

‘Once he was an organ-grinder!’

Wonderment.

My heart beats a bit faster just at the thought of the word. I like the sound of the syllables as they skip off my tongue and ripple through the air, as well as the thoughts they conjure in my mind.

As children, we are all consumed by wonder and revel in being astonished by new things and gaining a new perspective on the world.

I see evidence of this fact all the time as I visit local elementary schools to photograph events for the *Times-Courier*.

I’ve witnessed children stare openmouthed as they watch science experiments unfold and smile broadly as they learn about how everyday products are made. Exclamations of delight frequently burst forth from them without fear of public derision or judgment. They are wowed by the happenings in the world around them — be that something as great as a trip to the moon or as small as watching an ant carry a heavy load — and are not ashamed for others to know of their excitement.

It’s sad how easily we can lose sight of this way of looking at the world.

As we grow older, our wonderment dissipates and we are left with what we would like to think of as a more enlightened point of view. In reality though, I believe we lose something important as we age.

Such thoughts about the decline of wonderment were in the forefront of my mind recently as I read F. Scott Fitzgerald’s second novel “The Beautiful and Damned.” Set in and around New York City in the 1920s, the book traces the decadent saga of socialites



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Anthony and Gloria Patch in the height of the Jazz Age.

In it Fitzgerald writes, “It is in the 20s that the actual momentum of life begins to slacken, and it is a simple soul indeed to whom as many things are as significant and meaningful at 30 as at 10 years before. At 30 an organ-grinder is a more or less moth-eaten man who grinds an organ — and once he was an organ-grinder! The unmistakable stigma of humanity touches all those impersonal and beautiful things that only youth ever grasps in their impersonal glory.”

I must confess that these words saddened me a bit when I read them; perhaps this was the case because I’m still in the stage when life has not yet begun to slacken and recognize myself as “a simple soul indeed” since I do not want to lose my sense of wonderment.

I want to be amazed by life and to never grow tired of exploring the world and pondering its many intricacies.

To remind me of this goal, I have a Post-it note attached to my computer monitor reminding me to “have a wonder-filled day!”

Whenever I’m feeling discouraged, I take in those words and challenge myself to look at my surroundings afresh and to allow myself to marvel at instances that would typically pass me by unnoticed. Thus, I have come to appreciate things like the movement of an inchworm, the stately swaying of poplar trees in a breeze and the blessing of having a mind that can translate and garner meaning from words on a printed page.

In short, the exercise of nurturing a sense of wonderment never fails to lift my spirits and to remind me to not take the things around me for granted.

I’m not saying that we should look at the world through rose-colored glasses and only see

what we want to see. On the contrary, I urge you to look at the things around you with eyes that are clear and unencumbered — even by, or perhaps especially by, cynicism.

I find that when I stop to wonder, my life is enriched.

And so, I am determined that if growing up means losing sight of the excitement of seeing an organ-grinder and other marvels, then it’s not for me.

I’d much rather stop to hear the playful music streaming from a mechanical street organ than rush by with my mind filled with more “sensible” matters.

Where have you taken the Times-Courier?



Contributed photo

Eileen and Ben Bailey are pictured with the *Times-Courier* in front of the Bonito Lava Flow in Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument northeast of Flagstaff, Ariz., Feb. 13. Have someone take a picture of you reading the *Times-Courier* while traveling and send it to april@timescourier.com.

Northwest Georgia’s unemployment rate declines to 8.8 percent in February

Georgia Department of Labor

The Georgia Department of Labor announced recently that the Northwest Georgia region’s unemployment rate declined to 8.8 percent in February, down six-tenths of a percentage point from 9.4 percent in January. The rate was 9.8 percent in February a year ago.

The rate declined because there were about 3,000 fewer unemployed people and there was a significant drop in the number of initial claims for unemployment insurance benefits filed by newly laid-off workers.

The number of first-time claims for unemployment insurance benefits fell to 4,768 in February, down 8,120 from 12,888 in January. The decreases came mostly in construction, manufacturing, trade, transportation, and warehousing, and administrative and support services. And, the number of initial claims was down over-the-year by 1,066 from 5,834 in February 2012. Most of the over-the-year decline came in the

same industries as the monthly decline.

Also, the region’s labor force declined to 412,619, down from 417,066 in January. The labor force totaled 412,944 in February 2012.

Metro Athens had the lowest area jobless rate at 6.1 percent, while the Heart of Georgia-Altamaha region had the highest at 11.2 percent.

Meanwhile, Georgia’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for

February was 8.6 percent, down from 8.7 percent in January. The rate was 9.2 percent in February a year ago.

Local area unemployment data are not seasonally adjusted. Georgia labor market data are available at www.dol.state.ga.us.

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Assembly from 1A

School District was threatened with losing their accreditation. He suspended and replaced six members (two-thirds of the board) citing a 2011 law (initiated and signed by the governor as a result of a similar circumstance in Fulton County) in doing so. The law, which empowers the governor to circumvent local election processes, has yet to be tested by the Georgia Supreme Court.

A bill also was amend-

ed in the Senate to allegedly prevent DeKalb County CEO Burrell Ellis from winning future elections. Amidst accusations of racism and partisan meddling, Nan Orrock (R-Atlanta) warned Senators across the state voting on HB87, “It will happen in your county, and you will be powerless to stop it.”

And it did, again and again, throughout the session in many other jurisdictions wherein legislators desired to enact governmental changes in order to please constituencies and solidify partisan gains.

The Senate, adding significant amendments to HB 142 further restricting lobbyist’s gifts and protecting the rights of citizen advocates, finally emerged the winner. But that left many previously “tabled” bills to be heard during the final two hours of frenzied confusion.

Consequently, good legislative practices were thrown to the wind and so were many bills.

One of them was SB 101. Heavily amended to reflect countless hours of House deliberations, the bill had received final approval by the House. House advocates for the bill blame the Senate for failing to address the bill at the 11th hour.

That final, frenzied hour was conducted amidst the back-of-the-room screams of minority party senators claiming to know nothing about the bills they were voting on.

(Pam O’Dell covers news under the Gold Dome when the General Assembly is in session.)

Bat from 1A

was traced here from a cave in Tennessee. It was the first sighting of an Indiana bat in Georgia since 1966. The bat was not captured but researchers found 13 other bats clustered on the same tree.

Georgia Department of

Natural Resources biologist Trina Morris said the number of bats seen on Rich Mountain and the length of time the confirmed Indiana bat spent in the area means they are looking at a maternity colony of the endangered species.

The bats migrate during the summer, so tests have to be conducted in the summer months to try and trap and tag more of them across north Georgia. Re-searchers

will use an acoustic device to find the bats and use mist nets to capture and put a tracker on them. Required by the federal government, each project area must be tested and will cost \$80,000 to \$120,000. In total, those studies could cost up to \$8 million.

After the bat was discovered in Gilmer last summer, the GDOT scrambled to complete two bat studies on two projects — the Northwest Corridor toll lane along I-75 and I-575 in Cobb and Cherokee counties and a project on Ga. 17 in Stephens County.

Design for projects can continue undeterred. But construction and land acquisition cannot proceed until workers have listened for the bats in the projected work areas. If more bats are discovered, more delays and costly work may occur, as the state is required to take conservation measures to protect the habitat if the project will “harm, kill or harass” the bats, said DOT Chief Engineer Russell McMurry.

Fifty-eight of the state projects are nearing readiness but are on hold for now.

Catalyst from 1A

next few weeks, the group plans to identify three to five areas in which the community can improve, recommend solutions and develop an overall marketing strategy for promoting Gilmer County.

To begin this process, attendees at the March 29 meeting brainstormed about the assets and weaknesses of the local community. They were particularly encouraged to think in terms of what gives the area a competitive edge and the things that help or inhibit local job growth and workforce development.

In the coming weeks they will also identify some of the opportunities and threats they see concerning economic development in the local community.

Wreck from 1A

hung up or a deer ran out in front of them. I don’t know what went wrong. She just went off the road and hit a tree.”

Couch said in the report several people fishing at a nearby pond in the Walnut Mountain complex “heard the ATV wreck and came to help.” Gilmer EMS arrived and took both victims to the hospital. Burch, who was riding on back of the ATV, was airlifted to Grady Hospital in Atlanta and was in stable condition Monday, Hensley said.

Ellis leaves behind her husband, Jason Ellis, and son, Micah Stephen Ellis, according to an obituary on the Woodstock Funeral Home webpage.

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