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Jo Ann's Corner

Welcome to Jo Ann's Virtual Cafe 2023. It's always good to see you. Come on in and help yourself to a breakfast beverage. That hot coffee hits the spot this morning.

Let's talk. I've got to tell you that I hate giving advice, especially when it comes to personal relationships.

In my younger days, I would jump right in there. When they asked me, what would you do if you were me, I'd tell them what I would do. Sometimes, that didn't work out too well. They would come back and tell me they took my advice and it didn't work.

I even ended up losing friends over giving them advice.

It took years to find out that giving advice to someone is not in your best interest. Now, I'm telling you all this because it just happened. A friend of mine wanted some advice on her relationship. As she was telling me about her situation, everything I've just told you was flashing through my head.

So, here it came. She asked me: What would you do if you were me?

I smiled and said, Honey, I'm not you and can never be you, but I'm a person who cares about you. I want to share some words with you. I think that they may help you and anyone seeking advice.

The words say: "There is no-one who can give you wiser advice than you can give yourself. You will never make a slip if you listen to your own heart. No one else can do it for you."

She was satisfied with that and went on her merry way. Now, that was and is the best advice that I can give anybody. Having said that, let's share a breakfast beverage and a Native American Proverb.

The Proverb of today goes like this, "Our first teacher is our own heart." Thanks for coming.

Enjoy your gift of today, and have a great day. We look forward to seeing you again real soon.

Old-Wives Tales and Other Hacks

By Banjo

Spring is just around the corner, and I am so excited as I count down the days. I've already seen a Robin, which is a sign of Spring!

I hope this mid-winter thaw in early January is not a trick from Old Man Winter! Keeping my thoughts positive!



Anyways, after winter we look forward to Spring, and that usually means spring cleaning and other home-keeping chores.

Here is a list of some old-wives tales and other hacks. Plus, I've thrown in some baking and cooking folklore. Hope you enjoy!

A damp washcloth or rag, sprayed with a mixture of white vinegar and essential oils, can replace dryer sheets.

Having spiderwebs in your house will supposedly make it warmer. (A great excuse not to dust!)

Throw a whole potato into every tomato dish to absorb the oils. You can also use a small amount of sugar to cut back the acidity of tomatoes in your cooking.

Another idea was to throw a whole apple into vegetable or beef stew for an hour or two to make it more flavorful and add a bit of sweetness. Sprinkle black pepper around where you find mice droppings to stop them from coming back.

Any woman or man who desires order in their home must allow sage to flourish in her garden.

Stir cake, pushing the spoon away from you, and you will stir your troubles away. A cake baked in the morning will rise, and a cake baked in the afternoon will drop. To make cake light, you must always stir it in the same way.

Pastry must be rolled an uneven number of times. Otherwise it will be tough. Every scrap of pastry must be baked or there will be an unwanted expense. Cold hands and a warm heart make the best pastry.

When making the bed, don't interrupt your work or you will spend a restless night in it.

Stabbing needles through yarn balls will bring bad luck to anyone who wears something made from that yarn.

The walnut has been renowned for centuries for its ability to fill in scratches on wooden furniture and floorboards. Just cut a large chunk and rub it diagonally across the scratch in question.

Use an ice cube on dents in your carpet formed by heavy furniture. This will help to bring the carpet back to its previous form.

Vinegar is very effective at cleaning because it is highly acidic. So, it will break down grease, grime, and dirt easily. Be warned, though, it can damage some surfaces, so always check – or test patch – before you use vinegar for cleaning.

For window cleaning, mix equal parts of white vinegar and hot water and add a splash of liquid soap.

For cleaning floors. ***Do test this first if you are cleaning tiles or cleaning stone floors.*** Take equal parts vinegar and warm water and mop. It not only lifts off grease and dirt, but the diluted solution stops the floor from being damaged by the acid of the vinegar.

***You should never clean natural stone with vinegar, especially granite and marble. This means being extremely cautious with kitchen countertops and stone floors. Be careful, too, with wood, whether on countertops or when cleaning hardwood floors. Undiluted vinegar can damage all these. ***

Here's some lore about brooms: Do not lean a broom against a bed. The evil spirits in the broom will cast a spell on the bed.

If you sweep trash out the door after dark, it will bring a stranger to visit. If someone is sweeping the floor and sweeps over your feet, you'll never get married. Never take a broom along when you move. Throw it out and buy a new one.

To prevent an unwelcome guest from returning, sweep out the room they stayed in immediately after they leave. While sweeping near your front door, if the broom drops, expect company before the day is through. If you find a broom lying on the ground or floor, pick it up for good luck.

When sweeping up dirt by your back door, be sure to sweep it out the back door instead of inward, or you will be sweeping away the friendship of your best friend. Do not sweep using a broom on New Year's Day, or bad luck will follow you all year long.

Any trash that you decide to sweep up on New Year's Day, be sure to burn it so you will have money all year long.

When carrying a broom, hold it under your arm for good luck. If you carry it over your shoulder, you will surely have bad luck. Do not get mad and hit someone with a broom; if you do, you will find yourself in jail before the week is up.

Never sweep dirt out of your home before the sun comes up, or you will be calling for bad luck to enter. If the broom you are using happens to fall, it will bring you bad luck.

If you wish for someone that just entered your home to go away, all you have to do is sweep in front of them. This is a sign that you do not want them in your home. If you are visiting someone and you have to step over a broom in her home, or outside the home, this means that she is not a good housekeeper.

Never hand someone a broom through an open window. It can bring you bad luck. It is bad luck to loan your broom to anyone, even a good friend.

Stand a broom upside down, and you will marry soon. If a wife sweeps a circle around her husband, it will keep him eternally true to her. Funny, I didn't see one thing about riding a broom!

Happy Spring cleaning!

Banjo

Ode To Speculation, or, The Night Sentinel

By Aimée LaFon

The absence of Something is still Something —
Darkness has a name that hisses between
teeth, dressing the ambient breezes
with a blank face worthy of fear;

watching out from the porous stones
consuming slow-acting poison,
Something I harvest with a glance
at the eerie light shooting between

the bark-girded claws, those who project
into the deep, livid sky. Seconds
elongate themselves, first speeding
by on the road, then returning again

and again much later, taking up space
in the cave where I store my memories,
reforging themselves into hours of
careful, gruesome, shadows.

I have evolved for this;
growing into eyes that spin together
senseless air and light, conglomerating
absent particles into predatory shapes —

and again, a rattle projects from empty spaces;
evidence of Something that lasts beyond
whispers, Something altogether terrible,
terrific, terrifying, and ... admirable.

Darkness leads a life of her own,
owing Nothing to those who perceive
her and fear that she will swallow us
all, all, again, lodged in Chaos.

Balance

Sydney Hamilton

Birds, birds, they fly so high,

Way up, way up in the sky.

The vultures sit up high on the tower

Knowing it's near, every hour.

Grass swishes O'er the fields,

Tall, the tree creeks by the bottom of our Spring bog.

The silo, a different kind of tower, stained by water and sun,

The vulture finds home in the abandoned and unadorned.

The bird has no fear, there are here for shill.

You frolic and play, quick to waste your day away.

Here, again, before the hour comes, the bird comes to hum.

The tale of a tail, left beaten and torn, a good dog who won't bark once more.

The birds, they eat, don't turn a bad eye or cold shoulder,

It only encourages more to roll over.

When all has passed, the moonlight leads,

Mushrooms, moons, and graves all rise the same.

Birds, birds, they fly so right,

Birds, birds, say night night.

Mountain Folk Forage: Dandelions

By Aimée LaFon

***Disclaimer: I am not a doctor, nor do I pretend to be. This article is informative and only covers the traditional uses for edible plants commonly found in the Appalachian region. It's always best to consult a health care professional or medical doctor when suffering from any ailment, disease, illness, or injury before trying any traditional folk remedies. ***

I've been looking forward to telling you about one of my favorite forageable flowers — dandelions. These little weeds are packed with nutrition, and they sure are a cheery sight, even if most people today look at them as unwanted weeds.

About Dandelions



Once upon a time, not all that long ago, dandelions were prized flowers and herbs that had their place in the kitchen.

The ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and Chinese used dandelions as medicine and an ingredient in many dishes. Some traditional ways to consume the plant include using the foliage in salads, as wine, in stews and soups, and teas.

It is a very healthy plant to consume, as it contains many vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, C, K, and E and minerals like potassium, iron, calcium, and magnesium.

Other studies have proved that dandelions can improve digestive, liver, and immune system health. However, the dandelion is very bitter, which was part of its downfall.

Due to these health benefits, early American colonists brought dandelions over from Europe as a staple crop.

However, the advent of the lawn changed all of that. Lawns, traditionally manicured fields where the 16th-century European aristocracy played garden games and held parties, were cultural imports that came with the American colonists. They only became more popular as the development of the suburbs and industrialization grew between the late 1800s and 1960s.

During this shift, the humble dandelion became a hated pest since it often infested the solid sheets of grass that made up people's immaculate suburban yards. The dandelion saw a big comeback during the food scarcity of the Great Depression, but soon after, it lost its reputation as a reliable source of nourishment.

In addition, other, better-tasting foods and crops slowly replaced the dandelion in the kitchen. Plants such as arugula and chicory were much less bitter than dandelions, and they gradually displaced the dandelion in seed catalogs and on general store shelves.

Eventually, all that was left for the dandelions were to disperse, as they do so well, into gardens, crop fields, and lawns, where they have become a weed today.

However, you'll still find some people, particularly Appalachians and foraging enthusiasts, picking this plant and turning it into wine or blanching it as a salad ingredient. Likewise, you may also find dandelion roots, which many people use as a substitute for coffee, on the shelves of health food stores.

If you find yourself in a situation where dandelions overrun your yard, remember how far this humble little weed has come and how long it has been growing in our gardens and lawns.

From prized medicinal plants to weeds, dandelions have followed us wherever we have gone, regardless of what we choose to call them.

What's in a Name?

By Banjo

Appalachia is known for many things, a cultural region with a passion for keeping it simple, a seed that was sown by the first settlers over 300 years ago, and it is still the way of life today. This simplicity can be found in some of the unique, funny, odd, or just plain weird names of towns and communities.

Legend has it that if you stand on the hill, looking down on the town of Monkey's Eyebrow, Kentucky, it looks just like a monkey's eyebrow, and so that is how the name came to be.

According to a West Virginia legend, the town of Booger Hole has an interesting story to go along with its name. This holler in Clay County was the location of around a dozen mysterious deaths and disappearances between 1897 and 1917.

After the death of 23-year-old Preston Tanner, residents of Booger Hole formed the Clay County Mob to find justice for those who were murdered. Outsiders tended to avoid the town after that. Newspaper articles from 1917 read "Clay County Citizens Formed 'Mob' To Clean Out Lawless 'Booger Hole'."

Another version of how Booger Hole got its name is that an old stone mason who lived at the mouth of the valley grew tired of the violence and moved. When asked why he was leaving, he said that he was "leaving booger hole."

Other weird and wonderful place names around West Virginia include Pancake. Pancake was named after the Pancake family who lived in the area. Sorry, no syrup is needed here.

Then we've got the beautiful area of Big Ugly. We also can't leave out the little community of Shabby Run! Look out for War and Hookersville too.

Let's leave it with Looneyville and head south to Kentucky.

Now, I already mentioned Monkey's Eyebrow and add these beastly place names: Possum Trot, Mousie, Bugtussle, Hippo, Wildcat, Turkey, Viper, Lamb, Wolverine, Wolf, Sunfish, Raccoon, and Rabbit Hash.

Tennessee welcomes you, always, with lewd place names like: (you might blush at some of these), Lick Skillet, Rockwood, Sweet Lips, and Wartburg. Tennessee is just too sexy!

Food is a way of showing southern hospitality, and Tennessee honors that with these place names Slay Bacon Area, Onionbed Ridge, Poke Patch Creek, Buttermilk Road, Cabbage Island, Okra Community, and Tater Hill.

Hmmm, just need a glass of Iced Tea to go with that menu!

How about Virginia? Originally a stagecoach stop through the mountains of Southwest Virginia, Chilhowie is a Cherokee word meaning “valley of many deer.”

Tightsqueeze. Maybe you've never been to Tightsqueeze, but maybe you've been in a tight squeeze.

This community near Danville got its name when two merchants decided to build their shops on the road's edge but directly across from one another. The idea was that ladies wouldn't have to get their dresses dirty when going from shop to carriage. The result was that the carriages couldn't get past the two shops without slowing down and maneuvering just right.

Needmore, because some people just can't get enough. This little spot on the map is a coal mining community in Wise County. Located in Franklin County is Burnt Chimney.

In North Carolina, you'll find "Holy Bat Cave, Batman!" but no Batman. Bat Cave was named for a nearby cave that's home to a lot of bats. Figures. Also on the list is Grandfather Village, Seven Devils, Lizard Lick, Horneytown, Bear Grass, Bee Log, and Meat Camp.

Just gonna leave the following right here. Sugar Tit, Possum Kingdom, and Pumpkintown are just a few of the towns and or communities across the Upstate region of South Carolina. Hope you enjoyed our journey!



Improving Appalachias' Train Infrastructure

By Zeke Streetman



We have experienced four decades of fiscally and socially regressive politics throughout Appalachia and the United States. The parties that take the biggest blow are the rural towns that dominate Appalachia.

We're still living in the shadows of the civil war. Reconstruction never made it farther than the largest cities of the South, including Atlanta and Nashville.

So, today, one hundred and forty years later, the cracks are deeper. Appalachia has a long impoverished history, but we have a strong opportunity to restore a marvel of our past.

One issue deepening the problem is that we have lost almost all of our commuter trains. Our dependence on roads has, quite literally, blockaded a valuable opportunity to profit, both financially and communally, from the use of our widespread train lines.

Single families are maintaining single-industry dollar store towns. Where there was once a railway and robust trade system, a confused mess of pockmarked, poorly maintained interstates and crumbling backroads now lingers.

In terms of goods transportation, we have 2,552 miles of rail across the state, and it used to be twice as long before significant cuts to railroad lines in the 1980s.

The upshot of this is that towns become unwalkable, replaced by paved streets. Likewise, interstates create only one stream of income and one person who profits in the small highway towns with one gas station.

Cars dominate. Instead of a train station near a rural community, the only way out is with a car.

There is urgency in this issue. Trains in Appalachia have been connected with coal since their inception, and now is the time to recognize their great asset as movers of the most important cargo: people.

Putting a focus on public transportation can bring us together as communities and help us, as Appalachians, develop an economic network. Under this system, with the help of accessible and affordable transportation for all communities in Appalachia, we can collectively expand beyond the boundaries that currently exist.

We can disseminate information efficiently, find more job opportunities in specialist fields, and support local businesses in localities that seem far out of reach.

Initiatives to revive the dying railroad lines in Appalachia already exist. For example, the Appalachian Regional Commission released a report in 2016 that states:

“Effective public sector involvement is in the public’s interest. Importantly, because of the geographic and multi-jurisdictional scope of Central Appalachia, such public involvement must feature a large degree of cooperation and coordination among the states and other jurisdictions interested in preserving effective and affordable railroad service.”

However, without any action, this simply will not happen. We can fix the issue and create a strong network of rails so that the people of Appalachia can move freely and move away from isolation. But we need to start advocating for passenger rail lines now if we ever want to see our communities connect and give our fellow Appalachians the freedom that comes with getting around.

Bibliography

- [Rural Transportation: Access vs. Isolation: Preserving Rail Connectivity.](#)

- [ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card: Tennessee 2022 Report.](#)

New Year's 1992

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I looked at the syrupy spot on my shoe
And recognized the dregs of the last toast
At my coronation earlier that night in another year.
“Lord of Clouds and an Occasional Star,”
A grand title that.

“This has always been a night for auspicious beginnings”
I announced to my mute subjects
As I gazed up at them,
Looking for answers to questions
Not yet fully framed in my mind.

Then, wrapped in sodden loneliness,
I rolled up on my side
And slumbered in the ever faithless hussy of a new year.