

Opinions

Does the Police Jury want its own police force?

I have been given to understand that former Caldwell District Attorney Mark McKee generously donated his legal expertise to craft Ordinance 2975 that created the \$12 per month garbage tax under the authority of the Catahoula Parish Police Jury. (Doesn't the Police Jury already have an attorney?)

Mr. McKee and some friends also own some property in the vicinity of Duty Ferry Road here in Catahoula Parish. Unfortunately, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development declined to certify a bridge on that road above a minimal weight and the Catahoula Parish Police Jury lacks the funds to accomplish the required maintenance. On July 11th, McKee asked the Police Jury to abandon 500 feet of road before that bridge and told the Jury that he and his friends would install a replacement bridge. Instead, the Police Jury abandoned five miles of road ("temporarily", I'm told) from the Boeuf Wildlife Management Area entrance off of Duty Ferry. A locked gate runs across the road after five miles, beyond which must still be public road creating the preposterous circumstance of a section of public road behind a locked gate.

Of course, the Ouachita River is doing what it does best and that is it's eroding its banks threatening in several places to dump the road into the river, much like on Patten Church-Fish Market Road near Jonesville.

Furthermore, apparently some people are not respecting the new status of that condemned portion of Duty Ferry Road as private. So, now, Mr. McKee has helpfully drafted another

ordinance for the parish (doesn't the Police Jury already have an attorney?). This Ordinance #2976, if it were to be adopted, would also authorize the Police Jury's creation of its own police force.

The proposed ordinance says in section G (capitals for emphasis are mine): "All law enforcement agencies are granted right to enforce this regulation AS WELL AS THE CATAHOULA PARISH POLICE JURY, THROUGH THE PARISH'S DULY APPOINTED AGENTS IN INVOKING THE POLICE JURY'S POLICE POWERS to protect the Parish, public and LANDOWNERS BY ISSUING CITATIONS AND TICKETS to protect the Parish, public and LANDOWNERS."

And what about that river bank erosion and the abandoned road it's threatening? Well, for one thing, on October 25th, 2021, the Police Jury approved with NO DISCUSSION a capital outlay request for \$100,000 to be spent on Duty Ferry Road. But for what? Typically, there was no explanation or debate, just a snappy, efficient approval. When did the Police Jurors learn about what they were voting to do? It certainly wasn't in a public meeting on the record. It seems that the Police Jury either violated Louisiana's open meetings laws or they were negligent in their duty to the public trust. Which is it?

Prior to this on October 11th, the Police Jury voted to hold a public hearing on November 8th, 2021, "to consider adoption of roadway regulations" creating authority to levy fines for the destruction of signs and so forth.

Note that proposed Ordinance 2976 in its first paragraph A says, "The Catahoula Parish Police Jury may prohibit the operation of all traffic and vehicles upon any highway or roadway of the parish..." And who's going to enforce this? Remember section G of the proposed ordinance? "THE PARISH'S DULY APPOINTED AGENTS IN INVOKING THE POLICE JURY'S POLICE POWERS..."

So, what's happening here? Is the Police Jury doing a favor in return for services to write an ordinance and now their benefactor and his friends want their road fixed and condemned with the Police Jury exercising police powers to keep out trespassers? The argument is that the \$100,000 for the Duty Ferry Road capital outlay request is coming mostly from the state government. But so, what? No matter where it comes from (and all of it's not state dollars), the disposition of that money is obligated to be in the best interests of the whole parish. It is difficult to see how using that cash on even a "temporarily" abandoned road (a preposterous notion) to a non-resident's hunting camp fits that description.

No one blames anyone for wanting to keep trespassers off of his hunting property. No one blames anyone for donating his time and abilities to the benefit of the public interests. But once again, as is so often the case with this Police Jury, the issue is procedural. Have they done this right? Why were none of the details discussed in the public meeting, especially the use of \$100,000?

EDITOR'S NOTE

JEB Tales will continue to be featured in the Catahoula News Booster. But due to illness JEB will take a short break.

The good news is the introduction of LeRoy McMillin Jr.'s column. He has deep roots in Catahoula Parish and a love for writing. He is the son of Leroy and Dot Mcmillin Sr. Paternal grandparents were Tolbert Roy and Hazel Terry McMillin.

His maternal grandfather was Joseph Edward Sargent, owner and publisher of Catahoula News from the 1920's to 1931, and his maternal grandmother was Nellie Irene Huff Sargent.

About the book I was going to write Part 2

Writing, I discovered, is a lot easier when you know the rules, or at least the basics. I still had a lot to learn if I wanted to be considered a writer or a wordsmith.

My becoming a writer seemed an increasingly impossible quest and for some reason, still unclear to me, one day I just gave up trying. Oh, I didn't stop wanting to write though. Instead, I resigned myself to writing lengthy letters to my mom and dad while very homesick in the Army and Navy, but that was about it. I have no idea as to whether or not they read my long letters. No matter, because I got great joy out of writing them. But personal letters were not stories that typical readers would likely find interesting. Reluctantly, I convinced myself that writing as an author was no longer a realistic goal. I became lost in the unsettling world of, "What now?"

Then computers came along: soon followed by the Internet. WOW! It was so exciting that I tried to learn all I could about writing and researching subject matter. I could write on Internet forums, and emails, and the fast growing social networks. I could literally communicate with the world. And just maybe, make a living at it as a writer if I put my mind to it.

I wrote a lot, but mostly to get my brain used to thinking clearly about what I was writing. I found fans in an on-line food forum where I was able to charm readers with short stories I created in the middle of the night, or stories of things I had done growing to adulthood. I was encouraged by their acceptance of me as a 'storyteller.' I had fans that looked forward to my nightly injections of humor and life's experiences, almost always including my tails of operating a 'Chicken Ranch,' the name my wife and I gave our outdoor kitchen, humorously applying the infamous Texas "Chicken Ranch" to our collection of Big Green Eggs and menagerie of doll-like characters that were the mainstay of Chicken Ranch life.

But that's a story to itself that is definitely worth reading in an upcoming chapter.

A growing number of friends encouraged me to write professionally, while many people commented on forums and Facebook said that I had a knack for writing in a style that made people want to keep reading. I really appreciated their comments and encouragement.

Then one day I got encouragement from one of the most successful writers in the 21st century, Dianna Gabaldon, the very talented creator of the world famous, "Outlander" book

series. It is now a wonderful story brought to life on TV's STARS Channel.

She thanked me, as did many of her readers, for a comment I made about the choice of characters for her book's conversion to the big screen. Later, she volunteered to edit a comment I made so that it made for better reading while maintaining my original comments. I loved her for that encouragement to write. I too wanted to possess that kind of selfless support and encouragement to writers who found themselves stuck in the land of procrastination and opportunity lost, or simply not having the resolve to get off our asses and do it.

Of course, all that you have read above covered a huge period of time. Time spent writing millions of individual but short-lived words for a single moment of glory. But I also learned many new words, and became a prolific communicator to unmet friends around the world as sort of a food critic with a touch of story-telling. It became yet another time-consuming hobby that seemed to interfere with my true objective in life – writing.

For all the excuses I've described, and many, many more, that book I so wanted to write was never written. In fact, never even started, in spite of it being about a subject we all fear facing - a nursing home.

When I think of the word "procrastination" I suspect that one day a Google query as to its meaning will simply say, "See Leroy McMillin." I deserve that. Yet, I know the word can never be an excuse for any failure on my part to do what should be done.

Here I sit at a comfortable desk with a computer keyboard that is not unlike the ancient keyboard I learned to type on in 1956, sixty-five years ago. And I'm typing away about why I never did what I wanted to do most of my life –write. Such a waste of a good dream.

Somewhere along the line I decided to skip the writing of a fictitious account of an imaginary character doing exciting and dangerous things in places few people even know about. Oh, I had an idea for one, but it just lingered in the back of my mind, instead of becoming a priority. I just could never match the story to the characters or the characters to the story. Everyone was a nice person but it took a special someone to show how each was nice in their own way.

An exciting fiction story needs a villain, a plot, a hero, and supportive people that give it

life. My villain and plot and hero and supportive characters were pretty boring and I could not for the life of me give them 'importance.' They were people who came to the local nursing home to die, but needed constant care until they mercifully passed. Sad, but each death meant that a story was untold.

So I decided to write about me. Yes me!

Why not? I know the characters in my life quite well, along with lots of little details that just can't be made up.

Besides, even after 80 years my memory is still so sharp about the events that I can still smell the people or the weather or the coffee being served, or the circumstance of when these significant events happened in my life.

Some of them are so unique to me alone that I'm the only one left to tell the story: a story that I believe needs telling.

So, I'll get to the point. If you have read this much, you must find something about my life or the way I tell it interesting. If not, I apologize for taking up your time.

But if you decide to to stay tuned for the next story I promise I will do my best to keep you entertained through to the end.

Thank you.

Leroy McMillin

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