
Friday Lite

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Otis ...

... peeked his tiny head out onto a world he could not yet see because his eyes were still sealed shut. Otis is a brother to Henry who was born days prior of the swallow nest outside my back door.

I think how strange it would be to be born in a mud nest perched atop some human's household pipes in the breezeway of their garage and to hear sounds different than a parent's chirp.

Otis is cute in his ugliness. I watched the mother bird shove an entire dragonfly down his throat in one swoop and Otis scarcely swallowed it before opening his mouth for more.

Life can be simple and fundamental. Swallows are a constant reminder of that fact.

A gentleman shoved his business card into the padlock of my front gate one Saturday morning. The note on the card read, "do you want to sell?" I thought it a strange way to approach someone's property.

There seems to be a growing interest in my Ranch home as of

late as large properties get smaller and people yearn for more space.

I called the gentleman back and in his allusive way he tried to wiggle a notion for a price. I didn't give one. "I plan to tear the house down and build a new one," said he brashly.

I ignored it. I sent a letter to him stating that serious offers would be considered.

He didn't reply.

In the meantime, Otis is hungry and joined by new siblings who peer off the edge of the nest and I think how they perhaps wonder what surrounds them, totally oblivious to any business card shoved into a padlock.

I head to the barn of my ranch home and begin my chores. I sit on a hot tractor seat to cut row upon monotonous row of field grass and think how much work 40 acres can be when juggled with a full-time job and other demands on one's time. I feel saddened that I have to break up the land into lots in order to make any money from it and I wonder if there is any other way to sell out.

It doesn't seem right to me to break up the magic spell that my

Ranch home seems to cast upon its guests and yet it is too big a place for a new generation of buyers who have no interest in continuing the hard work it takes to maintain it.

"If money were no object, I would donate the Ranch to the county for it to become a wildlife preserve," I think as I cut. "In this way the land would be preserved for generations to come and patrons could enjoy it and look upon birds like Otis who return each year to nest. Wouldn't that be a better footprint to leave upon the earth than one created by a shovel?" I think.

I long to find the crystal ball that gives the right answers to questions I cannot answer about a lot of thoughts that come and go as I listen to the grind of grass spew from the brush hog behind me and the power of the farm tractor engine hot around me as I turn to cut yet another row of grass in the middle of a summer day.

It seems to me that I have learned more as of late from simplicity than from the complex equations I push through my calculator in my CPA world. I wonder why. Perhaps it is a way to unwind from the stresses I create in my self-serving world or perhaps it is a new focus on a

different set of values. Perhaps it is the aging process. Perhaps it is what I learn from watching Otis.

Humbling at best, I realize that I am an insignificant dot on the radar, as if a speck of that sand or star amongst the millions surrounding it that Abraham was promised ages ago and yet, somehow valued enough to be counted amongst that eternal promise.

The smell of gas and dirt and sweat created by one set of tasks seem mundane and ordinary within so vast a landscape as I watch a hawk suddenly cut the sky above me in search of whatever rodent my brush hog may kick out and I am reminded of the interdependencies of so vast a cosmos.

“Who took the time to plan this world and its design?” I think. “Who would think to create the perfect balance and composure of the wild and tame sharing the same space? Who created a predator for every species and a friend and foe for every defense and then an earth and sky and waterway to provide endless sources of food? It could not have just happened in such a perfect way because the perfection repeats endlessly and is timeless. No human undertaking has ever been so masterful.”

In all my book learning and academic seat sitting I am still

unable to design the rose; or push a daisy to the surface of the earth so that a cow can feast upon it to nurture its milk; or design a river to flow and yet never run out of water.

I think how perhaps I have too much time to think when cutting the fields of my small ranch and yet am somewhat entertained by thoughts that carry me to such places.

Absent this present circumstance I would perhaps miss the subtle message of its simplicity within the perfect design I find myself as I at last finish my final row of grass, reach down to disengage the PTO, lift the brush hog and start back towards the barn.

The *vanity* that Solomon, the richest and most powerful man who ever lived, referred to at the end of his life as he summed up his life connecting the dots between his hard work and the outcome of it, repeated its subtle mockery as I stowed the equipment. Like Solomon, I am reminded that the work done this day will merely repeat in a week as if it had never been done and as if work should have any meaning or purpose. But to ignore the work merely creates more of it and once a kingdom is won it must be upheld. Perhaps this is what Solomon meant in writing down the summary of his life's work.

The ranch existed way before my time and will continue until

the end of time and I wonder if my footsteps, mingled with those of its ancestry would really leave any meaningful mark in the soil or in the lives of those who visit the place. Funny the thoughts one battles when overrun with hard work. Yet I do not think myself atypical in the pattern of it.

I have always desired to make a difference. Yet as I strive to do so, using my talents and blessings in meaningful ways, there seems to be no measure for any of it as I pass fence lines that need repair and trees that need trimming and a house that has no one to fill it with music or the smell of home cooking or the warmth of a fire as I enter it and switch on the light.

But ranch life presents page upon page of a day like the one I have just wrapped myself around and I notice the parents of the swallows sitting on a utility wire above their nest talking to babies who jut their heads out at my approach and I realize it is a similar day for them. In a brash way it is a reminder that until eternity such is the fate for both of us.

Whether blessings or toil one has to decide that there is a greater plan and purpose and that a daily grind is somehow accounted for in the scheme of it all but nothing at the moment is more welcoming than a hot shower, a cup of soup and a crackling fire in the wood stove.

I think how my ancestry worked even harder than I and had to cut trees by hand, haul them by horse, chop them with axe for firewood. How the women had to grind flour for their bread and grow vegetables for their soup.

I merely go to a cupboard, open the bread bag and shove two pieces into the toaster, pop open a can of soup and dump it into a bowl for the microwave and put dry wood into the firepot that I had split, but not sawn by hand. So who am I kidding about having a hard day?

No, I think how even though the cycles of life seem to repeat with the generations of time, there is a steady improvement with each. I think how perhaps Solomon was wrong in his summary that all of his toil was for nothing but vanity. After all, had he not existed then perhaps my microwave oven and toaster would not exist either. Who is to know for sure how we connect through time?

It got me thinking ...

I have so little time to do all I wish to do it seems to me in the grand scheme of things and sometimes perhaps I am too hard on myself in my expectations of their delivery. It creates a quandary for me to know what is the proper use of my time - wondering whether or not is it smarter to do what I

have passion for - or to do what I must to pay for my passion. Nothing in life is free, not even dreams and I wonder if the measure of accomplishment is perhaps that vanity Solomon refers to in his life's work.

But one cannot sit idle or waste what is granted and I think how if each swallow of the nest outside my back door is a unique imprint in life, then how much more am I an important part of its patchwork? For don't we both wind up in the same eternal destiny at the end of it? - Perfect beings created for a purpose if nothing more than to sing our song to a world hungry for its music?

If it were not so, there would be no hope – no need to design a better toaster or improve upon a microwave oven or build a more beautiful home to wrap around a fireplace.

It translates to outcomes much like those enjoyed by Solomon of old in his vast wealth. His outcomes no different than mine, albeit much greater in volume, but the nuggets at their core are the same for both of us – work hard, be diligent, pursue passion. In this way don't the ends justify the means? Doesn't the cycle of history repeat? No, I think how Solomon was perhaps wrong in his conclusion – it is not for vanity that we strive, but for fulfillment. It separates us from the swallow of the nest.

I learn how even hard work is a blessing when I step out to put a food dish down for the dog and look out at a vast sunset casting golden light upon my freshly cut fields, painting an unsurpassed picture of artistry that changes with the dropping of the sun.

I watch the swallows dart the sky in search of food as they begin their work shift and I hear the frogs in the distance begin to call out as I think how a day actually never stops even though I do.

Fourteen days from now Otis and Henry and their siblings will leave the nest on their first flight and then join their parents working the skies above me. Fourteen days from now I will be on the tractor cutting the fields yet again. Fourteen days from now the sun will rise and set and touch the earth in some other place far removed from me where perhaps another man or woman is finishing their day of chores to look up at the swallows of the sky above.

No, I think how hard work at my small ranch home has taught me so much more about life than what Solomon concludes; more than any book or course or corporate meeting because I have learned that through the grind and grit of chipping away at dreams we find the golden nugget within them – the moment of transformation where a lesson is learned about the value of fortitude and prowess.