress. I play a mental game of "Can You Top This" and I fear losing.

Anyhow, *Worshday* is not terrible.

Yesterday as my friend Wes treated me to breakfast, he reminded me that last week marked the one year anniversary of the death of my friend Barbara White.



Although Barbara and I had been best friends for 30+ years, I'd forgotten her death altogether. And a funny thing about that is that I'd just been telling the AT&T repairman—yes over the weekend, our phone service went down for about the eighth time in the past two years—I'd been telling the repairman how a radio station in

Singapore had picked up one of Barbara's *Along The Way* books (www.bluefishbooks.info) and how they read her Christian meditations over the air, broadcasting into communist China and all over Southeast Asia.

But even though I'd written a lot about her final days (see my blog archives for April 2011) and even though I told the repairman all about her books, I completely forgot she was dead!

Isn't that odd. Or maybe not.

Maybe it's just an indication of how ingrained is a believe in resurrection and eternal life.

Even on her deathbed Barbara continued to minister to others and spread her message of hope as she walked with Christ along the way.

Barbara passed through many horrific heartbreaking troubles in her walk with Christ. But once she told me her favorite phrase from Scripture were the words, "And it came to pass".

Why?

"Because", she said, "It does not come to stay".

Long one of Jacksonville's most popular and award-winning newspaper columnists, on her deathbed, Barbara dictated a final *Along The Way* column to one of her newspaper friends, who printed it out from her laptop. Barbara gave me the printout and asked me to post it online (Ever the professional, she complained that her copy needed editing!) So here (with the byline photo from one of her earliest columns) is Barbara White's concluding column:

Along The Way



I was 14 when I heard God tell me that He loved me. After I got over the awe of knowing God loved me, I had no idea what to do about it.

That was on a Saturday afternoon at Bartram Girl's School, where I was a boarding student. I was alone in the library. It was quiet. I asked myself, "What do you do when God says He loves you?" I had no answer.

The next day they packed us all on the school bus and hauled us off to an Episcopal church on Hendricks Avenue where we sat glumly in a pew and waited for church to be over. (Years later a woman my age said she had been in the congregation and thought we were from an orphanage because we looked so sad).

That morning the minister announced that confirmation classes would begin soon for those who wanted to join the church. I said, "OK, that's what you do. You join God's church".

A week ago, I am now 81, a young woman asked me what I would like to say to Christians. There are so many different possible answers, but the one that came to my lips was:

Try to find out as much as you can about the God who says He loves you.

She asked how would you go about that?

I said, read the Bible with that as your intention. Not to analyze, or figure out what it means to you, or the history of it. Just see what it tells you about this God who declares to me, to His Chosen People, and to all who would come, that He loves them.

Start out with a favorite passage, something that you are familiar with that is meaningful to you. Ask, "What does this tell me about the God who loves me?"

If you are the kind of person who takes notes, make a note of what it was.

Look at everything in the world that God created and see what it says about Him as a lover of all mankind, of individuals, of yourself. Look at your life, your joys and sorrows, your pains and passions, and ask the Lord, "How can You love me with all of this"?

Ask, "What Do You want me to do with them"?

This is not a quick study. So while you're doing other things, ponder. Ponder, Who is this God who loves me"? Make it personal, keep it personal. When I have

been able to journal, which is sporadically, it's one of the things I try to note. What am I thinking about God right now? What do I understand about Him now that I didn't understand before?

During crises in my life, I've learned a lot about myself. I have learned things that made me wonder how God could possibly love me. Whether I can answer that question or not, He still loves me despite the awful things I found out about myself.

Need transition: Saint Paul noted, "The love of God is commended toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us".

I had a kitten poster that showed a darling kitten, and the words: God loves you just the way you are, but too much to leave you that way!

It's been the most pleasure-giving study. How can it not be a pleasure to examine the love Someone has for you? When you can trust it, rely on it, know that it's true, know that it's deeper than you can understand, and that it will always, always, always be there.

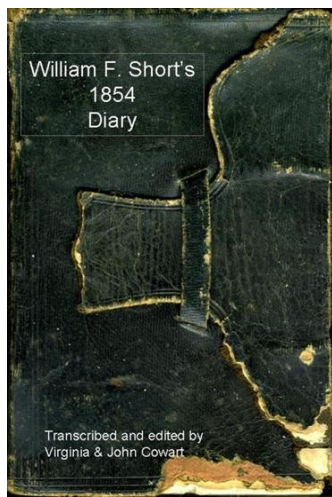
As I approach the time, in days or weeks, to go to be with Him, I am at rest and at peace in this knowledge. I don't know anything else that can give you this rest and this peace.

You say *bon voyage* when someone sets out on a long journey.

I don't know what to say to you when you set out on this task of knowing the God who loves you, but, have a wonderful time along the way.

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

The Long Reach Of Short



Yesterday I received an e-mail from Gordon in the country of Croatia. He is preparing a tourist brochure for that nation's capital city, Zagreb, and he asked my permission to use the cover photo from *William F. Short's 1854 Diary*, a book Ginny and I transcribed and published in 2009.

William Short, a teacher and Methodist Circuit rider, wrote his diary for his own benefit and would be surprised at the long reach it has in the modern world

A couple of years ago Rik from Canada wrote to me asking to use the Short Diary cover as a picture on the box of a board game. Here's a photo of Miss Canada playing that game:

William Short would have like Miss Canada.

Who wouldn't!

In fact, William Short's 1854 Diary often revolves around his dilemma over three pretty girls and which one to marry.



Back in July, 2010, David, a member of a band in Bloomington, Illinois, wrote to me asking permission to use excerpts from *William Short's 1854 Diary* in a flyer promoting the band's concert dates.

Though he taught school in Jackson,. Missouri, William Short centered many of his activities in Illinois. In fact he was in Springfield on the day then-presidential-candidate Abraham Lincoln gave a major speech—Short missed the political rally; he had a hot date.

I found the tiny autograph pocket diary at an antique mall here in my hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. Short eventually married a girl from Jacksonville, Illinois—how his diary ended up here in Jacksonville, Florida, I have no idea.

He taught at the Missouri Conference Seminary in Jackson,. Missouri. He often preached at McKendree Methodist Chapel there, as well as at Bethel Baptist Church, Jackson.

And he took part in several camp meetings in Illinois with the famous frontier preacher Peter Cartwright. Years after this diary was written, Dr. Short became head of the Illinois School For The Blind and of the Illinois Female College.

My wife and I transcribed the tiny Spenserian script of the diary's small hand-written pages using computer enhancements to make them legible. My July and August, 2009, entries in the blog archives tells our adventures with the Short Diary including how I discovered his fingerprints: that's on pages 192-220 in my book *A Dirty Old Man Goes To The Dogs* (www.bluefishbooks.info).

We published our transcription of Short's Diary, along with computer enhanced copies of the pages, a biographical sketch of Dr. Short, and relevant pages from my own diary describing the challenges and processes involved in preparing Dr. Short's Diary for publication.

In 1854 William Short said more between the lines of his diary than he did in its pages. He'd proposed marriage to Miss Sarah in Bloomington, Illinois. But when he traveled to Jackson, Missouri, he was smitten by Miss Amanda. Then at a Methodist camp meeting he met Miss Martha, "My Temptation". Suspense builds as the young minister decides which girl to marry while at the same time he feels a deep heart hunger for God. His mix of confusion about love and dedication to Christ still appeals to readers after 155 years.

William F. Short's 1854 Diary is available at www.bluefishbooks.info in both PDF e-book format and as a real print book.

Thursday, April 26, 2012

The Even Longer Reach Of Short

Yesterday I mentioned how pleased I am to learn that Gordon, a gentleman from Bosnia asked permission to use my photo of the leather cover of *William F. Short's 1854 Diary* (www.bluefishbooks.info)

William Short was a teacher and Methodist circuit rider. I found his diary in an antique store here in Jacksonville, Florida. The man's troubles and his

Christian life impressed me, and I decided to publish the diary.

That involved scanning each page, enlarging and enhancing them with various degrees of brightness because of the faded ink, and transcribing them into a Word document.

Once I published the diary, sales proved modest, but a band asked to use the cover photo for an album cover, and a Canadian company asked to use it for their board game.

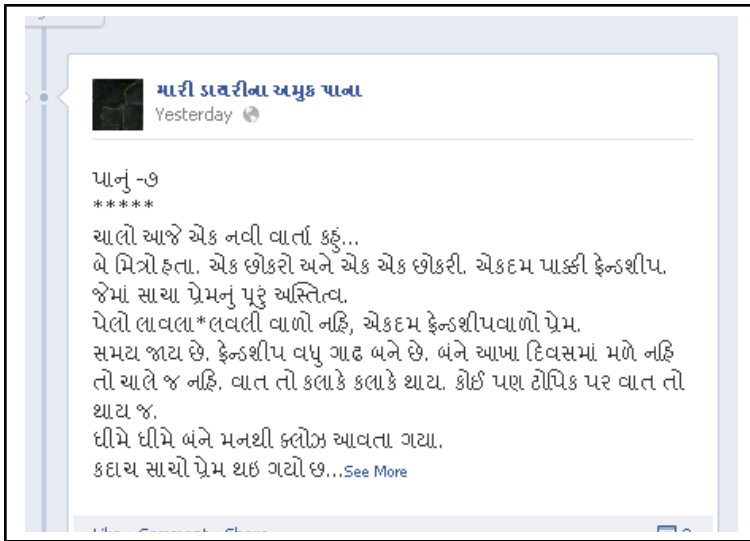
After I posted yesterday, Gordon let me know that the cover of Short's diary had been used already by a company that makes computer games featuring zombies; this company has offices in San Francisco; Sydney, Australia; and London.

Also, a gallery in London used the Short Diary cover in promoting a sculpture exhibit by artist Henry Moore.

Short's diary gets around.

Using a Google Image search, I found copies of the leather cover of Short's Diary all over the world.

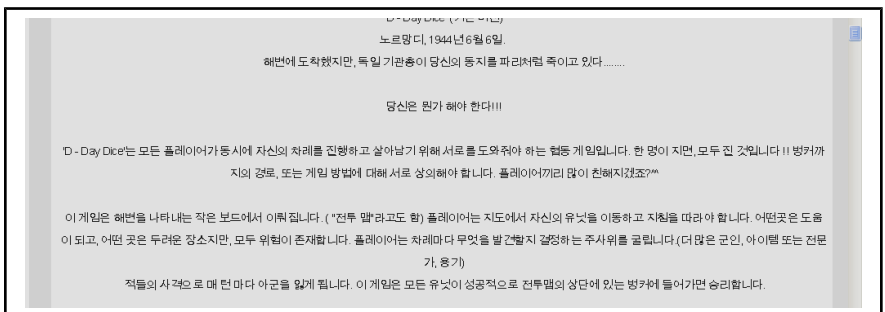
I'm not sure where this website is located, I don't recognize the language, but it pictures Short's Diary with the text:



I also discovered copies of my amended book cover on a website which I think is about tuberculosis, on a vampire story website, and on an Italian site about fallout. Another Italian site, a blog, pictures the Short Diary with the words:

“Homar Crosch aveva raggiunto le ottantacinque primavere quell'anno, ma la sua mente era ancora pronta e sveglia, anche se il corpo lo stava abbandonando”.

I found a Korean website with short's Diary pictured and the text:

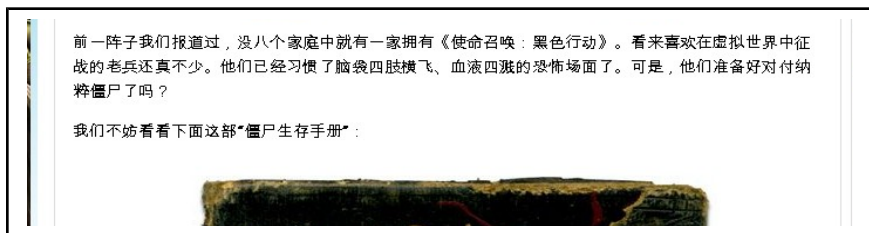


A German game site amends the picture of *William F. Short's 1854 Diary* cover and says:

D-Day Dice besteht aus Würfeln, Spielplänen und einem Wertungsbogen. Spielerisch scheint es den gleichen Charme zu versprühen wie **Im Wandel**

der Zeiten - Das Würfelspiel. Soldaten sind die "Lebenspunkte" eines Spielers, mit Ausrüstungspunkten werden wertvolle Hilfsmittel gekauft, Sterne braucht man für das Anwerben von Spezialisten - mittels Ressourcen optimiert man also seine Spielstrategie.

There is a Chinese site picturing the diary cover and saying:



And I found the diary cover on a Spanish site which says: "No, un diario, ¿y qué? pues nos puede dar varias pistas..."

Now it delights me that a photo I made of the diary cover has circled the world. Until yesterday's image search I had no idea this had happened. I really pray that some of the folks having fun with games, amusing themselves with tales of zombies and vampires, or worried about fallout or life with tuberculosis—I pray some of these folks look up Short's Diary and read his testimony to Jesus Christ, the Risen Savior who deserves worship from every person, in every place, and in every age.

That's why I published the old diary.

I see from my own diary entry for July 16, 2009, as I worked to publish William Short's diary, I wrote:

Yesterday, I worked 20 hours editing the text. Now, with another such session, all I have to do is format, set headers and footers, insert illustrations (making sure they are public domain), set gutters, pagination, addendum, proof again, design covers, make pdf files, and submit to the printer for proof pages to correct.

Is all this stuff worth doing? Commercially, no. I doubt if this publication will make anybody's best seller list. On a commercial level, I've been wasting my time.

However, on a personal level, engaging in this project, seeing Short's problems with decision making, watching him try, fail, and try again—all this encourages me in my own Christian life. Or, at least, as Ginny says, it keeps me off the streets.

I found this diary which has been hidden away for 155 years, and I rush and push and labor to get it published as though it were hot news—that's odd.

I've often hoped that someday some kid blundering around in a dusty attic will chance across a copy of my own diary and be inspired to follow Christ fully. I wonder if that sort of hope ever crossed Mr. Short's mind? I see no indication of it in his diary.

Yet whether he intended it or not, William Short proved an inspiration and encouragement to me...

As the Scripture says of Able, "He being dead yet speaketh".

NOTE: My daughter Eve sent me the following e-mail concerning that first graphic in this entry, the one in the language I didn't recognize:

Hi Dad, hmm... according to Google translate, the author of the site is "Diary, one of his own party. Everything is set to hear it. Just a few pages of the diary." And it is written in Gujarati and it is spoken in India, Pakistan, United States, UK, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, Mauritius, Fiji, Canada, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Portugal, Panama, Malaysia, Norway

My but you do get around, Dad :)

Love, Eve

Friday, April 27, 2012

Old Bones Open To My Interpretation—or not

Today as Ginny carsits at the garage spending close to a thousand dollars on new tires and preventative

maintenance (we hope this car will last the rest of our lives), I remain at home without adult supervision.

What fun!

Instead of working, I browsed the net where I discovered an Associated Press report about an archaeologist finding dinosaur bones in his excavation of an Indian site near Annapolis, Maryland.

The ancient Indian encampment lies in Anne Arundel County (where my son Johnny used to work) It overlooks the Patuxent River at Jug bay. County archaeologist Al Luckenbach found the dinosaur bone in a firepit with shards of a clay cooking pot.

“It is a ferruginous sandstone dinosaur backbone from the Arundel Formation,” Luckenbach said.

He dates the dig site, where his team uncovered postholes and evidence of several wigwams, as being from the Late Woodland Period, between 1000 to 1300 A.D.

In nearby Bladensburg, Maryland, the first dinosaur bones found in American, were discovered by workers mining iron.

Although I’m sure this is not a photo of the bone the archaeologist found in the cook pot, the AP report (at <http://washington.cbslocal.com/2012/04/26/dinosaur-bone-found-by-archaeological-team-in-edgewater/>) ran this photo with news of Luckenbach’s excavation:



Since I am here without adult supervision, I have time to think about how the finding of dinosaur bones in a cook pot opens several speculations:

My natural assumption is that the Piscataway Indians killed, cooked and ate dinosaurs.

The second book I wrote, *Glog: A Dinosaur Novel... Of Sorts*, (www.bluefishbooks.info) centered around an intelligent modern-day dinosaur who lived near Annapolis until an oil spill from a tanker on Chesapeake Bay eliminated his food supply (he eats muskrats).

Without his normal food, Glog steals a few cows but when a farmer shotguns him, he eats the farmer, some golfers, then a few school children (just the runts). This upsets people and forces him to pray for guidance to a new home.

So on one level, *Glog* tells the creature's funny adventures; on another, *Glog* examines how God guides us through adversity and circumstance.

Anyhow, *Glog* is my favorite among all the books I have written. It is available in both pdf e-book and real print book formats at www.bluefishbooks.info.

But I doubt that archaeologist Luckenbach thinks the Indians ate dinosaurs. He says the dinosaur bone he found was already a fossilized rock when the Indians put it in the cook pot.

Now, the Piscataway Indians were real he-men, fighting bears, conquering the wilderness, and all that, but I can't see them cooking rocks to eat.

Luckenbach said they did not cook the rocks to eat, but they cooked with hot rocks.

"The Native Americans cooked in clay pots. But if you put a clay pot on the fire it would crack as it heated up," he said.

"So they would put their meat, vegetables and water in the pot, then heat up these small rocks in the fire and drop them in the pot to cook their food," Luckenbach said.

He thinks some ancient Indian cook picked up the fossilized dinosaur bone along with other rocks, heated them red hot over a fire and dropped them in the stew so the heat spread through the pot.

He said it's not unusual for archaeologists find pot remnants with similar stones, called cobbles or pot boilers, in them.

That's the way they cooked regular food.

I think they ate the dinosaurs they caught raw.

Sunday, April 29, 2012

Parking Lot Sex and Stuff

Yesterday I sat in the car smoking my pipe while Ginny ran into the grocery store for a few things; my arthritis hurt too bad for me to want to go inside. A car whipped into the crowded lot and parked a space a few rows over. A bride got out of that car.

Yes, a bride wearing her white gown, no veil, but with a long white train. She gathered the train in folds, draped it over her arm and rushed into the grocery store.

Curious.

I assumed she must be a model going in for some product promotion or maybe a photo shoot.

But no. After a few minutes, the bride rushed out of the store carrying a plastic grocery bag containing some small package. She maneuvered her gown and train into her car and drove away to???

I wondered what in the world would bring a bride dressed in wedding finery into the Publix??? She must have been on her way to her wedding because she was alone in her car and I can't imagine her leaving the groom to visit a grocery store.

Of course that supermarket houses a pharmacy. Maybe she needed headache medicine. Or carrots. Or a can of soup. Maybe she bought a roll of SeranWrap in case the groom ran out of condoms.

What a mystery!

That's not the only odd thing I've encountered in parking lots recently.

The other day Ginny needed some bird seed and garden supplies, so we shopped at Big Lots. My back wore out before her few things were collected. I walked outside to a bench in the shade to smoke my pipe and watch girls walking past.

About that time a guy I used to know spotted me across the parking lot and came over. He carried a plastic Walgreens Drug Store bag in his hand.

Greeting me as a long lost friend, he showed me some loose pills in his bag.

"Let me give you one of these," he said.

He said the pills were better than Viagra. "One of these babe's will put lead in your pencil Try one," he said.

"No thank you I do not want to," I said.

"Go ahead. Try one. It will let you last all night".

"No thank you, I do not want to," I said.

"You don't even have to take a whole pill. See these little hatch marks? Split the pill into four quarters and just take 1/4th . You'll make some lady very happy".

Again I refused to try a pill offered by some guy in a parking lot.

"You still live in the same place?," he said. "If you change your mind, give me a call and I'll bring one by your house". He handed me a business card with his cell number.

He went across the parking lot, got in a car, and drove away.

You ever hear little mental alarm bells?

They ring for a reason.

I'll get back to talking about parking lot sex in a minute, but my encounter with this guy reminded me of an encounter with a book publisher years ago.

I had written a business article about a trucking company he owned. He liked the article. He asked me to critique the manuscript of a novel his publishing company (he owned several companies) was considering. I had not known he owned a publishing company.

I agreed to review the novel (written by a friend of his) and asked him in return to read my book manuscript *The Lazarus Projects*.

A few weeks later he called me to his penthouse for a conference. My home would fit into his living room. Floor to ceiling windows on three sides overlooking the St Johns

River. Several sofas, easy chairs, bar, and a grand piano rattled around in there. A stuffed zebra dominated the living room decor.

Yes, a whole stuffed zebra nosed up to the piano.

He explained he'd shot it on one of his African safaris. Trophy heads of other species decorated the massive fireplace surround.

Mr. Publisher praised my book manuscript. He said he'd never read better description; my dialog was perfect. He said he laughed often. When he read the climax, he said, he could not stop crying.

He wanted to publish my book!

He set up meeting with several of his bright young men. He and his staff talked about a 100,000 copy press run. They wanted to release *The Lazarus Projects* to coincide with a National Booksellers Convention in Dallas. He wanted me to go to his own tailor and buy a new suit at his expense then go to Dallas for a book signing, start a promotional tour...

Heady stuff!

Another meeting under the zebra's watchful eye... "By the way, John, I want a little favor. My wife and I are going to our place in the mountains for the summer. Our pilot will fly us up, but we want our car there too. We will pack the car with her furs and jewelry in the trunk and the trunk will be locked—you don't have to worry about packing anything. I want you to drive our car up there. No hurry. Don't exceed the speed limit. Deliver the car to my man there, and our pilot will fly you back to Jacksonville..."

I heard the same mental alarm bells I'd heard with the pill guy on the parking lot.

"I do not want to do that," I said.

I've told my children they can say, "I want to... or I do not want to". No other explanation or excuse is necessary to anybody for anything. Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay; whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. "I want to; I don't want to". Nothing more need be said.

Mr. Publisher elaborated on the beauty of the mountains and how fun to drive a luxury car, and...

"I do not want to," I said.

A week later my book manuscript came back to me by mail with a Xeroxed form rejection and check list marked with 15 reasons why my work was too shoddy to be considered for publication.

I've always wondered. Am I too suspicious? Was this another missed opportunity... or something else.

Back to another parking lot—one I was at last Friday.

Again Ginny shopped. Again I wore out. This time I retreated to sit on a lawn chair, part of a sidewalk display. Three store employees on break sat nearby—a young blond lady, a brunette lady a bit older than the other, and a male security guard.

The guard sweet-talked the blond about having sex with him; The brunette encouraged her to go ahead and cheat on her husband.

The trio dismissed my presence with a nod and kept up their intimate conversation.

The brunette said some magazine forum claims 80% of men cheat on their wives and that 50% of women cheat. "With so many people doing it, it's no big deal," she said.

The guard pressed his case with a tactic I've never heard before.

He pulled out his cell phone offering it to the blond.

He said the directory contained the numbers of 20 different women. He told her to call any of them and they'd tell her how satisfying they'd found sex with him.

He was offering her references!

No one mentioned sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, pregnancy... or morals.

The guy encouraged the blond to go with him. The brunette said, the blond might as well do it because her husband had probably cheated on her already.

The blond said no because...

Get this!

She said no because she didn't have time!

"By the time I finish my shift, pick the kids up from the sitter, go home, cook supper and wash dishes... I just don't have time to have an affair," she said

She sounded dead serious.

No moral consideration. Just she did not have time to cheat.

I gave a thought to entering the strangers' conversation ... but I didn't.

In Psalm 51, King David repents of his adultery. He does not mention his wife, or Bathsheba, or her husband. He says to God, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight".

All sin has only one "Victim".

Many instruments, many occasions, but only One Person transgressed against. The damage our sin does to other people is only a toxic by-product of our rebellion against the High and Holy One Who inhabits Eternity.

I want to tell one more parking lot incident—doesn't involve sex this time.

Years ago my children attended school with the grandkids of Jacksonville's Mayor, Ed. Austin, God rest him. The accelerated learning program hosted many field trips.

Inevitably these bus trips returned to Jacksonville late at night. Mayor Austin often picked up his grandkids at the same time I picked up mine. Many other parents met the busses. The Mayor and I often gravitated to a corner to talk about tools or football—never city stuff or politics.

One night the bus was late. Then later. A chaperone called some parent saying there'd been a breakdown. Most parents left—went home to await a phone call when the bus finally did get in. Mayor Austin and I ended up the only two people in that dark parking lot in the small hours of the morning.

"John, do you know what I call a man who hangs around dark school parking lots at 3 a.m.?"

"No, Mayor, what do you call him?"

"A good father".

Tuesday, May 1, 2012
Thanks Wes

Yesterday I did something incredibly stupid. But the action came so natural to me that I didn't realize what a dumb thing I'd done till two hours afterwards.

Thank God my friend Wes bailed me out.

Poor Wes, every time he sees me, it costs him money.

However, as he graciously explained his act of Christian charity while gesturing with each hand, "Here's a problem. There's a solution. And I happened to be in the middle with the wherewithal to bring them together".

Friday, May 4, 2012
A DOM On Wheels

God sees to it that we have whatever we need to do whatever He wants done.

Case in point: last summer as my daughter Jennifer and I shopped in a thrift store, we spotted a walker. One of those contraptions with four wheels decrepit folks can push along. It had a fold-down seat where the poor old dears can sit when they tire.

Jennifer wanted to buy it for me.

I said, "Humph! Grump! Don't need no @%*^ walker! Gruff, Groan. Aint that old and feeble!. Not me! Humph. Insulted. Prefff. Whistle. I'm ok! Don't even really need my cane. Humph!"

She relented.

Time passed.

Guess who can hardly walk from here to the bathroom now?

Guess who came to see the advantages of a walker?

Guess who didn't have one?

Guess who is so loved by family, friends and neighbors that when I admitted I needed a walker...?

Earlier this week I came within inches of owning four wheeled walkers! Yes, four!

Whittled those down to one, but I had to beat loving people off with a stick, they all were so intent on making sure I have what I need.

Makes me feel like Ezekiel.

When he saw the vision of God coming at him with all those wheels—I think maybe Ezekiel may have needed a wheeled walker and the Lord poured them on him.

Having my walker lessens my pain and increases my range. I've walked for blocks this week, further than I have in the past year.

I tied a folding lawn chair on the front of my walker so when Ginny and I went to the park, we just pick a place in the shade and we can both sit without having to search for a free park bench.

The other night we strolled in Riverside Park to watch wading birds squawk, and flutter seeking a roost on the island. Cranes, egrets, herons and wood storks—beautiful white wings in the sunset.

Last night, to watch the rising of the periodic Supermoon over the river, we had to park six blocks away from the Northbank Riverwalk because of concert crowds, but I managed to walk to the romantic spot where we sat and talked beside the beauty of the moonlite river.

I wanted to stroll down to the memorial spire commemorating the Great Fire of Jacksonville (111 years ago today) but I faded too soon. Having a walker does not make me Superman, though I'd like to think so

I have to learn that however far I walk, I must walk that same distance to get back to the car. With the walker, as with everything else, I tend to overdo it.

"Humph! Grump! Don't need no walker! Gruff, Groan. Aint feeble!. Not me! Humph... I'm ok! Don't really need my cane. Humph!"

On a different note, I've been reading *Rule And Exercises Of Holy Living and Holy Dying* by Jeremy Taylor, a happy and helpful book!

Taylor (1613-1667) served as royal chaplain to England's Charles I, the king they beheaded.

Referring to some Virgin Martyr in the far past, Taylor observed, "It is easier to die for chastity than to live with it".

Concerning work he said, "It is presumption to hope that God's mercies will be poured forth upon lazy persons".

On preparing for a happy end, he said, "Let a man frequently and seriously, by imagination, place himself upon his deathbed, and consider what great joy he shall have for the remembrance of every day well spent".

And Taylor encourages me to think on Christ and to live happy and content. "If thy bed be uneasy, yet it is not worse than His manger; and He suffered all the sorrows which we deserve. We therefore have great reason to sit down upon our own hearths, and warm ourselves at our own fires, and feed upon content at home," he said.

Learning of a neighbor's entering a hospice program yesterday caused me to think a bit about my own demise soon or late. And Taylor's book puts me in a happy frame of mind.

I feel ready for whatever comes—I got wheels.

Monday, May 7, 2012 Evening & Morning Glories

Saturday night I used my wheeled walker to see how the Heavens declare the Glory of the Lord. Ginny and I drove to the Ortega River to watch the rise of the Supermoon over the waters. (Saturday the moon approached closer to earth than any other time this year.)

Although we'd suffered a bit of a bickering time beforehand, we sat holding hands, watching the moonrise, and enjoyed talking for a couple of hours by the river.

Sunday morning, we enjoyed strolling in our garden and talking about plants and how Ginny plans to improve the garden when she retires at the end of the month.

I fail to see how she can improve much on the flowers I photographed:





Wednesday, May 9, 2012
A Long Short Letter

Yesterday I spent almost nine hours writing a one-page letter, a letter related to William Short's 1854 Diary.

Why should a short letter take so long to write?

I find that's often true, it takes me longer to write a brief piece. On a good writing day I can whip out ten pages of first draft text for a 300+ page book. Yet once it took me two days to produce a Garage Sale sign!

If anything impresses me about the Gospel writers, it's the succinct quality of their writing. They say much in few words. Not verbose like me.

I think their confidence roots their conciseness. They knew what they wanted to say and said it well. I fear being misunderstood so I elaborate and repeat and explain and illustrate and reiterate and... (Besides, I love to hear myself talk).

For instance, Luke tells the parable of the Good Samaritan in just seven verses; yet other writers recount that tale in whole books.

Once I attended a class where the teacher read the Good Samaritan, then asked each student to pick a character in the story and identify with that character. Tell what the character saw, what they thought, how they acted, what they felt...

Some students identified with the mugging victim, left broken and bleeding by the road. Others identified with the religious people who passed by on the other side of the road. Some identified with the Samaritan being helpful. Some thought of themselves as the inn keeper offering long-term care.

I, of course, identified with the ass trudging along doing the donkey-work of the kingdom as a bystander to the main action.

Interestingly enough, nobody identified with the robbers, although who hasn't run roughshod over others in our lives and left them bleeding in our wake. I wonder what Luke would have made of that?

Of course there is a danger of being too concise. Matthew 25 tells about a wedding feast and I've heard of

one preacher expounding that passage who challenged his congregation: "Will you stay awake with the wise virgins, or will you sleep with the foolish virgins"?

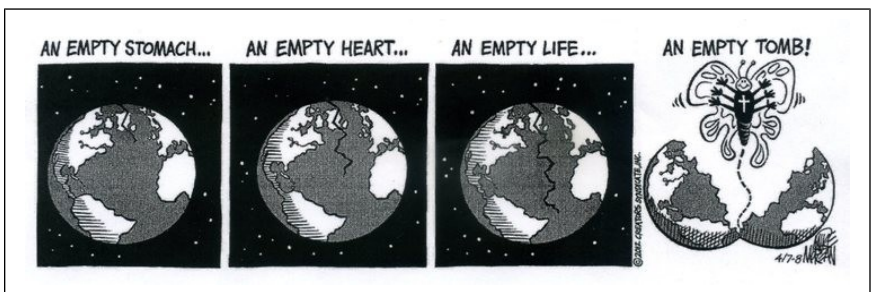
Thursday, May 10, 2012
Off For A Bit

I doubt that I'll write much over the next few days. Tomorrow at 7 a.m. I visit a dentist to see about having eight teeth pulled. Any diary entries I'd make after that would read: "Ouch! Groan. Damn! Ouch"! But that's tomorrow; this is today and all sorts of good things are happening.

Ginny and I continue to prepare for her retirement. Exciting times. We look forward to enjoying more time together before we get old, feeble and die. Yes, I know that could come at any moment but we hope other happy things come first.

She says her top priority before leaving the office is to make sure all the plants are watered! She is also training her replacements—looks like it will take three people to take over her duties.

Here's a happy find: when clearing her desk, as she carried some trash to the dumpster she found this clipping someone had thrown out. We don't know the source or I'd give credit, but it rings true:



Soon after my dentist encounter, I'm scheduled for another eye operation, the sixth one since Christmas. Eve brought me a player to listen to talking books and I'm enjoying hearing Homer's *Odyssey*. Why had no teacher ever told me this was a fun story? I've encountered bits and pieces of it for ages but this is the first time I've (read) it cover to cover.

I also continue to read Jeremy Taylor's *Rules And Exercises For Holy Living And Holy Dying*. What a powerful happy book. Though written 400 years ago, it speaks to my condition.

For instance, yesterday as I mowed the lawn, I reflected on Taylor's take on the subject of faith and work. Quoting James (I'll show you my faith by my works) Taylor mentions that work is not limited to what I've commonly thought of as good works—you know, feeding the poor, religious rituals, stuff like that. But work also means the common, everyday duties we are called to do.

In other words, I show my faith by the way I mow the lawn!

Do I do a half-assed job of it and say "close enough for government work" or do I perform this task to the best of my ability—yet without drudgery. Jesus said "My yoke is easy and My burden light".

As Paul said, "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him".

Thus the butcher shows his faith by keeping his thumb off the scale. The merchant by his customer service and fair dealing. The lawyer by honestly representing his client's interests. The clerk by not goofing off too much around the water cooler.

In practical application to my own work, perhaps I should spend less time browsing bikini girls on the internet and more time editing copy.

Oh, speaking of the net, the Croatian guy sent a copy of the tourist flyer with a tweaked picture of William Short's 1854 leather diary cover:



It is a double 8-page concertina fold, perforated in a way that each page can be torn off as an individual flyer written in one of the six languages.

Mr. Short would be amazed at this.

And my Google Analytics shows that last week 9 readers from Bosnia checked out my site. That astounds me. I hope they found something interesting and helpful. Incredible to think a bit of stuff I produced here in my little home office on a cul-de-sac in backwater Jacksonville finds its way across the world.

Perhaps I should regard my work with a deeper sense of responsibility. There may be more at work here than I realize.

Enough musing. Today's work remains to be done today.

As for tomorrow, I hope this new dentist is a man of faith who shows his work by sending me home intact...

Say, how come it is that Jesus never cured anybody of a toothache? Walk on water, raise dead Lazarus, give sight to the blind—but no toothaches. Must be some oversight on God's part. Or, maybe in some things He lets me live with the consequences of my own actions. Maybe I'm paying for all those Snicker's Bars, the kind with nuts, I ate as a kid.

That thought daunts me. I don't want to go the dentist.

I need comfort food.

I think I'll buy me a Milky Way Bar, the kind without nuts.

Sunday, May 13, 2012 **Harry Potter & Me**

Friday's dentist pulled no teeth; he referred me to another dentist who will. By the time the dentists get through with me, I'll qualify to star in the next Harry Potter movie.

I'll play the role of Nearly-Toothless John.

Tuesday, May 15, 2012 **Wisdom From A Homeless Man**

Yesterday I enjoyed breakfast with some friends near the courthouse.

One of the guys invited a homeless man off the downtown street to eat with us and enjoy our conversation.

We laughed and talked and joked for close to two hours. When we broke up, two of the guys each gave the homeless man a couple of dollars.

He had not ask any of us for anything but I felt I should give him something too—I didn't want to look cheap in front of my friends.

The homeless man turned down my money.

"You keep that to give someone else," he said. "The Lord has supplied me with everything I need to do all I have planned for today".

Then he added, "Know the difference between a pig and a hog"?

"No," I said.

"John, a pig gets fed, a hog gets slaughtered. It never pays to be a hog".

05/19/2012

Busted

lightening or something busted my computer last week.

I am trying to use a borrowed iPad. Phooey,

Saw a four year old in line at a restaurant using one of these things while sitting the pavement. She whizzethru grouch screens and programs like a professional. Smartass kid intimidates me.

When my real computer gets repaired, I,Il poste again.

05/25/2012

Eyes Have It

yesterday doctor said the many treatments (steroids, laser surgery, and injections behind my eye ball) seem to have halted my macular degeneration.

thanks be to God it looks like I,mnot going to go blind.

I don't know how to hanDle good news. I,m exhausted.

Still trying to learn how to use iPad. Be glad when my real computer gets back.

05/28/2012

Tropical Storm Beryl

During the night tropical storm beryl came ashore at Jax beach with winds of 70 miles per hour and heavy rains.

ginny & I hunkered down.

Much of the city lost electricity, many trees down, streets flooded.

Makes for an interesting Memorial Say

05/30/2012

In The Batter's Box

Imagine I'm in the ballpark. In the batter's box.

The pitcher throws. The ball zips past.

I resume my stance. The pitcher, first, and third basemen all throw balls at me.

Next, the three fielders, shortstop and catcher also throw balls at me.

Then all 73,000 fans in the bleachers all throw rock hard balls at me as well.

I'm overwhelmed.

That describes me life recently--overwhelmed.

Life is throwing too much at me all at once.

My eyes, my teeth, my arthritis, my computer down (typing this post on a borrowed laptop for the first time). tropical storm Beryl knocked five garbage cans of limbs in my yard, And Ginny retires friday; our income will be cut by 2/3s.

Overwhelmed!

How do I get to be whelmed again?

Today I thought of Psalm 142:3-- When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then the Lord knows my path.

Yes, the 73,000 balls coming at me are obiticlesdd on the path. Yes, there is a path. Jesus said, "I am the path, the truth and the life".

He knows where I stand on the path in this storm of balls and branches and bills. He knows the path I trod to get to this place. And He knows where my path goes from here. As the old hynn says, "The way of the cross leads Home".

Out of all those 73,000 things coming at me, I'm sure to hit at least one.

Haven't posted for a while because of busted computer... So I'm sure my faithful readers need one of my great jokes by now:

Take my blond girlfriend to the art gallery to see year's best news photos exhibit.

A photo of congress is captioned: US 163 tRILLION DOLLARS IN dEBT.

Photo of Facebook founder reads: Zimmerman looses Two Billion dollars.

Photo of Mars rover reads Rover 43 Millions miles from earth.

Photo of pitiful ragamuffins reads Three Brazilian Children Homeless In The Streets Of Rio.

I move on to photo of flood in Chaina but my girlfriend stands before the previous photo with tears streaming down her face.

"What's wrong, Honey," I ask.

"All those children. All those poor children".

"What do you mean all those children; there's just a few of them".

"A few," she said, "Just how many are in a brazilian"?

06/02/2012

Last Day

Yesterday Ginny retired from the Commission where she had served on a team feeding thousands of poor children each day, sending kids to summer camps, helping old ladies taking care of grandkids, providing scholarships, promoting reading, and numerous other helps to Jacksonvilles children.

Ginny specialed in expediting speedy movement of aid through red tape.

On her retirement, they split her job into two, possibllly three others!

She saw her secular job as worship to Christ.

but now she will never have to work again.

All she has to do now is stay home and take care of me. Yes her labors are over and she will never have to work again, she will just care for me. No more work ever. Just take care of me....

Stop that laughing!

06/06/2012

Computer Nearly Ready

my sons, Donald & Johnny, have my computEr close to fixed after a lightening strike or something destroyed it a few weeks ago.

I am trying to post this on a browed iPod but between my big fingers, I wonky sight and gross. Clumsy stupidity, I can't work this thThe guys tellme that as they rebuild my system with new and used parts, that I have a Satan drIVE, that needs stuff done to it b4 I,ll have a real computer again.

I,ll post again &bE able to read your blogs then.

06/09/2012

Communication Age?

My daughter needs to rename her cat.

We live near St Vincent's Hospital. So when Ginny and I heard a garbled phone message from our daughter about needing a ride to the hospital for Vincent, we launched into emergency alert to rescue our little girl from God only knows what disaster.

Thing is, Jennifer named her damn cat Vincent. And it was the cat that needed to go to an animal hospital to see a vet!

Damn CAT!

We got all shook up over nothing.

During these first days of Ginny's retirement, we have stayed busier than usual. For instance, Friday, we expected her last paycheck to be direct deposited into our bank as usual.

It wasn't.

Her office lost her check. It appeared that we would have to live from now till mid-August on the ten dollars in our account. Ginny called here and there around the city; the people who should know the location of her check, all had answering machines hooked to their telephones. When Ginny finally landed a live human, it seemed that her check could be in one of three downtown buildings, or in the mail to be delivered next Tuesday.

No body in her exit interview bothered to tell Ginny that her check would be diverted. Apparently they have computers and e-mail and all that but don't bother to use those machines. Finally, one of Ginny's former bosses, tracked down the missing check and rescued it from being outsourced to China or wherever. We drove downtown to pick it up.

So all is well—except our blood pressure.

God having a little fun with our faith I suppose.

Wednesday, Ginny had dental work done; Thursday, the dentist pulled four of my teeth. I could hardly talk. Thursday evening a neighbor died, and his wife called asking—even though I am not a preacher—asking if I would conduct the memorial service for him.

As I ponder what to do, three thoughts arose:

I'm tempted to lionize the man, to make the service all about him.

I'm even more tempted to lionize me, to come across as suave, considerate, cool, a great speaker and all-round exemplary Christian—what a crock!

What I really want to do on some level, is speak about the majesty and glory and honor of Jesus Christ who rose from the

dead Himsaelf and who will call each of us from our own graves on the last day. That's as the most important thing I can say... if my missing mouthfull of teeth will let me communicate anything but slobber.

N.B. my real computer is still down and I can't work this IBTOP.

06/13/2012

Burial Detail

Yesterday I learned the funeral service I'm supposed to speak at has been postponed for a week or two.

Various elements of the family dispute as to time and place of service and the animosity grew to the extent there may be two services, one for one group, one for another.

The widow tells me that some of the extended family came to her home wanting to take off her dead husband's tools, togs, and giant-screen tv. They got upset when she refused to let them strip her house.

Once as Jesus spoke to a crowd, a man asked, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me".

Jesus said, "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you"?

And He said to the crowd, "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Jesus knew better than to get involved in a family squabble!

My friend's widow's mother told her yesterdayer, "Death brings out the worst in families".

When my own mother died, one of her sisters took up a collection "to pay for funeral expenses". How much she got, I don't know, but I do know that nobody but me paid a penny toward's Mama's funeral expense.

When Ginny's grandmother died, while the husband and the rest of the family attended the funeral service, a group of relatives broke into the house and pried the kitchen cabinets off the wall and carted them off—"Because Grandma promised them to us".

Just after I spoke with the widow yesterday, I read in the London Daily Mail about the \$162 million estate of Francis D'Addario who died in a plane crash in 1986. The six people named in his will fell into a squabble, with lawyers, that lasted 26

years. Yesterday, the probate judge announced that the entire \$162,000,000.00 had been spent up in legal fees. All the millions are gone. the would-be heirs end up with nothing.

In happier news, my son Donald tells me he plans to complete repairs on my computer next Monday...

I'd leave this laptop to somebody in my will, but there's nobody I dislike that much!

06/14/2012

A Happy Compliment

Recently Ginny and I watched a BBC production of *The Barchester Chronicles* on a DVD disk. It is a happy story based on Anthony Trollope's novel *The Warden*. This is the best portrayal of Christian living I have ever seen on television.

Set in England's Petersboro Cathedral during the early 19th Century, the great jokes, colorful characters, dramatic costumes, true-to-life issues, and some of the most beautiful homes, carriages, and horses in England, make the series magnificent.

I loved the line where one character complains of another, named Septimus Harding played by Donald Pleasence, that he is good man but "He suffers from periodic bouts of Christianity!"

As Ginny and I talked about a daily living problem the other night, she paid me a great compliment: "You're just like Septimus Harding," she said, "Except that you have more hair".

Wednesday, July 11, 2012 Susie And Me

So... There was this guy who phoned a business associate at home one Saturday morning. A little girl answered the phone:

"Hello. You have reached the Brandon residence. This is Susie Brandon speaking".

"Hello, Susie. May I speak to your father"?

"He's not home right now. He had to take the car to the shop".

"May I speak to your mother then"?

"She's upstairs giving the baby a bath and can't come to the phone".

"Do you know when your dad will be back".

"No Sir. I'm not sure".

“Could you take a message”?

“Let me find a pencil”.

While she hunted a pencil, the caller thought what a polite, well-mannered little girl Susie was, one who obviously listened to the adults around her when it came to phone etiquette.

The child came back on the line. “I found a pencil and paper”.

“Good. Tell your dad to call Mr. Morris at...”

“How do I spell that”?

“M.O.R.R.I S.”

“How do I make an M”?

I identify with Susie; I know what to do, but not how to go about it. You see, back about eight weeks ago, my computer fried. Nothing worked anymore. My sons Donald & Johnny, computer geeks, have constructed a new computer for me and restored my backup files... Sort of.

Problem is, I had used the same system for a long time; some of my book manuscripts had been written on a dedicated word processor back in the 1980s and transmorgified into a Microsoft Word 95 program then tweaked and updated (more or less) for years.

Donald and Johnny—Thank God for them—have supplied me with a Linux system which uses Libreoffice Writer software with a Kubuntu operating system.

If I understand it correctly Kubuntu (sometimes spelled Ubuntu) is a computer system developed in Africa by Bushmen who are much smarter about computers than I am. They also know how to kill and cook elephants.

The Bushman program will do everything my old, familiar system would do. But it does not do it the same way.

I’m having to learn to use this thing from scratch. This is my first blog post with the new system.

Anybody out there know how to make an **M**?

Friday, July 13, 2012
Goldfish In The Sky

Has my life been wasted?

Feels that way.

Over the past two months while my computer was down and since Ginny retired, all I have done is run around on urgent, purposeless errands which seem to change nothing.

Yesterday morning we ran to seven different offices straightening out non-issues that related to staying right where we were before we started.

Treading water. Just staying afloat. Not really accomplishing anything new. Wasting time and energy.

We filled out relentless forms related to taxes, healthcare, insurance, and pension—only to discover that one office lost the form which another office insisted on having before acting. Thank God that Ginny always scans such forms into our computer before turning them in—but with our computer down, she's had to go to the library again and again to xerox the forms.

And my book sales?

Zilch.

Hardly anyone is buying my books. Why did I write these things in the first place? Have I been wasting my time? Has my life been dribbled away? Does God even care anything about my activities? Have I been pissing against the wind all these years?

And the phone calls drive me insane!

One organization set their phone machine to call our house three to five times every day with a recorded message. I hang up every time it calls.

Then live people claiming to represent this and that—voices in the air—call wanting to “verify” banking information, insurance information, social security numbers, credit card information. And they get huffy when I refuse to give out such information to strangers who phone.

Wednesday some girl called wanting insurance and social security numbers. She said she was from a doctor's office. I refused to give out such information and she explained—as to an idiot-- that she wanted to prevent some con-man from stealing my identity and claiming to be me at the doctor's office.

I explained to her that if the con man showed up pretending to be me, God bless him, because my next

doctor's appointment is for a prostate exam and he's welcome to it.

Ginny and I indulged in one extravagance since she retired; we added five goldfish to our aquarium. Three of them died within a week. *What a waste*, I thought. *What a waste like all my life*.

Then I remembered something that happened to our daughter Eve years ago when she was tiny, maybe five years old or so.

Somehow Eve got hold of \$20 and wanted to pay her tithe to the church we attended. The old church, built in 1927, featured a cloistered garden with a large spring-fed fountain.

Eve decided she wanted to buy goldfish for that fountain as her offering to God.

That Saturday she told the man at the pet store and he sold her a bag of 20 goldfish at ten cents each. I drove her to church and she released them in the fountain pool. The little fish looked beautiful swimming there.

Sunday morning before service, Eve ran to the fountain to see her goldfish.

Not a one in the pool.

I asked the janitor what happened.

He told us that no sooner had Eve and I left the church Saturday, than a flock of sea gulls swooped in from the St John's River a block away.

In that confined pool, the goldfish did not stand a chance.

The gulls snatched up every one.

I expected Eve to be upset at the waste of her offering to God.

She wasn't.

With five-year-old logic, Eve explained to dumb ol' Dad that God liked her goldfish so much that He sent His birds to carry her offering straight up to Heaven.

Friday, July 20, 2012
I May Tell All My Bones



My bone scan Wednesday checked out negative. My prostate cancer has not metastasized into my long bones, as the oncologist once expected.

Nor did I die on the table during the bone scan, as Ginny and I both expected.

We felt there was a strong chance of my dying because of a previous experience during a prostate scan a few years ago when the tracer injection triggered anaphylactic shock which brought me within inches of death.

By "a few years ago", I mean about 25 years ago; they tell me medical science improved a bit since then. Although the steel slab they stretched me on Wednesday resembles an autopsy slab in a Frankenstein movie.

Ginny and I were prepared for me to die Wednesday and we psyched ourselves up for news related to my imminent demise this morning.

No such luck.

I'm fine.

We feel disappointed.

No crisis at hand.

I seem scheduled to drudge on through life same as always.

We feel let down. We prepared for a big problem that never happened.

Ginny said that our reaction reminds her of a man listening to hurricane news as he nails plywood over his windows ahead of the storm. Tottering atop a ladder with a mouthful of nails, he hears the weatherman announce that the hurricane veered out to sea. He climbs down the ladder, raises his hammer and smashes the radio!

We understand that reaction.

However, undergoing the bone scan—nothing to it really, they inject radioactive glop into your arm, have you drink a lot of water, stretch you on the steel slab, pull your pants down, and make you lie motionless while a camera thingy takes pictures of the radioactive stuff inside your bones. Painless and not dangerous in modern terms.

So they say.

Scared me anyhow.

One nurse hinted that I am a cringing, whining, crybaby, cowardly, wimp—but she said it nicely—she just told her assistant that the bone scan machine could find no trace of my backbone. “Chart it that this patient is spineless”.

In reality the technicians, nurses and radiologists acted and spoke with complete courtesy, confidence, and professionalism. I'm the one who was cringing.

I worried so much about this procedure for weeks beforehand that by the time I was locked onto the slab, I just didn't care how it turned out anymore.

Ginny got a new camera for her birthday last week; her first picture shows me contemplating my bone scan:



Her second photo shows the entrance to the radiation chamber:



Her third photo shows the oncologist examining ossification in my bone scan:



This morning he told us that my chronic pain is not from the cancer metastasizing but results from “sever degenerative arthritis in the right knee, hip, and shoulder”.

Oh, is that all?

For the past few days I've thought a lot about my bones and about Psalm 22, the Psalm which contains the line, “I may tell all my bones”.

Many Bible scholars call this the Crucifixion Psalm. Jesus quoted the first phrase of this Psalm while nailed to the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"?

Psalm 22 foreshadows the crucifixion.

"I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him...

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint:"

All my bones are out of joint.

As I understand it, to crucify a man, the soldiers lay the cross flat on the ground and tripped him backwards onto it.

They nailed down his hands.

If you touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of your little finger, that hollow you see in your palm is the only place you can hammer a nail through a man's hand without breaking a bone. And a nail in that spot will support a weight of up to 300 pounds without ripping through the fingers.

The soldiers then flexed the criminal's knees and nailed his feet in place, one on each side of the cross.

Then two guys lifted the cross and dropped it in a hole, a prepared socket.

When the cross hit bottom, the jar often dislocated the victim's shoulders. "All my bones are out of joint".

That hurt.

But how would it kill a man?

The weight on his arms for an extended period stretch the chest muscles tawnt. He could breathe in, but he could not breathe out.

To breathe out, he had to straighten his knees and push up on those nails in his feet. Unbearable pain! He collapsed with all his weight on his arms again.

Again and again and again he writhed on the cross like a worm on a hook.

Every word he spoke from the cross required that he straighten his knees and push up on the nails in his feet. "I thirst... Father, forgive them..."

Psalm 22 goes on to say:

"My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

"I may tell all my bones:

"They look and stare upon me.

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture".

Why?

Why would the Son of God, the Prince of life, the wonderful counsellor, the mighty God, the King of kings... Why would He undergo crucifixion?

Why do you suppose He did that?

Friday, August 10, 2012 Gone Fishing

Major computer and minor physical problems bumped me off-line for weeks.

Although Ginny retired on June first, filling out tax forms, insurance forms, and such like occupied us for more than two months; so yesterday proved the first full day we could actually engage in retirement fun—we went fishing.

Yes, fishing for the first time in about 30 years.

Preparing for retirement Ginny bought a new camera and two fishing rods. Here's a photo she snapped of me on a dock close to our home:





And here is a photo
I shot of her:

I caught something, she didn't.

Several people have asked me if I've gained deeper spiritual insights to write about while I've been away from the computer.

No....But I can tell you how to grunt for worms.

As we prepared to go fishing, I knew we'd need bait and I recalled an old trick to get earthworms; when I was a kid, my grandfather taught me how to grub for worms.

Drive a wooden stake, called a stob, about halfway into the ground. About 15 feet away, drive in another one. They should be about 18 inches long.

Now scrub some piece of flat iron, an ax head works fine, over the top of the first stob to make it vibrate with a grunting sound. Keep this up a while and earthworms, sensitive to vibrations which passes between your two stobs, will come to the surface to be picked up.

There's a song kids sing while grubbing:

Worms, Worms, I know what you're wishing,
Worms, worms, you want to go fishing;
Worms, worms, come up to the top,
When you do, the grunting will stop!

As I grunted for worms in our garden, maybe, just maybe, an almost spiritual insight did come to me. I reflected on the call to praise which the Psalmist makes in Psalm 148:

**Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons,
and all deeps:
Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind
fulfilling his word:
Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all
cedars:
Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and
flying fowl:
Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and
all judges of the earth:
Both young men, and maidens; old men, and
children:
Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his
name alone is excellent;
His glory is above the earth and heaven.**

Yes, wild beasts and domestic cattle, creeping earthworms and flying fowl—we all are called upon to praise and honor our Creator. St. Francis of Assisi set these words to music in his hymn, *All Creatures Of Our God And King*.

Francis once told some people:

“Try to realize the dignity God has conferred on you. He created and formed your body in the image of His Beloved Son, and your soul in his own likeness. Yet every creature under heaven serves, acknowledges and obeys its Creator in its own way better than you do. Even the devils were not solely responsible for crucifying him; it was you with them and you continue to crucify him by taking pleasure in your vices and sins.”

Wow. No earthworm has ever sinned. They serve, acknowledge and obey the Creator in their own way better than I do.

Yet, they make great fishbait.

As far as flying fowl go-- yesterday, Ginny, although she caught not one fish, she did see a bald eagle, a flight of wood storks, a raft of Canada geese, a great blue heron, a tri-colored heron, and a number of crane.

While Ginny observed birds, I watched some girls in bikinis launch their sailboat from the landing.

Fishing is fun even when you catch little.

Seeing that we did not know what we were doing, some experienced fishermen landing another boat, brought us some fish they'd caught for our supper. That is a common custom here in North Florida, for those who catch fish to share with those who don't.

Did I mention that Ginny did not catch anything but I did?

Yes, on my last cast, I hooked a Leviathan.

Huge monster of the deep.

Fought him for five minutes before I landed him only to discover he was an enormous eel.

I'm sure if I could have straightened out his coils that sucker must have measured between three and eight feet long!

It swallowed my treble hook and rig right up to the swivel.

Huge, it must have measured ten feet long!

Of course, Ginny, whom you will remember had not caught anything, claimed that my eel was only 15 inches long—but, you know that all fishermen, especially those who did not catch anything themselves, are liars!

We came home to fillet the fish those guys gave us and, for about two hours, we watched You-Tube videos of other people catching fish.

What a happy start to retirement!

Friday, August 10, 2012 **Marriage and \$5,000,000**

Lot of talk this week around Jacksonville about marriage.

Our august city government soon will vote on the issue of defining marriage.

That would be more comforting if this morning's news had not revealed that they made a mistake in simple addition totaling \$5,000,000 when figuring the city's budget for next year.

And these guys want to define marriage!

Seems some folks want to marry; other folks don't want them to.

Chickens inflame the argument.

In a tv interview, the owner of a fried chicken restaurant chain said he believes in "biblical marriage" (whatever that is) and his statement outraged activists who want the traditional marriage definition expanded to include them.

Protesters blocked traffic around the chicken restaurants; cons demonstrated too.

Ginny and I stayed home enjoying our marriage and watching birds in our backyard.

All the fluff and furry and bother appears to me to just another instance of the world doing what the world does.

At a garage sale last week a young woman told me she and her husband had been married 27 years; she added, "Actually it's only 25 years. We spent our first two years living in sin".

I doubt that.

People marry people.

The government may issue a license. Religious groups may approve or disapprove. But people marry each other.

I've only been married twice and I've never had sex with any woman I was not married to, so I'm hardly an expert on such matters. My opinion is nothing more than my opinion.

It seems to me that I will answer to God for nobody's marriage but my own.

The question before Ginny and me is does our marriage honor God and does it satisfy the two of us.

What anybody else does or does not do is none of our concern unless they ask our help.

We wish them all joy.

Funny thing, at times our grown children have urged us to write a book about how to enjoy a happy marriage. They see us in love after our first 43 years of marriage. They see us happy. They see that something works for us that gives us joy.

Alas, Ginny and I can not precisely define what that something is.

When asked, we tease that the secret to happy marriage is saying, "I love you forever but I can't stand you right this second! Check back with me tomorrow".

I suspect that another thing that helps us get along so well together is that we each try to assume the good will of the other.

She knows that when I screw up big time, I generally mean well. I know that same thing about her. Love is important, toleration more so.

About three weeks ago, our son Donald and his wife Helen treated us to a Sunday lunch (BBQ, not chicken). The waitress asked if Ginny and I were honeymooners!

That surprised us. We were not acting any different than we always do.

Yet the waitress appeared wistful. She said we looked like we were in love.

Astounded, she said to Ginny, "Married 43 years! To the same damn man! You've got to be kidding".

Once Ginny and I considered divorce.

It was back in 1970 or '71, I think. At the time I worked as a long-distance truck driver. I got a surprise check for \$700, big money back in those days.

Up north, I deposited that check and wrote checks spending \$700. Here in Jacksonville, Ginny wrote checks spending that same \$700.

She and baby Jennifer joined me on the truck in Indianapolis and soon we discovered checks bouncing like popcorn from an uncovered pan!

Understand that neither of us had done anything wrong. It was just that neither of us had told the other about spending that money.

I grew livid.

She grew livid.

Incredibly angry at each other.

Sick with worry about how we would cover the missing money.

We reached Booneville, Missouri, about 3 a.m. She intended to get on a Greyhound bus and leave me. I drove her to the bus station glad to be rid of her.

An announcement in the deserted terminal told us that the next bus would not arrive till 6:30 a.m.

Well, mad as I was I still would not leave her and the baby alone in a strange town at a deserted bus station in the wee small hours of the morning.

We sat on the dark bus platform fuming at each other for hours. Each knowing full well that when she got on that bus, we'd never see each other ever again.

We were so mad that we could not speak.

Sat there in the dark.

Silent.

Fuming.

Thinking.

Eventually she got back in the truck and we drove on to Kansas City. Still too mad to talk, but still together.

Somehow or another the money crisis passed. I don't remember how. I do remember that the turning point for us was the realization that we could face life apart or together.

We deliberately chose to stay together.

Still angry. Still worried. Still frustrated. Still broke. Still driving through the night without speaking....But still together.

I'm not sure that love or any emotion played much of a part in our decision; it was a matter of cold choice.

So, Jacksonville's City Council votes next week on who can marry whom and why.

And that \$5,000,000 addition mistake, here's a hint guys: you carry the four into the next column, and those zeros at the end of a number do mean something.

I hope no council member's marriage cracks up over this.

It's only money.

There's plenty more where that went.

Monday, August 13, 2012
Bluejay Behavior

Ginny and I maintain five birdfeeders around our house.

Birdfeeders which have hung in the same spots around our yard for over 15 years.

Consequently, at any given moment from our chairs on the patio, we can count at least 20 birds in sight. Even migratory species have learned to stop off at the Cowarts for a free meal, water, and a safe, cat-free, place to rest.

Over the past weekend we watched chirping sparrows, chickadees, titmice, cardinals, thrashers, mockingbirds, downey woodpeckers, pilated woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, eurasian ring-necked doves, red-winged blackbirds, purple finches, and a bunch of LGBs (little gray birds which we can not identify) all doing bird things in our yard.

Occasionally we see buntings in our yard, both painted buntings, Florida's most beautiful bird, and indigo buntings, also incredibly beautiful creatures.

Once Ginny and I saw a hawk swooped down and snatched a dove right off our largest feeder.

Well, hawks are birds too.

And it is a bird feeder.

Recently a wren has build a nest in Ginny's teapot wind chime and laid a clutch of four eggs there—stupid wren ignored the birdhouses we have available all over the place and nested in Ginny's teapot!

Daily a herd of bluejays descend on our feeders to squabble among themselves kicking out more seed than they eat, while doves and squirrels gather up crumbs from under the table—seeds that the bluejays kicked to the ground as they scrounge for choice sunflower seeds.

We also placed two humming bird feeders in the garden, in addition to the five containing seed.

The hummingbirds we see in our yard sport emerald-green backs and red breasts and bright, round black eyes. Ruby-throated hummingbirds flit from flower in constant motion like flaming fags in the already colorful bird world.

Ginny and I like to watch them.

To attract hummingbirds, we've planted lantana, hibiscus, bloodweed, cigar plants and some bush with big orange flowers that I don't know the name of. Hummingbirds do not eat seeds. They drink nectar from tubular flowers. They love those big orange flowers...

Therein lies the rub.

Everybody knows that hummingbirds do not scratch and peck like normal birds; no, they hover and suck.

Outrageous behavior.

One of the bluejays in our yard feels it his God-appointed duty to keep hummingbirds away from garden flowers.

Now the bluejay does not eat flowers. He did not plant the flowers. He has no earthly use for flowers—but when a hummingbird hovers at a blossom, that jay squawks and rushes at the hummer flapping his wings, beating the air, raging in protest at the hummingbird's very existence on earth.

Reminds me of some religious activity going on here in Jacksonville..

Saint Peter said, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters”.

Lord, help me to mind my own business.

Tuesday, August 14, 2012
The Cutout Tongue

Shopping at a huge rummage sale in Orange Park last Saturday, Ginny and I bought several treasures.... Well, she bought treasures, I bought better things.

When I buy something neat at a yard sale, she sighs and says, “One man's trash is another man's trash”.

Anyhow, I bought a clear plastic accordion foldout thing for my billfold's cards and pictures.... or it would be if my billfold were the same size as the foldout.

Alas, it isn't.

I also bought an ironing board. An old ironing board serves as a great adjustable-height work table for yard work.

When Ginny and I saw it, a ceramic cookie jar struck our fancy.

Reminded us of the Adams Family house -- with flowers.

We debated about buying the thing. Ginny buys cookies in self-sealing plastic sleeves which we stack on a shelf. Works fine.

"We do not need a cookie jar," she said.

"Come right down to it, we don't need cookies," I countered.

We bought the cookie jar and brought it home.

Ginny bought the handle for a slingshot.

I have no idea why.

Who knows what goes through the mind of a woman at a garage sale?

Her purchase brings back memories for me...

When I was a Boy Scout, we guys made our own slingshots. Every boy searched for perfect Y-shaped fork of tree branch. We cut lengths of bicycle innertube. Then we needed a pocket to hold the rock or pecan ammunition we intended to shoot.

In my mind, the Japs and Germans feared nothing more than Boy Scouts armed with lethal slingshots. We could storm the island and win The War.

Now, the only suitable material for making the rock-pouch of a slingshot is the tongue of an old shoe. You cut the tongue out of an old shoe, tied it to the rubber innertube lengths and you were armed for war...



Small problem.

I did not have any “old” shoes.

I only owned one pair of shoes.

But I needed a tongue for my slingshot.

With boyish ingenuity, I simply cut the tongue from one of my only shoes, my school shoes, my Sunday-Go-To-Meeting shoes.

No big deal.

Who is going to notice a shoe with a missing tongue?

To this day, the only shoes I've ever actually noticed are ones with six-inch spiked heels worn with real nylons, the kind with that black seam ascending all the way up.

But I was a kid. So, who was going to notice if I'd cut the tongue out of my school shoes to make a slingshot?

Unfortunately, like most boys, back then, I had a mother. She noticed.

A slingshot provides no defense against an irate mother. Instead of soldiers, America should have sent mothers to tame the Japs and Germans.

So, Ginny's rummage sale purchase made me think of tongues.

In the Bible, the Apostle James said, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”

He went on to say, “The tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things....Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be”.

In his first letter, Peter said, “He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile”.

But the apostles were talking about mouth-tongues, not shoe-tongues.

Poor apostles.

They were Bible guys and never owned a Y-slingshot. Bible guys only had those swing-around-your-head kind.

They never cut the tongue out of a shoe to make a real slingshot...

That's because Bible guys only wore sandals ... and they had mothers.

Wednesday, August 15, 2012
God Help America

Our local election is over.

Now, I feel free to show this video campaign ad from one of our local dignitaries. I have voted in every election since I turned 21 years old (the legal voting age back then), but never before do I recall seeing a political ad like this one.

I did not want to post this before all votes were counted for fear of unduely influencing undecided voters.



This ad epitomizes politics in Jacksonville, Florida: Click on photo link to watch The Weinstein Slide.

Election results in this morning's newspaper show that 16,991 people voted to elect this candidate, but his opponent won the race anyhow.

Wouldn't George Washington be proud?

In other Florida news, yesterday a ranger in a south Florida park killed a python. It measured 17 and a half feet long.



Dissected by University of Florida students in Gainesville, the 165-pound female was found to contain 87 eggs destined to become baby snakes.

"This thing is monstrous, it's about a foot wide," said herpetologist Kenneth Krysko. "It means these snakes are surviving a long time in the wild, there's nothing stopping them and the native wildlife are in trouble."

The python's stomach contents revealed feathers, he said, but pythons also eat deer, bobcats, alligators and other large animals.

"A 17.5-foot snake could eat anything it wants," Krysko said. He estimates that tens of thousands of such snakes live in Florida swamps.

Want to move to Florida so you can vote in our local elections... if a snake doesn't get you first?

Thursday, August 16, 2012 My Unbiblical Marriage

Long ago a group of religious folks shunned Ginny and me.

People we had thought of as our closest friends ostracized us, often refusing to associate with or even speak to us because I was a divorced man intent on marrying Ginny as my second wife.

They did us a favor.

The treatment we received cemented in us the mindset of the two of us against the world. That attitude remains with us after all these years.

I say our marriage is unbiblical not just because of my having been divorced, but because of the way our marriage works on a day to day basis.

Lot of talk recently around Jacksonville, Florida, my hometown, about biblical marriage, family values, human rights, and alternate lifestyles.

The lead article in this morning's *Florida Times-Union* newspaper says, "In a cliffhanger decision, the Jacksonville City Council by a 10-9 vote Wednesday rejected a bill expanding the city's human rights ordinance to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination....Council members fielded about 10,000 emails and heard hours of public comments leading up to Wednesday's meeting"

Protesters and demonstrators and sign-wavers and cross-dressers and church congregations and just plain folks talk long and hard about "biblical marriage".

Ginny and I do not have a "biblical marriage".

Ours is decidedly unbiblical.

For one thing we've stayed married for 43 years now. I am happy and she gives every indication fo being happy. We are still romantically in love. We talk together continually yet we enjoy time apart. We often hold hands. Not a day goes by without our saying such things as, "I'm glad I'm married to you"... I love you... I treasure you... You please me".

I have never been unfaithful to Ginny and, although I don't lock her in a chastity belt, I've no cause to suspect she's been unfaithful to me.

We'd hung together through some hellish rough spots over the years—Us against the world!

My six grown children treat us with great respect. One of them earned a masters degree, two others graduated from college and the others went as far as they wanted with higher education. All remain consistently employed

and pay taxes and contribute to various charities. None has been in jail.

The kids often dine together just because they like eachother's company. They play games and go to movies together, help eachother out and seem to enjoy life.

Any time Ginny and I need anything in this our dotage, all we have to do is call and the kids spring to our aid.

See why I say we have an unbiblical marriage?

No?

In thinking about this, I skimmed the pages of my Bible looking for biblical marriages. Here's what I noticed:

Adam and Eve sinned and lost Eden through foreclosure. Got kicked out of their home and one of their sons murdered another.

That's the first biblical marriage.

Two of their sons married their own sisters to make incest the second biblical marriage.

Abraham, father of the faithful and friend of God, knocked up both his wife and her maid. That was a biblical marriage.

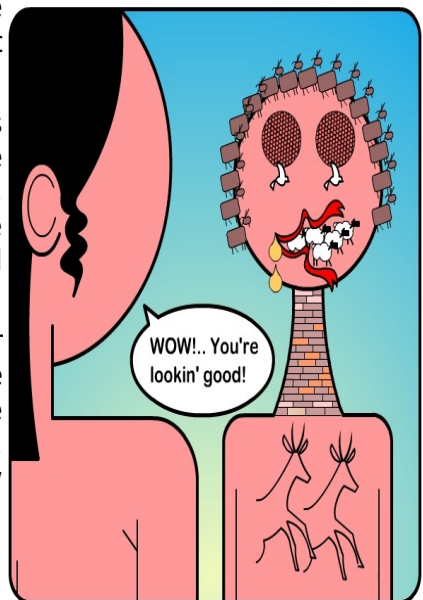
Issac's wife Rebecka deceived him to help her favorite son cheat his brother.

Jacob fathered 12 children on four different women.

Samson and Delilah-- well their's doesn't count as a biblical marriage because they never married, just shacked up.

Ruth crawled into Boaz's bed at the harvest before he bought her from a relative, but they married and became ancestors of both King David and Christ.

King David had her husband murdered so he could get Bathsheba. But he was also married to Micheel, Abigail, and I forget how many other women.



She was a strange looking girl, but Solomon loved her!

Solomon wrote erotic poetry praising in oriental imagery the love of his life—at least one of them because he had a harem of a thousand wives.

Apparently, Daniel and Jeremiah never married because the Babylonians cut them into eunuchs. No wonder Jeremiah wrote *Lamentations*!

King Ahasuerus, a jealous drunk, forced a beauty contest winner, Queen Esther, into marriage.

Job's lovely wife proved less than supportive in times of trouble telling him, "Curse God and die!"

The Prophet Isaiah and "the prophetess" had a son they named Mahershalalhashbaz. Poor kid! I had a hard time in first grade learning to write JOHN C. on my paper!

Then the Prophet Hosea married this lady who ran off I think nine times with other men dragging home pregnant each time. Theirs was a biblical marriage—one which to my way of thinking proves that you don't have to be smart to be a prophet.

Those are the biblical marriages in the Old Testament.

The New Testament starts with the unusual marriage of Joseph and Mary, who, on a trip to Jerusalem, managed to lose Jesus for three days.

The famous "Woman At The Well" was married five times and was shacking up with a new guy when Jesus met her.

God offed the married couple Ananias and Sapphira when they pretended to be more religious than they really were.

And the Bible ends with that mysterious section about the marriage feast of the Lamb in which the church becomes the bride of Christ

Those are all biblical marriages I recall right off the top of my head.

Sure glad Ginny and I do not have a "biblical marriage".

I suspect the folks protesting, voting, getting upset, advocating biblical marriage might be better off to use the term "traditional American marriage" instead.

And I think the best way to "protect the institution of marriage" is to go home, make sure your wife is happy

and your children cared for to the best of your ability. Be kind to your family, and charitable to outsiders. Tend your own fireside first. Mow your lawn. Play catch with the kids. Watch the game.

Honor the Lord in your own home so that other folks say, "I wish I had a marriage like that".

Friday, August 24, 2012
Odds & Ends... Mostly Odds

Birds In The Teapot



Yesterday Ginny balanced atop a ladder to photograph the baby wrens just hatched in her teapot windchime.

Mama & Poppa Wren objected, but here is a photo of the four baby birds hunkered beneath the rim of the teapot:



We suspect the silver pot will protect the wren family as Hurricane Issac approaches south Florida.

Although our yard remains supersaturated from daily rains—four inches yesterday—we think we are prepared for the storm's outer bands as it moves up the Gulf Coast of the state.

Most of the time recently, Ginny and I read on rainy afternoons and evenings:



Mrs. Johnson Died Yesterday

Our family friend Janet Johnson died yesterday.

She arranged for two of our children, Donald and Eve, to get through college. She also made such arrangements for our youngest but our daughter had other interests. In 1977, Mrs. Johnson founded the Upward Bound program at Jacksonville University. More than 1,400 students—including not only our children but also Jacksonville's present mayor—participated during her 22 years as director.

I'll bet she could call every one of them by name.

Old Book, Other Lands

Years ago I wrote a book called *Strangers On The Earth*; it is a collective biography of people whose faith got them into trouble.

Hardly any copies sold, yet that book keeps cropping up.

This week a pastor's wife in London e-mailed me about the chapter on Dr. Robert Bateman, a Jacksonville rescue mission worker who died aboard the *Titanic*.

A missionary in Argentina also e-mailed me with a question about one of the book's chapters.

And Gary & Sue Gaither, two missionaries in Ecuador, asked my permission to use that book in their ministry (I wonder if they intend to translate it into Spanish?). Their colorful blog is at www.thegaithers.blogspot.com

All this attention about a book I wrote long ago lifts me. *Strangers* is still in print at www.bluefishbooks.info.

The Too, Too Friendly Woman!

Ginny and I drove to Kingsland, Georgia on Tuesday. (We wanted to restock some supplies before Hurricane Issac limits travel and we can't buy our brands here in Jacksonville).

On impulse, we stopped at an antique shop run by a friendly woman. A terminally friendly woman. I'll bet she's the kind to hug innocent strangers in church.

"Where you folks from?" she asked the moment the shop door opened.

"Jacksonville," I said.

"Oh, that couple over there are from Jacksonville too. Do you know them?"

I told the lady the population of Jacksonville tops a million people and I did not know that couple in the shop.

“Well, I'll introduce you and you four can have lunch together and get to know each other”.

The guy portion of that other couple looked as appalled as I'm sure I must have. His facial expression, as did mine, said, *I already know more people than I want to now!*

The friendly lady kept insisting.

The guy and I nodded to each other.

Then I escaped. Walked out the door. Didn't browse. Didn't buy. Didn't shake hands. I obeyed the Holy Scripture in I Timothy 5:22 where it says, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure”.

Right.

I already know some people.

No need to know more.

My Physical & Spiritual Life

Some theologians separate the physical and spiritual realms. In essence they say physical, bad; spiritual, good.

I see the two elements equally intertwined.

Of course, I would.

My spiritual life stands at low tide recently.

My most fervent prayer in recent days: “Dear God, let me make it to the bathroom in time”!

National Convention In Tampa

Forecasters predict Hurricane Issac with tropical rains hundreds of miles from its eye should swirl off coast from Tampa by next Monday. Some bright planning committee decided that peak hurricane season is a great time for 70,000 people to hold a national political convention in Tampa.

These same folks want to run America.

Hope they have sense to come in out of the rain.

But I don't see much sign of that.

Sunday, August 26, 2012 Out Of The Teapot

Yesterday I watched a wren fledgling hop from the teapot nest and stand on the rim looking at the world. It flew about eight inches to perch on a nail in the wall where it hung for a few minutes testing the air. Then it flew to a bush about five yards away.

And from there it launched into a wide and brighter world.

Niel Armstrong, the first man to walk on the surface of the moon, died this morning. He too has now launched into a wider, brighter world.

As will we all.



Monday, August 27, 2012
Praying For Tarzan

When I was a kid I prayed for Johnny Sheffield to get sick.

Not real sick. Nor leprosy or something that bad, but sick like maybe athletes foot or jock itch—something that would incapacitate him.

And when he fell ill, frantic movie producers, who were filming at Silver Spring—a first magnitude crystal-clear spring, a major tourist attraction near Jacksonville—well,

these astute producers would pick me to play the role of Boy in the latest *Tarzan* movie opposite Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan.

In my mind I'd be perfect in the role of Tarzan's son. I was a Boy Scout.

Never happened.

They never called on me to replace Sheffield.

No answer to my prayer.

I remained undiscovered all my youth.

One Easter back in the mid-1960s evangelist Billy Graham's team announced that he would speak at an outdoor rally.

With thousands of other people, I trudged through snow to stand for hours in the predawn cold to hear him speak.

He didn't.

Come service time, some turkey walked up to the mike and announced that Billy Graham would not make the meeting. This guy actually said that Graham was meeting that morning with "important people", congressional leaders or some such.

Many of us unimportant people left the scene while some flunky substitute talked about something.

Later, I talked with a young pastor who revealed that he had prayed that Billy Graham would not appear at that service. The young pastor reasoned that if Billy Graham were not there, the organizers would have to find a substitute speaker and the Spirit of God was sure to tell them to look in Section G, row 194, seat 32, and they'd ask him (the young pastor) to replace Billy Graham.

He'd be catapulted to greatness.

I wonder how many other pastors in that audience harbored the same kind of thought? Does any pastor ever pray to be called to the second biggest church in town, or do all want the biggest and the best?

The Prophet Jeremiah warned, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not:"

Phooy! What did Jeremiah know. Wasn't he a bullfrog, for Heaven's sake!

But the Lord Christ knows some of us are not equipped to handle greatness; it would destroy us.

(Just as an aside, I volunteered to be a counselor at the last Billy Graham Crusade here in Jacksonville in 2005. They turned me down. I wrote a newspaper article about the experience, [Confessions Of A Crusade Reject](#). That article generated a lot of response, mostly from people who have been hurt by Christians. Odd.)

A couple of years ago, I felt discouraged that my wonderful books did not sell worth a hill of beans. Why do other writers earn fame and fortune while I remain undiscovered, unknown and broke?

With God all things are possible! Right?

Why shouldn't I become America's greatest writer?

So I began praying that the Lord Christ would make me into the best-selling author in America.

I thought that was a reasonable request to make to the Almighty.

As I prayed, a thought crept into my mind—perhaps the voice of God's Holy Spirit. “John Cowart, you idiot! I've already got America's best writer in place already. Pray for him”.

(Yes, the Spirit said *already* twice—I don't think English is His native language.)

From that day to this, I often pray for the man I think of as America's best writer.

I pray almost daily for his health, his prosperity, his happy marriage, his children, his work, his talent, his movie contracts, his peace of mind, his next best-selling book... and for his sales.

But, darn if I'll ever pray for him to star in a Tarzan movie!

For that, I'm still waiting for them to call me.

Tuesday, August 28, 2012
Fleas At The Stroke Of Dawn

Leg cramps woke me at 3 a.m. and when I turned on my computer to start work, on my next book, I found this disturbing e-mail from my son Johnny, a grown man in his late 40s:

Dad, I'm scared. My left hand just went all numbed. I can use it, but I don't really feel it. I've had worries with my left leg as well. It shakes for no reason....

Why he sent me an e-mail at midnight instead of calling, I can't guess.

For people of my age, weight and general indolence, the word *stroke* is never far from mind.

John's message concerned me. This week he's suffered troubles with his truck, a couple of weeks ago he suffered an on-the-job accident which causes him much pain, and recently he suffered the loss of one of his two jobs and is job-seeking. I worried that the combination of all this might have triggered a stroke.

I prayed for wisdom about how to handle this situation.

I called Johnny's apartment to rouse him.

No answer.

I called another six or eight times. No answer.

Is he dead? Incapacitated? Drunk? Unable to answer? Should I call rescue? What is his street number and what is his apartment number? I know where he lives but I don't know how to tell rescue how to get there. What if he can't call himself? Should I go over and call rescue to break his door down?

I woke Ginny to drive me over to his apartment; eye doctor says I'm ok to drive, but I don't trust my night vision on unfamiliar streets. As we dressed to go over, I continued calling Johnny's cell phone.

Finally, he answered in a stupor.

Sounded confused.

I told him to raise both arms above his head. He said he could do that. I asked him to smile and if it felt funny—two of the stroke indicators.

For the third, I asked him to recite any line of poetry he could remember—that should show whether or not he is coherent.

After a moment's pause—remember, it is now 4:30—Johnny said:

**Fleas.
Adam had 'em"**

Does that sound like coherent speech to you?

Sounded like stroke material to me.

I told him to immediately call rescue and then call me back...

Hours passed.

Ginny went back to bed.

Unable to get to work on the book, I hunched over my computer browsing through online photos of naked women—as I am wont to do in stressful times.

As I browsed and prayed, I rememberer a [Dave Barry Column](#) from the *Miami Herald* newspaper. He once wrote about how we guys feel reluctant to seek medical attention. He observed that in the event of a compound-complex fracture, a guy is likely to say, "It's only a sprain".

Even in a chainsaw mishap, any guy says, "It's only a sprain. If it doesn't get better by tomorrow, I'll go see the doctor".

I understand that attitude. I have a tiny bit of it myself. It's a guy thing hardwired into our nature.

Anyhow, about 6 a.m., having given the paramedics plenty of time to cart Johnny off to the hospital or the morgue, I checked my e-mail again... He had not called me. He e-mailed saying,

Dad, It is way too early for this crap. I'll sleep more and see how I feel when I get up. I've another Dr. appointment tomorrow anyway. I'll let them know about it. It couldn't be all that serious. I still live and move and have my being in God. When that stops happening, then I'm in trouble. Frankly, I'm just too tired just now to play with it. Maybe later. I love you Dad

Well, Johnny had not called rescue.

But he is a grown man and responsible for his own decisions.

However, for worrying me and keeping me on edge all those wee small hours of the morning, I could wring his neck.

Wouldn't do any good.

He'd say, "It's only a sprain".

Thursday, August 30, 2012 Other People's Misery

The wise man builds his house upon the rock; the foolish man builds his house in Florida.

Florida, where apart from a few limestone outcroppings, all the state is sand.

Or, maybe, in spite of past experiences, he builds in New Orleans

Yesterday, all day, I watched in fascination online streaming tv at <http://www.hurricanecity.com/> which chronicled in real time Hurricane Issac's strike on New Orleans and the southeast. Yes, the local tv weatherman said that the heavy rain which saturated my yard yesterday afternoon was a feederband from Issac even though the center of the storm in New Orleans was, according to Map Quest, 546.21 miles away.

In true Christian compassion, I thought, *Better them than us.*

I upbraided my hard heart, but that thought kept coming back with every view of miserable people, falling trees, howling wind, crashing waves, and driving rain.

The best quote in the coverage came from a reporter in the French Quarter Wednesday night saying that it was raining so hard, "Water is falling right out of the sky"!

Hurricane's screw up my prayer life.

Way back when Issac was far out in the Atlantic, I began praying about this storm. The burden of my prayers was that it would strike somebody else instead of my home.

I realize that storms replenish the earth. They prune trees. They refurbish the coastal marshes. They

reconfigure the beaches and shape the land. They are necessary to the ecosystem of the earth.

That's great so long as they do it someplace else.

So, I'd pray that the storm would turn north into the sea.

Or, failing that, that it would hit some godless place like Miami, Tampa, New Orleans, Cape Hatteras, or anywhere yankees live.

That's a selfish prayer.

Is there any reason a hurricane should not strike, Jacksonville, my hometown?

When I see those poor bastards being evacuated in New Orleans, rescuers risking their lives in the flood waves to chop holes in roofs to pull people and dogs out of attics, was I moved with compassion thinking that could be me and Ginny?

No, I wasn't.

I thought, *You dumb asses! Didn't you know it was coming? Why didn't you get out of harm's way last week? Waste of resources to rescue you... and your little dog too!*

In ancient times, a tower fell on some people. I don't know if it happened as a construction accident or because of a strong windstorm. Anyhow, eighteen people were crushed and died.

When some guys asked Jesus about the disaster, He said, "Those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish".

So, Hurricane Issac apparently is not drowning New Orleans because that city and those people are more wicked than my city and my people. Nothing happens in Louisiana that does not happen in Jacksonville.

Saint Peter tells us to resist the devil, but that the demon is not necessarily the cause of all hardship; Peter said we are to resist the evil one, "Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world".

In other words, some affliction, such as hurricanes, fall on everyone as the common lot of mankind because we live in a fallen world.

And sometimes it falls on us.

Anyhow, while watching nearly 24 hours of hurricane coverage from Louisiana, as an act of will, I modified my prayer: *Dear Lord, please bless the rescuers and the rescued... and even the terrified dogs in the attic...*

But I'm not sure that was much of a heartfelt prayer.

Better them than us, was my more honest one.

Friday, August 31, 2012

FLORIDA NEWS FLASH: ZOMBIES ATTACK RNC

Last night my son Johnny suggested I write a story about zombies; This one's for Johnny.

Sugar cane farmer Clint Gerauali, an undecided voter, in Kinner, Louisiana, caused it all. Too lazy to string barbed wire to keep cows out of his fields, he left coils of the wire stretched along his fence line.

Hurricane Issac dumped 27 inches of rain on Mt. Pisgah Church Cemetery just across the swamp from Gerauali's patch. Waters rose. Coffins of newly buried dead people popped up out of the ground in the flood.

The air-tight metal boxes floated downstream as the tidal surge subsided and tangled on the coils of barbed-wire. A lightening strike from Issac hit the floodwaters electrifying the coils of wire and metal coffins. This reanimated the dead creating zombies craving to eat human brains.

But they were locked in strong coffins with latches only on the outside.

Hungry zombies pounded on the lids from the inside but were trapped.

As the hurricane raged, tidal waves surged to and fro overtopping the levy and sweeping the coffins out into the Gulf of Mexico.

In the Gulf, 26 coffins bumped against the pilings of an oil drilling rig breaking the platform loose and releasing millions more gallons of crude oil into the Gulf. No matter. The oil company still posted record profits.

Collision with the oil platform snapped off the latch from one zombie's coffin and he climbed aboard the oil rig seeking brains to devour. But the platform had been evacuated of all humans before the storm and, starving, he threw himself into the raging sea.

The slick from the oil spill coated the floating coffins, greasing them so they sped south over the surface of a Gulf current till they grounded on the Bay Front seawall in Tampa Bay near the convention center where the Republicans were meeting for their pre-victory banquet.

Coffins cracked open on the seawall and zombies staggered forth ravenous.

Dripping sea water, rotting clothing and shreds of decomposing flesh, they stalked, arms outstretched in front of them into the Convention Hall.

Seeing the zombies shamle through the front door, 50 thousand Republican delegates—all with carry permits—drew pistols from pockets, purses and powdered cleavage and opened fire....

Alas, bullets, even thousands of them, can not kill the living dead.

Unfortunately, 27 waiters from Guatemala, were killed by gunfire. They worked the Convention without Green Cards because they work so much cheaper than legal workers. And besides, no real American wants the job of feeding Republicans at less than minimum wage

When the fire barrage could not stop the onslaught of the zombies, Delegates pressed to the walls behind the lavishly spread buffet tables. The evening's spread included salmon steaks, lobster, Delmonico steaks, Caesar salads, tomato aspic, German Chocolate cakes, Key Lime Pies, green peas with pearl onions (with a sprinkling of real pearls for a surprise)--and foil-wrapped Idaho baked potatoes.

Ennis Tumus, a substitute delegate from the great state of Utah where they know about such things, soon saved the day.

Snatching up a baked potato, he unfolded the aluminum-foil shell, molded it into a skullcap and slapped it on his head. Everyone knows that a tin-foil hat protects

the wearer from space aliens, thought control, government eavesdropping, and zombie attack.

Seeing Ennis' immunity to the zombies, all 50,000 other delegates immediately snatched up potatoes, placed protective foil hats on their heads.

They threw the hot potatoes at the zombies.

Zombies can not eat potatoes.

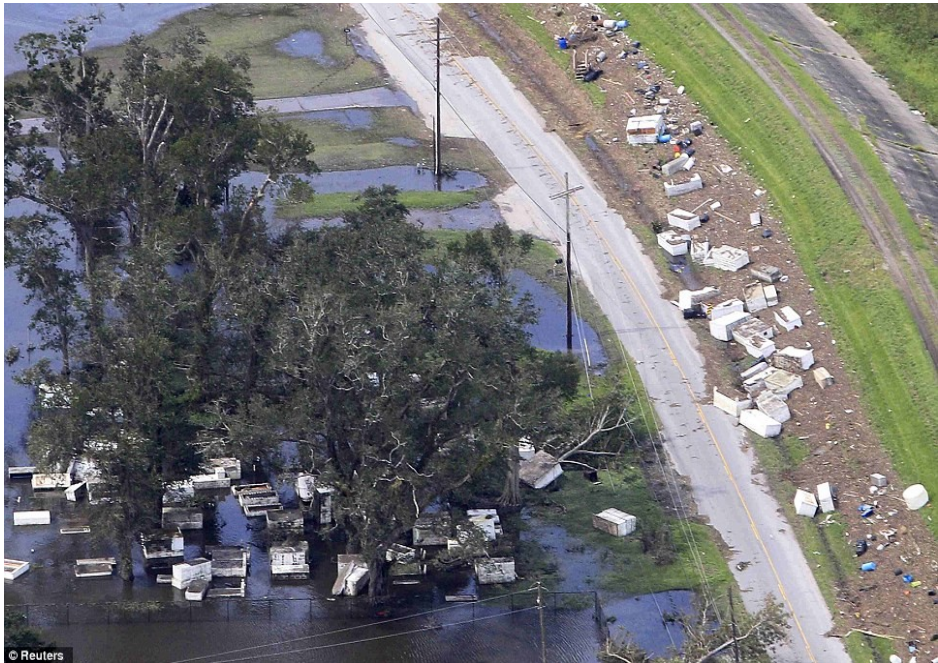
They eat only brains.

The poor zombies starved to death right there in the Convention Hall.

The zombies could not find a single brain in the place.

Sunday, September 2, 2012 And You Thought It Was Fiction

Today's issue of the London *Daily Mail* features the best photos I've seen related to Hurricane Issac. Several photos reveal coffins afloat on flood waters, washed out of their graves by the hurricane.





Please note: not a single zombie appears in these aerial photographs.

I wonder where they are hiding?

In related news, Saturday as political delegates and candidates made their way from Tampa back north where they belong, they stopped at Jacksonville Landing for a rally.

Cheered on by supporters here in Jacksonville, they celebrated the clever way they “foiled” the zombie attack at the convention in Tampa.

Party officials also unveiled their new plan to inspire workers to earn more, to stimulate their own economy, and to eliminate thousands from public welfare programs.

I overheard one party official say, “When we take the White House, there'll be an executive order mandating that only workers who earn over \$550,000 a year will be permitted to wear tinfoil hats”.

Monday, September 3, 2012 Labor Day Thoughts

To labor means to work hard to accomplish something, to expend energy and effort, to strain, to strive. It's associated with productive activity, but not always.

For instance, I can labor under a false delusion, meaning I put a lot of work into something that will never be productive of anything I want. I'll work hard only to wake up someday to realized its all a sham.

A woman labors to give birth. It wracks her body and being to bring forth something inside her. The thing inside struggles to get out. Artists are said to labor in that same way to give birth to their inner vision. Something inside strains to emerge, to get out, to express itself. And, until it does, all else pales to insignificance.

Sometimes the present labor was once something easy. I think of an old car climbing a hill. Once it would zip right over; now it huffs and puffs to chug up the same hill it once climbed with ease.

Of course, that makes me think of me. An old man huffing and puffing to walk to the mailbox or do many things I once did without even thinking. Being worn out makes labor of even existing.

I hear some speak of a labor of love. That what would be a toilsome task for some folks runs easy for others because they love what they are doing. I think of the old man who operated the elevator in Jacksonville's Florida Theater. That job would drive me nuts. Up and down for 45+ years but the newspaper article when he died spoke of how much he loved his work and how loved he was by the people working in that office building. He did a labor of love and his love of his job made it easy.

Jesus once said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light".

As I understand it, Jesus meant that in association with Him, work, strain, toil, labor became bearable and perhaps even something more than bearable—That's what I think in theory. I'm not there (or even close) in experience....

Which brings me to **John Cowart's Great Labor Day Joke:**

Three workers in the Drudge Building, two employees and the office manager, chanced to meet at lunch in the

park across the street. As they started back to the office, one spotted an old lamp atop a trashcan.

He plucked it up and wiped it off on his sleeve.

A genie appeared in a puff of smoke.

"I can grant three wishes. But since there are three of you, that means one wish each. Ask anything you want".

The secretary said, "Bermuda! I want to live in a resort hotel with an ocean view, Lounge poolside with a drink with a little paper umbrella in my hand".

"Granted," the genie said, and the secretary disappeared.

"Hawaii!", said the other employee. "I want to live in a resort hotel with coconut trees wafting in the breeze, a distant view of a volcano, and hula girls clinging to my arm".

"Granted," said the genie and the young man disappeared. "Now, what do you want?" he asked the office manager.

"I want those two back at their desks in the next five minutes. Lunch break is over".

Tuesday, September 4, 2012

Pressure Washed

This summer's rains soaked our back deck; an accumulation of leaves, pollen and drippings from overhanging trees made the deck slick.

Several times recently I slipped and almost fell.

It was dangerous to go into my own backyard.

For about a year now I've investigated ways to make the deck safer. Pressure washing the aged, blackened boards seemed to be the answer. But Ginny and I could not afford to have it done.



Last week I asked my friend Rex if I could borrow his pressure washer thinking that I could do the job myself by working a small section at a time.

I've written about my admiration for Rex before. (See my blog archives for November 28th last year.)

Anyhow, Saturday he took time away from his own holiday weekend to truck in the machine and treat our deck himself:



The machinery compresses water and blasts it out in a powerful stream which scours the wooden planks down to the grain. In this next photo notice how black and grungy the deck boards were:



Now, after the boards have dried, and we replaced patio furniture, Ginny's potted plants, and my naked girl statue our deck looks fresh, clean—and it is a whole lot safer to walk out there.



Many thanks to Rex for his kindness.

I feel mixed about being an object of charity. On one hand, I'm grateful to my friend for his help; on the other

hand, I feel disgusted with myself for being so weak and useless as to need help.

Rex's care for us old folks is welcomed, but I hate being pathetic but I'm just not strong enough to do such jobs as pressure washing as I did years ago when I was younger.

All my life I have valued self-reliance and my own ability to help others.

Scripture says it is more blessed to give than to receive. Giving make me feel good, important, useful; being on the receiving end of kindness makes me feel...

I'm not sure how it makes me feel. Sometimes it's more of a blessing to receive than to give—it's better for my pride anyhow.

This is something I'm having a hard time learning to deal with.

Wednesday, September 5, 2012

Nudged?

Except through the words of Scripture, I don't think God has ever spoken to me... but sometimes I get these urges that make me wonder.

One of these came yesterday.

No divine voice out of a burning bush or a quaking mountain. No glorious revelation. Nothing that sounded like Charlton Heston talking from the bottom of a barrel. No mighty rushing wind. All I felt was a gentle nudge that I ought to do something, to make a phone call.

Way back when, in the '80s I think, I wrote a piece, [How To Tell God From Pizza](#), which worries the question of how God speaks to us today. Can't say my ideas have changed much since then.

When I rose about 3 a.m. Yesterday The thought came to me that I ought to call a friend I have not spoken with in six or eight weeks. I actually reached for the phone to make the call then realized the time.

Nobody on earth would be glad to hear from me at 3:30 in the morning!

I put the phone aside and dabbled at my usual morning activities.

But I kept feeling that mental nudge to call her.

But I have no reason to call her, I kept thinking. I thought of many reasons not to call a single woman at dawn.

Yet the urge persisted.

Finally, mid-morning (human time) I did call.

Earlier in the morning her puppy had died. A puppy which had been her constant companion for more than ten years. The dog's death pained her enormously. It came right on top of a roof leak, a broken washing machine, car troubles, workers painting her kitchen, medical problems—and now the death of her beloved pet.

Of course, I had known nothing about any of this beforehand. I had called responding to a nudge in my own mind from what may, or may not, have been the Spirit of God.

And, here's what's particularly odd: after a lengthy conversation, the lady kept saying how much my call had lifted her spirits, comforted her, and given her hope.

Now anyone who knows me knows I am among the world's most miserable, dishearted, defeated, sour, pessimistic, discouraged men alive. I can't imagine how contact with me could relieve anybody's misery. In fact my best friend Wes, a theologian, says I am never happy unless I am miserable. He attributes this to my having a false view of God based on a pietistic worldview, i.e. a stress on the emotional and personal aspects of religion.

Perhaps..... Screw you, Wes.

Let's have breakfast next week.

Anyhow, was the mental nudging I felt to call the lady and doing so in a time of crisis, was that a nudge from the Spirit of God? Or was it a natural, conventional thing?

Let's face it, were I to pick up the phone book and dial any person anywhere at random, I'm likely to catch them at a time of personal crisis. Man that is born of woman is few of days and full of troubles.

But this call was not at random.

I felt that odd nudge to call a particular person I had not even thought of in weeks and I felt nudged to call her at a

particular time when she proved to be in pain and in need at that very moment.

Makes me wonder.

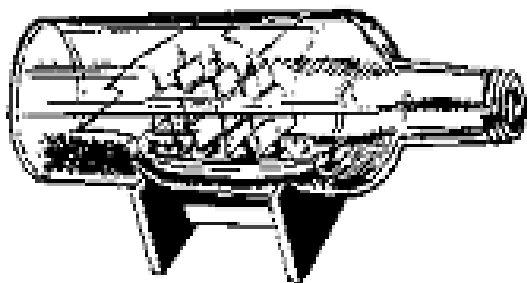
Thursday, September 6, 2012
Our Bottle Party

On January 21, 1989, Ginny and I hosted a bottle party, a party which merited newspaper coverage after a fashion.

Yesterday while looking for something else (which I never did find) I ran across a copy of that old article. It was written by our friend Barbara White, God rest her soul. It's reproduced here under its original headline:

**Whole Should Be Seen As Shipbuilder Shapes
Life**

by
Barbara White



I was invited to a bottle party recently. Before anyone gets upset, let me assure you that this was not the "bring your own bottle of alcohol" kind of party. It was a "watch me put a miniature sailing ship into a bottle" party.

This man I know who builds model ships thought some of his friends might like to see the process involved in getting the finished miniature inside its bottle home.

He was right. Several of us accepted his invitation.

(They offered refreshments, soft drinks or coffee, chips and fresh vegetables and dip, and cheeses and crackers.)

When the big moment came, we crowded around his desk and watched him grasp the tiny ship model in a pair of long, curved tweezers and maneuver it through the neck of the bottle.



Its masts, hinged for the purpose, were tucked temporarily onto the deck. The sails were bunched momentarily into small white billows. Trailing from them were several black threads long enough to extend through the neck of the bottle.

Two of the miniature cannons that were poised for battle along the edge of the ship's deck were dislodged in the process of putting the model through the neck of the bottle. Once the ship was safely at rest in a small sea of Elmer's Glue inside the bottle, my friend fished the tiny black pieces out again and then re-glued them in place, using more long curved instruments and a magnifying glass.

Once they were reapplied, he held the ship down with a tool while he gently pulled on the black threads. The masts slowly rose to standing positions and the sails reopened.

My friend said that after the glue under the ship had dried thoroughly, he would tighten the threads until the sails were taut, then fasten the lines to the bowsprit and clip off the excess.

With the "bottle" part of the evening successfully behind us, we retired to the living room for the "party" part— refreshments and conversation.

But before we left his study, he showed me through the magnifying glass some of the tiny details, such as a coil of "rope" on the deck near the stem and a minuscule brass fitting near the bow.

I talked to my friend a couple of days later. He thanked me for coining — he didn't often have an audience for his successes, he said — and I thanked him for inviting me — I had never seen the operation before.

Then my friend said that not only had he enjoyed doing something well in front of an audience, he also had gained a useful spiritual insight in the process.

He said that he had seen his model as a whole, complete ship for the first time when he was showing it to me through the magnifying glass. Before then, he had only concentrated on each miniature part, lining up the tiny rungs of the ladders that ran from deck to mast top, making sure each part was in proper proportion to the others.

"I guess that's the way we are about what God is doing in our lives," he said "All we see are the individual things — the cutting away here, the glueing down there — and we don't see the whole picture of what He is doing."

This is particularly true when it concerns the tough things that God does in our lives, he said.

This is a significant insight for my friend. He has had more than his share of knocks and bumps and has at times found it hard to generate any enthusiasm about life.

It's hard to see the various difficulties and problems as part of a construction process in which God is both the architect and the engineer, but that's what they must be. If he can remember that God is the One at work in his life, then perhaps he can maintain a more positive outlook.

And not only him, of course. I need that lesson, too. So, I suspect, do others.

First, of course, we have to believe that God does work this way, that He does occasionally put us through a painful process in shaping us in the image He has in His mind. Otherwise we won't be able to trust Him at all.

Then, if we remember that the Lord not only has a picture of the finished product in his mind — although we cannot necessarily see it — and that He is able to complete what He has started, we should be able to bear the processes with more equanimity, more peace.

We might even be able to rejoice and give thanks, as Scripture tells us to do.

Saturday, September 8, 2012 **A Sad Week In My Hometown**

Last week Ginny received an award for her years of public service.

No, she did not get to attend an awards banquet as in previous years when she's won awards; this time somebody just dropped the pin and award letter (which was dated last March) in the mail.

Last week also, the city of Jacksonville laid off 150 city employees in order to meet a budget shortfall. At the same time an additional 150 employees were demoted one pay grade.

Some of the folks laid off, did not know they'd lost their jobs until they read the list of the fired which was published by a local tv station.

When I scanned that list, the highest salary of a fired person I noticed was \$73,000. That's interesting because

two weeks earlier, the mayor promoted his assistant giving her a \$75,000 pay raise.

The day after the City Employee Massacre (which I think saved four million dollars in the city budget) the City Council announced Jacksonville is giving 3.8 million dollars to company to subsidize building a parking garage across from Jacksonville Landing, which I think is another city-subsidized business where bars thrive with spectators drinking after each professional football game—incidentally, Jacksonville's pro team also gets hefty city subsidies.

In fact, last week, again on the day after all the firings, the former owners of the team contributed seven million dollars to a hospital to build a research wing to be named after themselves. The city subsidy business must work well.

Our new 400 million courthouse opened last month at only triple the cost overrun initially projected years ago.

If I recall correctly, that courthouse was part of an initiative called around city hall The Better Jacksonville Plan—locally it was called The Better For Some People Jacksonville Plan.

With the 300 employees fired, and the Sheriff's Office slated to lose another 75 to 100 employees, the city budget focused on useless city features—notably the library system. The reasoning went: Who needs libraries? Let's give Jacksonville a lobotomy.

What we really need is a new city slogan.

During the 1890s, when Jacksonville was a tourist resort, the city Board Of Trade sported the advertising slogan: “Jacksonville: The Gayest of Gay Cities”. (*I will refrain from editorial comment*).

Over the years such official and unofficial slogans abound.

For a while Jacksonville's tag was “The Gateway City” or “Florida's River City”. On October 1, 1968, then-Mayor Hans Tanzler unveiled the slogan:

Jacksonville:

Bold New City Of The South.



**In 1969, actress Lee Meredith helped Jacksonville Mayor Hans Tanzler post a new city limits sign while the helpful, happy gentleman holding the ladder gazed upward...
Er, reading the sign.**

Then, as the city prepared to host the 2005 Super Bowl game, Jacksonville looked for a new promotional slogan. Among those recommended in a newspaper's Letters To The Editor, were: Jacksonville:Redneck Heaven.

Jacksonville: The Renaissance City

Jacksonville: Giant Cockroach Capital of the World

Jacksonville: It's Not That Bad

Jacksonville: Like Mayberry - Only Bigger

I heard a truckdriver suggested; Jacksonville: If The World Ever Needs An Enema, This Is Where They'll Plug It In.

On December 9, 2004, city officials announced that the city's official new slogan is: "Jacksonville: Where Florida Begins".

We native crackers refer to Jacksonville only as "Home".

To be biblical about it, I wonder if this verse applies:

Jacksonville, Jacksonville... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings--and ye would not!

Tuesday, September 11, 2012
Today is Nine/Eleven.

Instead of mowing our grass last Sunday, Richmond, the young man who does such a great job on our yard, went fishing.

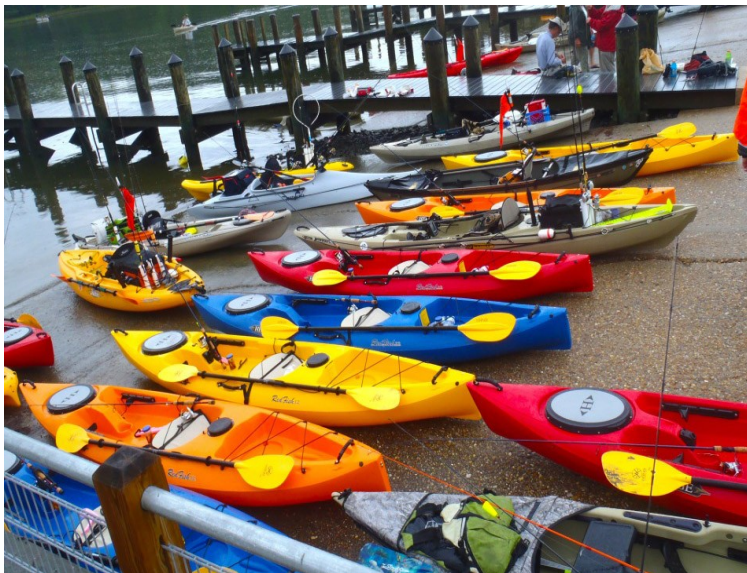


Rich entered the Northeast Florida Kayak Fishing Tournament, an event to benefit the Heroes On The Water organization.



Heroes On The Water's website is at <http://www.heroesonthewater.org/home> - A site worth a visit.

““Heroes on the Water’s mission is to help wounded warriors relax, rehabilitate and reintegrate into society through kayak fishing and the outdoors. ...Heroes on the Water is committed to driving this tremendous opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these well deserving veterans who have given so much for us and our freedom”.



“The Heroes on the Water program lets mother nature do what she has done for hundreds of years: heal. It’s an individual thing, each wounded warrior draws something different from it. But to a person, each one reconnects with a part of himself or herself that they thought was lost.

“Heroes on the Water helps injured service members with their physical and mental recovery using the therapeutic qualities of fishing from kayaks. Every HOW event across the country brings together wounded military personnel for guided kayak fishing excursions. Participants are taught kayaking and kayak fishing basics, and sometimes adaptive kayaks and paddling equipment are required. Warriors hang out with other kayak anglers, connect with colleagues and most of all leave behind stresses and memories for several hours communing with nature.”



As he did our yard yesterday, Rich told me about the fishing trip.

My friend Rich placed 7th in the tournament, not as well as he's done in previous years. But his cousin (I'm sorry I did not catch his name) caught what Rich says was a recording-setting bluefish'

Alas, the cousin, thinking that he'd caught an amberjack, threw the fish back! What a shame.

I'll bet that bluefish was almost as big as the eel I caught last month.

Wednesday, September 12, 2012
Far Away Happy Days Long Ago



I am going through a temporary bad patch.

It began in 1939 but I expect to come out of it any day now.

My Aunt Hazel, God rest her, said, "Johnny, you were born an old man".

Yes, I have a solemn, morose, studious nature. As a child I often heard my parents say, "Johnny, stop reading. Get your nose out of that book and go do something useful".

I kept on reading; I suppose I never have done anything useful.

I loved to read books about archaeology and ancient civilizations.

Once I was reading a book about ancient Peru by an adventurer named Caldwell. My mother saw it and threw a hissyfit about my reading filth. She said she thought I was reading Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*. Soon, naturally ... well, you can guess.

I couldn't see why Mama got so upset. When I read them, within a week, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*

were just books about trashy people doing trashy things. Nothing to get excited about.

Anyhow, as I've wallowed in my temporary bad patch recently, I realized I've been feeling a little more down than usual. I've heard that to offset negative thoughts, you should substitute positive thoughts, substitute happy memories for unhappy ones.

What a crock.

Nevertheless, I thought I should give it a try.

Problem is that when I ranged through what I expected to be happy memories, virtually every one proves flawed.

What's worse than eating an apple and finding a worm in it?

Eating an apple and finding half a worm.

Yes, somewhere in every happy memory I mulled over, I hit some sour note which spoils the whole thing. I feel like a walking, talking Book Of Job.

And, the hell of it is, that nothing bad has ever really happened to me!

I've lead a cushy life. All things considered.

But, on a more positive note, after much reflection and pondering, I did remember one happy stretch in my life when nothing untoward spoiled it—that was a stretch between 1954 and the fall of 1955 when I helped excavate an Indian burial mound.

A developer had slated the mound for destruction in a road-building project but gave us permission to excavate first.

I was youngest member of the archaeological society conducting the excavation—meaning I cleared a lot of jungle undergrowth and shoveled, sifted, and wheelbarrowed a lot of dirt.

I lived in hog heaven!

I felt really alive.

I recorded the dig with my Kodak Brownie box camera—no flash, took only eight photos which had to be developed at the drug store. Here is a shot of our base camp on a hammock in the marsh:



Here is a snapshot I took of the mound, dig in progress.
Notice the water-filled moat around it:



Here is the first of eleven skeletons I uncovered with a whiskbroom and camel hair brush:



All human remains and artifacts we turned in to the archaeology department at Florida State University.

We kept meticulous field notes and contour maps pinpointing in grids each step of the excavation.

Recently, I included my account of the excavation as a chapter in my book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers: Moments In Jacksonville History* (www.bluefishbooks.info)

Here's a photo of me holding a surveyors rod with a bubble level and prism while the expedition leader records elevations of mound features using a transit or theodolite.



Yes, I lived in Hog Heaven over the months we excavated that mound. I dreamed of becoming an archaeologist. I felt that was my niche in life. Yes, those months in 1955 when I was 14 or 15 spring pure into unsullied memory. Uninterrupted happy days.

A couple of months after the dig ended, I seduced, or was seduced by, a female school teacher twice my age. Confused, bittersweet memories there. God rest her.

Events surrounding those circumstances changed my life-direction a bit.

But clearing the jungle, shoveling the soil, brushing sand from skeletons, sifting dirt for beads, uncovering a 600-year-old fire pit, sitting around our campfire of an evening telling tales of long ago.... All that I remember with unsullied joy.

As St Paul said, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Such thoughts help me through my temporary bad patch... I think they call it life.

Care for half a worm?

Thursday, September 13, 2012
Decisions. Decisions.

Yesterday Ginny and I enjoyed a road trip up to St. Marys, Georgia. We drive up there every few weeks for errands and to buy things not available in Jacksonville. For instance, in one antique store I drooled over an 1892 leather bound Latin edition of Caesar's Commentaries On the Gallic Wars.

Beautiful!

Alas, I decided not to buy it because with my vision problems I doubt if I could read it—even if my Latin were not so rusty.

A good decision.

I do not need to spend money on a book I can't read.

On the other hand, I decided to buy three shirts for a special purpose I had in mind, but on the drive home I discovered that the purpose evaporated and I don't need them after all.

A bad decision.

At the Tobacco Planet store, I bought a special tool for cleaning my pipes. The tool I previously owned lasted about 15 years before giving up the ghost. It was a good decision to buy that new one; it should last another 15 years—longer than I'm likely to.

The couple who run Tobacco Planet, sorry I've forgotten their names, told me about their guard dog. Poor thing. Their chihuahua, sorry I've forgotten the puppy's name too (Am I getting Alzheimer's?) the puppy is over ten years old and having health problems even after several trips to the vet for operations. I grieve for the little dog.

And, yes, I do include dogs on my prayer list.

Gin and I enjoyed a long leisure lunch at Lang's Seafood at a table overlooking the St. Mary's River marsh. We watched big white birds catch fiddler crabs and snails in the sawgrass.

Peaceful.



It was a good decision to take this drive and dine at this restaurant because the time together gave us opportunity to talk about other decisions facing us.

For instance, I've asked my daughter Eve, a librarian, to serve as my literary executor when I die and yesterday she agreed. Lot of decisions involved in this. The term Literary Executor sounds pretentious; it just means she gets the chore of straightening out all the mess of papers I've accumulated. Poor Eve.

Carol, our sister-in-law, has called letting us know Ginny's mother is seriously ill. We've been talking over the decision of whether or not to try a trip to Maryland for the funeral. Our son Donald has offered to give us money for that trip if we decide to go. But, even the 50-mile drive to St. Marys depleted us so that we don;t think we can face a longer trip. We've almost decided not to go, but that decision still hangs over us.

Gin's mother is on our prayer list just ahead of the Chihuahua.

Yesterday afternoon I talked at length with a lady from the hospital who encourages us to sign up for a program

which would involve making three more doctors' appointments.

We balk!

Since June, Ginny has fielded scores and scores of phone calls with health insurance companies as we switched from one provider to another on her retirement.

Since Christmas between the two of us we have had 19 doctor's appointments besides lab work and pharmacy visits.

It's enough to make you sick!

We are doctored out!

We never want to see another doctor again! Ever! No. No. No!

But, is that a wise decision. I mean should we decide such an issue based on aversion and past experiences?

To me, going in for a medical evaluation when I'm not sick at the moment is like driving a perfectly good car that's giving you no trouble to the garage and telling the mechanic, "Find something wrong with it".

He's sure to.

The Bible says the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

That must be comforting to good men, but what about guys like me?

We can not foresee the future. We do not know what we will need or when we may need it. We can't lean on our own understanding because we don't understand what is going on in life.

The Bible speaks of the Valley Of Decision. I think that's kinda like the Valley Of The Shadow Of Death or the Slough Of Despond or maybe the circus Tilt-A-Whirl ride.

Decisions weary me.

I just want to sit quite and watch big white birds eat fiddlers.

Saturday, September 15, 2012

People Too:

7 To 7 With Cereus, Queen Of The Night

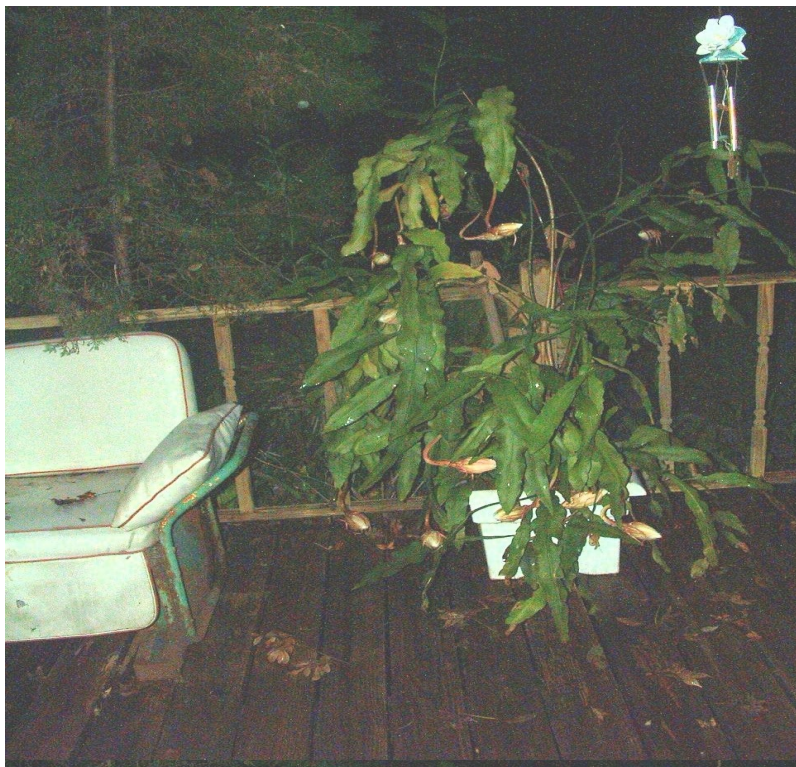
Last night Ginny's Queen Of The Night opened. Ginny nurtured this nightblooming Cereus plant for 40 years, growing it from a cutting my mother gave her.

The buds turn, open, flourish in glory, perfume the air for acres around, then fade in a single night.

Here are photos of the plant and one of its 15 flowers at 7 p.m.:



I called the family to come watch the buds open—they unfold so quickly you can see the movement. Here is a the plant at 8 p.m.:



Donald, Helen and Mugan arrived about 9 and the plant continued to flower:





By 10 p.m. We were eating lemon marange pie, talking and taking photos. The flowers did not impress Helen's poor, starving dog. You can't eat flowers:







As 11 p.m. Approached, the flowers opened enough to reveal their cathedral-like interior:



By midnight, the kids had thought of backlighting flowers to capture their beauty on film:



Alas, such beauty and glory fades; the cereus flowers die when sunlight touches them. Their passing makes me sad. Earthly glory fades. The only things that will last forever are people. I snapped these next two photos about 7 a.m.





I can't help thinking of what St. Peter said in his first letter:

"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

You, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.... For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Sunday, September 16, 2012
An Amateur Funeral

In recent years anytime when you saw my friend W., you saw a glass in his hand. And the liquor influenced his thoughts, behavior, and health.

I have not mentioned this before, but several months ago, while my computer was down for a long stretch, my friend W. died and his wife asked me to conduct a memorial service over his ashes.

Although I am neither a preacher nor the pastor of any church, I agreed to do it.

Yesterday I happened across my notes from that day and decided to record my remarks here because they may bring some comfort to some folks in a similar confusing situation.

I started explaining to the 20 or 30 people present, how I wanted to proceed: First I would make some general remarks finishing with my own memories of W. Then we'd go around the room so that anyone who wished to speak could have a turn if they want to. If you want to pass, just say so and we'll move on to the next person. Three people will read short Bible passages. Then, I will give a brief devotional thought and we'll conclude with the Lord's Prayer and move to a feast next door. OK?

Only three people in the Bible are called righteous. But all three have something else in common.

The Bible says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous".

Yes Jesus was called the Righteous, but that's not all He was called.

People of His day said, "Behold, a man gluttonous, a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners".

The word *winebibber* is an old-time word meaning a drunk.

That's interesting.

Father Noah is also called righteous in Scripture. He is called "A Preacher of righteousness".

We all know about Noah. Warned by God that the flood was coming he built an ark and God gathered animals two

by two to fill it. We've known that tale since we were little kids. But do you remember what Noah did when the ark grounded?

“Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken in his tent...” (Gen. 9:20).

Yes, Noah, preacher of righteousness, got drunk and his drinking caused untold misery to his family.

In Noah we see a man saved by God, but overwhelmed by life.

Abraham's nephew Lot is also called righteous in the Bible. He's named as righteous twice. St. Peter calls him “a righteous man” and even refers to him as “a righteous soul”.

When God planed to destroy the cities of the plain, He sent angels to rescue Lot and his family. Lot's wife cried so much at leaving her home that she turned to salt. Lot and his daughters escaped to a town called Zoar, then then hid in a cave in the mountain.

Lot had a bottle in that cave; he got drunk in that cave. And his drunkenness caused untold misery in his family and for generations to come.

Again we see a man saved and loved and rescued by God, but overwhelmed by life circumstances and turning to drink.

That's something to think about.

That sort of thing is the reason Scripture tells us to not judge other people.

We do not know what's in another person's heart.

Now let me tell you a few things about W., my friend for about 17 years:

I then told how he was first to greet me on moving into the neighborhood; how he taught me much about home repairs; how one midnight he rescued my daughter from a sticky situation; how he led neighborhood beautification projects; and how his influence provided food for hundreds, if not thousands, of homeless people in a local shelter.

Then, everyone in the room shared in turn their own memories of W.

His wife read I Corinthians 13, the love Chapter; his sister-in-law read Psalm 23; and Ginny read from I John 4.

I took my devotional text from that last reading, from what is probably the easiest of all Bible verses to remember::.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

Why?

Because we needed it.

Nothing less would do.

We screw up our world, our nation, our cities, our families, our own lives so bad we need a Savior. Can't do without Him.

We fall short of the glory God has in store for us. We twist good. We enjoy evil, yes we get a kick out of it. There is none righteous among us, no not one. There is not a teddy bear in the lot of us.

We have not done those things we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done ,and there is no health in us.

We have screwed up our lives so bad it took an act of God, nothing less would do, to even begin to set us straight.

So, the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

He did not send preachers or prophets or self-help gurus, or even angels. No, The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

The Son Himself.

Accept no substitute.

C.S. Lewis draws a picture of Christ like a pearl diver standing on the gunwale of a boat in Heaven. He dives in an arc through clean air and sparkling surface water. Down he goes deeper and deeper. Light fades. Cold sets

in. All turns black. He reaches the very bottom—that's what we call Christmas.

He stretches down, arm-pit deep into the muck and slime and nasty glop at the bottom of the universe—that's where we live. He grasps the oyster—that's what we call His Crucifixion.

And He starts back up to where He came from—that's His Resurrection, what we call Easter.

Yes, the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of America.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of Florida.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of Jacksonville.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of us in this room.

The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of my heart and your heart, my mind and your mind, my life and your life.

The Father sent the Son...

That puts the ball in our court.

What should we do about that?

And now, as Christ our Savior has taught us, we can boldly say, Our Father...

Tuesday, September 18, 2012

The Cowarts and The Muslim World

At our usual breakfast and gab session yesterday, only members of my family happened to be present. That, of course, resulted in outrageous goodwill, teasing, and laughter at family insider jokes and memories.

But Ginny and I and the three of our grown children who were here also discussed serious family matters concerning birth, life, unemployment, death, birthdays, health, and football.

Parts of our private talk generated tears, hugs, and offers of help.

We also discussed newspaper reports.

Recently news reports tell of more and more violent attacks by Muslim extremists on Americans, Christians, Hindus, and other Mohammedans.

Our family discussed how we ourselves can show the love of Christ to Muslims.

Ginny and I do not know any Muslims at the moment; haven't known any for years since we lived in Washington, D.C. Among us, Johnny has the most military experience. Donald works daily in tandem with several Muslims. And Patricia is the only one of us who has ever attended worship at a Mosque.

We feel that while a military response against a foreign government may be a valid option on a national level, as individual Christians we are to forgive even those people who try to kill us.

Johnny commented, "I'm remembering something that happened long ago. When I was young and living with you folks here in FL at one point we talked about something similar. You said "If a man is coming to the house to hurt or kill my family it is my Christian duty to kill him."

"Ok, totally normal human reaction so far.

"But then you said "And if that man has already been in the house and killed my family it is my Christian duty for forgive him." That is a totally normal Christian reaction to my mind. Do you remember that Dad?

"Christ changes those who follow him. He changes our total outlook on the world in every aspect of life. We see things differently from the world. And we come to know we are in the world but not of the world

"These and so many other reasons are why you are beloved of all of your children and so many other folks".

In our discussion yesterday we agreed that we ought not to be surprised that there are folks in the world who hate us enough to try to exterminate us, and that they do terrible things in the name of God.

Jesus foretold that very thing.

He said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

“And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them”.

Our family discussion touched on the example of Christ for us in the violent behavior of religious extremists around Him. St. Peter mentions that in his second letter:

“This is thankworthy,” Peter said, “If a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

“For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps:

“Christ, Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed”.

Jesus did not hit back.

Why should we?

The old law limited retaliation. You know, eye for an eye. If someone punched you in the eye, you could legally punch him back in the eye—but that's all, in spite of your natural impulse to knock his whole head off.

Jesus said we are to be different:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?”

So, where does that leave our family in relation to the Muslim world?

We concluded that a patriotic impulse of Convert 'em or Kill 'em is a reaction of the natural man when he is injured; it should not be ours.

Johnny pointed out that sometimes love is best expressed by doing nothing. Donald said the Mohammedan guys he works with have the same concerns he does about raising a family in a depressed economy, job outsourcing overseas, problems a kid is having in school, the price of gas, will the company have lay-offs, and why doesn't this damn computer server do what its supposed to! Religion may be different but human concerns remain the same.

Patricia noted that only the unusual makes the news; a good guy loving his wife, raising his kids, going to work, repairing his car, does not make the news. It's the extremist, the criminal, the violent, the thieves, the cheaters, the un-normal who appear in headlines. Good people doing good things are normal; evil people doing evil things are odd enough to make the 6 o'clock news.

As Christian Cowarts our family can best reflect the love of God to the Muslim world by praying for them and doing them good as they cross our paths in daily life.

But, the rub comes in when we realize that we can not draw another person closer to Christ than we are. If my own daily life does not demonstrate the presence of the living God, no amount of argument, reasoning, or even force will attract people to Christ.

St Paul cited a Proverb of King Solomon's when He refined that eye-for-an-eye thing in his letter to the Romans:

"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good".

Ginny and I had such a good time talking with our kids. I'm so pleased with them. Proud to be their dad—even though the lot of them lack a sense of humor. To think, instead of laughing at my jokes, they groan.

All I did was tell them how I phoned this suicide hotline that had been outsourced overseas to Talibanvillestan. I said, "I'm depressed and feeling suicidal".

The phone center guy got all excited and said, "O sir, are you a pilot? Can you drive a truck?"

Wednesday, September 19, 2012 **It's Great To Be Wealthy.**

Wow, it's great to be filthy rich!

Richer than old Ebenezer.

Yesterday the government informed us that Ginny and I do not qualify for Food Stamps.

The Food Stamp counsellor said we are ineligible because we are too well off. We have too much money. Too many assets. Not enough debt.

Why, combined, Ginny and I rake in close to \$1,400 a month.

Yes, our income and assets exceed the government's guidelines for poverty.

That's great to know.

God pity the poor bastards who really are poor.

But, better them than us!

Tonight, Ginny and I plan to celebrate the good news of our prosperity with a lavish feast.

She is serving fillet of Ramin. And to fancy up the dish, she will use the mushroom flavor packet.

Worry. Worry. Worry—where should we keep all that money we're supposed to have?





But where to keep my wealth is not all I have to worry about. The apostle James saw trouble ahead for rich guys like me.

James wrote: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you"

Well, that's a downer.

But the Apostle does not stop there. He tells us rich guys, "Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.

"Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

"Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you"

Then James stops addressing us wealthy men and speaks to the frustrated poor:

"Be patient, brethren," he says, "Unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.



"Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh".

Sounds worse than a Zombie Apocalypse for us wealthy guys.

Maybe I should put all our money in a 401K, or Apple stock, or maybe Facebook. It ought to be safe there. Something for a rainy day.

Cankered, indeed!

The government says I'm rich.

So I must be.

Thursday, September 20, 2012 **I know a bird...**

Though I'm no ornithologist, I know a bird when I see one.

Edgar Allan Poe did too.

He recorded his experience in a poem:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door.

Only this, and nothing more.

Of course the tapping, gently rapping at his chamber door was a bird, nothing but a raven.

Late last night, I heard a gentle rapping, not at my chamber door, but at the back kitchen window where Ginny's bird feeder hangs.

Weren't no raven. I know a bird when I see one.

Last week an enormous great-horned owl snagged a lizard off our deck in broad daylight. He carried his prize to a nearby oak branch and munched in contentment

while bluejays squawked around harassing him. The two-foot tall owl ignored them.

Since he stood in plain sight, Ginny and I viewed his beautiful markings through our binoculars. Alas, our camera was inside the house so we did not snap a photo.

However, I did search on-line for bird pictures. I know a bird when I see one.

Don't know what this thing is but I'm pretty sure it is not a bird:



Well, how about this next one?



No, that's not a bird either. That's a bird dog. There's a difference.

When, in the wee small hours of the night, I heard that gentle rapping at the kitchen window's bird feeder,, I investigated with my flash camera...

No, that's neither a raven nor any other kind of bird:



The rat's tail caused the rapping, tapping sound I heard as it slapped the window glass.

Enjoy the birdseed now God's little creature; rap and tap all you want tonight because I have plans for you tomorrow.

Open wide ye gates of Mickey's Magic Kingdom, I plan to send you another customer.



Saturday, September 22, 2012
Autumn First

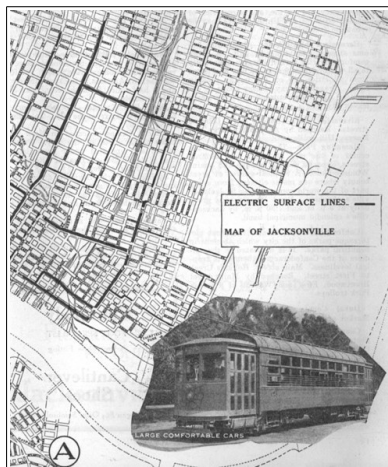
Today marks the first day of Autumn on our calendar.

The change in the seasons becomes obvious at our house as Ginny's bromeliads break into bloom:



More than a hundred of the bright red flowers surround our house.

(By the way, the border logs in the lower right corner of the photo are cross-ties that once supported Jacksonville's trolley car tracks back in 1937).



Yesterday Ginny began to decorate our home to note the change of seasons; she placed two scarecrows out by the mail box:



And, as she put away groceries, she draped a garland of Autumn leaves in the archway between our living and dining rooms:

As Summer fades and Harvest time approaches, I'm reminded of God's promise to Noah after He set His rainbow in the sky; the Lord told Noah:

While the earth remaineth,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night
Shall Not Cease.

Sunday, September 23, 2012
It's Not Fair!

The tiny girl, she could not have been more than three, tightened her fists. Her face turned red. She stomped her foot and shouted, "It's not fair"!

I don't know what provoked her moral outrage. At the store as I waited for Ginny to finish shopping, I sat resting in a chair when the child appeared beside me. She expressed her indignation, but her family--two adults, a baby in arms and an older brother—ignored her protest at some injustice and continued down the aisle.

The offended child followed after them still insisting, "It's not fair".

I wondered, *How would such a tiny child come up with the idea of what's fair and what isn't?*

Suppose she got it from her father? Maybe she heard him say the referee was not fair in calling a fumble; or maybe she saw Dad parade on a picket line waving a sign proclaiming Unfair To Labor.

Maybe she heard her mother protest, "You can't go bowling tonight and leave me here alone in the house with these kids again; it's just not fair".

Perhaps the idea of *fair* comes inbred into human character.

We sure don't get the concept of fair from observing the natural world where the rule is that the one with the sharpest teeth and longest claws gets the last morsel on the bone.

When I got home from the store—Thank God---I looked up the word *fair* to find its meaning:

FAIR: Without cheating or trying to take unjust advantage; just, equitable, honest, square, straight; free from bias dishonesty or injustice; legitimately done; right and proper under the rules; scrupulous, taking great care to do what is honest or morally right—all of that is contained in the word *fair*.

Where would a three-year-old come up with that concept?

I suspect we are born with a sense of what's fair.

On some level there is an innate knowing of what's right and what's wrong.

We know that some things ought to be, but are not.

And somethings ought not to be, but are.

Could this sense of what is proper or improper come from mankind's social mores? Rules of decent behavior to protect us from bullies?

Apparently not.

When I say, "But I was in line first", the bully says, "But I have a plane to catch at three o'clock" and shoves ahead in line anyhow.

Notice, he does not deny my claim as to what is right, he acknowledges that; but he claims an extenuating circumstance giving a higher priority to what he wants.

He is doing wrong, but for a good reason.

I do the same thing.

Nations do the same thing. Even heathen nations will sign a treaty vowing to keep the peace, and when they break it, they do not say, "So what, we've got a bigger army". No, they will claim the treaty was right at the time but circumstances have changed. They justify doing wrong by appealing to some higher right.

That concept of what is fair seems strongly ingrained into people.

It seems to come from some higher source.

There appears to be some sense of Right that everyone knows and acknowledges although we do not obey it.

And this sense of right cuts across the grain of human nature.

For instance, by inclination, I am a tender-hearted guy. Like many people, I cheer for the underdog. Nothing wrong with that, is there?

Yes, there is.

On the other hand, some people jump on the bandwagon and cheer for the sure-winner. Them what's gots, gets! Nothing succeeds like success. Nothing wrong with that, is there?

Yes, there is.

When God gave Moses the law on the smoking mountain, He prohibited favoring either the underdogs or the winners in this world.

Exodus 23 says, "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause....Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit".

Leviticus 19 repeats that idea saying, "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly".

Neither partiality to the poor nor favoritism to the rich.

All are to be treated equally because there is a Law above them both.

A law of fairness. Of right and wrong. Of the proper and the improper.

A law that is square, straight, and honest.

A law which sets the standard for what is fair or unfair, what is just or unjust, of what is wrong and what is right. A law of holiness.

And where there is a law, it came from somewhere.

A law means there has to be a Law-Giver to whom fairness means a great deal.

Even a three-year-old child knows that.

Tuesday, September 25, 2012

Food Stamps Of The Apocalypse

Last night Ginny and I burst out laughing during our prayers.

After supper. we usually read a brief passage from the Bible and a prayer. Our reading was about how Christ called Matthew from his government job, and how publicans and sinners gathered at the tax collector's home to meet Jesus.

We've had some contact with government workers recently as we applied for Food Stamps. Our first application was denied on the grounds that we are not poor enough to merit aid. Our second application was

approved, and, if I understood the counselor aright, we qualify for \$17 a month in Food Stamps plus some medical assistance which may come in three or four months.

Both counselors I spoke with showed great interest in the income Ginny and I earned during the year 1996. Somehow, the aid we qualify for today is related to what we earned back then as well as our present income.

Say what?

Back in 1996 when we both worked full time (she was a secretary; I worked as a janitor) , we did earn enough to support ourselves.

Now, we don't.

Far be it from me to understand the ways of God or government.

I'm thankful for the \$17 a month we should get—hey, if you see \$17 laying on the sidewalk you'd pick it up and put it in your pocket.

Anyhow, all this filling out applications to justify our existence, all the maneuvering, questioning, waiting, enduring stress, and belly-crawling to qualify as recipients of charity has left Ginny and me depleted, discouraged, and exhausted.

So, the words of the prayer we chanced to read last night choked us with laughter.

“Almighty God, grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches and to follow thy Son Jesus...”

We hooted over our covetous desire for more Food Stamps!

That struck us as so funny!

Hey, sin is where you find it.

When we stopped laughing, we talked about how we need to readjust our life to bring our resources into line with our fixed expenses. We remembered what John the Baptist told the soldiers, “Be content with your pay”.

If Ginny and I are indeed soldiers of the Cross, no surprise that we're called upon to live on combat rations while in the field. This world is enemy occupied territory.

God pity the poor bastards who are poor enough to qualify for much more in the way of Food Stamp aid. For us, it means foregoing ice cream or cookies from now on; for them, it means subsistence.

Nevertheless, I wonder what they were doing in 1996?

On a different note (or maybe the same one): Wes treated me to breakfast Monday. Then, he, Johnny, Donald, Patricia, Ginny and I sat in our living room for our regular bull session afterwards.

Among many other things in our three-hour conversation, we talked about mankind's fascination with, and even desire for, some kind of disaster to end the world.

I can't remember exactly who said what, but Donald, expert geek, explained the Y-2-K situation of a few years ago. Patricia told us about how the Mayan calendar ends on December 21st this year. Johnny told us about pop-culture's fascination with a Zombie Apocalypse—which Wes had not even heard of. I pontificated on historic disasters which folks thought meant the end of the world.

I reminded them of how some of our fellow Christians expected Christ to return and the world to end on May 21st last year. My diary entry, "[Thin Jesus/Fat Jesus](#)" in my blog archives tells about how Ginny and I spent that day.

Donald pointed out the boxoffice appeal of disaster movies--*Earthquake*, *Independence Day*, *War Of The Worlds*, *Towering Inferno*.

I think it was Patricia who said that it's almost as though people, deep down, want the world to end, for Jesus to return, or a comet to strike the earth, or a plague like in Stephen King's novel *The Stand*.

I observed that we long for relief from our day to day troubles and to start over on a fresh page. If a comet strikes the earth, then I don't need to pay the mortgage and the dirty dishes can soak in the sink. I get out from under debts, responsibilities, and dull routine. I begin a life of adventure.

We look for a disastrous end to the humdrum existence of daily life as a gateway to a new world with new rules—to a sort of Heaven.

Wes pointed out that we do not long for God; we rebel against Him. We want nothing to do with Him. But we do want a Heaven arising from the ashes. He said that this *Star Wars* pop-culture thinking about Mayan calendars or a zombie apocalypse where survivors –we all feel sure we will survive—make a new Heaven...Wes says all this stuff is a form of idolatry.

I disagreed saying that we do yearn for God as the hart pants after the waterbrooks but we don't identify what it is we want with such a deep hearthunger.

Patricia questioned whether the present-day thinking about an end to this world is a new idea.

I said that when Nero burned Rome, according to Dr. Schronefield, some Christians thought the great fire marked the end of the world and the return of Christ. They danced singing in the streets while the city burned. Pagans who said, *Hey, that's my tv burning in there*, thought the Christians to be heartless monsters. They threw our people to the lions thinking we deserved it.

Some medieval folks rejoiced at the Black Death thinking that meant the end of the world, the return of Christ, a new Heaven, and end to having to harvest the nobleman's fields, an end to serfdom.

No such luck.

Yesterday's talk in our living room concluded that disasters can give false hope.

Serious talk for serious people—people who are so serious they have no sense of humor when I tell them one of my jokes.

They didn't laugh, only groaned...

See there was this butcher shop that advertised Rabbit Sausage.

The government inspector came around and told the butcher, "Regulations only allow for 50% horsemeat in sausage. Do you comply using only 50 % horsement"?

"Sure," said the butcher. "When we grind meat for our famous rabbit sausage, we grind 50%-- one horse to one rabbit".

Wednesday, September 26, 2012
Old And Full Of Days; Young And Full Of....

I'll name her Undine after the sad water nymph of Greek mythology; I'll call her daughter, Eurydice; and I'll call her grandson.... Well, I don't want to use words like that.

I'm being judgmental.

Maybe he's just poor, not sorry.

Undine phoned me yesterday. She is ancient and full of days. Feeble. Frail. Over ninety. We've been casually acquainted for many years, but I had not spoken with her for ages. I'm surprised she could remember my phone number.

She is old.

She is wealthy.

She is sorrow filled.

She is grief-stricken.

She called me crying her heart out.

She remembered me from years ago and she couldn't think of anybody else to call. As we spoke, the old lady's voice broke so I could hardly understand her.

Her daughter, Euridice, a woman in her 40s, died unexpectedly in a recent traffic accident. Undine had lived with Euridice; now she had to go live with another daughter.

Euridice had a son, a young man in his 20s. He's married and has a couple of kids of his own. He is unemployed—Undine says by choice. Drinking or drugs may be involved.

Anyhow. Euridice died suddenly and Undine began paying burial expenses--\$6,500 for the funeral; \$600 to open the grave; \$1,200 for a coffin. And, Saturday, Euridice's son drove her to the stonemason's where she paid \$2,500 for his mother's headstone.

Undine asked him to stop at her bank so she could withdraw a hundred dollars for her purse, and she asked him to stop for lunch at a favorite restaurant. He asked her for a hundred dollars for gas money.

She refused, but gave him \$20 to pay for their lunch. But, on leaving the restaurant, he demanded that she pay for the lunch.

She paid.

Then, he insisted they drive by the electric company office so that she'd write a check the electric bill at his mother's house so he and his wife would have lights and air conditioning while they cleared out his mother's stuff.

Last month Undine had moved in with another grown daughter's family. She feels lost in an unfamiliar place.

Yesterday she phoned me for no other reason than to cry on my shoulder. Grief upon grief. Sorrow upon sorrow.

I said platitudes.

Doubt if they helped.

Thursday, September 27, 2012
A Day, Strangely Happy,
In The congregation Of Thy Poor

I wonder if a convention of Lotto winners would act so convivial.

Yesterday I spent many hours standing in long lines with poor people. (Thank God for my wheeled walker!) I'd dreaded the prospect, but found myself enjoying the experience greatly.

I'd mentioned the other day that the Food Stamp counselors said that on our appeal, Ginny and I had earned \$17 a month in aid; well, they changed their minds and notified us yesterday that we deserve nothing. As best we can figure, we earn \$30 above the Federal Poverty Level. Maybe I should have worked harder when I was younger.

Anyhow, with that settled, we are determining our next move.

Yes, we know that our children stand ready to willingly help when we ask, but we want to be stable enough ourselves to know what to ask for before we ask. Right now things are too transitional for us to know where we stand.

This caught us by surprise because we'd figured we had more resources than it turned out we have on tap. The

timing of a large insurance payment this month skewed our plans out of whack.

So, while Ginny prepared yet another Excel Spreadsheet to plot budget cuts for us in greater detail, I visited two local food pantries to get groceries to tide us over till our next check arrives. By then, we'll be more aware of our status.

I expected the experience to be unpleasant.

It wasn't.

Quite the opposite in fact.

Long lines of poor people waited hours in the blazing sun to get to the window for a bag of groceries.

Under Florida law, when items on a grocery store shelf remain unsold past their Sell-By date, the supermarket can donate the items to a food pantry at a church or some ministry to be distributed among the poor. And if you get sick eating the out of date food, you can't sue the merchant. That law provides food for the poor and provides legal protection for the merchants—who also get a tax write-off for their spoiled goods.

What a happy crew the poor in line proved to be. I can't remember being in such a convivial group before. They treated each other with dignity, courtesy and good will.

The only potentially unpleasant note sounded when a harried church worker fussed at me, but she ended up laughing. I'd asked some stupid question about how to proceed and she snapped, "You ought to know that."

"Maybe so, but you see, I've never been old before," I said.

That broke the tension.

Of course, this day had to fall on one of my bad days for shakes and when they noticed me in the line having trouble filling out paperwork, one young woman held the clipboard while another filled out the forms for me. They both were in the line to ask help for their own families but they made sure I had what I needed to apply.

That spirit proved typical.

As we stood in that line for hours, people gave each other job tips. Mothers entrusted tiny children to the care

of complete strangers while they broke line to visit a bathroom. Young men from the line carried bags for elderly and enfeebled. Guys told jokes. People shared umbrella shade.

Poor folks held places for a couple of Hispanic men who stepped out of line to jump-start an old lady's car in the parking lot. The men wore teeshirts promoting Guatemala and the old white woman whose car wouldn't start was a stranger to them.

When a mission worker announced only a few bags of groceries remained before they gave out, people who had stood in that line for hours willingly gave place to a lady breathing oxygen from a tank so she would not miss out on the distribution.

Well, I did miss out.

Others in the line told me of another mission with food in stock.

Bunch of us went there and signed in.

"Who 'dis John Cowart done signed here?" a lady yelled.

"I'm John Cowart," I said.

"You must be my Uncle 'cause I's a Cowart too". She ran and hugged me announcing to the crowd of poor folks, "He be my Uncle. We's Cowarts".

I said, "Sure we are. Look at us stand side by side. You can see the family resemblance".

The crowd of poor people hooted—of course that other Cowart was as black as the bowl of my pipe.

We joked about Sam Cowart, a famous football player who signed contracts for millions—he was not in the line—and we discovered we are not related to him.

"He the rich Cowart," the lady said, "We's the poor Cowarts. I be's from Georgia".

"Is there anybody in Jacksonville who isn't?" I said.

The crowd of poor people laughed and teased and joked with us.

Three guys who from their dress and tattoos I'd have identified as gang members held the door open for people and helped old folks carry stuff to their cars. All treated all

with such courtesy. I felt honored to be accepted in their company.

Another black guy called my name—back in the '90s he and I had both worked as janitors and he remembered me from those days. We had fun talking about his grandkids and about people we had known back then.

Some guys told jokes about how a neighbor hid his beer in a garden hose so his wife would not know he drank while washing the car. That started a round of “my funny neighbor” stories as the line inched forward.

Again and again, I overheard poor people tell each other tips about where to get help and how to stretch cooking recipes, and what company may be hiring.

“Praise Jesus” was a cry I often heard in that line.

There's a phrase in the Prayer Book which asks the Lord to “Bless the congregation of Thy poor”.

I may be beginning to grasp what that means.

Maybe Jesus knew what He was talking about when in Luke's Gospel He said, “Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God”.

(And yes, Kids, we are doing fine at the moment as we continue to investigate our options. I'll let you know when we've stabilized and need help—love, Dad).

Friday, September 28, 2012

Is a Hippopotamus In My Future?

The first thing I noticed were the Hungry Hippos.

Yesterday as Ginny and I continued to investigate our options in retirement, we visited a Senior Center—that's sort of a soup kitchen for old people.

We enjoy eating out and as we consider budget cuts, this venue might be just the thing for us.

The first thing I noticed as we walked into the cafeteria were a coven of old ladies around a table engaged in slapping hippopotamus es or i or ae—whatever the plural is.

Matt at churchofnopeople.com said, “Promising several minutes of fun, this classic 1978 game challenged

players to summon all of their strategy and wits to...bang on the game board faster than the other players”.



The old people appeared deadly serious in their approach to this activity as though life depended on winning the hippo game. Activity is what the senior center is all about. Busy Till You Croak ought to be the motto.

You can dance, exercise, get beauty treatments, study Bible, weave baskets, play BINGO-- whatever as long as you stay active.

We came for the free lunch.

The lunch was healthy and wholesome, but the noise level in the cafeteria deafened us.

A crazy lady shared our lunch table; I'm guessing bipolar. As she told me how frustrated she felt being shut up in an apartment with no one to talk to, how the pressure built driving her up the walls, how she needed any human contact—the poor thing alternated rapidly between tears and loud laughter.

Perhaps that is why the Lord forced us to be in that place at that time.

The Psalmist said of God's people, “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing to shew that the LORD is upright:”

Maybe that's why Ginny and I were in that place not for activities and a free lunch but to show that the Lord is upright.

That's a factor in how we consider our options and where to go from here.

As an experienced inmate lead us on a tour of the facility, we noticed an arrow sign: POOL. No. It is not a place to swim. We found a bunch of guys racking up balls and sinking them in pockets.

But what makes this pool hall unique is that it also serves as the center's library reading room!

Books line the shelves around the green pool table. Readers have to duck under resentful pool shooters ranging sharp wooden sticks. Ginny and I perused the titles while dodging swinging pool cues. If we join this center, I have some better titles to donate.

Not being much of a pool player myself, I wonder if rousing intense games of Hungry Hungry Hippos lie in my future?

Saturday, September 29, 2012

Eve To The Rescue!

We've talked about it off and on for months and now my daughter, Eve, an employed librarian, (yes there are a few left in Jacksonville after the 300-person layoff) has agreed to work as my literary executor.

Among her first tasks was to photograph a bookcover shot for next year's edition of my diary in my *Dirty Old Man Goes Bad* series (www.bluefishbooks.info).

I have kept an almost daily diary since I was a Boy Scout. The earlier ones disappeared through divorce, moves, and a house fire, but Eve gets to sort hand-written ones going back into the late 1960s. Poor Eve!

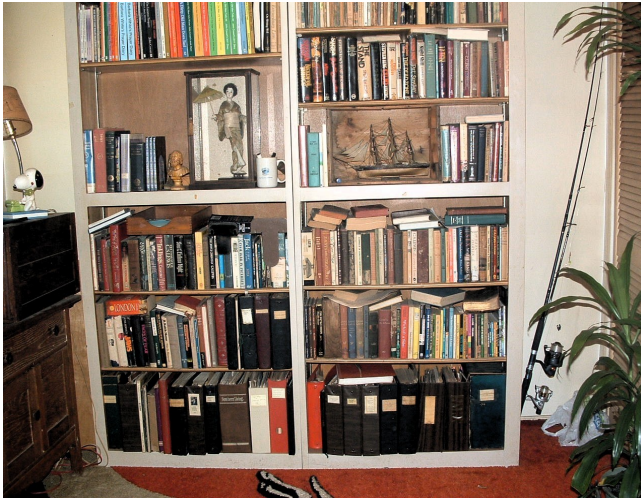
Because this is the year I ended up needing a wheeled walker to get around my working title for that book is *Dirty Old Man On Wheels*. Here is the cover photo she made yesterday:



Eve spent yesterday afternoon with me going over what her volunteer job as literary executor involves. For instance, she gets to straighten out and dispose of my collection of Florida history materials which I have accumulated over 35 years. Here's a photo of Eve at the closet with that collection stacked neatly behind her:



She also gets to transcribe my handwritten diaries, calendars, truck logs from the 1960s & '70s, tax records and journals—all stored in a second closet—plus all these thick volumes on the bottom two shelves of the bookcases:



Not only that, but Eve gets to see to the sales and handling of my 30+ published books, pictured on the shelf above the dollcase:



I gave Eve access to my computer accounts and showed her how to deal with various problems therein. And I showed her the boxes, in a third closet, of background research materials related to my novels.

And, as an added bonus, she gets to deal with all the books stored in boxes underneath my bed.

In the past Eve helped me transcribe and publish the shopping bags of such stuff Barbara White, God rest her,

left when she named me as her own literary executor. Ghastly amounts of work! So Eve has a bit of experience in working with a writer's pack-rat mentality—I'm sure to use this in a book someday...

Yes, as King Solomon said, "Of the making of many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh".

I'm thankful that Eve intends to undertake this job for me and I've given her total authority to handle my books and papers as she sees best. Eve relieves me of an enormous burden, one I've worried over for a long time. Her shouldering all this work will enable me to focus on the fun parts of writing. I'm looking forward to that!

Now, for her next job as my Literary Executor—

Eve Dear, see if you can find where I put my copy of Pleasant Gold's Duval history pamphlet. It has a red binding, I think. Maybe brown, or tan. It's about the size of
...



Sunday, September 30, 2012

My Great Brassier Hunt

Yesterday I visited the Lord's Store again. The visit reminded me of one of the funniest and most embarrassing things I've ever experienced—My Great Brassier Hunt.

Yesterday, again the courtesy and demeanor of the poor people in line impressed me. All treated me with great kindness, helpfulness, and respect; I must look more pathetic than I feel.

As I drove home with a bounty of groceries, I recalled that ten years ago Ginny and I used to be on the other side of the counter, and that thought led me to look up my diary entry for visits I made to the Lord's Store in September, 2002. I reprint it here:

My Great Brassier Hunt



Thursday, September 5, 2002-- Yesterday, as Gin & I walked to the bus this morning, we discovered a huge pile of clothes and shoes deposited at curbside where some people have moved out around the corner. I walked back with my wheelbarrow and collected these items for the Lord's Store mission. Why let perfectly good shoes and cloths (we're talking Calvin Kline, Air Jordan, Nike, Oshgosh, etc) be trashed when poor people need them.

I don't know if my being a Christian with a modicum of compassion for the poor has anything to do with my actions or whether it's just my conditioning for ecology that makes me hate to see things wasted. I'd like to think there is some love for Christ involved though I doubt it. Anyhow, I collected all I could salvage from the trash (Isn't the biblical term "gleaners" so much nicer than "rag-picking dumpster diver" or "bag lady"?), wheeled them home, and spent today washing clothes for the poor - who are always with you and are always a pain in the ass....

.Monday, September 9, 2002--Gin off to work. Donald off to his class. Me, I went on a brassier hunt.

When I did the washing last week to take all those clothes we'd collected to the Lord's Store mission, I laundered some of our own clothes along with the ones for the poor.

Now for the past 35 years Ginny has worn a favorite bikini for swimming now and then. She's pleased that she still fits into it (mostly) as well as she did when we first married. Of course over the years the swimsuit has stretched a little but then so has she. Well, Saturday Ginny discovered that I'd inadvertently sent to the mission the top of her two-piece swimsuit! I had not been paying attention and packed the bikini top into one of the white plastic garbage bags with the other clothes. This did not thrill her.... So, this morning I drove back to the mission (with another car full of goodies we decided to donate while cleaning up this weekend).

I carried the bikini bottom with me so I could be sure to match the material with the right bra.

At the mission I had the joy of explaining to the manager lady on duty, one I'd only met once before, that I wanted to dig through the dozens of bags of donated clothes, especially lady's underwear, to recover a blue brassier with white stars on it.

I'm such a dignified Christian gentleman that I'm sure she hardly thought I was a pervert at all.

Of course our conversation had to take place in the middle of the floor, me standing there with a bikini bottom in my hand, where a dozen or so other women, helpers and clients, listened in. Those other ladies worked hard at stifling giggles as they overheard my explanation.... And I gained the status of an international buffoon as one client translated the situation into Spanish for the benefit of another lady who spoke no English at all.

I'm not sure what exactly was relayed in Spanish, but that lady too tried not to snicker at the guy who'd given away his wife's bra and now wanted it back.

Maybe it's a cross cultural thing.

Why does the Lord let me get into situations like this? Doesn't he have any regard for my dignity:?

Anyhow, Friday's donations had not been sorted and put on the floor yet. Over the weekend workers had piled heaps of donated white plastic garbage bags full of ladies' dainties in the storage and sorting area. Many of the ladies there watched without laughing -- or even choking trying not to -- as I searched bags full of negligees, sweaters, coats, robes and panties till I did finally find the missing bra.

I have returned it to it's rightful tits.

That pretty much sums up my day. Come to think of it, that pretty much sums up my life.

Back to just yesterday of this year:

When I got home I found Ginny acting like a retired lady. Friday, as Eve and I prowled through writing materials, Ginny had uncovered a big box of old photos. Now, she has them spread out all over the floor sorting them by year and placing them in a couple of albums she bought a few weeks ago at a garage sale.

She has worked her way up to 1972.

She's happy as a clam.

It's going to be a long weekend.



Tuesday, October 2, 2012
Painted Women

In juggling our budget, Ginny and I explored the possibility of selling some of the great art that adorns our home.

I am noted for my taste in art. For instance this art treasure is one of my prized possessions and I would never sell it:



Other art treasures around the place I'm willing to let go.

Since I appreciate the aesthetic value of great art but have no idea about its commercial value, Ginny and I consulted our son Donald and his wife Helen about such things as they treated us to lunch at Five Guys Burgers yesterday. Helen is an artist; she owns the [Elemental Name Gallery](#).

Alas, Helen said the first piece I wanted to offer for sale has virtually no monetary value. Donald suggested that we hold a yard sale or open a thrift store.

Earlier in the day at breakfast with Wes and Johnny, our conversation drifted into the art of Pablo Picasso. So when I got home I checked out one of my favorite web sites, [Olga's Gallery](#). That site shows numerous examples of art from practically every painter of note. Olga's Gallery contains nearly 300 of his paintings.

Browsing through I discovered that Picasso liked to paint women.

Naked women.

For instance here is his *Nude On A Beach*



Here is *Another Nude On A Beach*:



He painted *A Girl Throwing A Rock*:



And he painted *A Tormented Girl*:



And he painted a girl named *Lee Miller*:



In 1896, Picasso's mother asked her son to paint a portrait of her.

That pastel on paper rendering hangs in the Museo Picasso in Barcelona, Spain.

It proves Picasso was not a dumb man. Here is Picasso's portrait of his mother:



Wednesday, October 3, 2012 I'm Thankful To My children

My grown children have helped us very much as Ginny and I adjust to retirement. In different ways each one contributes to our wellbeing. And I can't begin to thank them enough.

The other day I wrote about how Eve is relieving me of the burden of my 35+ years accumulation of writing stuff. She and her husband also pay for a young man to care for our yard.

Donald and Helen provided me with the computer I'm writing on. They pay for the server and such to keep my website going. They treat us to BBQ at Sonny's and drive us here and there when we need a ride.

Johnny has loaned me cash money. He's also bought me garden tools to make my life easier. And he climbed on top the roof to blow off leaves and clean rain gutters. He shares his gentle wisdom when we talk.

Patricia, even as she seeks as new job, has helped clean house for us, carry bricks and dig sand to help construct our patio. Her smile brightens the place.

Jennifer and Terri are buying me pipe tobacco this month. They provided chemicals for our pool. And they are getting me pipe tobacco. And they have brought in bags of groceries and they are buying me pipe tobacco. And they cooked a big pot of chicken & dumplings. And

they are buying me pipe tobacco. They have provided a refuge for Fred at times. And they are buying me pipe tobacco.

All the kids treat us to meals out now and then, and they always stand on call whenever we need anything.

Thank you kids.

I appreciate you.

You make our world better.

Love, Dad

Thursday, October 4, 2012

A Happy Comeback

Yesterday as Ginny and I just finished breakfast at Hardee's (I'll come back to that in a moment) the cell phone rang. Our eldest daughter Jennifer calling in a crisis.

Her puppy, Brittany, had eaten some poison mushrooms in the yard. The dog was throwing up and acting weird. Could we come rush her to the vet?

Instead of turning left on Fouracre Road, we turned right. Picked up Jennifer and her dog (as well as Brandon and the cat) and drove south of Orange Park to the animal hospital—which was closed. Jennifer pounded on the locked door and pleaded emergency service for her dog.

The vet gave Brittany a shot to put her to sleep...

Er, let me re-word that:

The vet gave Brittany a shot which made her sleep while she recovered from the treatments.

The dog appears to be thriving as she recuperates.

Afterwards. Jennifer treated us to lunch at a fine Mexican restaurant. Then Ginny and I continued to run our own errands. In the course of the day we drove over 70 miles and stopped at eleven places along the way—Exhausting!



You never know what a day will bring forth. Life turns on a dime.

Now, let me go back to tell what happened at Hardee's after breakfast:

As we ate breakfast, I had noticed two buxom young women taking photos and measuring walls and such; apparently they are interior designers planing to refurbish the restaurant.

When I went into the men's room before leaving, I found the two women in there measuring walls and making notes on a clipboard.

Being the wag that I am I said, "Girls, we've got to stop meeting like this, my wife is getting suspicious".

One of the girls came back with, "Darn. But, I meet all my best dates in this men's room".

Saturday, October 6, 2012

**Alva
1923—2012**



In Maryland yesterday afternoon Ginny's mother died. She was 89.

Thursday, October 11, 2012

A Hell Of A Line

Resentment consumed much of my day yesterday and as I seethed, I pondered the nature of forgiveness.

I pondered forgiveness without much success at practicing it.

Case in point: I stood in line better than three hours at a local church's food pantry waiting to get a handout of food. A couple of Latino females ahead in the line kept letting friends break in ahead. Some even used their cell phones to call family or neighbors saying, "They giving out sausage today. Drive on over here and I'll say you was in line ahead of me".

Thus the line grew longer toward the front than at the back.

And while I'm sure there are fine upright Christian Latino people in the world, the contemptible behavior of this lot I was exposed to yesterday generated a feeling of contempt.

Their behavior resulted in the church pantry running out of bread before those of us at the end of the line reached the counter.

Someone said that, Man shall not live by bread alone, but after you've stood in line for three hours to get some and are turned away because of line-breakers, that noble sentiment pales.

I want my damn bread!

As I drove to another soup kitchen to belly-crawl some more for food, I questioned my own behavior. The first thing to ask when someone offends me is *Have I ever done this same sort of thing?*

I don't remember ever having broken in line ahead of others before. As my mother would have said, *We Cowarts just don't do that sort of thing.*

So, I can look with contempt on fat pigs that shove to the trough ahead of others.

Or maybe not. Because I can remember taking unfair advantage of my position in different situations.

So I made a conscious effort to forgive even though I didn't feel very forgiving. I recall the Lord's Prayer phrase, "Forgive me my trespasses just as I forgive those who trespass against me".

Lest I appear overly pious about this, let me say that I included an addendum to my mental prayer—*Lord, this is*

not a prayer, just a suggestion, You understand; but if one of those cans of beans on the pantry shelf happens to be dented and maybe have a touch of botulism, I think it would be nice if it ended up in that cell-phone lady's bag of groceries.

As I drove to the next feeding site for the poor, I also questioned whether I'm just a weakling for not calling the women on their unjust low-life behavior. I mentioned this to a woman in line at the other feeding site.

She said, "No, Sir. Don't you ever call them on it because they back each other. If'in you say anything, they likely to gang up and jump on you. These days you never know who got a gun or a knife or a club. Best stay out of it and alive. They don't know it, but they just pushing to the head of the line through the gates of Hell".

P.S.: Relax, kids. We ended up before the day was over with groceries to last a week. When I finally got home, Ginny cooked up a big pot of chicken with yellow rice, the kind with olives and tomatoes cooked in the rice. Delicious! And later in the evening, we enjoyed a box of chocolates, a sugar-free Whitman's Sampler, which a lady had given me for Ginny. So we munched bon-bons as we watched a rerun of *Ghostbusters* on tv.

My, but it's tough to be poor.

Friday, October 12, 2012 Lights & Logs

It looks like in my 73 years of life experience, I'd have learned the ropes by now. I haven't. Fortunately, guides are available to help me navigate as I circle the drain.

Recently three such guides proved invaluable. Over the past couple of weeks Ginny and I have been in contact with Judy, Debbie and LJ, young people who work specializing in helping elderly folks learn of available resources.

We'd have been lost in the woods without them.

At a conference yesterday LJ, guided us through the process of getting our light bill paid. The electric company scheduled us for cut off next week. Now, we'll continue to walk in light.

Although I'd made contingency plans—hey, my grandparents lived without electricity or running water for years, so can we—the help of these three young people have made life much easier for us and I am grateful.

Their help will give Ginny and me a bit of wiggle room for next month.

We are stabilizing.

We have climbed from destitute to just plain tute.

That's progress.

And it feels good.

Lord, help us to reflect Your light as we move through life.

To celebrate having lights, and because we were on that side of the river for the first time in years, Ginny and I went to Blue Boy's Sandwich Shop for lunch. When our kids were little, we often observed special events with lunch at Blue Boy's.

As Ginny and I shared a scrumptious potato salad, we reminisced about college graduations, birthdays, new jobs, and such. Donald, our youngest son, stands about six foot six now, but I think the first time we ate at Blue Boy's, he needed a booster seat to get to the table.

Last week a couple of long oak branches fell in our yard. The yard trash men come Fridays but won't pick branches up if they are more than five feet long. So when we got back home, Ginny sawed one log in half. And I sawed the longer limb into five lengths.

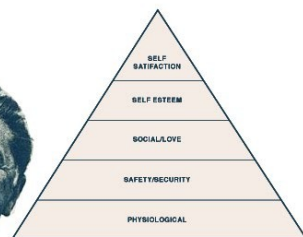
Naturally, I fell to singing as I sawed, "I'm a lumberjack! And I'm OK!..."

Saturday, October 13, 2012

Abraham Maslow's Ghost

When I got home from picking up groceries from the Lord's Pantry, a food source for poor people, Abraham Moslow's ghost greeted me as I walked through the door.

I immediately recognized the famous psychologist, who had died in 1970, from his many photos on the Internet; he



formulated Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, a theory of self-actualization.

"Dr. Maslow, what are you doing here," I asked, putting the bag of groceries on the kitchen table.

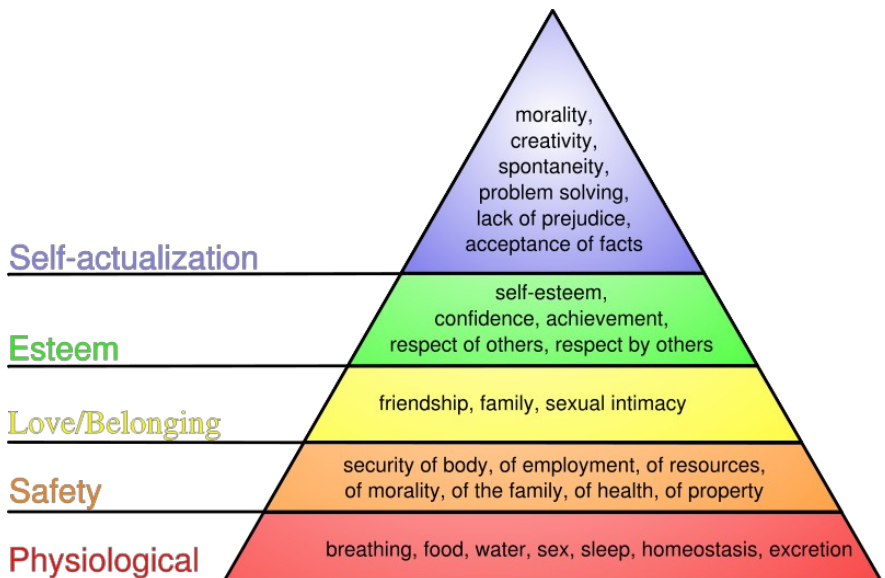
"John," he said, "I've come to talk with you about human need. But first, where is your bathroom"?

"I didn't know that ghosts needed to ..."

"Talk about need! I've been dead since 1970 and unless you want a puddle of ectoplasm on your living room floor..."

"Go down the hall till you come to a room with a toilet, that's the bathroom" I said.

When he returned, he said, "John, I see a pyramid of human needs, each layer resting atop the ones below till you reach a state of self actualization". He drew this diagram in the air (I think the ghost lifted it from the Internet)..



"Yes, I see that," I said.

"Dr. Maslow said, "Air. You can only live without air for about six minutes tops before you die. Air is the basic. Do you have air".

Yes, Sir, not only do I have air but before they left on vacation Jennifer and Terri bought me a couple of packs of pipe tobacco. I have plenty to breath"

"You breath pipe tobacco"?

"I've smoked a pipe for over 60 years now. It's a basic need for me".

"Ah," said the doctor.

"You can only live without water for a few days. Something to drink is a foundational human need".

"Yes," I said, "And this morning at the Lord's Pantry, they even gave me a pound of coffee".

"And you think coffee and pipe tobacco are basic human needs".

"Well, Sir. Jennifer, my daughter who is a registered nurse, talked with me about giving up smoking. And I asked her if she would rather be locked in a room with me when I was hungry or when I was without coffee and pipe tobacco. She said, 'You've got a point, Dad'".

"Interesting," the psychologist said. "But you can only live without food for a couple of weeks at the outside. You must have food".

"Yes, that's why I stood in line at the Lord's Pantry three hours this morning. To get food to get Ginny and me over this temporary slump we're in. And while I stood in that line of poor people, I overheard snippets of conversation about incredible human need. A 19-year-old kid seems to have given up on life already. A 45-year-old woman told me about her chronically-ill bed-ridden husband whose father brings him whiskey and since his father is a registered sex-offender she's afraid to leave her children in the house when he's there. And the 56-year-old woman was just diagnosed with breast cancer and she terrified but when she told her unemployed live-in boyfriend yesterday all he wanted to know was how long she could keep her job because she is their sole support. And the woman whose daughter stole her cell phone and sold it for drugs. And ... and... and—These people know all about your hierarchy of need".

"Ah, so much human misery on the most basic level. So sad," Dr. Maslow said. "On the next level, human beings need security, to feel safe. If a person is afraid, fear drives

out aspirations for self-actualization. John, how is your own level of security?”.

“Well, I installed dead-bolt locks on the doors when we moved in to this house,” I said hedging. Ghost of a fine psychologist or not, I was not about to reveal our home's security system to this stranger.

‘No need,” Dr. Maslow laughed, “We ghosts can walk through walls. On the next level, humans need to feel loved. How's your love life. Want I should prescribe Viagra?I'm a doctor, you know”.

“Look around you,” I said. “My life abounds with the love of Ginny, my grown children, my friends and the love of God. But, Doctor Maslow...”

“You can call me Abe,” he said.

“Well, Abe, I notice God is missing from your pyramid. For myself, I envision a circle drawn around it touching all three points. Because in Him we live and move and have our very being. Without the Lord, there is can be no self-actualization. What does a man have if he gains the whole world yet loses his own soul”?

“Ah,” said Dr. Maslow. “You fall back on religion. That's common for people like you, John. As I said when alive, If you only have a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. Here's a picture illustrating that principle”.

He waved his hand and this illustration appeared in the air:



We both laughed.

“John, on the next level of my pyramid, I see that human beings need some measure of respect. What do you make of that”?

“Last week Alva, my wife's mother died. Physically or financially Ginny and I could not attend the funeral, but two of our daughters went to pay our respects. There was a family gathering yesterday so her seven children and many grandchildren could share good memories of her. I asked Ginny after our supper if she wanted to talk about her own good memories of her mother. Know what she said”?

“What did she say”?

“She said, “John, any memory at all of Mom is a good memory. There aren't any other kind.... I hope the same can be said of me by my children.

“Ah”, said Dr. Maslow ever the psychologist. “Now, we approach the tip of my pyramid—self actualization, the point where creativity takes place. John, how are you doing in the realm of your creative writing? Still stymied?”

“Actually, Abe, I've been nudging around the edges of my next book. A historical novel set in Jacksonville in the 1840s. It starts with the first woman executed here at a public hanging and moves into the atrocities of the Second Seminole War and the narrator...”

The phone rang interrupting me... I listened for a moment...

“Dr. Maslow,” I said, “My daughter's cat Wee Bit just died and I need to go over and bury it for her. Where does needing to bury a cat fit into your hierarchy of need”?

“Ah,” he said, “An interesting question. But, if you need to go, you need to go”.

And the ghost faded into ethereal mist – into the Circle.

Thursday, October 18, 2012 **Alva's Memorial Service**

One of the happiest days of my life, I spent with my mother-in-law, Alva Worthington, digging in a corn field.

She took me along to excavate a 16th Century site in Maryland where the English settlers had abandoned a house abruptly (perhaps because of Indian attack or an

epidemic which killed the whole family immediately). Under the supervision of a state archaeologist, we uncovered silver shoe buckles, a mortar and pestle, intact kitchenware, etc. A treasure trove of artifacts. Wow!

Alva, museum docent, had set this expedition up with the state park service for no other reason than, because of my interest in archaeology, she knew it would please me.

It did!

Earlier this month Ginny's mother died just days short of her 89th birthday.

Ginny and I were not able to attend the service, but Jennifer and Eve, two of our daughters, rode a train to Alexandria, Virginia, then rented a car to drive to Accokeek, Maryland, where their grandmother had lived since the 1950s.

Jennifer and Eve traveled to honor their grandmother and to convey our respect.

Here is a copy of the newspaper obituary—which hardly says anything about what a wonderful life my mother-in-law lived:

Alva Daniels Worthington

**Worthington, Alva 88 of Accokeek, Maryland.
(October 19, 1923 - October 5, 2012)**

Alva Worthington died October 5, 2012 at her home. Born October 19, 1923 in Ashland, Kentucky. She was the daughter of the late Elliot Daniels and the late Virgie Wheeler Daniels.

Family was the center of her life. She was their rock and shining star. She was always willing to help everyone.



In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by two great-grandsons, three brothers, two sisters, and her loving husband of 65 years, Jack Worthington.

She is survived by her children; Katherine Griffin of Accokeek, Maryland, Jack and his wife, Sue Worthington of Bend, Oregon, Virginia and her husband, John Cowart of Jacksonville, Florida, Daniel and his wife, Linda

Worthington of Oscoda, Michigan, Jeffrey and his wife, Carol Worthington of Accokeek, Maryland, Mark and his wife, Beckie Worthington of Monument, Colorado and Eric Worthington of Redwood City, California. Also surviving are twelve grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and a host of nieces and nephews.

Memorial Service will be held 2:00 pm on Saturday, October 13, 2012 at Faith United Methodist Church, 15769 Livingston Road, Accokeek, Maryland 20607. Reverend George Aist will officiate.

Contributions may be made in Alva's name to: Faith United Methodist Church (Outreach Ministry). Mail to: FUMC 15769 Livingston Road, Accokeek, Maryland 20607 or Master Gardeners: Payable to Prince Georges Master Gardeners c/o Ester Mitchell. Mail to: Maryland Cooperative Extension Prince Georges County, 6707 Groveton Drive, Clinton Maryland 20735.

Services entrusted to Thornton Funeral Home, P.A., 3439 Livingston Road, Indian Head, Maryland 20640.

Eve posted a multitude of photos at <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10152199531500385.912007.506740384&type=1&l=45335a8e3e>

She also edited about three hours worth of video films which Jennifer made of the service; I have not watched them all myself yet, but if anyone truly wants to, send me an e-mail and I'll send you the links.

Many thanks to my daughters for this tribute to their grandmother.

The other night I asked Ginny if she wanted to talk about any good memories she has of Alva; Ginny said, "John, any memory at all of Mom is a good memory. There aren't any other kind... I hope the same can be said of me by our children".

"Her children shall rise up, and call her blessed"--
Proverbs 31

Friday, October 19, 2012
The Taste Of Grits

Once in a truck stop restaurant a driver told me that if you order a bowl of grits and add lots of salt and pepper and butter then stir it well, it tastes exactly like salt and pepper and butter.

Needless to say, he was a yankey.

Among us Southerners, grits are the staff of life. They are a thick porridge made of coarsely ground corn; in fact, I've read that the word *grits* comes from the Old English *grytt* meaning "coarse meal". As you boil the corn meal in plenty of water or milk, stirring often, the grits expand almost like rice does, making a hardy dish to serve at breakfast or with fried fish. If you've ever eaten snacks like Fritos or Corn Chips, or such like, they are essentially thin slices of seasoned fried grits.

The folks at a church Food Pantry for poor folks gave me a bag of grits Wednesday.

You know there are not many laughs in a poverty line of folks waiting for a survival crust—but I provided one as the butt of a joke.

To get a bag of groceries before the supply runs out, you have to get in line at least two hours before a charity pantry opens. So I sat on the seat of my wheeled walker in the pre-dawn chill in a line of about 50 people for about three hours listening to the conversation around me.

Two guys, Charles, a veteran of the Korean War, and Joe, a veteran of Viet Nam, lead a vigorous discussion of the upcoming presidential election. The gist of their talk, kibitzed by by-standers, was worry over which politician was most likely to starve poor people. Several folks spoke fondly of the days when "Tricky Dickey" held the office.

As I listened to the political discussion, a lady came up behind me and tried to get past, but her foot slipped and she grabbed my shoulder to keep her balance. She almost fell into my lap.

I flinched.

Well, I did a bit more than flinch.

I began shaking all over and stopped breathing. I do that whenever anyone touches me unexpectedly. Since I was a teenager, I've even cut my own hair to keep a barber from touching me—one of my many idiosyncrasies.

Anyhow, the crowd watched my distress as the lady disentangled herself apologizing profusely to me.

I caught my breath and said, "Thank God it's just you. I thought Mitt Romney had grabbed me to jerk me out of the line".

The poor folks howled.

Hey, if you can't have fun in a charity line, where can you?

(Note To The Kid In The Attic: "Tricky Dickey" is a nickname for former President Richard Nixon; Mitt Romney is one of the men running for office in this year's presidential race with the election scheduled for next month).

Now, I have a confession to make.

I hope my evangelical brothers don't judge me too harshly.

Please understand that recently Ginny and I have been praying for our Daily Bread daily.

Many local churches of all denominations sponsor food pantries. Each one operates in different perimeters with different requirements.

This week the church where I gleaned our food for the next couple of days is a church which ministers primarily to gays and lesbians. I'd guess homosexuals comprise 90 % of that rainbow congregation. They provide food and volunteers to help poor people in their immediate surroundings.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy".

And Psalm 41 declares, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble".

And in Proverbs, King Solomon said, "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again".

I thought of those Scriptures as I waited in that line to collect my dole in this unfamiliar place.

The person who helped me get my sack of groceries to my car—now I could not swear to this because I did not ask her to lift her skirt—but I'm pretty sure she was a man dressed as a she.

I thanked her or him very much for the care shown to me and to other poor people in line for the gift of sustenance food which the transvestite's church has provided. ...

And you know what?

When Ginny cooked breakfast, our grits didn't taste queer at all. Thanks be to God.

Monday, October 22, 2012 In The Sex Clinic

I saw Crystal's phone number thumbtacked to a corkboard with a message to call her at the Sex Clinic for a "private consultation". I copied down her number, called, and made an appointment. I felt could use a private consultation with Crystal.

Turns out that the Sex Clinic is in the same medical building as Dr. Woody's office where Ginny had a routine appointment Friday. Dr. Woody is our long-term physician, so while he examined Ginny and set up her x-rays, I walked down the hall to the Sex Clinic for my "private consultation" with Crystal.

Turned out to be not so private. The clinic's sex team of physicians, technicians and nurses tested me.

Using an extensive battery of hi-tech medical equipment tests including catalytic converters, ohm meters, laser-tag pointers, blood pressure cuffs, regulation police handcuffs (Crystal has read *50 Shades Of Grey*), Alien Rectal Probes, digital thermometers, CPR, MRI, PSA, and MTV, they tested me.

At the end of their extensive tests, these medical professionals concluded that—get this—they concluded that I am old.

Alas, I failed their tests.

I trudged back to Dr. Woody's office to tell him and Ginny what Crystal said.

I told them that since I was in the Sex Clinic anyhow, I had volunteered to become a male sexual surrogate. Yes, I volunteered to teach frustrated women how to achieve heights of lustful passion, sexual ecstasy, and orgasmic satisfaction.

"Selfless volunteering seems the Christian thing to do," I said. "But, Crystal turned me down. She said my prostate cancer knocks me out of the running as a sexual surrogate".

Dr. Woody knows me too well; he laughed at me.

But Ginny, God bless her, said, "It's ok, John. They just don't know what they're missing".

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

The Poor In The Promised Land

The more I think about it, the more confused I get.

For the past few days I've pondered the relationship between poverty and wealth.

Yesterday my friend Wes delivered a truck load of groceries to Ginny and me; I won't need to visit a food pantry in order to eat for a while. Ginny, Wes, Johnny and I talked for a bit about the time Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor before becoming a disciple.

Was that an instruction for that one specific individual only? Or did Jesus intend for it to apply to all Christians?

Thinking about wealth and poverty and tonight's Lotto drawing reminded me of an old joke about practical religion:

A poor preacher who could barely support his family got a call to a large church paying three times his present salary.

A deacon from the little church went to his home to ask if he were leaving.

A little girl answered the door.

"Is your father in?" asked the deacon.

"No, Sir," said the child. "He's down in the basement praying about whether or not this call is from the Lord".

"Then is your mother available"?

"No Sir. She's upstairs packing for our move".

I've given this business of wealth and poverty a lot of thought and I just don't know.

So, when I decided to look in the Scripture to see if I can make heads or tails of wealth and poverty, the first thing I found is that God Himself causes both.

The prayer of Hannah in First Samuel says, "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up".

King Solomon repeated that idea when he said, "The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is Maker of them all".

But all my life I've heard that if you work hard, you will get rich; is that a lie?

King Solomon also said, "It is the LORD's blessing that makes a person rich, and hard work adds nothing to it".

So, if the Lord makes a person poor, as Hannah said, and if labor is irrelevant to blessing, then why did St. Paul tell the Thessalonians that, "If any would not work, neither should he eat"?

And Paul also condemns poor men—me included—to the worst sort of Hell when he told Timothy, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel".

So, if I read Scripture right, God makes poor, but if I am poor and don't provide for my own household, then I am worse than a heathen.

There's got to be some loophole.

Let me think about the broader scope of Scripture; who was poor and who was rich and who was both?

Well, the Prince of God, Jacob, Israel himself, comes to mind.

At one point in Genesis, Jacob was the wealthiest man in the country. He and his brother Esau owned so many cattle they had to split estates because there was not enough grass in the Occident to support their herds.

A few Bible chapters later, we see Jacob applying for government welfare assistance.

And not just any government—the government of Egypt!

Yes, famine forced Jacob and his family to apply for the old-time equivalent of Egyptian food stamps.

Jacob lucked out (or God provided) in that his estranged son, Joseph, happened to administer the Egyptian welfare program.

Jacob established a welfare pattern in Egypt. He got government aid, his children drew government aid, his grandchildren followed on welfare, and so on and so on for 400 years.

But the Egyptian pharaohs frowned on families mooching off perpetual welfare while spawning more snotty-nosed children than they could support.

Egypt established a work-relief program and put sturdy beggars to work making bricks for public building projects. Make more bricks, get more food. No more entitlement slackers.

But God spoiled that fine program.

He raised up Moses to lead the Jews to a Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Moses told the brickmakers, “The LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee”.

Ah yes, the Promised Land.

At my grandfather's funeral I first heard an old American hymn. *I Am Bound For The Promised Land! O Who Will Come And Go With Me? I'm Bound For The Promised Land.* What a toe-tapper!

Who wouldn't get excited about harvesting field you didn't sow, eating fruit from trees you didn't plant, drinking water from wells you didn't have to dig?

Heaven on earth.

All you have to do is go in and kill off the Arabs or Indians, or Aborigines or Southerners, and take over their property.

Whooppee! It's like winning Lotto! Plenty for everybody!

But, here's something weird.

As God led them to the Promised Land, as all that prosperity and wealth lay before them, as He gave the Ten Commandments, while the mountain was still smoking, in the very next breath God gave them instructions about—get this—instructions about how to treat the poor in the Promised Land.

“Thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God....

“If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee....

“If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth....

“Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

“For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land....

“Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day

thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee”.

Heavy words.

Yes, God knew there would be poor in the Promised Land and He demanded that they be treated with mercy and respect.

But, how could anybody end up poor in the Promised Land?

Maybe some lazy people did not work.

Proverbs says, “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich”.

Or maybe the greedy exploited and cheated people out of their property.

Again Proverbs says, “The fields of poor people might produce a lot of food. But those who beat them down destroy it all”.

The Bible pronounces terrible things ahead for people who oppress the poor.

The Patriarch Job said, “If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof... If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; If his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate:

“Then, let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone. For destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of His highness I could not endure”.

King Solomon, world's wealthiest man, agreed with poor Job; he even linked God's honor with how we treat the poor. Solomon said, “He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor....

“Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished....

“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again...

“He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination”.

And Solomon added that, “A poor man that oppresseth the poor is like a sweeping rain which leaveth no food”.

Yes, God takes all this business of wealth and poverty seriously.

The Prophet Isaiah questions, “What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts.”

Yes, through the prophet Ezekiel, God even said that ill-treatment of the poor corrupted Sodom.

Oh, why else did you think Sodom was destroyed?

Through Ezekiel, God told the wealthy big-wigs of Jerusalem secure in their self-righteousness, “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good”.

Oh, and here I thought this Sodom thing was just about sex.

Now, here's a puzzle: If God is so hep about the poor, what was going on when that street woman poured a flask of expensive ointment on the head of Jesus?

All four Gospels record this incident and in every one the disciples balked saying, “Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her”.

But Jesus said she had done the best thing possible. He said there will always be poor people around and I can do good for them whenever I chose to.

Then He praised this street woman with the highest accolade possible; He said, “She hath done what she could”.

She worshiped Him and anointed His body for burial.

That thought about Jesus, His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection brings me to another thought about poverty and where it fits in God's scheme of things.

St. Paul said, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich".

For my sake, for your sake, He became poor.

Borrowed boat, borrowed donkey, borrowed tomb—all returned to their owners in good order—Jesus became poor. The Son of God lowered Himself from the heights and glory of Heaven to the depths of creation to become man, taking on Himself the form of a servant, dieing on the cross for our sin.

Isn't that rich!

Thursday, October 25, 2012 **A Bird and Two Songs**

Yesterday as I transplanted a small tree in the garden, a hawk flew along the fence-line clutching a squirrel in its talons. When squirrels raid one of our birdfeeders, they feed birds.

Two odd songs got stuck in my head all day.

On Pandora Radio Tuesday night as Ginny and I sat reading our library books, in one of my chosen music mixes the computer played Gordon Lightfoot's haunting ballad *Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald*.

All day long these words have run through my mind:

*Is there anyone knows where the love of God goes,
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?*

And, what's odder, other music has also played in my brain alternating with *Fitzgerald*. One of the best-known scores in music is the *Hallelujah Chorus* from Handel's *Messiah*—but that's not the one anchored in my brain.

In the section immediately before *Hallelujah*, the singer quotes the Patriarch Job singing:

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I

see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another;

That reminds me... I go in for an eye exam today. I may take the weekend off and go fishing.



Wednesday, October 31, 2012
In The Dark

For the past week I've spent a lot of time sitting in the dark with my eyes shut.

That's a new way to see the world.

An unexpected bout of eye surgery which involved injections of radioactive glop necessitated my isolation in the dark. In a way, there's no surprise there because I've been in the dark most of my life.

While sitting with my eyes closed, I've listened to talking books and to news reports about Hurricane Sandy's devastation of New York and the northeast. They say it's the worst storm ever to hit the country.

Of course any hurricane that hits where you live counts as the worst one ever.

God bless the poor yankees.

The best quote I heard on the news came from a reporter watching the Hudson River tunnel flood; he said the Hudson River poured into the tunnel "like a river".

Reminded me of the reporter in New Orleans who said, "Rain is coming down so hard that water is falling right out of the sky".

During my confinement six incomprehensible letters from Social Security Administration, Medicare and insurance companies leave me even more in the dark. Neither Ginny nor I, both literate college graduates, can make heads or tails of these communications. Even when Ginny called the 800-numbers for clarification, we remain in the dark about what our income will be next month.

But, all is well.

We have no more medical appointments scheduled for a few months (we visited doctors' offices five times last week).

As Dr. Woody examined me Monday, he asked Ginny, "Has he any trouble hearing?"

She said, "What?"

I said, "You're asking the wrong person".

He and I started laughing. As her physician also for 15 years, Dr. Woody knows full well she is mostly deaf and as we laughed, Ginny kept saying, "What? What? What?"

God, I love her so!

Saturday, November 3, 2012
Birds, Moss, Misery, Gort & Gifts



Ginny saves bread crusts in the freezer and when she gets a bagful, we go to Riverside Park to feed ducks and other birds.

Big excitement for us.

After another eye operation for me and hours upon hours in various doctors' waiting rooms, we needed a break. So we went to feed the birds.

Odd thing: as my sight dims recently, I see more and more human misery around me this week. All those poor yankees suffering damage from Hurricane Sandy; a six-

year-old girl afflicted by a sudden seizure; a feeble old man recovering from radiation therapy with his poor exhausted and exasperated wife trying to care for him; workers frustrated by unemployment; the loving couple arguing in the restaurant and having a hard time making up—I find myself praying for many people whose names I don't even know. But I see them all around me.

At the same time, I see misery, I also see helpers everywhere. Rescuers wading in for storm victims. The waitress being kind to that arguing couple; The babysitter helping the single-parent dad of the child with the seizure; The guy holding open the men's room door for the cripple guy. Yes, misery abounds in this world, but so does good.

My garbled memory sings words from an old hymn:

Once to every man and nation,
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth with falsehood,
For the good or evil side;...
By the light of burning martyrs,
Christ, Thy bleeding feet we track,
Toiling up new Calv'ries ever,
With the cross that turns not back;...
Yet behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above His own.

A phrase of Scripture comes to mind: And when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion. The Scripture also says that In all their afflictions, the Lord was afflicted.

No matter what we have done, no matter what has been done to us, Jesus cares. He stands with us come Hell or high water. (That last phrase is not exactly from Scripture).

I'm sidetracked.

Back to the birds.

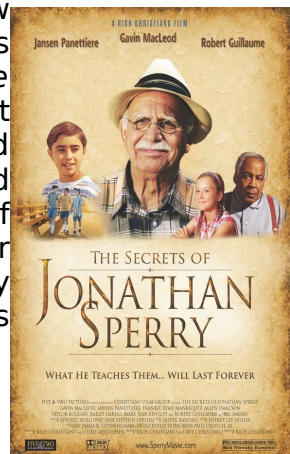
So, Ginny and I took a day off to feed the ducks.

Scores of ducks surrounded her as she tossed crusts. Even more pigeons gathered for the feast. And four Ibis joined, approaching her close enough to take crumbs from her hand.

I rested on a park bench admiring Ginny's beauty as she enjoyed this simple pleasure.

We gathered fallen strands of Spanish Moss, an air plant, from the ground and when we got home, she draped silver beards of moss over oak tree branches in our front yard. Slanted sunbeams illuminated the moss and Ginny's silver hair so I could hardly tell one from the other as she balanced on the ladder. She looks beautiful in whatever she does.

We celebrated Halloween by giving a few kids candy and munching the rest ourselves as we watched two videos. We saw *The Secrets Of Jonathan Sperry*, one of the best films of this sort I've ever seen. In it an old man forms a relationship with the 11-year-old boy who mows his lawn—No, not that sort of relationship; I've been reading the newspaper so much recently that it's infected my thinking—a good relationship. Mr. Sperry's secret proves to be an amazing one.



We also watched *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. I saw this film at the long-gone Palace Theater in 1951 and I still think it's one of the best movies ever made!

After thrilling to this video, nothing would do but for me to dig out my statue of Gort out of storage where it has long lay in its original box. Here's a photo of it by my computer:



Now here's an odd thing: I know that one of my children gave me this stature of Gort for some Christmas several years ago. It is one of my treasures. Gort winds up and walks; his visor moves. He exudes menace. I remember just where I stored him to keep him safe—but I can't remember which one of my grown children gave Gort to me.

I enjoy the gift; I've forgotten the giver.

I do that a lot.

I enjoy love, beauty, birds, moss, sunbeams, seeing hurting people helped—I enjoy the gifts, but I hardly ever give the Giver of all good things a thought.

Sunday, November 4, 2012 Glad We Missed Him

Just minutes after Ginny and I left the bank yesterday morning... Well, TV-4's report says it best:

**Police search for Wells Fargo bank robber:
Surveillance cameras capture suspect**

Published On: Nov 03 2012 11:20:30 PM EDT Updated On: Nov 03 2012 11:39:11 PM EDT



JACKSONVILLE, Fla. - Police said a man robbed a Lakeshore bank Saturday morning after saying he had a gun and demanding money.

Investigators say a man wearing a blacked hooded sweatshirt, jeans and a Boston Red Sox baseball cap told the teller at the Wells Fargo branch at 4206 San Juan Avenue, he had a gun and asked for money.

Witnesses said he then ran away from the bank.

Police describe the man as a white male, between 5'7"-5'10", thin build, dark hair, and had a mustache.

Anyone with information about this crime is asked to contact the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office at 904-630-0500 or Crime Stoppers at 1-866-845-TIPS .to remain anonymous and be eligible for a possible reward



Monday, November 5, 2012
Happy Times (with a tiny bit of confusion)



Yesterday to celebrate their wedding anniversary, Donald and Helen invited Ginny and me to a lavish breakfast at their home.

Helen cooked eggs and ham, served with dates, pineapple, and fried apple wedges. She sautéed red and green peppers and onions in a tasty mix.

Delicious!

As we enjoyed the feast, Helen announced that her skill as an artist has earned her a substantial grant from the Jacksonville Community Foundation. And also a commission to create public art for an major area hospital.

Hoot!

Way to go Helen!

Here are two recent example of her art: one of glass, and the other a sketch of a naked girl:



More of
Helen's art
can be seen
at
<http://elemental.name/>

I only have one question: Why doesn't she ever introduce me to any of her naked art models?

I'm your father-in-law, Helen; you can trust me.

After breakfast, we lounged talking in their backyard.

Our conversation ranged from the business protocols of biotech companies to the sinking of the replica of *HMS Bounty* in Hurricane Sandy. Here is Coast Guard photo of the shipwreck:



Then our conversation turned to our questions about God's control of the universe and of our individual lives.

Did the Lord create the world, flick His finger to set the whole thing spinning and sit back to watch? Does He control just big things like the orbits of planets and presidential elections? Or does He care about the most minute things, like my decisions—what kind of car I buy, who I marry, what job I work??

The Scripture proclaims “The earth is the Lords and the fullness thereof”.

It says, “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth”.

It teaches, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will".

And when it comes to our decisions King Solomon said, "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord".

And Jesus said that No sparrow shall fall on the ground without your Father.

Big things. Little things.

But then, if God is in control, what am I responsible for? What do I control?

In theory, I'm inclined to side with the falling sparrow school of thought.

Unfortunately, most of the time I do not feel like one of God's cherished little sparrows. I feel more like a clay pigeon on God's skeet range.

Faith tells me He knows what He's doing—but I have my doubts.

When Ginny and I drove home, she replaced batteries and changed the time setting on most of our clocks to account for Daylight Savings Time—she changed all the clocks but one.

The clock radio in the kitchen, she did not change.

That clock has sit on the same shelf for about 15 years and yesterday Ginny told me that she never resets the time on it because years ago the reset button got broken. So she leaves that clock alone.

I did not know that.

Now, understand that this is a digital clock with big green lighted numerals. With my vision problems, it is the one clock I can see best. It is the clock I use to know when to perk coffee in the morning. It is the clock I check when I have a doctor's appointment or a meeting with someone.

When Ginny went out to work, this is the clock I used to know when to expect her home. And when she was late arriving, I worried everyday that she'd been in a traffic accident, or that she and James Bond had met for a passionate affair in some hotel room, or that the car had broke down stranding her in the slums, or that she

realized she was sick of me and decided to drive back up north to her mother's, or that. a cop would knock at the front door asking me to come to the morgue to identify her body, or that...

Well, you get the way my mind works.

So, why didn't she set the clock radio to the correct time like she did all the other clocks?

She said she did not need to set that clock yesterday because she had never moved that one's time setting last Spring. That clock has been one hour off for months...

And I'd never noticed!

For days and days, weeks and weeks, months and months, for years even, everything I did was an hour off—and I had never noticed!

The standard I'd lived by was wrong.

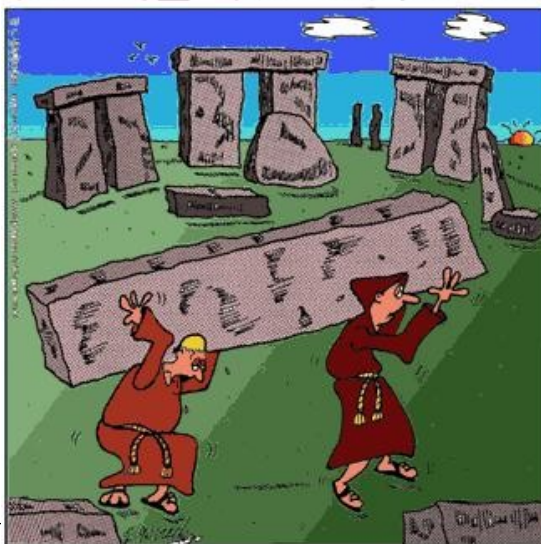
I'd regulated my life by a clock that did not tell the right time.

And I worried and worried and worried because I never noticed that my standard was far off kilter.

I feel like a dunce.

Is there maybe some spiritual lesson I should notice here?

McHUMOR by T. McCracken



"I hate changing to Daylight Saving Time."

Tuesday, November 6, 2012

Russian Sub in Jacksonville News From London

Ginny and I plan to drive up to Kings Bay again tomorrow.

Local news outlets here in Jacksonville might be interested to read today's issue of London Daily Mail. Although over the past ten days or so presidential candidates from both parties or their wives have been in Jacksonville and were played up in the local media, we've had another visitor that I've seen no mention of in local tv or press. I learned about this visitor from the London newspaper.

Here's a clipping of an interesting bit of news they missed:

Russian attack sub discovered just 200 miles from the East Coast and given safe harbor from Hurricane Sandy

By Daily Mail Reporter

PUBLISHED: 00:15 EST, 6 November 2012 | **UPDATED:** 00:15 EST, 6 November 2012

U.S. defense officials are downplaying the potential threat of a Russian attack sub detected just 200 miles from the East Coast and given safe harbor in Florida during Hurricane Sandy.

The Russian Seirra-2 class submarine was believed to be part of the country's Northern Fleet, outfitted with SS-N-21 anti-submarine warfare missiles, SS-N-16 anti-submarine warfare missiles, and torpedos.

This is the first time a Russian Seirra-2 class sub has detected near a U.S. coast, reported the **Free Beacon**.



Harmless: U.S. officials say the Russian nuclear attack sub posed no threat and was even given safe harbor from Hurricane Sandy

The Free Beacon's sources spoke only on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of anti-sub warfare.

'While I can't talk about how we detected it, I can tell you that things worked the way they were supposed to,' one officials said, adding that the submarine 'poses no threat whatsoever.'

Officials said the submarine was likely conducting anti-submarine warfare efforts against U.S. ballistic and cruise missile submarines at Kings Bay, Georgia.

The submarine did not sail near Kings Bay or threaten a U.S. aircraft carrier group conducting exercises near it in the eastern Atlantic.

There are two guided missile submarines and six nuclear missile submarines docked at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base. Those American vessels are a known target of Russian attack subs.

However, the Russian sub was considered safe enough that it was given a safe harbor in Jacksonville, Florida's commercial port during Hurricane Sandy, within listening range of Kings Bay.

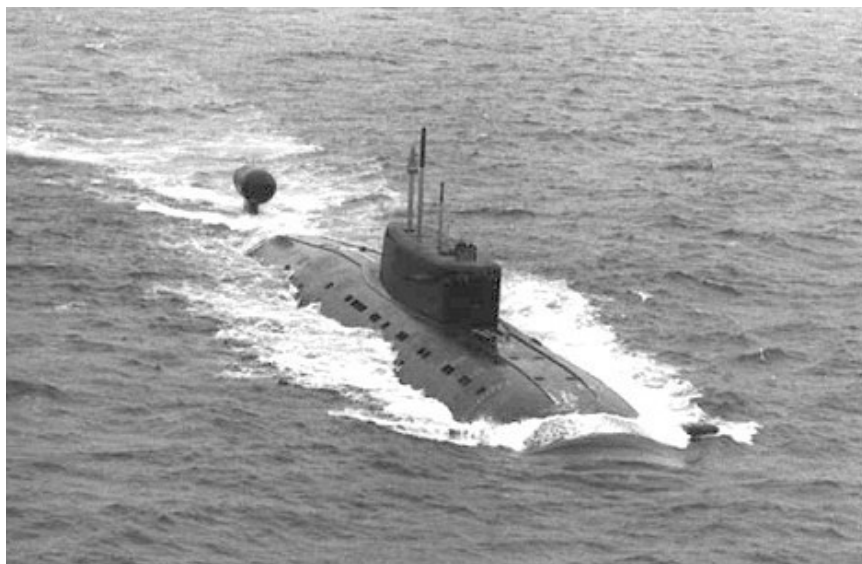
A Jacksonville Port Authority spokeswoman declined comment on the submarine.

At this time the submarine is thought to be hundreds of miles from American shorelines.

The deployment could be read as an effort by the Russian navy to re-establish naval power projection capabilities.

Russia said as much in February when it announcing an increase in submarine patrols in strategic waters around the world.

'On June 1 or a bit later we will resume constant patrolling of the world's oceans by strategic nuclear submarines,'" Russian Navy Commander Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky said in February.



Armed: The Sierra 2-class submarine was armed with anti-submarine missiles and torpedos

'A Russian AGI and an SSN in the same geographic area as one of the largest U.S. ballistic missile submarine bases—Kings Bay—is reminiscent of Cold War activities of the Soviet navy tracking the movements of our SSBN's,' said another U.S. official.

SSBN is the designation for ballistic missile submarines.

Russia's navy carried out hundreds of submarine patrols during the Cold War to maintain first-and-second-strike nuclear capabilities.

Even when the Soviet Union was in decline in 1984 it still conducted 230 submarine patrols. Today it conducts fewer than 10 a year.

'As was their primary mission during the Cold War, Russian SSNs [nuclear attack submarines] would likely be trying to track U.S. nuclear missile submarines deploying from Kings Bay, Ga., and to monitor U.S. naval deployments from Norfolk, Va.,' Richard Fisher, military analyst with the International Assessment and Strategy Center, wrote in an email.

By now, U.S. officials believe the sub to be miles away from American shores



Thursday, November 8, 2012

The Most Important Election Result!

My most recent book, *Worshday*, opens with a north Florida Cracker farmer cleaning his guns at the kitchen table as he gets ready to ride into town to vote. In those days all voters went to the polls armed. Had to.

And as he cleans the guns, the farmer explains the election to his wife who is cutting up bar soap to do her worshipping.

No need for her to go to town with him; women couldn't vote.

Here are my short story's opening words:

Like all real Florida men Leonard Barrs voted for Horace Greeley against That Bastard Grant. Lincoln was bad enough—but Grant! Another term with him in office weren't tolerable.

Then Greeley up and died betwixt Voten Day and the Electoral College meeting!

What could you 'spect from a New Yorker?

Now there was nobody to stand against That Bastard Grant.

Leonard Barrs and none of the Florida men around wasn't gonna stand for that. "We want another election with maybe Benjamin Gratz Brown on the Liberal Republican-Democrat ticket. Least he's from Missouri, what is a damn sight better than New York or wherever That Bastard Grant is from. " Leonard grumbled.

"Look what That Bastard Grant did at Vicksburg, and Petersburg, and ... well, you know! Another term with him as President—that just weren't tolerable!"

Ah yes, who could orget that important presidential race?

Like most Americans, Ginny and I voted yesterday, then stayed up way too late watching election results on tv news.

Someday, when the Kid In The Attic gets born (he's the far-future teenager I write my diary for), he may read of the 2012 election in his high school history book—or maybe the election so important to us today will rank right up there with the Grant/Brown race in significance; his book won't mention it.

To me the single most important election result is that now the voting is over, Robo-caller, automated telephone machines with recorded political messages, will stop calling my home eight to 12 times a day all day every day urging me to vote for Grant or Greely or Brown or whoever!

November 10/2012
Ginny III

Last night Ginny suffered some kind of an attack and passed out.

I called Rescue and rode in ambulance # 5 with her to the hospital where she was admitted. I'll write more when I know more.

Donald snapped this photo of us in the emergence room with his cell phone:



Monday, November 12, 2012
Crisis and Ordinary Life

Once while war correspondent Edward R. Morrow covered the London blitz he and some other journalists heard a fire engine's siren. They jumped in a car and followed the firemen to a home - where a lady's dinner burned on the kitchen stove.

Morrow said that he felt surprised to realize anew that in the midst of the city being bombed, ordinary happenings still go on. Not all that happens is of great magnitude.

I said that when I knew more about what happened to put Ginny in the hospital, I'd write about it.

I still don't know what's going on.

I hear terms being tossed about about cardiac event vs heart attack—I can't tell the difference. And they've run test after test but tell us of no conclusion yet. She may be released soon or may be there quite a while. I know nothing yet.

But, when I got home last night, the pump on the aquarium has burned out and out poor goldfish swim in murk. I had to get the garbage can to the curb. Laundry piles up. Bathroom faucet drips. Grocery shopping to be done—just because a siren wails doesn't mean ordinary life is put on hold. All my kids are pitching in to help with all such stuff

A crisis comes as an extra bonus in life.

According to the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*, Jesus is quoted as saying, “When thou drawest water from the well, I am there; when thou hewest firewood, I am with you”.

Rings true to me.

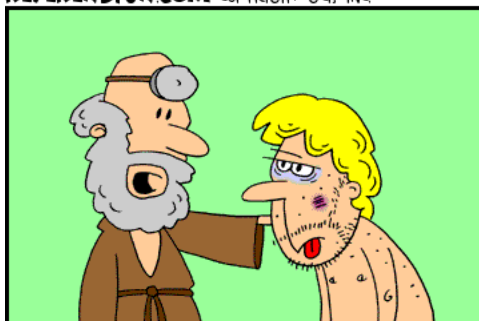
Heard this joke at the hospital yesterday-- my father died peacefully in his sleep, not screaming and pounding on the windows like the other people in the car!

I'll write more when I know more.

Tuesday, November 13, 2012

A Medical Decision

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Thanks to Charley Abraham

09-07-1999

NEAR AS I CAN TELL YOU'VE BEEN SMITTEN
... BEST THING FOR YOU IS TO REPENT AND
PRAY TWICE AND THEN CALL ME IN THE
MORNING

Yesterday afternoon a doctor released Ginny from the hospital with a 13-page report explaining that after about eight or ten medical tests, the doctors still don't know what caused her attack.

In summary the report says, "The exact cause of your episode is not certain... Because we do not know the exact cause of your near fainting spell, another spell could occur without warning...If your blood pressure drops too low...your body responds by losing consciousness... this problem is called syncope...a common problem with many possible causes...Dizziness (uncertain cause)...Vertigo (Unknown cause)...near-fainting (uncertain cause)...If heart trouble causes syncope...Heart trouble can be serious and may even be fatal...Certain medications, heart disease, or an inherited condition can also cause this...If heart trouble caused your fainting, treatment may improve blood flow, stop syncope, and help prevent further heart problems..."

She is to see more doctors for more tests as an outpatient, but at the moment she is back home tending her goldfish and watering her houseplants. She says she feels fine. No pain at all.

As the first of many doctors examined her last Thursday, Ginny gave him a notarized copy of her Living Will and explained that she does not wish to be resuscitated. He said that he'd never seen anyone ever do that before.

Her Christian approach to possible death impressed him, I think. She said, "I'm not afraid of dying; it's just another damn nuisance we have to go through".

Several doctors gathered round and got excited about her personal medical record book—because for years Ginny has recorded every blood sugar reading, medication, doctor's visit, test result, medical procedure, shot—everything organized under quick-to-find headings. One doctor asked if she were a nurse; another asked if she were a teacher; and one has asked to xerox some of her blank forms to show other doctors.

Now I want to write about my own weird thoughts about her attack:



(See Luke 10:30-36)

09-10-1998

DON'T GET TOO EXCITED FELLA, I'M THE
MEDIocre SAMARITAN ... I ONLY GIVE YOU A
BANDAID AND THEN I'M OFF

Her getting out of bed about 2 a.m. Thursday woke me. My arthritis slowed my struggling out of bed and when I found her unconscious and naked on the floor in the hall several thoughts went through my mind before I decided to call rescue:

First, my prostate cancer said I needed to piss big time and I had to move her unconscious body to get in to the bathroom without stepping on her.

With a quick prayer, I checked her breathing and determined that she did not need CPR.

As I struggled to move her and get her covered with a warm robe, she kept rousing a bit and saying, "I'm ok. No need to call rescue. I feel better" then she'd pass out again still on the cold floor in the hall.

My next thought was that it would be a shame if she died before our 44th anniversary coming up this week. I love and adore her and I'd miss her terribly. She is my life and love.

I thought of how we have previously discussed whether to call rescue in such an event (our Plan B). Or whether the best thing called for leaving her lay until she was dead (our Plan A). She promises to do me the same loving service if I'd collapsed at home.

I thought of that line from *Grumpy Old Men* and how, on hearing of an old person dieing of a sudden heart attack, Jack Lemon would exclaim, "Lucky Bastard". Young people have no idea what that means.

I thought of how Ginny's father died in his sleep without a sound after a full day of working in the garden he loved. What happened to Ginny could be hereditary because of good genes. I thought of what a great day we had had browsing garage sales and dabbling in our garden. There are worse ways to spend your last day on earth. And I thought of how my own parents lingered for months in slow agonizing death with cancer—not a happy ending.

I even thought of the Social Security mess we've been dealing with recently and how we expect a check soon and if Ginny died without endorsing it first, I'd have to send the money back!

I prayed for wisdom to do the best thing for her.

Ginny came to and passed out several times, each time insisting she was fine and didn't need medical attention--as her eyes rolled up in her head, she turned clammy, ghastly pale and collapsed again.

So, I decided the situation called for a professional opinion and I called rescue following our pre-planned protocol in such a case. Ginny and I took Red Cross and CERT training so we know the procedure for maximizing help—directions to dispatch, doors open, lights on, insurance cards ready, list of medications, etc. .Even as I followed the protocols I really questioned if I were doing the right

thing. Some medical life-prolonging procedures appear to Ginny and me as torturing sick people and we hope to avoid that situation.

The paramedics worked to stabilize her for a long time before the ambulance left the house. I got to ride along with lights and siren blasting. Even though I have written a book about Jacksonville's Fire-Rescue Division, this was the first time I ever got to ride with lights and siren—Cool!

Hospital triage began treating Ginny's symptoms immediately—the interminable tests came later after admission. But we still do not know what caused her attack or what to do next time.

Once I got her home we spent a lovely evening listening to 1960s music on Pandora Internet Radio, holding hands, cuddling, reading our books, chatting, just enjoying being together.

And, I'm proud to say I engaged in a three-way conference phone call with a doctor's business office, a Medicare councilor and an insurance agent to iron out business details; and I handled this myself to save her a bit of worry and frustration—for me this was the most difficult thing in the whole affair!

That business turned out satisfactory for all concerned. Yet I worry.

Although my calling rescue may have helped Ginny this time, I certainly hope I have not just set her up for future agony.

But our times are in His hands.

Lord, show us where to go from here please.



Another thrill-packed day begins for ActionSloth

Friday, November 16, 2012

A Ninja On Wheels

Now that Ginny is back home from the hospital, we adjust our lifestyle into a calmer mode.

At first an influx of visitors arrived filling our house and expressing care for us. The two nurses in the family relished discussing test results, giving us health tips and showing off nurse parlor tricks—like pinching the back your hand to see if there's blood in your veins.

Until the next doctor's visit, I'm keeping Ginny as inactive as I can but she wants to pitch in doing all the things she did before her “cardiac event”. But I take my own nursing role seriously as I've cooked and cleaned and negotiated business stuff.

Ginny has rested by reading and by spending six hours tracking down a discrepancy in our bank statement—her idea of fun. She found the error and thrilled to know we had more money in the bank than we'd thought—about 70 cents more.

When Gin was a little girl she won a blue ribbon for a prize-winning Iris and she took a class in flower arranging. So I bought her some cut flowers to play with; the above photo is her arrangement.



Here's an aside under the heading of The Things I Do For Love!

Back in the early 70s in some California town as we passed through driving the 18-wheeler, Ginny saw a notice about an Iris show. I parked the rig and escorted her to the show—huge crowds of “mature” ladies—very mature—talking about dirt-eating plants.

Across the gymnasium floor, I spotted this wiry guy in a black leather motorcycle jacket, the only other male in the place, and I gravitated to him to explained that I was only in there because my wife wanted to come. He in turn explained to me that he was at the iris show because he'd driven his mother there, then he added a classic line I've remembered all these years.

He said, “I'm a Camellia man myself”.

Then the macho man told me all about growing his camellias.

So much for old memories—back to the present.

The other day I took Ginny to Riverside Park to feed the ducks. When she tossed breadcrumbs in the water, ducks

pounced on them from above while scores of little fish nibbled the floating crumbs from below the water. All of a sudden a big white heron swooped down and snatched a fish right at Ginny's feet.

Delighted she said, "This is real nature!"

I wonder where I stand in the food chain?

I see the shadows of herons everywhere.

But I heard a line on the radio that impressed me: If God owned a refrigerator, your picture would be on the door.

Held in place by the magnets of His love.

And when you feel most lost, you are not abandoned or forgotten, He sees your picture on every milk carton.

An incident while Ginny was still in the hospital dwells on my mind—I had a confrontation with a young man who hassled me as I sat in my wheeled walker seat outside under a tree beside a public street.

We exchanged words.

Three times.

If he had actually touched me, I intended to take off his knee caps. I am too feeble to fight long, but I know how to fight dirty.

If he had not decided to walk away from the confrontation, I like to suspect he might have experienced one of the most memorable mornings of his young life.

Perhaps I'm tough only in my imagination, but it might not be wise to try me.

The Bible speaks of certain elderly people as being "old and full of days"--but that's not all we're full of. Over a long life, a man's capacity to meekly put up with crap fills to near critical mass. We can't take a whole lot more senseless hassle.

Besides that I like to think of myself as a ninja on wheels.

I could qualify for the coveted black shoelace in wheely combat.

As my elderly Aunt Hazel, God rest her, often told me, "Youth and skill can never match old age and treachery".

Right!

We old folks may not be as defenseless as we look.
Beware of dirty old men on wheels!



Saturday, November 17, 2012
The Creature In Jacksonville

In the early 1950s all kids in my hometown thrilled because a film crew was shooting a major movie right here using familiar locations such as the Lobster House, a fine restaurant where I could never afford to eat though I often walked past it as I crossed the bridge, and the very spot on Hechshire Drive where my father and I used to go shrimping.

As I recall when the movie was released here, and, as a promotion, the film company gave away free posters depicting *The Creature From The Black Lagoon*; now those posters go on auction starting with a \$7,000 bid.

About 50 years later, Ginny and I vacationed at Wakulla Springs, the first-magnitude spring near Tallahassee where the underwater portions of the movie were filmed. Ginny snapped a photo of me beside The Creature in the lounge at Wakulla Lodge. I'm the one on the right:



What brought all this to mind was an article in the London newspaper (found at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2234063/Maiden-monster-film-poster-collection-goes-sale-New-York.html>) about an auction of old movie posters to be held. The posters at the sale all feature maidens being carried off by monsters.

As a kid when I first saw the Creature in a movie theater—the Palace, the Imperial, or the Empress, I forget which one. All lined Forsyth Street in a row-- when I saw that movie as a kid, I thought the Creature wanted to tear the girl apart and devour her. Only after I'd grown up did I realize that the monster might have other plans for Julia Adams with her pencil-sharpener breasts. I was a dumb kid.

Anyhow, yesterday seeing the great graphics of movie posters in the London newspaper brought up many happy memories of monsters and maidens.



Monday,

November 19, 2012

I Got Wet For A Stupid Bluejay!

At breakfast yesterday Ginny suddenly alerted to something she saw out the window.

In the screen porch of the abandoned house next door, a bluejay fluttered trying to get out. It must have found some opening in the screen to get inside but it could not find where it had come in.

This distressed Ginny.

And, moved with compassion for the bird, she wanted me to trudge out in the freezing rain, wade through knee-high wet grass, and free the bluejay.

She quoted the Holy Bible's saying that God cares about every sparrow that falls.

I explained to her that while God cares about sparrows, the Bible says nothing about stupid bluejays.

Ginny is no theologian. She insisted that I brave the freezing drizzle, trespass on the abandoned property, and open the door to free the bird.

Her compassion cost me aggravation... as mine so often has made extra work for her: *Come on over to dinner, my wife won't mind setting an extra place... Sure I can lend you a few dollars...Bake five dozen cookies for Church coffee hour? No problem, Ginny whips up great cookies...*

I find it easy to give away what ain't mine to give.

But—this comes under the heading of The Things I Do For Love—I went over, (getting soaked in the process), pried open the screen door and either set the bluejay free, or maybe let one of the neighborhood cats into the porch.

My action pleased Ginny and that in turn pleased me.

And the incident almost triggered a (faulty) memory:

Years ago I wrote some article for some magazine (can't remember which one) and inside the back cover of that magazine was a poem by some lady (can't remember her name) who wrote about a sparrow being trapped on her sun porch.

The poet likened that situation to the frustrated, trapped feeling of so many people. People who could identify with how that bird was feeling

Her trapped sparrow tried frantically to escape by flying here and there, crashing into the wire mesh, feeling scared and trapped and frustrated and thwarted by its circumstance—yet the screen door stood open all the time, the poet said, in its panic the bird just could not see any way out.

The door to freedom always stands open.

Jesus once said, "I am the door".

His door always stands open to us.

The question is, Is our door open to Him?

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

Ginny's Health Update

Ginny is ok.

We spent Monday morning with Dr. Woody who said she had a vasovagal episode. He advised us to look it up on the Internet and the world renowned Mayo Clinic website has an article saying the term means she fainted. You can

read their explanation at
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/vasovagal-syncope/DS00806>

Dr. Woody went over the test results from the hospital (the ones he had—the hospital had not sent them all, nor had they sent her patient treatment summary, nor her patient release code--so never get sick on a holiday weekend) and He said all the test results, even the heart murmur, fall within acceptable normal range for a woman her age.

Of course one of the test results identifies her as an African-American Female (don't go into the hosp[ital on a holiday weekend).

Dr. Woody issued no new prescriptions and told her just to come in for her next regularly scheduled appointment next year.

I asked if are any restrictions on her normal activities and he said she ought not to go swimming alone or take up sky diving. Other than that he said her weakness is caused by smoking and he advised her to stop.

Just in case, he gave her the option of seeing five other doctors and he will mail referrals, so she may have appointments with a cardiologist, a pulmonary specialist, an event monitor, a neurologist, and a gynecologist in the future--if she chooses to go to any or all of the above. It's her choice.

Bottom line is that neither he nor any of the physicians at the hospital know what caused her problem although they ruled out many possible reasons.

Dr. Woody said her main problems is smoking and she should give it up. I think she ought to give up doctors!



Wednesday, November 21, 2012

Here is one of the first newspaper articles I had published:

**THANKSGIVING
AT THE LITTLE END OF THE HORN**

by John W. Cowart



A political cartoon from 1919

The Thanksgiving holiday confuses those of us who live at the little end of the horn.

One of the symbols of the season is a cornucopia – the horn of plenty – with grapes, figs, wheat and all the ingredients for a lavish feast pouring forth in prosperity.

However, at the little end of the horn is nothing but a blunt point of wicker. Hardly a single grape seed can squeeze out there. And at times all of us feel as though we live at that end.

Sometimes, it seems we pour our energy, talents and money – our very life force – into the big end of life's horn while we are forced to subsist on a trickle from the little end.

But even the poor are expected to be thankful. We look at unpaid bills, the children's tattered shoes, the wife's fading best dress and we wonder what there is to be thankful for. It seems like hypocrisy to sing hymns about joyful thanksgiving when you worry that tomorrow the city will cut off your lights.

The traditional image of Thanksgiving presented to us makes no provision for folks at the little end of the horn. We feel intimidated into working up a feeling of thanksgiving. We are urged to look on those worse off than we are and be thankful we are not in as bad a shape. That reeks of a sour grapes attitude. Can I really believe that someone else's toothache hurts as bad as mine? My troubles may not be as desperate as someone else's, but they are mine.

How can I honestly give thanks when the circumstances of my life dictate despair?

How can I joyfully sing about all the crops being safely gathered in when the only crop I gather comes from the food stamp office?

How can you relish the glory of God while confined to a drab nursing home, while waiting to see if the biopsy is malignant, or while dividing your paycheck among creditors?

How can you be thankful when you feel lost, confused and frustrated?

Is God reasonable to call for praises and thanksgivings from the poor and needy?

Yes, He is.

There are three elements involved in giving thanks: external, internal and eternal. And these three elements reach even to the little end of the horn. Even there, Christ offers good news.

The external element in thanksgiving involves things outside of you – your job, your family, your car, your home – anything you have or don't have. These things change constantly. Their value to you fluctuates. Their relationship to you shifts all the time.

Yet, most thanksgiving occurs on this external level.

We give thanks – or complain – depending on our current state of affairs relating to these externals. The worm in this particular apple is that no one has every external thing ordered exactly to his own liking. No one can depend on the externals of life to motivate his thanksgiving.

Those who today are thankful for their new car, tomorrow will complain because they can't afford gas for it. Those who are feasting will grumble because they have to wash dishes.

The internal element in thanksgiving is based on things within you – your emotions and feelings. These also constantly change and are almost impossible to control.

For instance, sometimes I adore my wife no matter what she says or does or spends. Some other times nothing she does could possibly please me because I'm determined to be grumpy no matter what.

Often internal feelings are influenced by the secretions of tiny glands. Although you are responsible before God for how you choose to express your feelings, those feelings may depend on how much bile your liver produces at any given moment. Some chemical imbalance within the body can exercise more control over feelings than conscious thought does. Therefore, your feeling of well being – or of hopelessness – may not truly reflect your actual state of affairs.

We all know of times when we expected to feel happy, but really felt nothing at all. And we have all felt depressed for no reason we could pinpoint. Because of the changing nature of internal factors, we find it impossible to "work up" gratitude toward God without feeling like hypocrites.

Neither external things nor internal feelings form a solid basis for being thankful. But, in requiring thanksgiving from us, God takes into account both our internal and external circumstances.

He does not ask for something we cannot give.

The book of Psalms -- although filled with hymns of thanksgiving-- reveals the author's distress over internal and external factors.

One writer complains about the cruelty of his external enemies and prays, "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth" (Ps 58:6).

In another place he reveals his internal distress saying, "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly: I go mourning all the day long" (Psalm 38:6).

But even with these internal and external stresses the Psalmist still finds a solid basis for offering thanks to God.

God knows our frustrations and exasperations. There truly is a place where we can pour out our complaints before the Lord. We can certainly tell our Father where it hurts.

The Scriptures contain no nonsense about trying to be thankful for things you are not thankful for. But they do reveal a solid basis for thanksgiving founded on a third element regardless of our state concerning the other two.

The third element involved in giving thanks is eternal.

On this level, the factors calling for our thanksgiving depend neither on external circumstances nor on internal feelings, but rather on the unchanging character of God.

Because of the eternal factors involved, thanksgiving is obligatory for all believers regardless of which end of the horn we call home. It is reasonable for God to expect thanksgiving and praise from even the poorest, neediest, sickest, most miserable person.

"Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good". (Psalm 118:1)

God is good.

More than any preceding generation, our generation questions this declaration. Tiny nibbling mice of doubt gnaw away at this foundation stone in the mind of everyone experiencing troubles.

If God is good, then why retarded children? Why war? Why cancer? Why are my children rebelling? Why am I so frustrated in what I want from life?

Is God really good?

Occasionally we have something bad happen which, with the passage of time, works out okay. Then we are elated and testify about how "All things work together for good". But our very elation and testimony proves that we basically believe this working out for good is an exception to the way things normally go.

God is good. In spite of our doubts and lack of faith, God is good. His nature is good. His purpose is good. His actions are good. The things He gives are good, and the things He withholds are also good.

The catch in this is that good often hurts.

Once the doctor admitted me to the hospital. They probed and punched and drew my blood. They gave me a bitter cup to drink and took pictures. They strapped me to a machine which tilted and

wobbled this way and that. They would give me nothing to eat, not even a slice of dry toast.

Even though my overall treatment made me uncomfortable, humiliated and afraid; even though I was hungry, confined and apprehensive; even though I did not like what I was going through – it was still reasonable for me to be thankful for what was happening to me.

They were saving my life.

The very tribulation I endured called for thanksgiving since it worked for my good.

Christ is not a common doctor; He is the Great Physician. He gives us the full treatment. He is good and He insists on working for your good. So don't be surprised if His treatment causes you pain, discomfort, indignity or humiliation. Healing usually hurts.

When you live at the little end of the horn, when you are subjected to hunger, to anxiety, to tribulation, to a bitter cup, even then be thankful for God is good.

He is on your side no matter what is happening to you. He cares about you. He likes you. Believe that he is good and that He acts for your good...

And be thankful.

The anticipation of Heaven is another factor involved in the eternal element of thanksgiving. In our day this factor has fallen into disrepute. Scoffers have mocked and Heaven now embarrasses us. The taunt Pie-In-The-Sky-By-And-By intimidates us and we cover our shame by dismissing Heaven and dwelling on the blessings of God now in this life.

We don't talk about Heaven very much, except for vague references to a better place made at funerals.

We don't think about Heaven very much.

We don't believe very much.

We grieve like the world grieves saying, "Poor John. Looks so natural. At least he's at rest now".

Nonsense!

Poor John is the latest guest of honor at the biggest celebration this universe has ever seen. It's like Christmas morning for Poor John. The presents are spread out in lavish array around the Tree Of Life. And, although Poor John may have spent an anxious Christmas Eve wondering if there really would be any presents, now he's wide-eyed with wonder...

And he has no regrets that our Father didn't let him open his gifts early.

God has gifts, wonders, delights unimaginable stored up for His children. The Scripture says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

His treasures can't break, rust or be stolen. He has a place for you. He has a plan for good and not for evil to give you a future and a hope!

Can you imagine anyone in Heaven complaining about what they lacked on earth?

Pie in the sky by and by?

Well, yes. That's the only pie there is.

If you're at the little end of the horn at the moment, why not anticipate Heaven and be thankful for "verily, there is a reward for the righteous" (Psalm 58:11).

Viewing your present circumstances in the light of anticipating God's eternal Heaven helps earthly things fall into place. For instance, if your biggest worry now is cancer, remember that those malignant cells will eat up everything they can and then they will starve from lack of food - You will outlast them.

You will live forever. You will spend all eternity somewhere.

We are offered eternal life in Jesus Christ, God's Son. And that life in Him not only goes on forever but it has a quality that makes you glad it does.

Another eternal element in thanksgiving at the little end of the horn is that we know the present order of things is not based on reality. The True and Righteous Judge is going to straighten things out. "For He cometh to judge the earth: with righteous shall he judge the world and the people with equity" (Psalm 98:9).

Why strain and struggle to get to the head of the line?

The Scripture declares that when He sets things in their true order the last shall be first; the least, greatest, and the greatest servant of all.

Should we sulk and demand our rights and chafe under ill-treatment as though a servant ought to be greater than his master?

Our Lord Jesus Christ lived at the little end of the horn.

He was a guest at other men's banquets. He did not own the boat he preached from. He did not own the donkey he rode into Jerusalem. The cross He died on was not his possession; it was the property of the Roman government.

Even the tomb where He was buried was borrowed from a wealthy man.

Jesus returned it in good condition after only three days use.

Jesus is the Lord of Glory; and we, His followers, can expect no better lot in this world than our Lord received. We can not reasonably expect to take our proper place in the scheme of things until He does.

Therefore, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God... made Himself of no reputation, and too, upon Himself the form of a servant" (Philippians 2: 5-7).

If we live at the little end of the horn, then let's be thankful that we live where Christ lived.

Serve Christ and your brother right where you are when you can with what you have

The day is coming when Christ will stand the horn - the whole order of things in this present world - on end and shake it. You are in the right place for His abundant blessing. He once said, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the Kingdom of God".

Was He lying?

At the little end of the horn there are eternal reasons to be thankful....

That's fundamental.



Thursday, November 22, 2012 Butterball Police Attack



Help!

The Butterball Police Swat Team surrounds my house.

They want their turkey back.

They'll never take him alive!

I've already cooked him.



Happy Thanksgiving

**Sunday, November 25, 2012
Thank You Book Buyers**

Many thanks to the discerning readers who bought copies of my books on Black Friday.



Tuesday, November 27, 2012
Imaginary Readers

My computer tells me when one of my books sells. But that's all it tells me.

Many thanks to readers who bought copies of my books this -past weekend. I appreciate you. By the way, the 30% discount coupon in yesterday's posting is still good till midnight Tuesday.

My computer tells me when someone buys a book but it does not reveal the who or where of any reader of my books.

But, in my mind's eye, I imagine my typical readers.

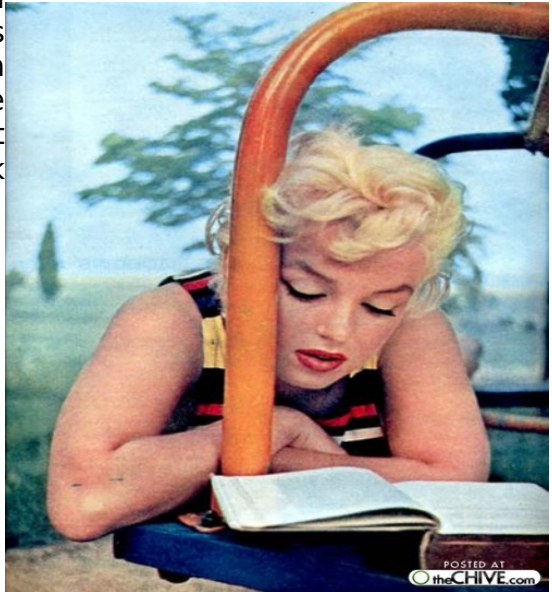
For instance when I saw this photo in the newspaper, I imagined that President Obama just had to be buying a copy of *Glog*, my dinosaur novelof sorts.



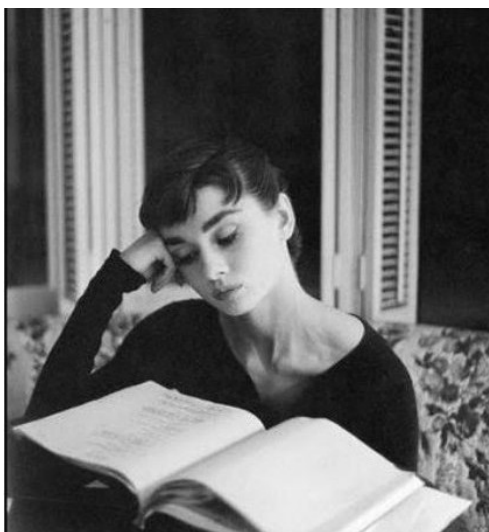
It just had to be my book! Why else would the President look so happy as he took his book home to the White House?



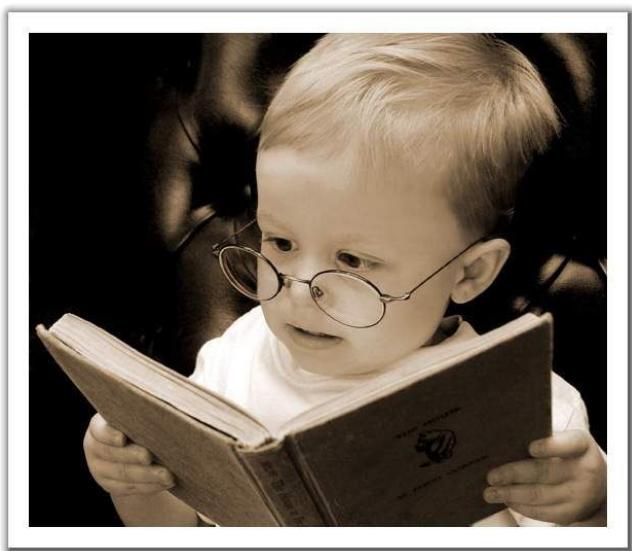
In my pipe dreams, I imagine other famous people read my books. In the next photo, I'm sure that Marilyn Monroe must be perusing my book *Gravedigger's Christmas*.



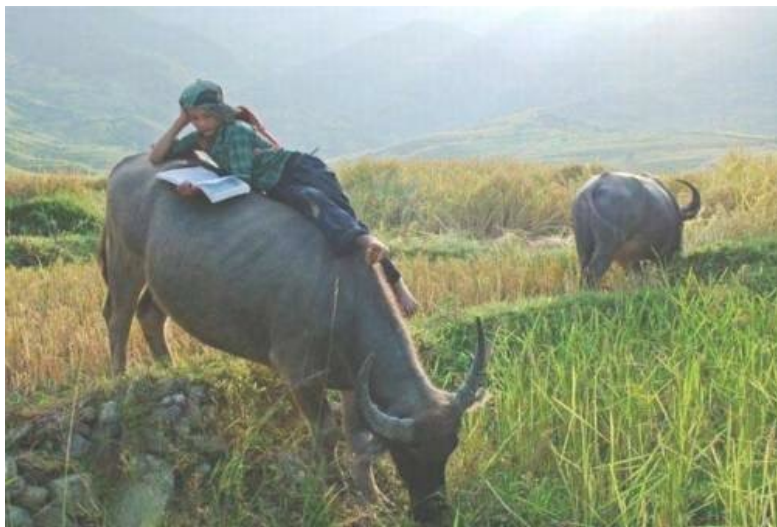
I imagine that Audry Hepburn enjoyed my short story collection *Worshday & Other Tales*.



I imagine my books attract young readers too:



I'll bet this next young person must be reading *I'm Confused About Prayer*, the only one of my books to be translated into the Indonesian language. (Also available in English at www.bluefishbooks.info)



Yes, I imagine my books are being read everywhere. The guy in the hammock appears to be enjoying *Rebel Yell*, a never-before-published Civil War diary.



And this spiritually hungry young woman is, I imagine, reading *Seeking A Settled Heart*.



I imagine not only individuals buy my books but no well-stocked library exists without copies of *William Short's 1854 Diary*, another never-before published diary. The author spilled ink and I found his fingerprint on one page.

Here, I think I see the spine of my book on the third shelf to the right:



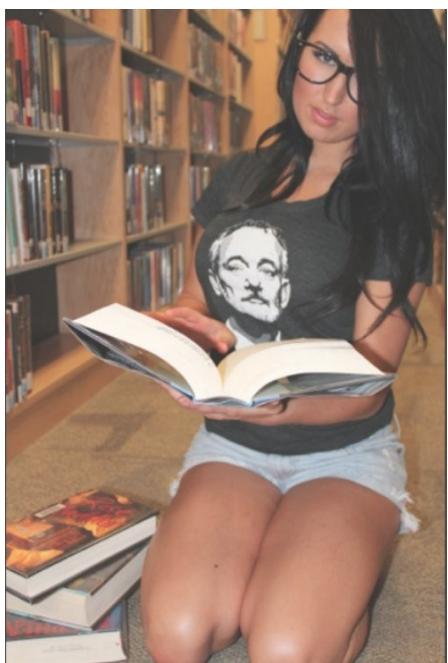
I imagine this typical reader of my books was so engrossed in her copy of *The Lazarus Projects*, my science fiction novel about a team of modern scientists who traveled back through time to see whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead—she was so engrossed in reading she got her copy wet in the ocean and will have to buy another.



I imagine this dedicated reader keeps dry her copy of *Along The Way*, first in the Barbara White series, a series I edited.



I imagine this hot woman just has to be reading a copy of *Heroes All*, my history of firefighting in Jacksonville, Florida.



Unfortunately, I can also imagine a reader finding my *Letters From Stacy* so boring it puts them to sleep.



Yes, I can imagine all sorts of typical readers of my books.

In fact, I imagine...

I imagine that...

I imagine that one of my books is somewhere in this next photo but for some reason I forget which one it is or where it is on the shelf.



Wednesday, November 28, 2012
Pennies From Heaven ... Or Someplace???



Several times in his novel about John F. Kennedy's assassination, a book with the odd title *11/22/63*, Stephen King uses the phrase, "Life turns on a dime". The phrase reveals how actions have consequences—sometimes unexpected consequences; it shows we have no idea what the future holds even seconds from now.

Over this past month Ginny and I have found our life turns not on a dime but on pennies.

A bunch of pennies.

And I have no idea why.

Is it God? Or is it natural circumstance?

And, is there a difference?

Here's a little bit of what happened to us:

For months we had regressed from poverty to abject poverty. Our situation looked desperate. After Ginny retired, the bottom fell out. We found ourselves without the minimal resources we had expected.

To keep body and soul together, I stood in line at three different church food pantries (God bless those folks for their aid). When the electric company threatened to cut off our lights, we appealed to a charity agency to pay our light bill (God bless them too) We applied for food stamps—and were denied. Bill collectors called daily. With great reluctance, I overcame my vanity and asked our grown children for money.

Of course each kid cheerfully helped us with cash, groceries and other help as they were able.



Things began to turn around for us.

In varying amounts, penny by penny, out of nowhere, money began to come in.

The car dealer called telling us he owed us a refund on mechanical work we'd had done six months ago. A drug company sent me a check for \$3.90 because I'd overpaid them. Social Security adjusted our income and payment dates with a six page incomprehensible letter explaining why—Albert Einstein cringed when he got such letters. Someone out of the past who Ginny used to work with sent a surprise gift card. My book sales generated more royalties than I expected. I was able to fax the bank a receipt proving we'd already paid a bill they were still trying to collect—What a relief! I won \$5 on a scratch-off ticket. And the telephone company refunded me cash for downtime last summer!

It all added up.

Jennifer and Terri even gave us a tv set and we enjoyed watching the parades and football on Thanksgiving Day.

As best I can figure pennies and dollars poured in to us from six or eight different sources,

Or was it all from One Source?



Anyhow, today Ginny and I have gas in the car, food in the frig, money in the bank, and, most importantly, pipe tobacco in my humidor. My belly is full. Bills are paid. Our home is warm. Our health is tolerable. And future prospects look good.

God's in His Heaven and ... and I'm still down here.

Yes, Ginny says that were I to win Lotto, I'd treat it as a problem!

Our life has turned on a dime and I question why?

We are doing nothing different. We work no harder. We pray no differently. We give no differently. We live just as we did when facing abject poverty. So what happened?

Did God intervene on our behalf?

If so, He took His own sweet time about it!

Did our present well-being come about as a natural consequence of life and business? Is our abundance of pennies just a normal result of businesses settling their year-end accounts?

Was God miffed at us before, but got over His peeve?

Does physical prosperity have anything to do with spiritual standing?

Some preachers say so.

I think they lie.

When they tell me that material things equal God's approval, I suspect what they are really saying is, "I got mine 'cause I'm godly. Tough about you".

In fact, when I hear testimonies about how God prospered some guy, I resent him. I question what's wrong with me that God does not give me goodies.

And it is an easy step for me to go from asking, "What's wrong with me" to asking "What's wrong with God".

To me equating material well-being with holiness reeks of vanity. The love of money, the chasing after material things, is a root of all sorts of evil.

Writing to some of the poorest slaves in Nero's empire, St. Peter assured them that no matter how poor we are, we have what is truly needed. He said, "Jesus our Lord according to His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue".

All things pertaining to life and godliness.

John The Baptist told the soldiers, "Be content with your pay".

Content.

King Solomon said that the blessing of the Lord maketh rich and all thy labor adds nothing to it.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor".

Case in point: St Paul knew how to deal with prosperity and how to suffer.

He said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

"I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"

These things puzzle me.

I do not understand the ways of God, nor the workings of the world.

I feel like I'm a human turtle and as Ralph Emerson said, "All the thoughts of a turtle are turtle".

That does not stop me from writing and telling the world my own two cents worth.



Incidentally, all these pictures of pennies I use here come from the October 28, 2010, blog posting in the archives of Pat & Jerry's Blog at <http://www.patandjerry.com> Their article about finding big money on the road is well worth reading.

Thursday, November 29, 2012
Stuck In Sticky Mud

Bob, a reader of my website, e-mailed asking: "[Are you able to help me in some research and explain KJV Judges 5:20](#)"?

I had to look up the verse; it says, "They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera".

I assume Bob wants to understand what it means to say that stars fought.

I took a stab at it for him with this answer:

Hi Bob,

What a fun question! I'm glad you visited my website and I've enjoyed thinking about how to answer you. Your question sparked some happy memories for me because once years ago, when she was a pre-teen, my daughter Eve and I constructed a model of Sisera's war chariot for a Sunday School project.

Please understand that I am not a Bible scholar, just an amateur and occasional Bible reader. You may do much better consulting authoritative Bible commentaries. But here is my take on the passage.

The first thing to note is that Judges 4 & 5 contain a narrative section and a poem, both describing a battle between the Canaanites and the Israelites .

The verse you question, 5:20, are lines from a song, "Then sang Deborah..." (5:1)

One feature of Hebrew poetry is parallel repetition; that is, it says a thing once, then repeats the same thing in slightly different words:

I, even I, will sing unto the LORD;
I will sing praise to the LORD (5:3)

I, Deborah arose,
I arose a mother in Israel. (5:7)

They fought from heaven;
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.
The river of Kishon swept them away,
That ancient river, the river Kishon. (5:20,21)

The poetical structure is one factor to consider in thinking about this passage.

Another factor is to compare the poem with the narrative account in Chapter 4.

The pagan general Sisera boasted of 900 armor-plated chariots (4:13). Some ancient sources, Josephus I believe, said two horses carried a crew of three warriors in each

chariot—a driver, an archer and a spearman. I imagine these battle tanks must have weighted close to two tons.

On level ground these battle tanks cut through lines of enemy foot soldiers with lethal effect. On uneven ground... Well, the floor of the chariot was not solid; a tightly stretched carpet floored the fighting platform and these carpets acted in much the same way as a car's springs act to give a level ride.

Invincible?

Not necessarily.

God told Deborah, the only female Judge, "Go and draw toward Mount Tabor... and I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera with his chariots" (4:6).

Ok, the Israelites camped up on the mountain side of Tabor, Sisera's charioteers camped on the level plain near the riverbank.

On the day of battle, as Deborah sang, "The heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water".

Water on the plain means mud.

Josephus, I think, said that during the night Deborah's army crept down into the clear space in front of the mountain and dug trenches. Rain water and the overflowing river water filled the trenches and when the chariots attacked, they thought they were charging over level ground.

They bogged down in the mud.

"The Lord discomfited Sisera and all his chariots, and all his host with the edge of the sword" (4:15).

"Then were the horsehoof broken by means of the pransings, The pransings of their mighty ones" (5:22)

I have no idea what pransings are. Ditches? Sticky mud?

Anyhow, Israelite foot soldiers slaughtered the Canaanites.

So, they fought from Heaven,
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera (5:20)

I doubt this verse says anything related to astrology. As Shakespeare observed, "The fault is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are underlings".

I think the bottom line is that God rained on their parade.

The heathen relied on their superior weapons systems instead of the Living God; God thwarted their superior technology with mud.

He used the very thing the Canaanites were proudest of to bring them defeat.

Or you could say, Wet weather favored the Jews against the Canaanites.

General Sisera escaped on foot, entered a Bedouin tent, fell asleep exhausted, and the lady there nailed his head to the ground with a tent peg—don't think in terms of a Boy Scout tent's pegs, but a thick, three-foot long stake used to anchor Bedouin tents in a desert sand storm.

In one of the most poignant passages of Scripture Sisera's mother speaks for women everywhere in every age—any woman with a son, father, husband, lover in the armed forces—as she worries, When will he come home? Will he come home?

Anyhow, Bob, these are my thoughts on your question. I hope this helps.

Friday, November 30, 2012
Busy, Busy, Busy

Already our calendar fills with Christmas season activities—items for our pleasure, duty, and necessity.

Pesky doctors call for new appointments.

Happy family activities hover soon.

Old friends call with invitations.

The Scripture says, As is thy day, so shall thy strength be.

Yesterday Ginny and I saw to property taxes and grocery shopping. Today we plan to relax at home and plan where to go when. Tomorrow we intend, God willing, to go Christmas shopping. 'Tis the season to exercise restraint, common sense, and patience.... Fat chance!

Saturday, December 1, 2012
Late Mail

Wonder why my mail was delivered late yesterday by a substitute mailman?

An office pool of workers at the Kings Road Post Office bought 85 tickets in the Powerball lottery drawing for Thursday night.

One of those 85 quick-pick tickets won one million dollars.

Had they hit one more of the numbers the total jackpot would have been \$587.5 million.

An inscription above the entrance of U.S. Post Office building in New York quotes what Herodotus had to say about the ancient Persian Empire's pony express riders system for getting messages from the Mediterranean coast to India in three days.

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds”.

This unofficial Post Office motto says nothing about winning Powerball.

Good for the Jacksonville Post Office guys and gals! I'm happy for them.

Who can blame them if they celebrated a bit?

Soon, these workers can expect a visit from Santa Clause. ... and the tax collector.

Sunday, December 2, 2012
They Moved The Store

Yesterday I wanted to buy a double-barreled shotgun.

Wood stock with steel barrels and pump action. A realistic toy shotgun that fires caps with a bang.

Wanted to get it for a neighbor kid. Knew just the place to buy one. I'd seen such shotguns in that store before.

So, Ginny and I ventured across the bridge and braved heavy, insane, holiday shopper traffic to search for parking near one of Jacksonville's biggest shopping malls. We arrived at the location and found no toy store there. What happened?

It used to be right here. A toy store with a booming business every Christmas season. We'd shopped there many times buying toys for our own kids back when they were little... Er, Come to think of it, the last time we shopped in that toy store was 30 years ago.

No wonder it was not where we remembered it.

They moved the store.

The world moved on.

I wish it would stay put!

I wish things would stay as I remember them—or maybe not.

This incident reminded me of something that happened back in the late 1960s, the first time I took Ginny Christmas shopping.

Here's the way I remember it when I wrote about it years later:



Warnings and Illicit Kissing On Christmas Eve

Caution: this posting contains -- among other things -- a warning about illicit kissing.

What would a nice, 43-years-married, old guy like me know about illicit kissing?

Well, let me tell you:

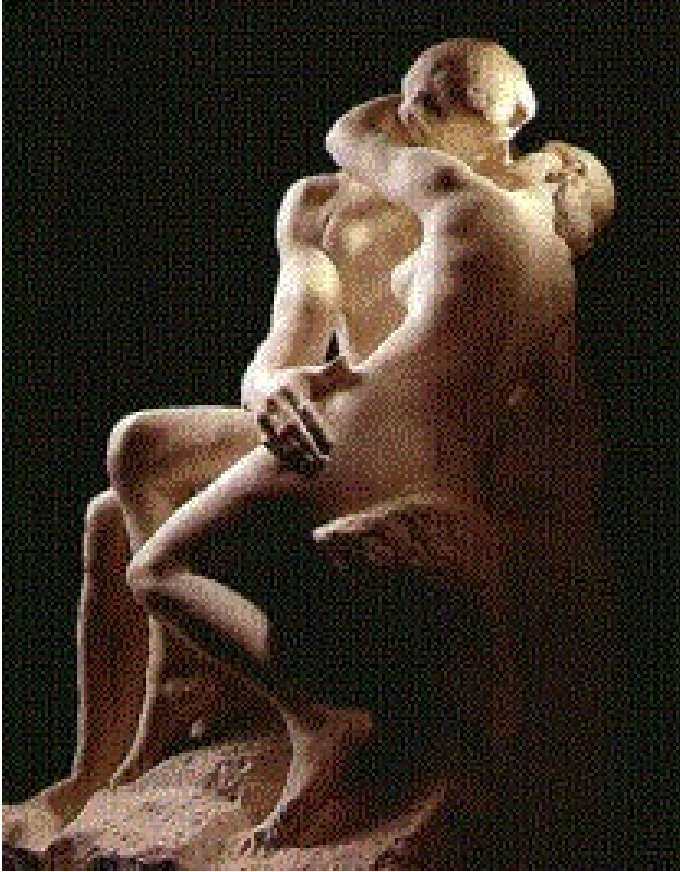
When Ginny and I were first engaged, I drove a brand new 1967, four-on-the floor (I don't think they even had automatic transmissions back then), Mustang. Bright yellow, the yellow you only see nowadays edging the cover of a *National Geographic* magazine.

Wow! A sporty new car and a beautiful woman.

Wasn't I something!

On Christmas Eve, Ginny wanted a few last minute things from the mall and I was proud to drive her in spite of the heavy traffic.

To turn left off the main highway into the mall, we got stuck in a monster long line of plain drab old cars which inched up a steep hill to trickle through the light one or two at a time.



**Ginny's
first
Christmas
gift to me
was a**

reproduction of Rodin's Kiss

We were obviously going to be stuck in traffic on that hill for a while and since even back then I was a biblically minded man, I decided to "redeem the time".

So... whenever the line of traffic stopped, I reached for Ginny, or she reached for me, and we smooched fervently.

HONK! Honk, honk!

What's this?

The guy behind me kept hitting his horn, the creep.

What's the matter with him? Traffic isn't going anywhere.

We started kissing again.

Again, he started honking.

The spoilsport. Let him find his own girl. What business is it of his what I do in the privacy of my own new yellow four-on-the floor Mustang.

The light changed. I crept forward in the line maybe three car lengths and stopped again.

Again I kissed; again he honked. He not only honked, he also flashed his lights at me!

Now, I'm getting mad. This guy is a pest, a creep, a voyeur, a busybody. I'm half a mind to...

The traffic light changed again. I inched up the hill toward the turnoff again and stopped on red to resume smooching.

The dirty so-and-so really leaned on his horn this time.

I ignored the killjoy and kept on kissing Ginny until.....

CRUNCH!

Here, younger readers should know that a car with a manual transmission requires that the driver keep one foot on the brake and the other on the clutch when stopped on a hill in traffic. If you don't do that, then your car rolls backward.

That's what I had done!

Yes, every time, I'd lean over to kiss Ginny, I had let up on both clutch and brake until I rolled backward and smacked into the driver behind, who had done everything in his power to warn me of the danger.

I did not feel quiet so sporty when I had to get out of the car and apologize to him. I felt stupid and silly ...and I discovered that I'd crumpled my own rear end (You can take that figuratively and literally.).

Now let me say straight out that as a fundamentalist Christian I have nothing against engaged couples kissing. I wish them joy.

However, I'd be a dunce if I did not learn from my own experience that when God warns me about something He's not being a spoilsport, a killjoy or a busybody meddling in affairs which are no concern of His.

If the scripture teaches nothing else, it teaches that God hates to see His children get hurt.

So He warns us.

He warns us again and again.



He blows the horn and blinks the lights when we do certain things because He can see that by doing them we are going to crumple our own rear ends.

But most of us do just like I did with that other driver, we ignore the danger signs or get peeved at the person doing the warning.

As sure as cars roll downhill when the driver is not keeping his foot on the brake, there are other rules in the universe. The rules are not arbitrary but they are absolute.

Take an easy one for instance, the Bible again and again warns us that we ought to care for the poor.

"He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord," says the Proverb (19:17).

Jesus equates our care of the poor to our own eternal destiny (Matthew 24).

Yet, the Bible also reveals a flip side to concern for the poor.

In Leviticus 19:15, the Lord declares, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor."

In other words, right is right and wrong is wrong regardless of the status of the person acting. Stealing the pennies from a blind beggar's cup is stealing -- and charging a few personal bucks on Donald Trump's credit card is also stealing.

And God's word warns us not to steal. Stealing makes us thieves and God hates to see that happen to one of His beloved ones. And that's just what you and I are, beloved ones of God.

As a fundamentalist Christian, I believe that Christ warned and warned us away from the sins that bring us down, defeat us and corrupt us.



Then He died to save us from the sin that has us beat. He died the death for us and rose again from that death to lift us up to where He is.

Wow! What can we say after all that?

Unfortunately, most of us don't say much. We're too proud to say thank you to God or to even repeat the warnings even those we care about most.

I suspect most other people do just like I did when they ignore the warnings and back into trouble: I fussed and fumed and blamed and then ended up driving around with my own rear end crumpled.

Nobody should live like that.

St. Paul was not speaking tongue in cheek when he linked two rules for living in I Thessalonians 5:14; he told Christians to "warn the unruly" in one breath and in the next he commanded, "Comfort the feebleminded."

That's fundamental.

Thursday, December 6, 2012
The Jesus Christ Barbecue

Tuesday Ginny and I drove up to Kingsland, Georgia. And on the way home I glimpsed a highway billboard advertising the Jesus Christ Barbecue.

Of course no such place exists, but I saw a sign to it anyhow.

Thing is, in all the frenzy of getting ready to get ready for Christmas—you know, all the preliminary stuff you have to do before even decorating your tree—I've hardly given Jesus a thought recently.

Yes, I know Christmas marks an observance of God entering this world to save mankind. But Santa stuff pre-empts God for me and, I imagine, for many other people.

I mean, what is God's honor and majesty, or man's eternal salvation and deliverance from a burning Hell compared to a sale on gift sets of aftershave?

My family escaped some of the Santa frenzy as they grew up. When my kids were little, Ginny and I told them that Santa was a lovely old legend, a myth that we all pretend to believe even though it is not real but it is so much fun to pretend that it is, that we do.

Therefore the kids never “believed” in Santa, although we always went all out to decorate, celebrate, feast, and give gifts.

So, Tuesday found Ginny and me gleaning the Salvation Army Thrift Store in Georgia to load our car with fun gifts to the best of our ability and purse.

The Lord Jesus Christ stayed out from underfoot during all this Christmas falderol .

Jesus is smarter than I am.

Ginny and I shopped, listened to carols, shopped, dined out, shopped, looked at decorations, and shopped—all with Jesus, Whose birth we celebrate, far in the background.

Then as we drove home I saw the big yellow and red billboard sign: JESUS CHRIST'S BARBECUE

That is not what it said. But those words are what I saw as we sped past on the highway.

It was a question of kerning.

Kerning has to do with the spacing of printed letters. For instance a printed M is wider than a printed I. Kerning allows for proportional spacing of letters; there's not always the same distance between one alphabet letter and another.

So the billboard really advertised *Jessi* somebody's restaurant up the road, but I saw those first three letters and my mind's allowance for my blindspot filled in the rest.

I have this tiny blindspot in my left eye. It causes no problem driving—my doctor says I am safe to drive during daylight hours—but it factors into my doing small things, like fitting a screwdriver into the slot on a screw or a key into the keyhole, and it blurs the middle out of some highway billboard words. If the kerning is slightly off, then my brain fills in what it guesses should be the rest of the sign.

And I'm sure I saw what I saw even if it's ridiculous.

So *Jessi* became *Jesus* and my brain immediately balked at what my eyes thought the billboard said. I know good and well that there is no Jesus Christ's Barbecue serving succulent ribs, beef and chicken.

Although, some folks do proclaim their faith in naming their secular businesses; I see Heavenly hair dressers and Spirit-Filled lawn care and Praise The Lord book stores and Hallelujah used car lots all over the South. Good for these folks. They say what they can in the best way they know.

You know, sometimes it takes just the littlest thing to turn my thoughts back to Jesus. Yes, He is always in the background even when I concentrate on buying presents. But, out of sight, out of mind.

Guess what?

There's nothing wrong with that.

When a Christian who loves the Lord doesn't think of Christ for a while, all that proves is that we're comfortable with Him. You'd better think of an active enemy all the time. You have to be alert for bad guys. But a friend

needs no such constant attention. You can even go to sleep in God's presence; you dare not do that with an enemy.

The Spirit moves like a breath of wind; we breath Him in and out constantly even when we are no more aware of Him than a fish is of the water it swims in.

But sometimes we do become aware.

God was in the world from the foundation of the earth. Yes as Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am".

Yet, the incarnation, God becoming man, is a well-documented historic fact that happened at a specific time in a specific place to specific people.

The world, at least a few people in it, became aware of Emmanuel—God With Us.

But sometimes, I think I'm not the only one to misread signs.

Everybody knows Jesus Christ does not run a roadside barbecue stand—if He runs anything, it's a crab shack.

P.S.: I will not be posting for a couple of days because I go in today to have the eye doctor stick another needle in my eye to keep my macular degeneration from progressing. It's easy to find his office at the Retina Clinic because it's right next door to the Rectal Surgeon's office; I do not ever want to misread those two signs!

Friday, December 7, 2012

An Odd Joy In Christmas Lights

Yesterday's visit to the eye surgeon turned out better than I expected; Dr. Sailor said my sight has improved so that he did not need to inject glop behind my eyeball, that I'm ok to drive, and that I do not need to see him again for a couple of months.

Thanks be to God and the good doctor.

Dr Sailor and his nurse broke out laughing when I told them about the Jesus Christ Barbecue sign; he said that was the funniest thing a macular degeneration patient had told him in years.

It was about a year ago this week that my eyesight first went phooy as I was driving home from a trip Kingsland a few days before Christmas.

I've wondered why Christ, who healed many blind people while here on earth, would let me suffer this vision impairment?

Doesn't Jesus love me anymore?

Sure He does. He said it's better to enter into His Kingdom with one eye than to be cast into Hell with both eyes wide open.

So, why me? Why now?

My being old as dirt might have something to do with it.

But there's another factor: with my own vision dimming, I see more of other people's problems to pray about.

For instance in the eye clinic yesterday I noticed three people I would never have encountered had I not been there myself. There was an old man wearing a Korean War veteran's cap. He wore his best suit, white shirt, tie, polished shoes—the way people of my youth used to dress up to go to the doctor's. I go in jeans now, but I remember when I'd wear a suit for a doctor's visit.

This old veteran's sight was so bad that his daughter had to lead him through the office by the hand.

Poor bastard. I sent up a flash prayer to Christ for this old guy's comfort. I would never have encountered him had I not been seeking treatment myself.

The woman dressed in gray looked far too young to need treatment for macular degeneration. She has a long road ahead of her. *Lord, give her aid.*

The nurse-- first off, I can see well enough to spot her big tits. Then I noticed the worried expression on her face. It occurred to me that she must be having family problems and I prayed for her home life.

Then there was Dr. Sailor himself. I know he is a yachtsman and has a rebellious teen at home. God help him!

Now I seldom pray for such people I chance to encounter long or hard, rarely do they remain long in my

heart. But they are there for a little while. And for a moment I do care about them big tits, VA cap, and all.

They would not have crossed my path were I not in the same boat (yes, I know I'm mixing metaphors, but that says it best).

The thing is, I wonder if Jesus did not gift me with this eye problem just to bring me into contact with people to care about that I would not otherwise have encountered.

Makes me wonder.

Normally I only flash a prayer to the Lord for people I notice. Noticing someone often constitutes a call to pray for them. Occasionally I even smile at them, or hold a door open or some such small courtesy. Rarely do I speak. But it's not too unusual for me to listen to their tale if they want to talk—like the clerk in the hardware store Wednesday who just came back to work that day after a heart attack in August and drew me into a corner to tell me about it while Ginny shopped. I told him that I was glad his health was improving but that a heart attack might be a good indication eh should prepare for Eternity.

My point is that noticing people and exercising even a tiny bit of mini-love just might let them know that for a short moment somebody gives a damn about them. And acts of mini-love may spark their interest in the Great Love available.

Or, maybe I just do this goody-goody stuff just to feel like I'm a neat guy. Who knows? All my motives are mixed motives. I'd go ape trying to sort them out.. But on some low level, I have a chance to show love. Or maybe I've just been listening to too much saccharine Christmas music on the radio.

Anyhow, after the good news about my own sight's improvement, Ginny and I enjoyed breakfast at a sandwich shop near the hospital. Three physicians sat at a nearby table commensurating with each other about their work load.

I eavesdropped.

One complained that it had been such a busy night in the emergency room that he was 12 hours late getting home.

Another doctor, an ossiologist (is that the right word, I mean a guy who sets broken bones)...the bone doctor said Christmas is his busiest season.

“Thank Heaven,” he said, “For strings of Christmas lights and idiots on ladders. They're paying my kid's way through college”.

Sunday, December 9, 2012

No Blue Max For Me

Because the restaurant where Ginny and I'd been invited for a surprise party tends to be upscale and expensive, I pulled up the menu on-line ahead of time to see what I would be able to eat according to my ability and budget.

Because I'm such a sloppy eater and so self conscious, I avoid eating in public, especially among strangers. I worry that my eating might disgust anyone seeing me. Usually I just drink coffee at such functions and hope no one will notice.

As though anyone on earth would give a damn what, or even if, I eat. The world dwells on concerns other than my dignity.

However, this surprise party was to honor someone important to me—several someones actually. Five members of the family have birthdays between now and January.

So I steeled myself to go the party and I studied the menu ahead of time.

I chose a special meal called The Blue Max.

The menu description made it sound palatable.

Besides, I once knew Jack D. Hunter (God rest him), the author of the famous World War I aviation novel titled *The Blue Max*.

During the 1980s, Jack, author of 17 novels—several made into movies-- served as writing coach at the Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville's daily newspaper, where I worked as a mail clerk. As fellow Christians, we struck up a friendship and he encouraged me greatly in my writing.

Naturally, when I saw Blue Max on the menu—named for Jack's book or because it's cooked with blue cheese?—I decided I would order the Blue Max at the party.

Didn't happen.

Just as I stood up to shave and dress up for the party, the phone rang. Turns out the guest of honor had learned of the surprise party and adamantly refused to attend.

The party was canceled.

Crap!

About 15 people's Saturday night plans torpedoed.

Some cried.

As I hung up the phone on hearing the news, I thought of my mother. She mastered the art of removing joy from any would-be happy occasion.

The more I thought about what had happened, the more it upset me.

I have been to events where I felt uncomfortable, but it did not kill me to stay an hour or two instead of raining on the parade for everybody else.

How annoying!

You know, the best thing when I let someone piss me off—the best thing for the good of my own soul—is for me to remember times when I have done the same sort of thing to someone in the past that is being done to me in the present.

My memory is a bitch.

Soon as the thought about what someone did aggravates me, pesky memory happily supplies me with examples of times when I offended. Times I've spoiled someone else's happiness.

It's that whole mote and beam thing again.

Since Ginny is closest to me and knows as much of my heart as can be known, I asked her about times when I've done that very thing to her.

She said we seldom hurt others intentionally. It's usually inadvertent. But we are a selfish lot. "John," she said, "It's just part of the human condition".

I asked her to forgive me for being such an ass.

"Part of the human condition," she said.

The Scripture talks about forbearing and forgiving one another.

Hard to do.

I haven't learned to act Christian yet.

And Lord, I don't want any more lessons in disappointment and frustration. I can't take much more!

Did I just hear a Voice from Heaven saying, "*Sure you can, John*"?

Anyhow, for dinner, no Blue Max for me at the party.

Just left-over spaghetti at home.

Monday, December 10, 2012

Yucatec Maya

Some folks claim the Mayan Calendar predicts the world ends on December 21st.

I wonder if these folks can read Yucatec Maya, a Mesoamerican language combining 550 logograms representing whole words and 150 syllabograms representing spoken syllables, and somewhere between one and five hundred glyphs?

I can't.

I looked it up.

However, if the Mayan buffs can predict the end of the world on December 21st. I can predict too.

I hereby predict that on December 20th, I will win Florida's six-million-dollar Lotto drawing.

That is the predictable story of my life.



Tuesday, December 11, 2012
Christmas Bones

Nothing says Merry Christmas to me like handling old bones.

Each year Ginny and I try to do something special just for our own pleasure during the Christmas season—watch the boat parade one year, hear Handel's *Messiah* another year, take a horse-drawn carriage around downtown, serve dinner to homeless one Christmas, tour historic churches, ride our bikes through Riverside on a long ago Luminaria Night—any fun thing that strikes our fancy.

Yesterday for our Christmas fun outing we attended an excellent presentation on Florida's Ancient Animals given by Jean Schubert, naturalist supervisor with Jacksonville's Recreation and Community Services Department.

Ms Schubert illustrated her talks with hand puppets, photographs, books, and fossils (both authentic and museum quality replicas). She also used two steel measuring tapes to give us a feel for the size of the ancient creatures that once roamed Florida.

For instance, she showed a nine-inch model of a modern scorpion, then had a child in the audience measure off the nine-foot length of ancient scorpion fossils found in Florida. Our state also served as home to dragonflies with a three-foot wingspread.

She demonstrated the difference between mastodon teeth and woolly mammoth teeth. I confused the two beforehand but I know better now. She taught me that mammoths grazed; mastodons browsed, and their teeth show the difference.

She showed us a wolf skull and told how giant red wolves, sloths, bison, and beaver once inhabited our area.

Here's a photo of me holding the skull of a modern jaguar to compare the teeth with those of Florida's ancient saber-toothed tiger:



And, here I am with an alligator skull; in the good ol' days this one's ancestor grew 40+ feet long.



For obvious reasons I envy the big cat and gator their teeth! Dentist pulled the last of mine in June.

Also, notice in both photos I am wearing my dinosaur shirt—a shirt old enough to qualify me as a fossil—it dates back to the late '60s or early 70's. And, it glows in the dark!

No dinosaurs lived in Florida; our state rose from the ocean bottom too late for them. But I thought it appropriate to wear my shirt to this fun event anyhow.

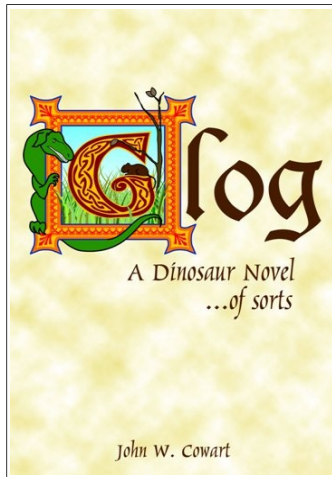
The children attending the program seemed fascinated with visions of finding fossils themselves in the spill of the phosphate mine in this photograph:



Ms Schubert's steel tape showed the kids, who held one end of the tape, how long and tall and big Florida's ancient animals were. To give some idea of the scale of a mastodon, here is a photo I took a couple of years ago of Ginny with one at Florida's State Museum in Tallahassee:



Although the common geologists' time-table was followed in yesterday's program, the focus was on what lived here more than on when they lived. As a creationist, I appreciated that element in the lecture. My own views on dinosaur life were presented in my book *Glog: A Dinosaur Novel Of Sorts*. Of the 30 or so books I've written, *Glog* is my favorite. That's one reason I enjoyed this program so much. Here's a copy of *Glog's* cover:



Yesterday's program was presented at Camp Milton, a Confederate earthwork fortification near the town of Baldwin. After enjoying the program on fossils, Ginny and I roamed the fort grounds a bit. During the war, Fort Milton housed over 8,000 Confederate soldiers who would go into battle against the invaders at Ocean Pond.

The yankees killed one of my fore-bearers, a private named John Wilson Cowart—same name as mine—during that fight.

Here's a photo of Ginny stepping down a firing-step into a trench beside a reconstructed log barricade:



Speaking of guys with the same name, just before we drove to Baldwin, the mailman delivered a significant, huge, big check addressed to John Cowart—Alas, it was for my middle son, not for me. Johnny did not know a

thing about this check. To him it came as an out-of-the-blue Godsend.

Since we were running late, I'd phoned to have him meet us at the curb in front of his house so I could drop his unexpected check off.

As we drove up, I held the unexpected check out the window and called out to Johnny, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy"!

Then we were off for our Christmas fun with fossils.

Wednesday, December 12, 2012

Chicken Christian and The Sad Lady

Jacksonville's doctors continue to play medical ping-pong with Ginny and me as the ball. They keep making appointments then calling to change dates and times and places. All this keeps us off balance.

The changes resulted in our having an unexpected free afternoon yesterday and we went to the library where we met the sad lady.

When I saw her come through the door, my heart dropped. I'm pretty sure we'd encountered her once back in June. I hoped she would not notice us. I suspect she is mental, or at least neurotic.

As we sat talking she sat nearby and overheard something nice I said to Ginny. Immediately she turned around and said, "Nobody's ever said anything like that to me".

I'm sure she did not recognize us from having met before, but she launched into her story.

Over 50 years-old, never married, no children, no friends, lives alone in a one-room apartment with a tv and a dog, lonely, lonely, lonely. Has nephew out of state and out of touch.

"Christmas is the loneliest time of the year," she said.

She plans to buy a Chinese carry-out dinner with an extra egg roll for her Christmas dinner treat and eat it alone in her room.

A thought crossed my mind: *we can invite her for Christmas with our family.*

In years past we have taken in strays for the holiday. Jesus said that when you give a feast to invite in the hurt, lost and lonely off the streets and we have occasionally done just that. Our kids used to bring in stranded foreign students from college and even hitchhikers off the streets.

These folks have always fit right in with our mob.

There is no reason we cant take in this sad woman... but I chose not to.

Being a chicken Christian, I excused myself from the conversation and let Ginny listen to the lady's woes.

I pondered the ramifications of taking this lady in for the holiday, the logistics of driving her around, the minor tensions in my own family I'll have to moderate during Christmas, the problem of buying a few extra gifts for this stranger so she would not be left out.

And I pondered the extreme lack of energy Ginny and I both are laboring under recently. I decided that I just don't want to bothered with this woman and her needs.

Practically every year of my adult life I have worked graveyard shift alone during Christmas. It doesn't kill you.

I recalled what my daughter Jennifer said recently, "Dad, your main Christian duty at this point in your life is to protect Mom".

I returned to the table and told Ginny it was time for us to leave. We picked up our stuff and walked out leaving the sad lady alone.

I think I did the right thing.

But it bothers me.



"I know! I'll run my Christmas screen savers!"

Saturday, December 15, 2012
A Sad Note For The Kid In The Attic

Someday in the far distant future, I hope some kid prowling in a dusty attic will stumble across a copy of my diary. He is the person I write for; everybody else just reads over his shoulder. I want the Kid In The Attic to glimpse how a Christian life is lived out for one ordinary guy, me, in this present age. Therefore, every once in a while, I mention current events as a peg for the Kid In The Attic to use as background.

This is such a sad, sad note.

This past week North Korea launched a military satellite into orbit; and the U.S. staged missiles and troops at the Turkish/Syrian border as Syria plans to gas rebel civilian populations into extermination; and Tuesday a gunman shot Christmas shoppers at a mall in Portland, Oregon; and Iran continues to develop nuclear weapons; and...

And yesterday, just days before Christmas, in Newtown, Connecticut, 20-year-old Adam Lanza, armed with two semi-automatic handguns, entered the Sandy Hook Elementary School and murdered his mother, seven other teachers, and 20 children all between the ages of five to ten years old.

After his shooting rampage, Lanza killed himself.

At a White House briefing, President Obama wept and wiped tears from his eyes as he commented on this slaughter of innocents .



How could such a thing happen?

When I was a little kid, one Christmas I heard about some kid hit by a car and killed. My little mind questioned why Santa (or God, I had the two confused in my mind back then... still do sometimes) Why Santa would let bad things happen at Christmas.

It just didn't seem right.

As an adult, I read *Practice Of The Presence Of God* by Brother Lawrence, a book which has greatly influenced my thinking ever since.

Someone asked Brother Lawrence who God allowed evil in the world?

Lawrence replied "that as for the miseries and sins he heard of daily in the world, he was so far from wondering at them, that, on the contrary, he was surprised there were not more, considering the malice sinners were capable of: that for his part, he prayed for them; but knowing that GOD could remedy the mischiefs they did, when He pleased, he gave himself no further trouble".

Brother Lawrence has a point but his attitude does not completely satisfy me.

Yes, it is a wonder that there is no more evil in the world than there is. I mean look at morning traffic; It's a wonder that so many people drive more or less according to rules. It's a wonder that massive pipe-ups and carnage don't block every intersection.

Sin and evil are finite.

There is only so much damage evil can do.

Whereas God's love, forgiveness, and mercy are infinite. God did indeed so love the world that He sent His only begotten Son.

Why didn't that work?

Or did it?

I still wonder how God could let awful things happen around Christmas—or at any time for that matter.

And I feel helpless about fighting evil in the world.

Face it, I can't stop evil in the world. I've never been to Syria or Turkey, or Korea and I've only driven through Connecticut twice 40 years ago. What can I do about evil rampant in such places?

Diddle-squat.

The only evil I can do a thing about is the evil in my own heart.

And that's a big enough job!

Thing is, I'm just a sin dribbler. I engage in petty nastiness, sneaky resentment, private lust, secret hypocrisy—nothing that takes courage, nothing that will ever make a President weep.

Just Jesus.

And Jesus came to save petty sinners as well as gunmen.

But what about Christmas? Isn't this a time of Peace On Earth Good Will To Men?

Thing is, historically there was the virgin, there was a star, there were angels, there were shepherds watching in the fields by night, there were wise men, there was God Himself incarnate in a manger.

And there was also a Herod.
And a bunch of us mini-herods.
That's why Christ came.

Sunday, December 16, 2012
Today's Post Is Brought To You By The Number
5, and By The Letters D, A, M, and N

Our street address contains the numbers 0, 2, 5, and 8.

But in the breezes generated by the fringe of Hurricane Sandy, the number 5 blew away and I could not find it.

So, I bought another 5 to replace it—a rash action.

Tiny nails secure the numerals to the sign board letting the mailman, or the rescue squad, if we need them again, know they've arrived at the right address.

Turns out the five I bought does not match the 8, 2, and 0 already in place. Different style font, different color—silver instead of black. Couldn't do anything about the font, but I used a permanent marker pen to color the 5 black.

Now all I'd have to do is nail the tiny nails. through the 5 having lined it up with the existing numbers. No problem... HA!

With my the macular degeneration of my left eye I see big things. I'd spent the morning watching squirrels across the yard raid our bird feeders; but small things close to me -like the food on my plate at lunch—disappear into my blind spot.

So, when I went to nail the 5 in place, I could not see the hole in the number; I fitted it in place with a pair of needle-nose pliers, placed the new five over the shadow of where the old 5 had been, and hammered.

The house sign board bounced.

The 8, 2, and 0 bounced off into Ginny's amaryllis bed. They buried themselves in the dirt. I had to abandon the 5 and crawl stomping flowers to find the 0, 2, and 8, Once I found them, I had to stand up.

Couldn't.

My severe degenerative arthritis in my right knee, shoulder and hip will not allow me to stand once I'm

down. I have to claw my way up on my cane... I'd left the cane in the house.

Ever see a camel kneel?

That's me, a fat camel wallowing my way upright on the rain-gutter drain pipe, stomping amaryllis plants as I rose with grace unlike Venus emerging from the sea.

Had to nail the three numbers I'd knocked off back on. The nails I found to do the job proved too big to fit the little holes in the numbers. Using the tip of my pocket knife blade, I discovered the numbers were cast in iron. Drilled the holes bigger... Lost cause.

Tried to super-glue numbers to the board. Superglue would not hold. Glued the 8 to my fingers.

Pried the 8 off and got stuck on the 2...

Finally, with choice words of heart-felt prayer and thanksgiving (do you believe that?) I finished the job.

Now, if anybody wants to find us, just look for the house with stomped amaryllis plants at the front door.

Monday, December 17, 2012

All Over Everywhere

Captain Neil burns wood.

Using wood-burning tools the Captain creates pictures on wood panels.

Last week he asked to use a picture from a book I wrote on Jacksonville history, *Crackers & Carpetbaggers* (www.bluefishbooks.info) This woodburning art now decorates a casino gambling boat on the Mississippi River.



Also, on Friday, [Pete](#), in Great Britain tweeted a link to my December 13th posting "Christmas In A Little Tin Box" (at <http://blip.tv/cowart-video/christmas-in-a-box-1580399> .). And [Amrita](#), in India, re-posted that same video on her site last Christmas season.

From a Mississippi gambling boat to Britain to India--when you post something on the Internet, no telling where it will end up!

Tuesday, December 18, 2012
Thin Jesus/Fat Jesus
(Again, and Again, and Again)

Google news tells me that some folks gather in Siberia's Krasnoyarsk region expecting that place is the only ark to save them at the world's end.

At the same time, other people are drawn to a peak in the Carpathian Mountains saying its magnetic force will save them from an impending apocalypse. They say space aliens created the pyramid shaped peak thousands of years ago.

In January, 1974, some folks predicted that Comet Kohoutek foretold a colossal doomsday event to be right at hand

Earlier in history, some folks thought Jesus would return in 1914; and before that in 1848. And even before that, some folks named Napoleon as the Antichrist; and before him, the pope; and before him, Attila the Hun; and before him, Nero...

This year, some folks expecting destruction at the end of all days get set for December 20 when the Mayan Calender stoped dating days.

And back on May 21st of last year, some folks preached Jesus would return to earth that day spreading destruction and bringing judgment on bad people.

Here, I am repeating *Thin Jesus/Fat Jesus*, an entry I made that same day:

Sunday, May 22, 2011
Thin Jesus/Fat Jesus.

Some of my fellow fundamentalist Christians expected Jesus to appear at 6 a.m. yesterday in New Zealand.

News outlets, talk shows and cartoonists enjoyed a field day making fun of us Christians and mocking those who thought Christ would appear at that time.

I did not expect Him to return yesterday anymore than I expect Him any day, but that's neither here nor there.

Those believers who did hope for His appearance in New Zealand yesterday have been disappointed. They calculated the precise time and place from a formula factoring in Noah's Flood, the international dateline, and—can this be right?—a Mayan stone calendar.

According to the newspaper, "Some proponents predict it will all begin around 6 p.m. local time with a devastating earthquake in New Zealand and move time zone to time zone until it goes around the world".

Jesus did promise to return, but He stipulated no one would know when.

If you're interested, one place Jesus talked about such things is in the 24th and 25th chapters of Matthew's Gospel.

He said, *"If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not...Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only....Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come"*.

Now, I do not know what happened in New Zealand.

But I do know that Jesus Christ appeared here in my hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, yesterday.

In fact Ginny and I saw Him appear a couple of times.

As we ate breakfast at a fast food place talking about the media stir over the anticipated return, Jesus appeared at the garbage can near the door. He was effectively disguised as a bum. He rummaged through the trash hunting leftover food scraps. He was rail thin in a way that made me think of why they call AIDS, the Slim Disease. He wore clothes several sizes too large for him. His pants bunched at his waist.

A Christian who sat near Ginny overheard our conversation about New Zealand. As this man left the restaurant, he gave Jesus a couple of dollars and told Him to buy some breakfast. Then the guy got in his car and drove away.

For I was hungry and you gave me food...

Ginny and I saw Jesus appear again when we stopped to gas up our own car—we drove to Georgia to buy my brand of pipe tobacco. This time Jesus appeared as a fat guy wearing a soiled sleeveless undershirt. He drove a beat-up gray car with New Jersey tags. Imagine that! Jesus disguised as a yankee! Unthinkable!

When Jesus puts on a disguise, He really puts on a disguise. Sometimes, He's really hard to recognize

Anyhow, Jesus explained that He needed a dollar to get gas enough to get home and a Christian at a nearby pump gave him enough to buy a couple of gallons. Jesus put gas in His tank and drove away.

I was a stranger and ye took Me in...

Ginny and I saw Jesus appear again just before we got home. Some people had been cleaning out their yard and put at the curb some old lawn chairs we could use. We stopped to pick them out of the trash heap and Jesus appeared calling from behind the screen door of the house next door.

This time Jesus appeared as a feeble old lady wearing a thin cotton housecoat. She ask if I could move two cement flower pots up onto her porch for her. I tried to lift one but it was too heavy for me, so Ginny had to grab one side and me the other to move those pots for old lady Jesus.

I was sick and ye visited me...

We got home, exhausted after a long day's driving. We kicked out shoes off. We threw sweaty clothes in the laundry hamper and put on swimsuits ready for a cool dip in our pool. Ready to soothe away the rigors of the hottest day of the season. And...

You guessed it.... Jesus appeared again. Right there on our back porch.

This time He wore His helpless, little animal costume.

Now, not to be disrespectful, when Jesus puts on His animal disguise, He's not the smartest possum in the woods.

Yes, Jesus appeared on our deck as a possum that had blundered into an animal trap that was not even baited! And He'd been trapped in the hot sun all day without water.

Now there was no way for me to slip a water bowl into the cage. I was afraid He would bite me if I put my hand in. Did you know that Jesus can have a nasty bite?

Immediately I filled a bucket with water and from outside the cage, I poured water over poor Jesus. He lapped it up eagerly.

But, nothing for it, we had to let Jesus out of the cage.

Tired as we were, we had to dress again. Put on hurting shoes. Unlock the gate, fold up the car seats, put the cage with Jesus in the back seat (on a plastic sheet.

Jesus in His possum disguise is not housebroken), drive to a wooded area by the river to let Him go.

I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink... In prison and ye came unto Me...In as much as ye did it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

Yes, I don't know what happened in New Zealand on the other side of the world. But Jesus appeared here in Jacksonville yesterday.

Same as He does everyday.

Thursday, December 20, 2012 Kicking The Manger

Battling doctor's appointments and insurance companies fill our days recently—and no one on earth wants to hear our medical woes, lest I be accused of being boring. Therefore today, I'm repeating this posting which comes from my diary entry way way back on Tuesday, December 12, of the year 2006:

You've got to kick our manger to start it.

Ginny & I think like tightwad skinflint Scrooges when it comes to buying Christmas gifts. All year long we shop at garage sales, jumbles, and thrift stores to buy gifts for the many people we care about — but can't afford to get things for in the local Family Dollar Store.

Yesterday we examined a unique manger scene we'd acquired for only \$3.98.

Let me emphasize that this item is a decoration only; it is paint and plaster and a computer chip. It bears no more religious significance to our actual faith than had it been a replica of a Daytona 500 race car.

Actually this device combines a tabletop fountain with a manger scene, a music box, and a motion sensor.

Some puzzled coolie worker in the Orient assembled this machine with no concept of western taste, religious or secular.

Ginny put batteries in the base and filled the reservoir with water. She flipped the switch on.

Nothing happened.

I glued the wisest of the wise men back in place. (I call him the wisest of the wise because he was the only one trying to escape).

She figured it was broken. But \$3.98 is no great loss if it did not work.

I fiddled with the device and discovered the motion sensor is out of whack — but, when you kick the manger, the star lights up, water flows over the waterfall, and the angel sings “Up On The Roof Top Reindeer Pause, Out Jumps Good Old Santa Claus”.

Actually, the angel does not so much sing as stand aghast at the tinny tintinnabulations of a western song played to notes on some oriental scale... Picture Andre Rieu with a kazoo instead of his Stradivarius .

The Crèche must play 15 or 20 such songs, but at the end of each piece of music, the star goes out and the waterfall ceases.

Yes, the trouble is, with the sensor out of whack, the only way this wonderful manger scene will start again is for someone to kick the coffee table it sits on.

Ginny and I sat for an hour taking turns kicking the manger, laughing our heads off, and trying to guess what possible song the thing was playing at the moment. “Jingle Bells” and “O Holy Night” we recognized; but much other music left us mystified.

Now, some folks might be offended by a Nativity Display that plays “Rudolph” but I delight in the combining of secular celebration with the holiest of Christian doctrines.

We do one because it’s fun; we observe the other because it’s real.

From the time our kids were tiny, we taught them that we all pretend there is a Santa because that’s so much fun; and that we worship Jesus Christ because He is God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth, Emanuel come down to earth as a helpless baby to save us from our sin.

It’s hard to confuse the two facets of Christmas, secular and holy.

All indications from Scripture are that Jesus enjoyed secular celebrations like weddings and harvest feasts as well as Passover.

He enjoyed a firm grasp of reality.

The holy and the fun, each in its place, or both blend together with common sense and joy.

Some malls ban employees saying Merry Christmas in favor of Happy Holiday; some churches advocate renouncing decorated trees and giving gifts.

I think both parties need to get real!

Celebration, exuberance and joy are in our very nature. A hunger for the Holy One, a longing for His reality, a thirst for the pure joy of His presence is also deep seated within every heart.

What's to confuse?

To deny either one is to warp reality.

People aren't too dumb to know the difference.

It's odd but I think one of the songs our Creche plays is the Easter hymn, "Christ The Lord Is Risen Today", the very essence of the good news the angels proclaimed.

Another song on the menu contains the lines:

Long lay the world in sin and error pinning
Till He appeared and the soul found its worth".

Heavy stuff.

Wonderful stuff.

The essence of Christmas joy...

Such thoughts excite me, but, I'll get down off my soapbox now.

Ginny and I intend to keep our treasured manger. It works fine if you kick it. I could try to repair it but as Ginny said, "How can you tell if it's broken?"

So, we intend to keep kicking our manger to start the fountain, light the star and play the music.

No we aren't planning to give it to anyone else as a gift.

Some gifts are just too, too good to pass on.

Also, there is that Scripture about not casting pearls before swine ...(Er, not that I think there's anything wrong with swine, you understand).

My camera is still broken so I can't post a photo of our manger scene.

That's a shame.

Because our kickable manger is unique.

In fact, Ginny said, "I'll bet we're the first ones on our block to own one of these things".

Saturday, December 22, 2012

Thoughts About Religious Art

Each year Christmas challenges my scruples about religious art.

It's just my opinion, but I think most religious art I see reflects poor taste.

On Luminary Night last Sunday looking at Christmas lights a few blocks from our home Ginny and I drove past a house with a lawn display of a Nativity scene in which every figure—Virgin, angels, shepherd, wise men—all figures consisted of lighted pink plastic flamingos gazing into a nest with a glowing pink egg.

As a Florida native, that's my idea of great religious art.

Although I love to post cartoons illustrating some spiritual point in my blog, I draw the line about using overtly religious pictures. They make me uncomfortable.

Not all Christians feel that way.

And the Christmas season generates all sorts of religious pictures and figurines on everything from greeting cards to coffee mugs.

At the moment, I'm specifically looking at a Manger Scene Ginny and I bought on our honeymoon 43 years ago. It's the nicest one I've ever seen. Our Christmas tradition dictates that we display the charming little plaster figures of Mary, Joseph, Wise Men, Shepherds, sheep, cows, donkey... and Jesus as a baby.

Are these home decorations or are they idols in our house?

God Almighty abhors it when we worship anything or anyone less than Himself. His Ten Commandments start off with the words:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth

beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God”.

How does our little plaster manger scene on the bookcase, or any religious art for that matter, factor in with this commandment?

Now we do not pray to plaster.

Nor do we ascribe magical power to the figures.

Yet I recall the old country/western song:

I don't care if it rains or freezes,
Long as I got my little plastic Jesus
Up on the dashboard of my car!

Now some folks find religious imagery helpful in their worship of the Lord God. As I understand it, in ancient times when many European peasants could not read, the Bible incidents depicted in stained-glass windows or in carvings and statues, reminded them of the words and stories of Scripture. The religious imagery provided an aid to worship in Spirit and truth. That's a valid use of religious art.

But these same images can trap us.

The Prophet Isaiah said, “They shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods”.

He describes the process of making an idol from a wooden log,:

“The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.

“He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress or the oak,...He maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.

“He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, 'Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire':

“The residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshipping it, and prayeth unto it, and says, 'Deliver me; thou art my god'”.

That cedar log was perfectly good growing as a tree in the woods or as it lay decomposing on the forest floor. It was a fine log when set afire to warm the carpenter or to cook his grits. It was a fine piece of wood as he carved it into a household object. However something changes when he addresses a prayer to it. Apparently nasty entities can attach themselves to material objects (or even people). And St. Paul said that such bad nasties stand gloating behind every idol men pray to.

Now a log is a log is a log. It is a thing. A created thing—not the Creator. He can not be pictured in wood carvings, metal castings, graven stone images, or in painted pictures. God is too big.

He can not even be comprehended in the most vivid human imagination of the smartest person. Too big for the telescope or the microscope. He holds us all and all created—everything from galaxies to grub-worms in His palm. The heavens and the heaven of heavens can not contain Him.

No artist captures His majesty—the majesty of the God who reduced Himself to become a Baby in a pile of straw.

I think the most powerful religious painting I've ever seen hung in Washington's National Gallery of Art—Salvador Dali's *Sacrament Of The Last Supper*. The painting stunned me when I first saw it. As I recall it is the only painting in the National Gallery to deserve a whole room all by itself.

But even that great work of art hangs paltry compared to the reality of God's Person.

OK. I have scruples about art. I don't want anyone to think I worship anything less than Christ Himself.

But what is the difference between art and idol?

Little statues fascinate me. Over the years at garage sales and such I've collected scads of them, including some which represent the gods and goddesses of ancient China, Greece and Rome. Such art charms me.

But once years ago while I taught the Bible books of Joshua and Judges to a group, I decided I did not want idols, even idols manufactured as tourist souvenirs, in my house lest after my death some innocent cleaning out my junk might think these knickknacks influenced my faith in Christ.

I smashed and buried the lot of them.

That's me.

Not recommending it to anybody else.

I think I may have made a mistake by over reacting to harmless tourist geehaws..

I know these trinkets are bits of clay, rock, wood or metal. I agree with St. Paul who said, "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but the One".

Yet, writing to Corinth he said, "My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.... I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils".

Big words those.

Bad nasty spirits lurk behind every idol.

Of course all the Prophets in the Bible warn of the insidious danger of idols in the heart. Not in metal or stone, plaster or wood, but in human gut.

My gut.

Saint John's letter said, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols".

However, one of the old Puritan preachers warned, "Be ye not over pious".

My heart finds it's own idols. Idols more vile and dangerous than plaster Manger figurines. or my desk statue of Venus de Milo, or the plastic Thor with his hammer.

Our manger scene is a happy decoration with no more true religious significance than a picture of Frosty Snowman or Rudolph Reindeer.

I think I need to get over my iconoclastic scruples about religious art and become more broad minded..

Therefore, to show I am broad minded, I hereby post on my pious blog a religious picture of some historic saint or the other which I chanced across on line, but I doubt it might tempt anyone sensible to worship—unless he's a really sick puppy:



December 23, 2012
Two More Days





Underneath the Muscle Toad



"Alfred, you may instruct the staff to begin decking the halls."



12-20-2010



Thanks to Mark Highum

12-19-2000

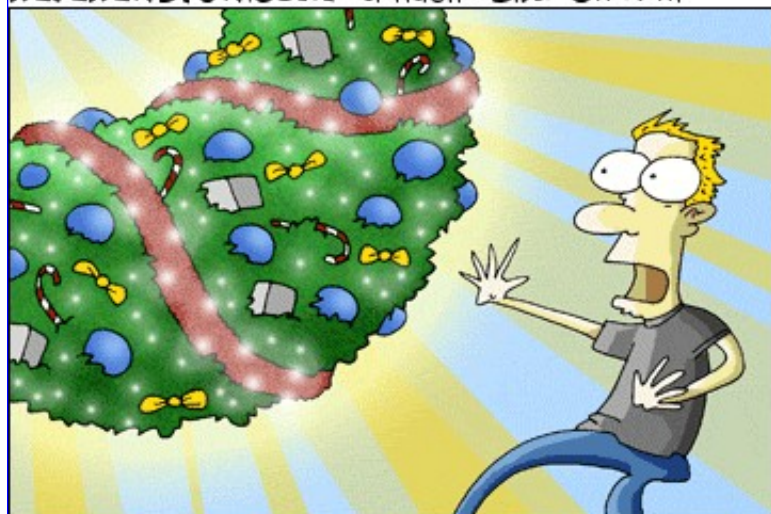
SEASON'S GREETINGS



"No, no! For Rockefeller Center,
we send them with the branches still on."

© 1966 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

**December 24, 2012
Christmas Eve**



Thanks to Mikel Rice

12-19-2007

THE WREATH OF GOD

DOCTOR FUN



The night before Christmas, with the cat

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Thanks to Mikel Rice (See Luke 2:1-16)

12-18-2000

I'M SO SICK OF BEING A SHEPHERD ...
NOTHING EXCITING EVER HAPPENS OUT HERE

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Thanks to Kathryn Dickens

12-21-2000

CHRISTMAS EVE

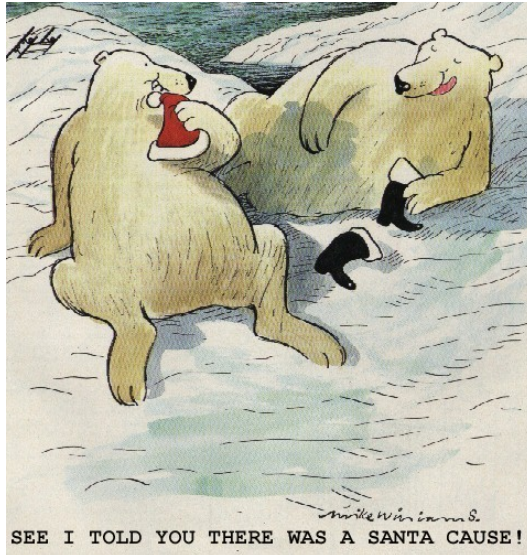




December 25, 2012
Christmas

December 26, 2012
The Day After Christmas

**Sunday,
December
30, 2012
Hand-
Me-Ups
get Me
Down**



I know all about hand-me-downs.

As the father of six grown children—my youngest is now 30+--I've seen many items of clothing, toys, furniture, etc. out-grown and shared from older kids to younger.

Now, in my dotage, the order reverses. As the kids out-grow electronic devices, they pass their outdated items up to me. And considering the life-span of high-tech stuff lasts only 15 minutes after the box gets opened, I'm getting a lot of stuff I have no idea how to operate.

When my sight began to fail, my daughter Eve, supplied me with a machine that plays what I call records but she calls DVDs. Readers record whole books on a tiny silver disc to be played on this machine with little gray buttons on black backgrounds which become invisible and cause great glee in Japan when Americans buy one.

And my daughter Jennifer gave me a tv with a remote thingy. This one has big buttons with symbols in Kurgustandanesie which only Mr. Spock speaks. With this remote I can turn the tv set on and turn it off—but I can't seem to change channels so I'm doomed to watch only the cooking network for the rest of my viewing life.

Yesterday, Donald and Helen came over and spent eight happy, care-free hours teaching me how to cut and paste on my new Ubuntu computer system.

I wonder if they will ever come by my house ever, ever, ever again?

They also got Ginny and me a new cell phone which plots the course of star constellations, locates the capital of Pandemonium on gps tracking, and figures the volume of a sphere.

I think it can all do phone calls—maybe. If we can figure out how to move the old address book to the new phone.

Our old phone rang and you answered it. If you did not answer it, intelligent callers figured it was ringing in an empty room.

The new phone has voice mail, texting, photo capability, tweets, and washes windows. Perfect gift for a guy who finds Scotch Tape dispensers challenging and to whom electric can openers would leave starving in the loaded pantry.

The thing is modern kids teethered on technology.



They take to this stuff naturally.

Those of us who fought off Indians with sharp sticks find tech stuff frustrating.

However, I did take a photo of some Blue Mystic Orchids I gave Ginny for Christmas:



She snapped this photo of me with the phone yesterday:



We Tweeted the photos directly to God-Only-Knows-Where then downloaded them to the desktop computer.

I'm proud of me—John Cowart, King Of Geriatric Geeks!

Someday, I'll figure out how to answer this phone if it ever rings—which I doubt because it gave us a new phone number which I can't remember because we had our old one for 20+ years.

I think somebody smart ought to invent a camera-phone designed for us old folks so we can survive the transition to modern times. My ideal high-tech devise would look like this:

first smartphone



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John Cowart:

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A Dirty Old Man Gets Worse
The Lazarus Projects
I'm Confused About Prayer
Letters From Stacy
Crackers & Carpetbaggers
Strangers On The Earth
Gravedigger's Christmas & Other Tales
Heroes All:
A History of Firefighting In Jacksonville
Rebel Yell:
The Civil War Diary of J.T. Whatley, CSA
Seeking A Settled Heart:
The 16th Century Diary Of Puritan Richard Rogers
The Diary Of Samuel Ward,
A Translator Of The 1611 King James Bible

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