

Remember to water the bamboo

The sun was in late Leo/early Virgo the first time I saw San Francisco Bay. I came out of Chicago in a Ford pickup, with my motorcycle took-to-pieces and wrapped in a tarp in the back. Everything else I owned was stuffed all around me in the front seat.

I started motoring up the east side of the bay, and I knew that this was where my home was going to be because I hit Fremont on a Sunday afternoon and right there by the freeway was a full-tilt drag strip with hundreds of far-out cars and right overhead were real gullwing gliders, cruising over the bay and landing beside the drag strip.

I scored a little house to rent across the bay in Menlo Park, by a cemetery. I unloaded my stuff into the house, put the motorcycle together and went job hunting.

I scored a job as veterinarian's assistant for a crusty old dude on El Camino in Mountain View. I didn't mind shoveling dog manure, really, but I totally was not able to handle holding the dogs down while the doc shot them up to put them away. Something about their eyes.

I told the vet that California was just too much for me, that I missed my family and I was headed back to somewhere, and could I please have my week's pay? This guy was so used to losing help that he just wrote the check. No deductions, no goodbyes, no nothing.

There used to be jobs around every corner. On the way back to Menlo Park I saw a Help Wanted sign. I parked the bike and went over and read the fine print that

said "Janitor needed, easy work, low pay" and gave a phone number, which I called and set up an appointment for an interview the next day at Lee Manor.

Lee Manor was a 100-unit, three-story, singles' cinderblock studio apartment thing, down by Bayshore in Palo Alto, shaped like a horseshoe, with a swimming pool in the middle and a rec room wedged into the open end. I stashed the motorcycle a couple of blocks away. You never know.

The job interview was strange. An older Chinese dude, Mr. Lee himself, dressed like some kind of Sicilian gangster with a diamond stick pin and big gold pinky ring, was sitting in the rec room eating pudding. When I came in, he offered me a little plastic cup of chocolate pudding and we sat there eating pudding at a folding table. He didn't ask or say a thing, just stared at me eating pudding. Finally he said, "Let us walk."

I walked, but he was 90 years old and had metal taps on the heels and toes of his wingtips, so he shuffled, and it was fingernails on the blackboard stuff. Sounded like somebody was dragging a refrigerator down the hall. We stood out by the pool, and he waved his arms around his empire, telling me to watch the garbage, and skim the pool, and water the bamboo (which are these little teenage bushes all around the pool), and paint the rooms every time somebody moved, and buff the hallways, and I was to get \$300 a month. Then he scraped over to a Lincoln Town Car and peeled out toward downtown Palo Alto. I'm hired.

I never really figured out who lived in

Lee Manor. Nobody cares to meet a janitor. The first floor was mostly big brown guys from junior colleges, being fattened by Stanford as their football team of the future. Big guys produce big garbage.

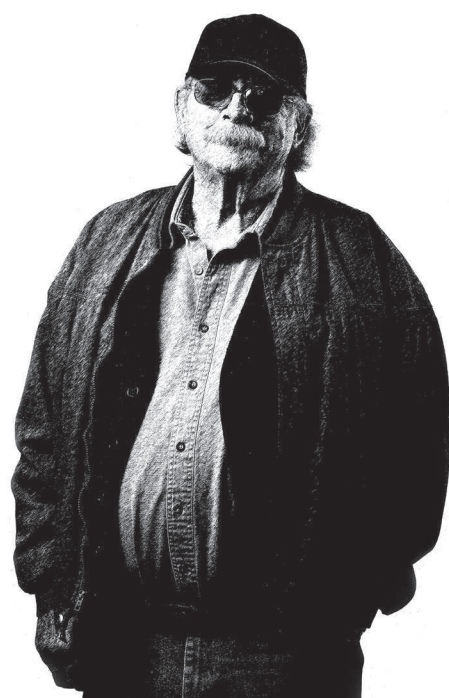
The second floor was a crash pad for stewardesses working out of SFO. They were slobs.

Flight attendants may be the super-tidiest of human beings when they are at work, but you put a couple of them in lounge chairs by the pool and they trash all of East Palo Alto with their hair spray cans and wads of Kleenex, then they barefoot it back to the apartment and leave the mess for the servants. Litterers. Get out of the airplane and think the outside world is so big they don't need to deal with their trash.

And then there was the Artichoke Woman on the third floor. I never saw her wearing anything but a pink chenille housecoat. I think she worked nights at Stanford Hospital or something. Anyway, she was mysterious and lived on a weird schedule where every Tuesday night she came home, ate artichokes and tried to run the leaves through the garbage disposal. You can't do that.

I didn't even know what an artichoke was. The first time I took apart her disposal and found all that fiber wrapped around the works I seriously thought that she had decided against hanging herself and shoved the rope down the sink. The second time I asked her what she was putting down there, and she showed me, so we made a deal and every Wednesday morning after that I picked up a little plastic sack of artichoke leaves from in front of door 329.

The first of October I come to work and there was Mr. Lee standing out by the pool staring at the pool plants, which are nice and gold, like everything should be by the

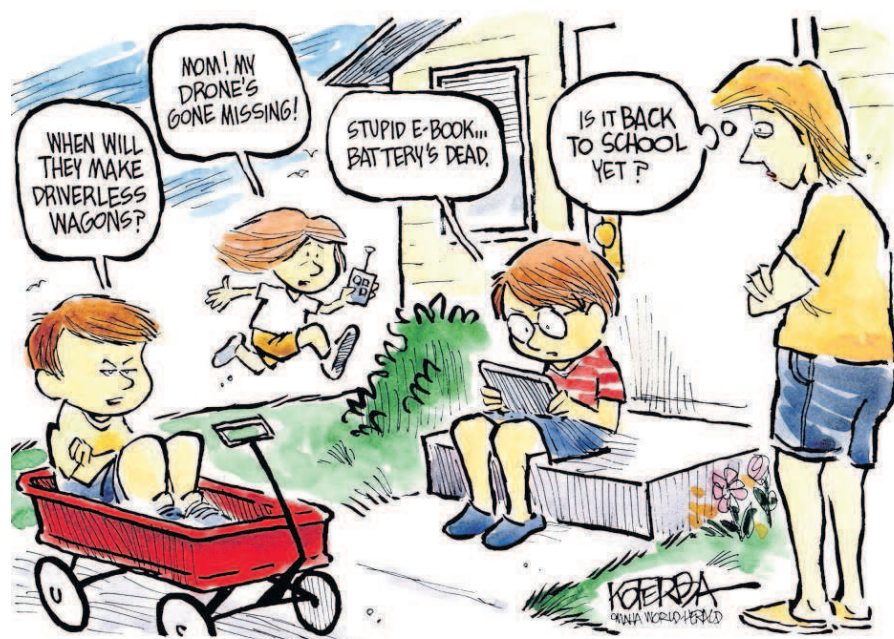
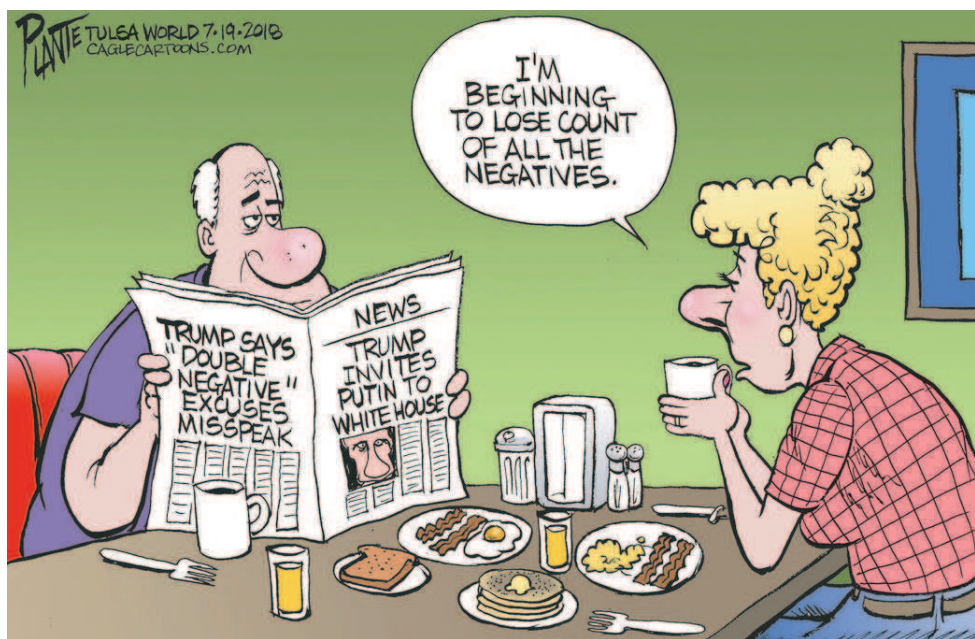


J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

first of October, right? I'm from Nebraska. The cottonwoods turn in September.

Mr. Lee looked me up and down, looked at the plants, looked back at me, back at the plants, then reached into the breast pocket of his Taiwan suit coat, peeled off three \$100 dollar bills, handed them to me, and dismissed me from his employ, right there, saying "You are fired, sir. Somebody no water bamboo." A week later I was working on the city of Palo Alto tree crew.

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.



Don't permanently sterilize wild horses

On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Interior Appropriations bill — a massive piece of legislation that funds a wide range of government programs and agencies, including the National Park Service and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Every year, the Interior bill becomes a vehicle for all manner of controversial riders that impact our nation's wildlife. This year was certainly no exception. But what's new this cycle is a tucked-away provision that would adversely affect some of our most iconic and treasured animals: wild horses that embody a spirit of freedom for so many Americans.

Under an amendment by Rep. Chris Stewart (R-UT) — a longtime and vocal proponent of culling wild horses to reduce population size — the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (which oversees much of the land these animals inhabit) could launch a mass surgical sterilization program for stallions and mares.

A diverse group of stakeholders recognizes the need to deal more effectively with wild horse populations on the range. But when it comes to managing these federally protected animals, it is important to implement viable and humane fertility control options that the American public can support. It is irresponsible for the federal government to use tax dollars for surgical sterilizations.

Rep. Stewart's amendment ignores obvious humane fertility control options, such as porcine zona pellucida (PZP) — an immun contraceptive vaccine that can be administered safely. Conversely, surgical sterilization entails a risky, stressful, painful, and highly invasive procedure on the animal.

Conducting ovariectomies (i.e., removing the ovaries of mares) on the range or in a holding pen is a complex and costly process. Trained medical professionals would need to conduct the surgery. In ideal circumstances, horses undergoing this procedure — which is normally performed to deal with an abnormality or to remove a malignant growth — would be put under general anesthesia and monitored carefully. Wild horses, by contrast, would likely receive



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Comment

local anesthesia. The reality is that these proposed surgical sterilizations would be conducted in a nonsterile environment, thereby increasing the risk of post-operative complications including infections.

In a 2013 report on improving wild horse management, the National Academies of Sciences stated that ovariectomies are "inadvisable for field application" due to the probability of "prolonged bleeding or peritoneal infection."

Whether the Bureau of Land Management has fully weighed the costs and feasibility of a mass surgical sterilization program is unclear. Any population control proposal should consider the following factors: pain relief, antibiotics to treat infections, the long-term health and behavioral effects of removing organs, the ability to provide individual care and attention, and the safe handling and transport of large wild animals.

For an agency that routinely warns lawmakers and the public that it lacks sufficient resources and funding to effectively manage wild horses and burros, the idea of bankrolling mass surgical sterilizations doesn't make fiscal sense. If the Bureau of Land Management were to move forward with impractical mass sterilizations and the results fell short for whatever reason (costs, difficulty, complications), that failure could spur lawmakers to renew their push for the agency to resort to outright culling the herds to reduce numbers.

Wild horses are protected by the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, which established a policy of allowing these "living symbols ... of the West" to thrive on public lands. This latest rider circumvents the law's intent since mass permanent sterilizations would lead to nonreproducing herds and nonviable populations.

As lawmakers in the Senate and House work to reconcile their versions of the Interior bill in the coming weeks, they would do well to reject this misguided approach to herd management.

Joanna Grossman, Ph.D., is the equine protection manager at the Washington, D.C.-based Animal Welfare Institute.

President Trump keeps the Bundy standoff alive

President Donald Trump's pardon of the Oregon ranchers whose legal case helped spark the armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge perpetuates the polarization triggered by the entire Bundy saga.

Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven, were convicted of arson in 2012. The men set two fires on federal land, one in 2001, witnesses testified, to cover up a poaching incident, and the second in 2006, initially allegedly set as a back burn. This happened at a time when relations between federal officials at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and many local ranchers had become especially tense.

The charges against the two men were brought under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which required a mandatory five-year sentence. Instead, U.S. District Judge Michael R. Hogan sentenced Dwight Hammond to three months in prison and Steven to a year, saying the mandatory sentence "would shock the conscience to me."

That wasn't enough jail time for U.S. Attorney Billy Williams. He appealed and the Hammonds were ordered to complete their five-year sentences.

That's when Ammon and Ryan Bundy weighed in. In 2015, they came to Burns to take up the Hammonds' cause, which even some moderate ranchers supported.

The Bundys' involvement inspired militia members and other supporters, who had clashed with federal enforcement officers at the family's Nevada ranch in 2014. That dispute was over federal grazing fees that Cliven Bundy, the family patriarch, had refused to pay for decades.

The Hammonds, however, ignored the Bundys' call to join their occupation of the wildlife refuge. Instead, they decided to return to prison, thereby demonstrating some support for the rule of law.

I spoke with federal employees whose families were bullied by some of the men with assault rifles who came from across the West to join in the Bundys' protest. The people who worked for the government were members of the community — coaches of Little League teams and volunteers in churches who also served in local government. But the Bundy supporters treated them like enemies. Rancher Fred Otley, a former president



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Comment

of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said he thought that state and local officials had overreacted to the presence of militia members. When community meetings were shut down and schools closed, that only encouraged conspiracy theories about federal agents stalking and harassing local people. He and other ranchers had no intention of siding with the Bundys, he said, but he also believed the federal government had treated the Hammonds too harshly.

When the 41-day occupation of the wildlife refuge ended, one man, LaVoy Finicum, was dead. But the division over land policy continued. The Bundys and five others were acquitted of conspiracy, weapons and theft charges after a five-week trial in 2016. But many of their followers are either in jail or face fines and probation.

Then in January, U.S. District Judge Gloria Navarro dismissed the case against Cliven Bundy, his sons and others involved in the 2014 Nevada standoff. She said that prosecutors had engaged in "flagrant misconduct" by withholding evidence that could have supported the Bundys' case.

No matter what you thought about the Bundys and the radical band of anti-government, gun-toting extremists who follow them, it was clear that the federal government had bungled the two cases.

Imagine this: What if President Barack Obama had commuted the Hammonds' sentence, showing clemency for the two men who had been willing to return to prison and accept the consequences for their actions? Instead, it was President Trump who gave the Hammonds a full pardon, thereby feeding the fires of conflict over federal land management.

An earlier, more nuanced approach might have placated Fred Otley and other Oregon ranchers, who might have felt that justice had been served. It might also have helped the many federal public servants who must carry out their jobs protecting our public lands, often in lonely and vulnerable circumstances.

Now, provocateurs like the Bundys can feel empowered to push their alternative brand of American history and the law. The standoff continues.

Rocky Barker is a contributor to the opinion service of High Country News.