OPINION PAGE

THE GUM LOG
By Van A. Tyson

Good Vets Day

It was a good day for veterans.

It was Friday of last week, and I was with the crowd at the Vietnam wall at the Pope County Fairgrounds.

I was mainly there to take pictures, but I am a veteran and enjoyed mingling with the other veterans and the crowd of people showing interest in the wall.

I always feel a little sheepish about calling myself a veteran, because I never went overseas and never was in combat. However, I did serve, two years in the National Guard and six more years in the Army Reserve as an artillery officer.

My active duty was at Fort Sill, Okla. I did National Guard duty (217th Engineers) at Fort Polk, La., and 8 weeks ROTC camp at Fort Hood, Texas.

The wall is very impressive, starting low, about two feet high, and rising to eight feet in the middle, with all the names in relief in the surface, available for rubbing onto paper. People were on hand to help visitors find the names of friends and relatives to make a rubbing.

The only one I knew for sure was Jimmy Cartwright, a classmate of mine in Arkansas Tech ROTC. I found his name when the traveling wall was in Little Rock on the capital grounds a few years ago.

While I was at the site, several busloads of students unloaded to tour the display.

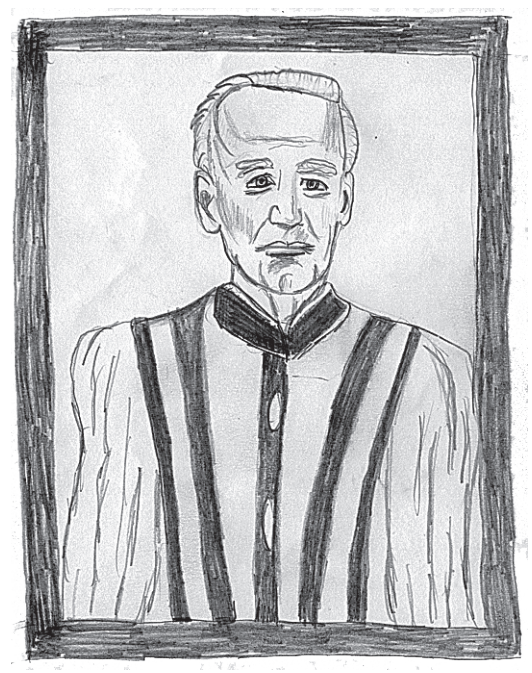
In addition to the wall, which had a flag flying from a crane above the middle, there was a flag garden, in honor of the people from Arkansas who had died in Vietnam.

The disassembled wall was hauled in a trailer that came through Atkins Wednesday morning on the way to Russellville. It was accompanied by several dozen motorcycle riders, the Patriot Guard, presumably veterans paying tribute to those who died in Vietnam. They assembled at Blackwell and led the trailer on Highway 64 through Atkins and Pottsville to the fairgrounds in Russellville.

It is an 80% scale replica of the wall in Washington, D.C. and is 360 feet long.



Patriot Guard



The Tragedy of ~~Hamlet~~ Biden Prince of ~~Denmark~~ Delaware

"To run or not to run ... that is the question!"

Sue & Steve

Power Lines • By Bob Allen

Processed Foods

Today we think of processed foods as a relatively recent innovation with rather negative connotations, think chicken nuggets, Cheetos and diet sodas. However, the reality is that humans were processing foods long before we settled into agricultural societies.



The first obvious innovation was the use of fire to cook. It takes less work and provides more calories to eat cooked food such as meat and root vegetables. Some authors have suggested that use of fire to prepare food was integral to human development, allowing for enlarged brains, and resulting in the more gracile facial characteristics of smaller jaws and teeth.

The time line for the adoption of the use of fire to prepare foods may begin with suggestions that H. erectus used fire 1.8 million years ago. Others suggest that the real control of fire and frequent use of fire in food preparation dates roughly to the time of a later relative H. neaderthalensis, about 400,000 years ago. Others say it is as recent as 20,000 years ago. Whichever time line you choose, processing food with fire began long before what we describe as civilization, the transition from isolated hunter gather groups to larger agrarian societies.

Agriculture was the great transition to move towards larger social groups, but there is evidence that making bread preceded active cultivation of grain crops. Wild grains are nutritious but difficult to consume without processing. Grinding grains to produce flour, and then baking that into bread provided a relatively calorie-dense, environmentally-stable and easily-transportable food. As we became more dependent on bread, cultivation became necessary and drove the transition towards agricultural.

The shift to agriculture produced new demands. Crops are seasonal but our diets are daily, hence the need for storage, at least on an annual cycle. The next technical advance was quite likely the invention of beer. Traces of a residue from beer on pottery have been found dating back to over 7,000 years ago.

During the Middle Ages much of Europe was probably mildly drunk — men, women and children alike. Hygiene not being the strong suit at the time, water sources were invariably polluted with human wastes. To brew beer, however, required boiling the wort, a mixture of malted barley and water. This produced a potable beverage with considerable nutrition to boot. Later, hops were found to improve the flavor and increase the storage life, making beer all the more valuable.

Europe, especially northern Europe, saw the evolution of lactose tolerance in adults. Milk is an extremely nutritious source of protein and fat and therefore a complement to bread and beer. But milk doesn't store well. Cheese on the other hand has a considerable shelf life, months to years. Cheese was first made by storing milk in a natural container, a stomach removed from a ruminant. A substance known as rennet, present in the lining of the stomach, caused the milk to clabber. Add various bacteria to produce lactic acid for increased digestibility and you have a flavorful, stable, fat and protein laden foodstuff.

A diet of "processed food" - Cheese Whiz on a cracker washed down with a beer - is a truly ancient meal. With the macronutrients protein, fat and carbohydrate, and the micronutrients both fat and water soluble vitamins, it's all there. Bon appetit.

Bob Allen, Ph.D., is a retired professor of chemistry at Arkansas Tech University. Bob of the Ozarks: http://ozarker.org.

Fancy That by Beckie Tyson

Old Movies



I spent Saturday night watching old movies on television. I have an HDTV so they look pretty good.

First I watched the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, I think. My TV guide screen cut off at *The Return of* . . . and I never saw the full name of the movie. I guess I could google it. (Should "google" be capitalized?)

The movie had lots of battle scenes showing millions of soldiers going at each other. I wasn't sure which side I should be on but I figured I would root for the beings who looked human. The other army was full of misshapen creatures and huge monsters. The human-looking soldiers were wearing armor like in King Arthur's time.

I guess you have figured out by now I've never read *The Lord of Rings* trilogy. I read *The Hobbit*, though, so I'm not totally ignorant about Middle Earth and hobbits and elves and such. I also watched *The Hobbit, An Unexpected Journey*. I realized at the end of the movie that I had seen part of it already.

The first movie had a side story of two hobbits trying to return a ring. (Or was it the main story?) They were trying to climb a steep mountain while fighting with Gollum, a really creep-looking little creature. He talked about himself in the third person and talked to someone else who wasn't there. He also sounded like he had sinus trouble.

Frodo Baggins runs into some really unpleasant situations while trying to climb the mountain. A particularly messy incident is with a giant spider. He eventually is cocooned in a web after fighting for quite a while through lots of the web. For people who don't like spiders, that part must be especially uncomfortable.

Frodo is accompanied by his faithful friend Sam who ends up saving Frodo's life. When Frodo finally gets to the cliff edge where he is to throw the ring into molten lava, he decides to keep the ring after all.

The epic battle happening on the plains around the mountain is getting desperate as the hobbits argue on the edge of the cliff about the ring. Sam convinces Frodo to get rid of the ring, I think. Either that or Frodo just drops it. By then it was getting rather late at night and I may have slept through some of the movie.

Once the hobbits are saved and flown by eagle back to the shire, the hobbits are hailed as heroes. Then Sam is shown with his wife and kids and Frodo sets sail on a ship with Bilbo Baggins.

Next I watched *The Hobbit, An Unexpected Journey*. The lead hobbit is played by Martin Freeman, whom I like to watch. He plays Dr. Watson on *Sherlock Holmes* on PBS. In this story Bilbo Baggins is telling of his adventure when he gets the ring. He plays a riddling game with Gollum, which I remembered from watching the movie before. I guess I hadn't watched the first of the movie before.

After the other hobbit story, *The Pirates of the Caribbean* came on. I'm not sure which one but it had Davy Jones in it with eels for a face and they were seeking his chest that had his heart in it.

Captain Jack Sparrow had been reunited with his ship, The Black Pearl, so it may have been the movie called the *Legend of the Black Pearl.* I like to watch Johnny Depp so I continued to watch just to see him. Fancy that.

The movie was really silly. I found it tedious. They kept fighting with a ghost ship captained by Davy Jones and a kraken (a huge sea monster). At the end, Sparrow walked into the mouth of the kraken but then it seemed as though he was still alive.

I finally went to bed when that movie was over. I felt like I had really wasted an evening.

Writer's Prerogative
BY "PETE MOSS"

Once again it's happened. I had a page or two of notes, from which to write this week's column and once again I've changed my mind. Hey! Whose column is this, anyhow? Neither topic is time-sensitive, so I'll just go with my urge.

Humor me, please. Saturday night was a sleepless one for the most part. The kids' dog seems to think that our little, old house is a safe place to be in a thunderstorm – or any other time for that matter. Granted, it is a comfortable location, but she takes up residence on scary nights in the crawl space under the house – directly under our bedroom. Things might be quiet for some time, but she's likely to warn us of a danger – real or imagined. First she utters a low growl, which is followed by sharp barking. Naturally, this sets our dogs off and they commence barking to frighten the foe. Of course, this has happened often enough to wake us on the first growl.

We thought that the situation had been remedied by a board and rebar blocking the entrance, but this was not the case. Once our dogs were outside, the noisy situation escalated. Four hours later and a couple of trips outside with the flashlight, we thought of putting a five-gallon pail of water in front of the board and rebar. So far, so good.

Why then, you might ask, am I sitting here in an armchair in the living room writing the column out in long hand? It's because our computer is doing strange things and won't behave. That's why!

But permit me to back track to this morning. I slowly moved out of the bedroom to find my spouse watching a movie on television. From the number of "thees" and "thous," I took it to be Friendly Persuasion. I'd never seen it in its entirety, and still haven't, but the gentle lingo brought back a long-ago experience.

Our senior high youth group at church visited other churches to experience their methods of worship. One of these services was at a local Friends Meeting House. For those of you unfamiliar with this term, the group is also known as Quakers. They have no structured service format, but sit in the meeting house, men on one side of the room, women on the other, and at one point in the meeting someone will stand and tell the rest of the assembly what is on their heart. There is no music, so the "meeting" tends to be quiet and peaceful.

On the day our youth group attended, a man related this story. It seems that a minister was hosting a group of ministers from various parts of the world. As they sat in the host's living room, his young son came into the room and sat on his father's lap, gazing at each of the guests in turn.

He stopped and stared at the native minister from an African church. Then he held up his arm and, pointing at the man, started to say, "That man . . ." You can well imagine what the others in the room were worried about, not wanting to have a young child offend the only black man in attendance. The boy continued, however, and turned to his father, pointing and saying in a loud voice, "That man, that man is smoking a pipe!"

What were you thinking as the story unfolded? It was probably just what everyone in that room was concerned about, but the child didn't notice the color of the man's skin. He noticed a man smoking a pipe!

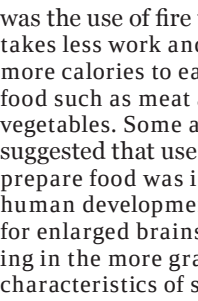
It was a memorable lesson and one we might all try to learn and follow.

Do the Rich Rule America?

Our campaign finance system isn't just sending us toward a new Gilded Age — it's a new Platinum Age.

By Chuck Collins

Is America's political system controlled by a small financial elite? One former president thinks so.



Almost 40 years after he was elected, former President Jimmy Carter commented recently that our political system is now "an oligarchy with unlimited political bribery." He may be right.

For the last three decades, wealth has concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Just how few? As of 2013, the wealthiest 3 percent of households in the United States held more than half of all private wealth.

All that concentrated wealth translates into concentrated political muscle — including the power to influence elections.

As of this summer, over half of all donations to Republican super PACs came from just 130 wealthy families and their businesses. Democratic candidates had a wider base of small contributors, but also plenty of big-money donors of their own.

We're now living through the billionaire primary. Six months before a single vote is cast in New Hampshire, the field of candidates is being selected and winnowed by billionaire donors.

Indeed, it seems like a presidential hopeful must have at least one billionaire backer — and ideally several — to be considered a credible candidate. Roofing billionaire Diane Hendricks gave $5 million to the Scott Walker campaign. Houston billionaire Toby Neugebauer gave a $10 million boost to Ted Cruz. Oracle CEO and billionaire Larry Ellison gave $3 million to Marco Rubio.

This political patronage system effectively disenfranchises ordinary voters.

Since the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision opened the floodgates for unlimited political sending, the pace of contributions has only escalated. Super PACs have already raised $258 million for this election cycle — more than 16 times the total from this point in the 2012 race.

Unfortunately, this is just the tip of iceberg.

The wealthy are major contributors to a vast array of other lobbying groups masquerading as tax-exempt social welfare organizations. The Koch brothers alone have vowed to give and raise nearly $1 billion for these kinds of groups and related work by think tanks and universities during this electoral cycle.

These organizations don't have to disclose the identity of their donors, even as they increasingly influence our elections.

The Federal Election Commission has effectively thrown up its hands in attempting to regulate this secret money. As a result, untold additional millions will flow through these tax-exempt corporations, providing the super-wealthy with another avenue to influence the outcome of state and federal elections.

This isn't just a new Gilded Age. As Campaign Finance Institute president Michael Malbin says, this may even be a new "Platinum Age."

What can we do?

Encouraging movements are forming in response to the corruption of our electoral system. So far, 70 former members of Congress have come together to form the bipartisan ReFormers Caucus to press for campaign finance reform. And a new group, 99Rise, has launched a campaign to expose and eliminate secret money from our campaign finance system.

Carter laments that the present system of campaign finance "violates the essence of what made America a great country in its political system."

A century ago, Louis Brandeis expressed similar fears for our fragile experiment in self-governance. "We must make our choice," the future Supreme Court justice said. "We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

We must make our choice: democracy or rule by the rich?

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