

been to Africa, so now the . . . may I use that word again? . . . the *serendipitous* coincidence seemed too great, virtually mandating that I too book a flight to



Johannesburg to visit with Matt and Bekah. I had to wonder, at age 63, how many more chances I could expect to get to visit that equatorial continent and see my daughter and their home there in the process? So once again, not wanting to be “forever regretful”, I booked it. I flew to Africa and it was a fantastic trip. While there we took a four day side trip down to Capetown . There I stood on the shore, watching the waves crash against the rocks along the Cape of Good Hope and stared southward out to sea toward Antarctica. Wow!

November 11th every year is Veterans Day. Since the end of WWII it has replaced Armistice Day, which formerly commemorated the ending of WWI on our national calendar. Today Veterans Day is, I’m afraid, a *holiday* (originally read “holy day”) that for many of the younger generations has become little more than just another day off from work. Even fewer people know that the day before that every year is November 10th, the birthday of the Marine Corps. This past year the Corps was 232 years old, a year older than the country itself. For Marines all over the world, that celebration of their birthday every year is a *very big deal*. This year it was also the third annual occasion for the

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have written of the amazing rediscovered bonding within that special group. We enjoyed it again this past November in Austin, Texas. This year there were sixteen of us present. A reporter for a local Austin weekly newspaper, an old Marine himself, came by to visit with us and ended up staying two days. In his later newspaper column he commented that “. . . the one thing these guys seem to have in common is a great affection for each other and . . . although they (since) went in different directions, (they) stayed loyal to each other and to the Corps.”

I was only barely back from Texas when my wife and I were talking about the especially bright fall colors in the foliage this year. Very quickly I was infected with her itch to go to the Smokies to revel in that color. It was just to be a fast weekend trip. You know, *Thursday* through Sunday. So we did. Among other places, we rode our bicycles one more time around Cades Cove. We luxuriated in the colors, the invigorating late fall air and the visual delight of multitudes of deer grazing on that high valley floor that once was the home to a hardy breed of nineteenth century mountain folk. We made a lot of

reuniting of my old and formerly disconnected buddies and brothers who as long ago enlisted Marines found our selves together in a prep school run by the Department of the Navy to academically prepare us to enter that Academy class of ’68. In a previous edition of this letter I

photos and I did a pencil drawing for my journal. We walked through the restored historic sites there in the valley and appreciated again how rural Americans used to live in a way that forged steel into their characters.

After celebrating Thanksgiving here at home with the family, I was off again to Nashville for the annual conference of the American Society of Consulting Arborists. A previous issue has commented on that group as well. I never miss it.

We were home with the kids for Christmas. Even Matt and Bekah flew in from Africa to be here. But for some time now there have been whispers, rumors of a necessary late February “anti-winter-depression trip” to Key West. That’s another favorite place! “We can rent bikes or scooters down there,” she said. “Just like before.” Well, how can you argue with that sort of logic? Anyway, I know my bags are not yet so threadbare that

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they will not stand a few more packings. Years ago, when our three girls were young(er) and still with us here at home, we more than once busted our budget and on at least one memorable occasion borrowed *a bit more than a bit* to make a family trip that we really, financially speaking, could not at the time afford. But each time we recovered somehow and now we view that extravagant habit as something we could not afford *not* to do. And we’d do it over again . . . in a blink! Absolutely! How do they say it in that ad? EuroRail pass through Europe, \$600. Bareboat sailing in the Caribbean, \$6,000. The memories and stories, Priceless! Sure don’t want to end up “forever regretful.”

Another Winter Oak Gall Reminder

Over the three years that I have been producing this newsletter, I have more than once mentioned the exciting new control we can now get with oak gall, that knotty tumorous growth that plagues both the vitality and the appearance of our large oaks. Previous editions have gone into some detail with both how this gall forms and the procedure now available to reverse this undesirable, debilitating and disfiguring phenomenon.

Aesthetics aside, maybe a more serious objection to this gall issue is its increasing interference with sap movement (water and sugar) through the tree, thereby retarding vitality and elevating susceptibility to additional problems.

January and February is the optimum time to administer this treatment. If you have been watching these knotty malformations form on the branches and twigs of your oak(s), call us. We can help.

