



“Our Finest Hour” July 16th, 2020

Good Morning COE:

After self-quarantining my computer for 14 days, I’m back. Didn’t want to spread the virus virtually, and then I discovered droplets don’t transmit very well via satellite signals? So, we are all good.

Today’s version of “Our Finest Hour,” is titled “Pandemic Produce Predators.”

After the spring monsoon drowned most everything in the vegetable garden, a dove brought me an okra leaf, signaling the end of the ordeal. This was followed by a drought, so am thinking now it was a starling instead of a dove. Now the cut-worms are on the attack. Would not be surprised to see a locust plague descend upon me sometime soon.

Despite it all, had the summer’s first BLTs and Pico de Gallo last week. A few sweet peppers and jalapenos weathered the weather so to speak, and I managed to salvage portions of tomatoes the worms were working toward but had not yet finished off. Then, I clipped the cilantro that is actually doing very well, stole a lime from one of Landon’s experimental indoor-outdoor citrus trees, and chopped an onion the size of a Baby Moon hub cap. [Note to Gen Xers: Hub caps were round plate-like coverings found on pre 1980’s automobile wheels like my first car, a Corvair (See the History Channel or Smithsonian for details.) As luck would have it, a guy named Frisbee stole one (hub cap cappers were common back then) and as he was being chased tried to ditch the evidence by throwing it into the wet weeds only to see it sail across the field and land somewhere in the Atlantic. You can Google the rest of the story, but that was pretty much the end of hub caps and the beginning of a new sport.]

In any event, am making due during the pandemic. The grandkids have picked all the peas and pulled all the carrots. None of these veggies made it out of the garden. It was a pick and eat frenzy. They dubbed themselves “Pea Predators.” Grandkids notwithstanding, the drought would have “done in” peas and carrots long before now.

A raccoon named Rocky let me know when the sweet corn was ready, so I let him know where he could go, i.e., to the north side of Fellow’s Lake. As it turns out he also favored carrot cake, so I sacrificed a piece to save the crop. Once secure inside the Missouri Department of Conservation wire trap they jokingly call a critter crate, I loaded my corn-for-main-course-carrot cake-for-dessert friend into the Silverado and headed to the tourist side of the lake where concrete fire pits, pavilions, and porta potties abound. A crowd of non-mask-wearing folk of all ages toting more children than an elementary school during back to school night gathered round and started taking about as many cell phone photos as questions so they could share the event on Facebook. One asked, “What is it?” I said, “I don’t know for sure, but it might be a monkey.” That set-off a Google search amongst the crowd which soon erupted when one fella shouted, “I found it! It’s a badger.” They started reading about

badgers and then scattered like a covey of quail in an overgrown lespedeza field. Good thing as it turned out, because when I opened the critter crate, Rocky shot out right past my bent over nose spitting in my eye for spite as he gave me an indignant glance over his shoulder before disappearing into the forest like a ghost. Long story made short (I know, too late): Am now eating raccoon free ambrosia sweet corn. Am also dealing with PETA.

New routine is up at 5:00 AM, water the garden, pick enough green beans, corn, okra, and squash for lunch and dinner and then Zoom myself into oblivion from 8 to 5. Catch up on email from 5 to 8 PM and then head back outside until dark to do chores and such. Watch COVID news at 10:00 PM.

Yesterday, we had a COVID-19 “Table Top” exercise from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM, followed by the ALC Summer Retreat from 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM. Ah, a slight reprieve. The focus of both was on managing novel coronavirus situations that could occur throughout the rest of the summer through fall and into winter. In my humble opinion as formed while attending the College of Hard Knocks, trying to raise and nurture vegetables while dealing with the weather and critters that undermine your efforts, is good preparation for handling pandemics. Some things are out of one’s control, but others can be addressed. I have often been asked why I didn’t take up farming full-time as a career. (Some faculty would rather I had, btw.) The answer to that is pretty straightforward: Successful farming is dependent upon two things over which no one has any control, i.e., the weather and the market. You can work yourself silly, but conditions change and you have to determine how best to proceed. The local truck farmer across from Pleasant View Gardens plowed his sweet corn under after the spring flood dried up. I kept mine. Granted, the crop is only about a third of what it would be in a “normal” year, the ears are small and worm eaten, but I am salvaging what is eatable and turning the rest into cattle feed. Makes a body not take last year’s bumper crop for granted, teaches patience, diligence, persistence, and requires hard work. So it is for all of us as we manage through a pandemic that (like my vegetable garden) is trending in the wrong direction right now.

During Administrative Council next Monday, I will lobby for some degree of “local control” regarding pandemic-related issues over which our species (and College) does, in fact, have some control. The University has developed policies and will continue to do so. These have been serving us very well thus far and will continue to do so. However, environmental conditions (like weather and bugs) will inevitably necessitate response. I am confident our faculty, staff, and department heads can work with the Dean’s Office to address situations as they might arise in our classes and buildings. More on this after next Monday . . .

Gang, I am tired of this pandemic. I don’t like the way the virus is currently going. Then again, I was tired of the rain. Am now tired of the drought, bugs, worms, and thieving critters including green bean eating rabbits. I am watering the garden, humanely relocating critters, and dealing with the bugs and worms. However, I am not going to use insecticides and I am not going to let weeds choke out my precious plants.

Early next week, we will review masking policies and protocols in classes and buildings. Until then,

Keep Calm and Appreciate All the Good Things We Have,

David