

Preface

1/24/2010

I have poured my heart and soul into this book about the Wekiva River. It is a celebration of the beauty and depths of the natural community and chronicles the history of its protection and preservation for future generations by a prodigious effort of the people who care. I make no place for the opposing forces, but I am not blind. I choose to believe in the human potential to create new structures to overcome the negative dimensions of the capitalist enterprise.

Please do not be put off by the optimism of my approach, the notion that the environmental protection accorded now to the Wekiva River could somehow make up for Florida's clear record of environmental degradation due largely to an explosion of human population. So Florida has experienced habitat loss, declines in fish and wildlife populations, and numerous abuses of the eight-billion-gallon-a-day natural water system. We have also seen outrageous constructions along hundreds of miles of the primary dunes; and our world of commerce and transportation is designed largely without nature in mind. This is not destiny.

I follow these days the terrible experience of natives of West Virginia and Kentucky who have to watch their mountain tops blasted into creeks and stream beds. As children they scurried over boulders through bouquets of mountain laurel and around dense stands of rhododendron, following the songs of cerulean warblers, and then finally reached the top where ravens pitch their swift-gliding shadows over great vistas. The children who survive this mindless blasting will surely have a shorter hike.

We burn their coal in Florida and with each kilowatt hour we shrink the rocky top experience of future children in Appalachia. The local protests have risen to the level of the state legislatures and courts, and even the supreme court, in vain. King coal has taken over the democracy, it would seem. Even this is not destiny. We have choices, networks, inventions, incentives, mitigations, rule changes, protests, and elections.

In 2000 my friends Bill Belleville and Bob Giguere made a superb documentary film about the Wekiva entitled "Legacy or Loss?" I am not in denial about the horrible possibility of loss. However, no one is threatening to blow the springs of Florida to sandy bits. Protection of the precious Florida natural world and our own pursuit of life, health, and happiness are dependent on a hopeful, positive, cooperative attitude. The idea of this book is to give us the heart and the creative spirit to sustain, for all of Florida and America, what has been achieved here, in the Wekiva River basin, in just a few decades.

Acknowledgements

Here comes the parade of folks to be thanked for helping me along the way.

For leader of the troupe I have the poet, Jean West, my dear wife. She reads it all and helps to keep me honest. Her much more measured spirit has not always been able to contract my tendency to overstatement.

Next come the delightful antics of my four children: Sean, John, Brian, and Kathleen. They have been my fellow explorers in Florida and across the land. What a blessing such extension of myself has been in the wild everywhere: four more sets of eyes and ears, many more legs and side paths, we move like an earthbound octopus across the landscape. My fondest vision of this marvelous crew is watching the four of them in contests of gunnel-pumping on the Lower Wekiva. Now they have children of their own and some of them have tasted the pleasures of Wekiva.

My closest hiking and paddling friends, Jim Warden and Bill Belleville, bring their own music to the party. Jim is a fellow teacher, physicist, and songwriter. Bill is one of Florida's finest voices for sanity and grace. His many articles and books, his films of the wild, fill a special shelf in the minds of Florida readers and viewers. I have logged well over a thousand hours of exploration with each of these two friends. Both can see themselves in my writing and take the measure of friendship in its vision of Wekiva.

In 2003 I attended a writers workshop in Montana at the Teller Wildlife Refuge conducted by John Elder. It was an exceptional experience in mentoring and support from the group of fellow writers. In conferences with John I received very strong confirmation to keep all three pathways of the book, not to be afraid to mix the literary, historical, and nature writing. He was a force for inclusion of the complexity of the book while Bill argued for attention to scale in his reading of an early draft of the collection.

Now like a band of many instruments come all the board members of the Friends of the Wekiva River to whom I am indebted for all they have taught me about the river and its politics: Russ and Eleanor Fisher, their daughter Julie, Pat and Fred Harden, Russ and Katie Moncrief, Nancy Prine, Eddie and Loraine Williford, Mary McKey, Polly Miller, Arlen Charters, Deede Sharpe and John Parker, Keith Schue, Deborah Shelley, Barbara Howell, Faith Jones, Jay Exum, Kathy Hart, John Fillyaw, Joe Bishop, and Mike Martin.

In full regalia now comes the set of Rollins College professors who were paramount in my moving across departmental boundaries into the world of the river. First among all these is the Ed Scheer, biologist and geologist, who started me on the path of teaching

environmental literature. All the members of the ES department have been valuable supporters, but when it comes to the river, a special thanks to Bill Partington, Joe Siry, Bruce Stephenson, and Jim Hulbert. Of course, I owe much to my own English department colleagues for support in research on Whitman and for graciously allowing me to teach a dizzy array of new courses linking literature and biology long before eco-literary perspectives had arrived.

Eileen Gregory taught me General Biology with marvelous excitement about the workings of the cell that matched up well with Whitman's biochemistry. Many thanks as well to archaeologist Marilyn Stewart for helping me understand about the natives of the basin and especially the Shell Island midden. I am grateful to George Herbst, Rollins Vice President, who provided the abstract of ownership of the island.

The students in this show are the gist of the matter, too numerous to name, but each one knows how much I was able to learn from the projects and journals of the course. Two are of special note. After they graduated and entered the local environmental scene, Jim DUBY and Kay Yewell certainly had the most profound effect upon my work and this book. Jim's fine drawings of animals have crept into a few of my chapters.

For many years at Rollins I was part of the Florida Inter-academic Consortium (FLIC) and would like to thank the high school teachers who entered my workshops and spread my courses into their own schools. They helped extend the reach of my classroom to several thousands of central Florida's brightest juniors and seniors, especially Brenda Walton, Guy Kinney, Sharon Johnson, Marsha Taschenberger, and Mary Ellen Tierney. Udeth Lugo was the assistant dean who kept all this program working so smoothly. I see him now, year after year, bringing all the lunches for 300 hungry teens when we did our field trips out at the state park.

Research librarians are also here on the march. From the Archives of Olin Library at Rollins I owe special thanks to Trudy LaFramboise whose prodigious memory and knowledge of the Special Collections is only exceeded by her energy to find more and more. I also wish to thank the current director of Archives, Wenxian Zhang. When the FOWR was committing its historical documents to the Rollins Florida Collection, it was these two and the sponsorship of the Library Director, the late Donna Cohen, that made it all run smoothly. Kathleen Reich, former director of Archives, was especially helpful with the Whitman collection. Information technologists Miriam Moore and Sean Phalen were especially helpful in creating the ebook manifestation of the Song.

I also wish to thank the proprietors of the Putnam County Archives, who helped me in my research on the era of cypress logging, Robert Tindall for sharing some of his research on the subject, and Bill Dreggors for regaling me with stories at the historical museum in Deland. For the chapter on Camp Cozy I am especially appreciative of the help and photos provided by Mayor John Land of Apopka and that city's fine Museum of the Apopkans.

It will take a boulevard as wide as Florida to conjure up my comic finale to this list of helpers: the complete list of flora and fauna in Bartram's *Travels* (see the appendix). Imagine Lucille Ball with the cartoon task to gather them all up: otters, limpkins, live oaks and hickories, snowy egrets, starflowers, tortoises, gar, gators, crayfish, eagles, cypress, buttonbush, blueberries, deer, big ole bears, scrub jays. . . Thanks all.