



“Our Finest Hour” September 15th, 2020

Dr. Jennice McCafferty-Wright sent me a photo of her garden vegetables last week and gave me permission to share same, so here you go:



“Pandemic Produce Picked Persistently by Pesky Predators”

On Sunday afternoons the grandkids glean Grandad’s Garden, but somehow they become much more interested in predators than produce frequently asking, “What’s that one called?” I never know, so I revert to my classroom management skills and “redirect.”

“Oh, that’s a spaghetti squash,” I will say.

“No, I mean that bug. What is it?”

Now my lack of biology acumen becomes apparent, so I revert to another classroom strategy, i.e., when you don’t know the answer, Google it on you cell phone.” You will not believe what these little critters are called. In fact, even a Latin teacher turned linguist can’t pronounce their biological names. This leads to a third classroom approach, one I patented myself and call, “Believe it or Not.” This involves making up an answer and having the kids, AKA students, do all the work en route to a somewhat believable answer. As usual, my grandkids stay two steps ahead of me and this one is no different, so they create names for the critters and throw it back on me to validate.

“Here’s a Leaf-Eater,”

“Look at this one; I think it is a woolly tomato killer.”

“This one only has one eye. What’s it called, Grandad?”

“I think it is the dreaded Cyclops Cabbage Clobberer. And that one over there is a Golly Whopper.”

In truth, I wish there was a bug that would eat okra. The Grandkids and I can't pick it fast enough. I think okra grows at the rate of one inch per hour.

The noticeably shorter days and abundance of produce (and predators) compels reflection. Sometimes we take things for granted, usually when there is plenty, and goals are achieved with relative ease. Whenever scarcity causes fear and difficulties and leads to frustration, human nature starts pricking us with a variety of choices: we can complain, blame others, curse, panic, or invoke my former high school PE teacher's philosophy of life: "When in trouble or in doubt, run in circles, scream and shout."

I always look forward to spring and that first tomato, finally assembling enough asparagus or okra to "make a mess," and grabbing crisp, untouched-by-insect green beans by the handfuls. After a long, hot, dry, bug-induced summer; cooler autumn days are a refreshing change. I even look forward to plowing under what was once precious, succulent salad greens. In fact, they now make good fertilizer.

I think back to pre-pandemic times and how much I not only took for granted but actually complained about. (Pardon the preposition.) Meetings, more meetings, and then meetings after meetings. I complained about the too-sugary desserts that caused me to order longer suspenders. Driving the same boring route to Jeff City and back all too often. So many voices in the office I couldn't complete a thought, yet alone write a coherent email. So much to tweet, so little time to Twitter.

What will it be like post-pandemic. I don't know, but I have vowed not to complain about it, whatever "it" is.

Keep Calm and Autumn On,

David

PS – We are managing through the pandemic-laden fall semester very well thus far, thanks to committed faculty and staff who have stepped forward to provide a safe environment. I can't thank you all enough, but I can reiterate how very much I appreciate you. And I do not take your extra work efforts for granted. Am already looking forward to next year's spring garden . . . and academic semester. Will not take those for granted, either.