

TOP STORY SPOTLIGHT

Don Wooten: An interesting collection of opinion pieces Wednesday

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Last Wednesday's editorial page caught my attention. Two of the columns were written by friends: Judith Lee and Dr. Louis Katz. Former U.S. Archivist, Dr. Colleen Shogan, penned a third, and the editorial cartoon dealt with play pals Trump & Epstein, a topic currently roiling the headlines. Each is worthy of further comment.

It was about 10 years ago when I first met Judith Lee at a Quad City Symphony Orchestra concert. We were introduced by a mutual friend and the casual conversation among us was as enjoyable as the music. It was in a later encounter that I mentioned how hard it was to find someone to play Scrabble and Judith, always adventurous, immediately volunteered.

A few weeks later, she came over for a few games of Scrabble and further conversation, something that soon developed into a weekly routine. As our friendship grew, I began to enlist her companionship for meetings and other gatherings. Like most of my friends, she was a generation younger and able to help me maneuver about, whether in a wheelchair or with a cane.

I was not able to return the favor, since her outings often involved hiking or kayaking. For those robust activities, she has a companion of similar age and interests.

It was during this period that I learned of her remarkable career, one largely devoted to wildlife and the environment. From her early years she worked at such jobs for the states of New York and Maine and in western states for the U.S. Forest Service. She was one of the first women to take a field job in each.

She later joined a private company serving the government, then formed her own, specializing in training government workers in understanding and applying environmental regulations. Her knowledge of the law bordered on the astounding.

Her granular reading was not focused solely on law. In a personal quest she read the entire Bible (twice!), the Koran, and other spiritual writings. She would attend religious retreats and meditation sessions. Her interests were wide-ranging and taken seriously. But it was her adventures with animals that I found most amazing.

One of her earliest tasks was to crawl into a bear's hibernating den, use a wrench to remove a large collar from the bear's neck, and attach a new one. During one such episode, the bear stirred, opened its eyes, turned around, and looked at her; but then went back to sleep. During all this, a male coworker held onto one of her feet, ready to pull her out quickly if anything went wrong.

Years later, she was tasked with doing some research on bighorn sheep. For that purpose a helicopter dropped her in the middle of the Idaho mountains and left

her alone for a week to follow the group and take detailed notes of their behavior and movements; after which, the helicopter returned to bring her and her notes back to the base.

I asked how she managed to pass the nights in that wilderness without shelter. She explained that she would find a depression in the ground, spread a waterproof cover over it, weigh the ends down with stones and crawl under it to sleep.

I guess that a person who has braved bears in their dens, and walked and slept alone in mountain wilderness can handle a mayoral campaign. The question is: will a sleepy electorate open its eyes and see her?

My friend Louis Katz was a gift COVID gave me, even as it sharply lessened my contact with Judith and others. The hardest hit was the loss of my friend Roald Tweet, who died within five days of his diagnosis. I lost 15 pounds, but that was it; until long COVID began its grinding work on my balance.

Like others in those early days, I was desperate to find answers for this new and lethal illness. I asked around to find someone who had reliable knowledge of what was going on. The name that came up most frequently was Louis Katz. I tracked him down by phone and asked him to join me on my Saturday morning radio program. He readily agreed and so I had the first of what would be several sessions with him.

At the end of each conversation, I would joke that I hoped not to see him again, but it would take only about six weeks for new developments to bring him back to the microphone. At times, for safety's sake, we had to sit in separate studios. He was always ahead of the news, solid in his understanding of what was happening day-to-day, and clear in translating scientific data into simple English.

I enjoyed — and miss — his clarity, patience, kindness, and mordant wit. It is typical of his devotion to public welfare that he alerts us — via this newspaper — to the disintegration of the government's reliability and honesty in scientific matters.

And further, to provide us with dependable sources of the information we need in navigating these confusing times. It is characteristic of Lou's devotion to his profession. He is indispensable.

I also appreciated Dr. Colleen Shogan's defense of her work as director of the National Archives. I only hope that those who follow her remain steadfast in our commitment to preserving the truth, good and bad, about our nation. We should always face the facts, not dwell in fantasies.

Finally, Wednesday's editorial cartoon on Trump's meltdown over the "Epstein Archives" is a fair depiction of the fix our president is in. It is a mess of his own making. His MAGA followers assumed that the information the Justice Department is sitting on would somehow implicate Bill and Hillary Clinton, among other notables. And Trump promised to reveal all. Or did he?

We know that the Clintons and others attended Epstein's wildly popular parties, but there is little amiss about that, other than that a number of young girls were in the crowd, past their bedtime. It's what happened apart from the public displays that count. And the only sworn affidavit concerning pedophilia we have heard of appears to implicate Trump. Attorney Pam Bondi is sitting on a keg of dynamite and her job depends on not letting it blow up.

All in all, a most interesting editorial page.

