

OPINION PAGE

THE GUM LOG

By Van A. Tyson

80 and Able

I am 80 years old as I write this and still able to play music and enjoy others making music.

I played music at Picklefest Saturday afternoon in Jazz Reunion. We were worried about getting rained out, so we watched the weather. We were relieved when the rain quit in the morning and was still looking dry by 1 p.m.

We began with some of our standards. We started with *Blue Monk* by Thelonius Monk, on which I play a plunger solo and Bill plays a trumpet solo. Then Emory sang *All of Me*, with band accompaniment. Our third piece was Emory singing *Can't Help Lovin' That Man* with me backing her on harmonica and taking a solo on the Harp.

We also did *My Funny*

Valentine, with Emory on vocal and me splitting a solo with Bill in between Emory's vocals.

In the second half of the set, Carling Futterer sang a duet with Emory, then three other solos, one with her father Ken on alto sax. He played keyboards on most of our songs.

As usual, we finished with our religious number, *When the Saints go Marching In*, in which we all take solos.

We had a respectable crowd, largely our groupies, (relatives and friends), who responded well to our choices.

The Barber
My listening experience was Sunday afternoon at the Center for Humanities and Arts at the UofA Pulaski Technical College in North Little Rock.

Ginnie and I went with Emory to that beautiful campus on a hillside to see the *Barber of Seville* (Rossini: *Il Barbiere de Siviglia*) opera. We were especially inter-

ested because two students we knew at Arkansas Tech were principal players.

Darren Drone was Figaro, the barber, showing off his magnificent deep voice.

Jonathan Ray was Count Almaviva, a nobleman, who was the principal love interest, and who also doubled as a comic drunk for part of the show. He also has a magnificent voice. We saw and heard him as part of the Tech barbershop quartet singing to Emory at pArty in the Park and to Suzie Wetzel at the Dover Chamber of Commerce banquet. (He is from Dover.)

Also heard both men in musical plays at Tech, including the Broadway show reviews, presented by Ken and Holly Ruth Gale at Tech.

A trip to Red Lobster for my birthday dinner led to a tour of former residences of us and Emory on Park Hill in North Little Rock.

A pleasant day celebrating my birthday. There will be another event.

To be fair, the President did warn us before the election about the dangers of an administration under FBI investigation.



Susy & Steve

Fancy That

by Beckie Tyson

Picklefest 26

Our Picklefest has happened again. The PBA puts in a lot of long hours to set the event up and then works all day Friday and Saturday.

I was around most of the time, too.

Friday, the weather was beautiful. Quite a few people showed up

and the entertainment, which started late, was good. The vendors were plentiful and I was pleased to see all the local groups with booths to raise funds for their projects. Atkins people are loyal to their Picklefest, both with attending and using the venue for their causes. I took lots of pictures.

Saturday was a different story. The morning started with rain and several vendors didn't even set up. Some of the entertainment canceled too.

The rain let up in time for the parade, but there were not many entries. We had plenty of horses (after all, it is the Rodeo parade). We also had the queens

on a float and fire trucks. So the parade was noisy.

The pickle-juice drinking and pickle-eating contests were lightly entered. The juice drinking only had one age group, under 10, and I missed it. The eating contest had two age groups. No senior group in either contest. I guess people had stayed home because of the rain. The talent show didn't happen either, because of the rain.

I roamed around Saturday taking photos, although I didn't take as many. Van was also there and he took photos. He also played music in the afternoon. I took photos of his band, Jazz Reunion. Emory sang with them. Carling Futterer also sang some. Her father plays in the band, too. This was the first year they have played at Picklefest for a long time.

So, it was a family affair. The band sounded good. Van said playing on the stage was difficult because the sound echoed back on them. Van played some trombone and harmonica solos. He said they usually have another trombonist who plays

the solos.

I told someone Friday they needed some ceiling fans on the stage when the weather is hot.

When Kelly, my daughter, and Travis, her husband, were here last weekend, they slept on my bed. I have a Temperpedic mattress and they decided it was the most comfortable mattress they had ever tried. They've slept on it every time they visit, but had never noticed its comfort before. Fancy that.

They said they were going to get one as soon as they got home to OKC. Kelly called last night. She said they hadn't bought one yet, but they were going to.

My mattress isn't anything fancy, just the plain foam mattress. They have added a lot of variations since I bought mine at Rackley's. But I have been more than satisfied by it.

Kelly said she and Travis woke up without the pains they usually have at home. They attributed it to the mattress and they are probably right. I guess before when they stayed here, they weren't as old and didn't have the pains yet.

Don't tell Kelly I said that.

By "Pete Moss"

POWER LINES

by Bob Allen

Name Your Poison

There seems to be a newfound fondness for the Russian government on the part of Trump's followers, both in the government and the population at large.

Several officials have been less than forthright about their connections with Russian government officials or moneyed oligarchs. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has recused from the investigation of Russian interference in our election.

Mike Flynn was fired after only three weeks on the job due to his failure to divulge his connections to Russia.

Paul Manafort, who was Trump's campaign manager was fired after it was revealed that he had multi-million dollar contracts with certain Russian oligarchs. Other examples abound.

There seems to be a consensus on both sides of the political aisle that the Russian government, or associated criminal elements, tried to affect the outcome of our election, and would like to see further destabilization of democracy in America. This is the usual stuff of "cloak and dagger" behavior reminiscent of the cold war. The Russian government also has a much darker side.

Early in the twentieth

century, Russia developed a lab to test poisons to be used by various agents and spies. Poisoning is a common method for dealing with both foreigners and Russian dissidents.

One of the more famous events occurred during the cold war. Georgi Markov was an anti-communist Bulgarian writer who lived in exile in London. While crossing a bridge to catch a bus in 1978, he was poked in the buttocks with an umbrella. Later in the day he went to a hospital with flu-like symptoms. Three days later he was dead. On autopsy, a small hollow pellet was discovered at the site of the poke. Chemical analysis showed that he had been intentionally poisoned with ricin, an extremely potent toxin made from castor beans.

Victor Yushchenko ran in 2004 for president of Ukraine on a policy of aligning his country with the West rather than Russia. Shortly after his election, he met with Ukraine officials who favored an alliance with Russia. Later he came down with what was initially diagnosed as acute pancreatitis. Later still he developed extreme chloracne, a condition only seen in individuals exposed to certain chlorinated hydrocarbons.

In Yushchenko's case it was determined that he was exposed to TCDD, a toxic bi-product of the manufacture of Agent Orange. Although he survived, he was ill for months and remains disfigured from the

chloracne.

Another dissident, Alexander Litvinenko, fled Russia for asylum in the UK.

In 2006, he became ill in the evening after having lunch with two Russian officials. He was diagnosed with acute radiation poisoning from Polonium-210. Three weeks later he was dead. It is thought that only a few drops of a Polonium solution in a bowl of soup would produce a lethal effect. This synthetic element can only be had from reprocessing waste from a nuclear reactor.

Surely the luckiest Russian poisoning victim is Vladamir Kara-Murza. Mr. Kara-Murza describes himself as a Russian democracy campaigner.

In May 2015, he became ill for unknown causes. Blood works showed elevated levels of heavy metals, but no known toxins were found. Although sophisticated chemical analysis can detect the most minute amounts of toxin, it only works if you know what to look for.

Last February he became inexplicably ill again. He was in critical condition for weeks, but is now recovering. It can't be said for sure if Kara-Murza was poisoned - twice - but surely he is a target of the Kremlin and Russian leaders have a long-standing monstrous tradition of poisoning political opponents.

Bob Allen, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of chemistry, Arkansas Tech University. Bob of the Ozarks: <http://ozarker.org>.



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The Bird Book

Last week I wrote about our surprise birthday party.

What I neglected to mention was the surprise gift. The idea for this originated a month or so ago when the birthday kid pointed out a bird in the yard, saying that it was a scissor-tailed flycatcher.

Well . . . not being much of an expert on birds, but knowing a little bit about them, I said that the bird in question was NOT a scissor-tail, but was probably a cat bird or a mockingbird. This can be frustrating at times, when one knows what something isn't, but is not certain what it is!

I headed for the bird book, conveniently located on a bookshelf in our living room. It was a mockingbird.

With that question solved, I thought back to the time when my spouse and I were first married and were existing on a very-strict budget. We frequently saw birds that we could not identify and were curious as to what, exactly, they were.

Living in the country, in a new part of this country, unknown birds were frequent visitors. A bird book was at the top of our wish list and finally came to rest on the shelf. It now has photos of "our" birds tucked into the pages and has long, long ago paid for itself in pleasure and information.

Photos weren't the only

treasures that I found residing in our bird book. The former Little Rock columnist, Richard Allin, was also a bird lover. Two of his columns gave witness to this.

"We are also bird parents. Spring and early summer nurtured a brood of chickadees in one of our backyard birdhouses. A Carolina wren nested in a small basket hanging in our carport, producing an uncertain number of babies. For two summers straight, we hosted an Eastern phoebe that occupied the same nest on a crossbar under our deck."

I'm thinking of the wren nest just outside our bedroom window. Marcus Kilburn's wrens, and also of the mockingbird family in a nearby tree. Then there's the brown thrasher family teaching their young to hunt for insects . . . but I digress.

"On two occasions TC [Allin's wife] nursed goldfinches back to consciousness when they knocked themselves cold by banging into our glass patio doors. She held them in her palm until they opened their eyes, reoriented themselves, and flew off as wiser birds."

Oh yes, there was the time that I was recovering from surgery and heard a male cardinal "bonk" on the kitchen window.

It was a cold, windy winter day and I placed the bird on a

high windowsill, out of the wind. Not far away, a female cardinal called encouragement and an hour or so later, he flew off to join her.

One of our favorite birds is the largest woodpecker to be found in our area. Richard Allin had also found one in his yard.

He wrote, "I used to take smug pride in *knowing* that the first syllable of "pileated" is pronounced PILE instead of PILL. Then one day I met Roger Tory Peterson, considered by many to be the world's greatest bird authority and artist.

"As we talked a raucous chuckle came from a distant clump of trees. 'That's a PILL-ee-ate-ted woodpecker,' Dr. Peterson said.

"It was like Sir Isaac Newton telling about an apple falling up. Should I tell the great ornithologist where he had erred? 'Dr. Peterson,' I began.

"But I stopped myself. And since then I've been pronouncing it PILL-ee-ate-ted.

"Whatever Dr. Peterson says is what I say."

It just seemed totally appropriate to give a bird book as a birthday present. I believe, though, that we might have gone a bit too far. There were three books and a pamphlet wrapped up together. Was that overkill? I don't believe so.

by Marcus Kilburn

fired was a memo from the Assistant Attorney General that essentially said Comey needed to be fired. The following day the *Washington Post* ran a story based on

See **KILBURN** page 3

Signs of the Times

Graduations

I've probably attended significantly more graduation ceremonies than most folks.

I taught high school for 36 years, and while I didn't show up for every single graduation, I was at lots of them.

When you add the ceremonies for friends, family, and those I've actually had a part in, you get . . . a pretty good number.

Just in the past few days, I've been to three: two for high schools and one at my granddaughter's pre-school.

I usually enjoy graduations, and I certainly enjoyed these three, but there are a few things that sometimes bother me, starting with the word itself.

The word *graduation*, along with cognates such as *grade* and *gradual*, comes from the Latin root *gradus*, which means, "a step or degree."

Knowing this can provoke a bit of insight. "Graduation" is not a culmination or ending as it is often portrayed, especially in the hearts and minds of students.

It is a step in a continuous and (hopefully) never-ending process.

This view is supported when we note that the word referring to the credential conferred on graduation from college is a "degree," which implies that it takes the bearer

only a certain distance toward a goal.

The initial degree may be supplemented by higher ones that identify one as a "master" in a field or as one steeped in the "doctrine" of their chosen profession.

But each step or degree, each *gradus*, is designed to lead to something else.

Another way I think we as a culture have missed the mark linguistically is in the use of "graduate" as a verb.

Traditionally, "graduation" is not something you do, it's something that is done *to* you.

In other words, the student doesn't graduate from school; the school graduates the student out into the world.

Not that it's a totally passive experience on the student's part and more than "education" is, but they are ultimately the product, not the producer. This should in no way deminish their sense of accomplishment. If anything, it should increase it.

It should, however, be made clear that the graduation is not *their* ceremony, but the *school's*.

In addition to such minor vocabulary quibbles, the thing that disturbs me most about many graduations is not the students, but the audience.

Many times friends and family "distinguish" themselves with whoops, hoots,

hollers, shouts, and inappropriate applause that are an offense to the dignity of the students, the institution, the ceremony, and, if possible, themselves.

I've noticed over the years that there's an inverse relationship between the academic status of the graduate and the enthusiasm of the crowd.

As achievement goes down, noise goes up. That is, students with the highest of honors are received politely and quietly, but those who barely squeak by are often greeted with truly rafter-rattling displays of hooliganism.

Make of that what you will. I discussed the "bad crowd" phenomena several years ago with a good friend of mine, (Hi, Mark!) and he pointed out that most people tend to take their cues from their surroundings--if they're in a sports venue, they're going to act like they're at a game and cheer for the home team.

It's true that the majority of graduations I've attended have taken place on a basketball court or football field. (Pro tip: If you ever feel the need to break a drought, schedule an outdoor graduation ceremony.)

I hope Mark is right in his observation and that things would be different in a theater or a church, but I'm not sure.

Fake News

President Trump complains a lot about FAKE NEWS.

Does he have a point? Some recent examples say he might.

A few days back, President Trump fired FBI Director

James Comey. Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* subsequently published front page stories that later turned out to be 100% false.

President Trump and his spokespeople said publicly part of the reason Comey was

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