

Jim Casada Outdoors

August 2012 Newsletter

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August Memories—and More

Reading and This Month's Offers

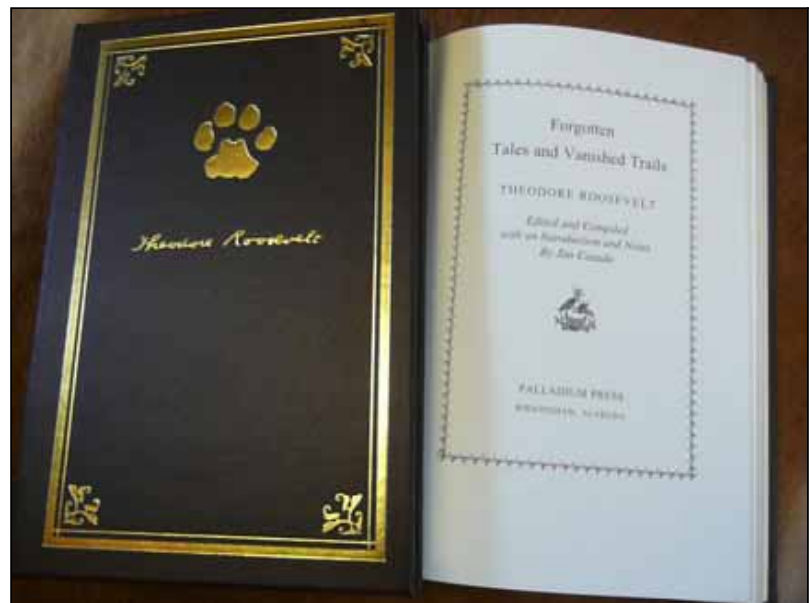
I've always been a great fan of Theodore Roosevelt, the man who must rank as our greatest sporting president and, in my view, one of our greatest presidents—period. We sure could use a man like him today with his love for and belief in “the strenuous life.” Can you imagine Barack Obama taking his family on a camping trip or even a day-long hike in a national park or national forest?

If you check my Web site's various listings of books for sale, you will find one list devoted exclusively to [items by and about Roosevelt](#). **As this month's special, I'll take 15% off the list price of any of those books AND shipping is free.**

In addition, an award-winning collection of TR's outdoor writings which I compiled and edited, *Forgotten Tales and Vanished Trails*, is available at a reduced price of only \$35, and again, shipping is free. This book is beautifully done, bound in leather, with all edges gilt, a ribbon marker, marbled endpapers, gold embossing on the front cover and spine, and other attributes of a fine book. On top of that, you get Roosevelt's wonderful writing on hunting, nature, and the outdoors. The book won a first-place award in the Southeastern Outdoor Press Association's annual Excellence in Craft competition the year it was published, and I'm quite proud of it. I only have eight in stock although there is a possibility (not guaranteed) I can get more if there are additional orders.

For these offers I will only accept personal checks, cashier's checks, or money orders. Payment should be sent to me c/o 1250 Yorkdale Drive, Rock Hill, SC 29730.

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In a sense I guess the title of this month's newsletter is a bit misleading, inasmuch as my memories of matters specifically linked to August in days of yesteryear don't run nearly as deep as is the case for some other months. Still, a number of things stand out. For me as a boy, August was a sort of bittersweet month. The demands of work in the family garden, over at Grandpa Joe's, or in whatever job I happened to hold as a teenager (among other things I worked on a golf course, served as a photographer taking pictures of flatlanders posing with a Cherokee "chief," handled room rentals at a motel, and even did some substitute work for a cook who somehow never made it to work the day after drinking up his weekly pay check) eased a bit, and that was a blessing. On the other hand, resumption of school lay just around the corner, and I considered that a curse.

Similarly, the best of the year's trout fishing was either months behind or a couple of months ahead, and the opening of squirrel season (October 15) seemed little more than a distant dream. On the other hand, there were trout to be caught in the gloaming, katydids sang in the twilight like there was no tomorrow, and even the worst of dog days could be pleasant when you sat on a river bank beneath a good shade tree and watched for a bobber to bounce or a line to "run." Garden truck was available in abundance, and most any evening bore fruitful promise of a slice or two of watermelon or several pieces of an ice-cold muskmelon (a cousin of the cantaloupe which Grandpa raised with great success). Late in the month fox grapes began to ripen, and a "knowing" boy could find enough of these sweet/tart wonders from nature to fill his belly to the bursting point.

Then too, there were special adventures of all sorts. One which comes immediately to mind involved an annual ritual for my father. Even though the opening of rabbit season lay several months away (it always came in the week of Thanksgiving), he was a great believer in getting our beagles lean and keen well in advance. Cool August evenings in the high country, especially when a late afternoon shower had lowered temperatures and produced ideal trailing conditions for that dose of magic found in every decent rabbit dog's nose, were ideally suited to starting a canine fitness regimen.

We lived close enough to town (if a metropolis with a population of just over 1,400 souls qualified for the status of town) to make turning the dogs loose for an evening a bit problematic. Most neighbors didn't really care for a hallelujah chorus of beagles hot on a cottontail's trail at 11:00 p.m. Accordingly, Daddy normally found someone who lived out in the country who would take the pack for a few weeks in return for a modest payment and provision of the necessary rations.

One summer he "farmed" the beagles out to a fellow who worked at the same plant as him (a local furniture factory which was the county's biggest industry, by far). Daddy somehow knew that the fellow's wife had cats, and two of our beagles, in roles which are highly unusual for the breed, were pure poison on cats. With this in mind, Daddy said the day we delivered the dogs, "These beagles will chase cats and kill one if they can catch it."

The man who was to look after them glanced over his shoulder, saw that the coast was clear, and softly said, "To tell the truth I wouldn't mind if they got rid of two or three. My wife's got 17 of the rascals and they are a flat-out nuisance." With that bit of roundabout encouragement, we left the pack in his care and headed back home. The idea was for the beagles to remain out in the country, being turned out nightly to run for two or three hours, and stay for a full month.

That didn't happen. Scarcely a week after leaving the pack of beagles with the man, he contacted Daddy after work one day. "You've got to come and get those dogs," he said, "they've played hell with my wife's cats and she's playing hell with me." If anything, he minimized the dire nature of the situation.

When Daddy and I showed up the next day (a Saturday) to collect the misbehaving dogs, what had been an impressive abundance of 17 cats had been reduced to a single old tomcat. It looked down at us from the roof of the fellow's house when we arrived, as fine an example of four-legged feline paranoia as you could ever want to see. Suffice it to say we got the dogs away as quickly as possible, and looking back I suspect Daddy was concerned about an earful from the fellow's wife. Once we had them loaded up and headed back home though,

he sort of chuckled and said, "I told him Chip and Dale (the name of the two beagles who were the primary culprits) were hard on cats. I reckon they've made a believer out of him."

My favorite August memory, however, also happens to be the first thing of any sort I can remember from my childhood. I was blessed to grow up in a fishing family, and regular readers of this newsletter will no doubt recall numerous mentions of fishing experiences with my Grandpa Joe, and of course Daddy was the one who set me wading down the wonderful trout fishing way which has been an integral part of my life. But interest in angling was by no means limited to the male side of the family. Mama didn't get to fish as much as she would have liked, but she took a keen interest in all aspects of angling.

She transported me to streams countless times, and likewise picked me up in the gloaming many a day. Right up until her death we shared a smile every time I headed out from Mom and Dad's home during a visit to the N.C. mountains, because I would ask her, "Do you want me to keep a mess?" In her view, as someone who had known little but hard times as a child and who was a young, single woman in the depths of the Great Depression, that was about as ridiculous a question as one could possibly ask. Fish which were caught were meant to be eaten, and that was that. Her concept of "catch and release" involved a capacious frying pan and "release to grease."

She did, however, to her lasting regret, get personally involved in one instance of releasing a fish. The event is literally my earliest childhood memory, maybe because it was so traumatic at the time. I was probably four or five years old and the whole family (Mom and Dad and my younger sister, Annette—my brother, Don, was not born until several years later) had gone out one Sunday afternoon in August for some bank fishing in Fontana Lake. We were fishing beneath a big bridge which crossed the Little Tennessee River arm of the reservoir. The bridge provided welcome shade but the steep bank leading to the shoreline made things a little bit dicey in terms of getting settled into place to watch for a bobber to bounce.

I think Mom was probably kept pretty busy watching my sister while Dad supervised my fishing efforts. After a quarter hour or so with no bites, suddenly my bobber dipped and I hefted up the cane pole when Daddy said to lift it. The result was a smallish bream going airborne, but that didn't matter to me. I had caught a fish—my first one—and excited is not a sufficient description of my state of mind. Mom was equally excited, and she pounced on that little bream like an otter grabbing a cornered brown trout. "I'll take care of it," she said, as she removed the hook and headed up the bank. I didn't pay much attention since I was anxious to get the hook baited again and back in the water.

Moments later though, there was a strange noise and here came that little bream, flipping and flopping down the steep bank into the lake and freedom. Mom had apparently placed it beneath a rock not much bigger than the fish, and one good convulsion had liberated the bream. According to Dad in later years (and he loved to retell the story), my howls of anguish were something to behold, and apparently Mama was heartbroken. Not only had she let her budding piscatorial genius down; the beginnings of a fish fry had escaped.

Today, well over six decades later, I can recall the great bream escape as if it happened only yesterday. It produced a lot of laughs during family gatherings over the span of better than half a century, and poor Mom never really lived it down. To her eternal credit though, she made up for it a thousand-fold. She was always the first to praise any fish I caught, and that praise was heartfelt. The first time I brought home a truly trophy-sized trout nothing would do but that she hunt up a camera to take my picture, and she shared tales of my prowess to anyone who cared to listen at the beauty parlor, church, or elsewhere. She never made a fuss about cleaning fish (or squirrels or rabbits) in the kitchen sink, and the culinary wonders she wrought with the game and fish I brought home still bring a smile to my face anytime I think about those simple, satisfying meals.

It all started on that August afternoon, and I now know just how blessed I was in having parents who not only tolerated but actively and enthusiastically encouraged my outdoor pursuits. As my favorite outdoor writer Robert Ruark once suggested, boys don't get into much trouble when they are hunting and fishing all the time. I certainly was no juvenile delinquent (unless raiding a watermelon patch or two qualifies), and there's no question that most of my free time was spent in close communion with the natural world. I genuinely believe I'm a better person as a result, and August is a fine time to remind myself of that. After all, it was the month in which

my father was born (and he would enjoy 101 birthdays) and in which my mother helped shape my first memory, a priceless one enjoying fishing.

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Thoughts On Fixin's

I don't really feel like a newsletter is complete unless it includes some food folklore, recipes, or thoughts on fixin's. August is a time of year when gardens in most of the country have peaked or stand at their highest state of productivity. Some crops, like cucumbers, squash, zucchini, eggplant, and okra, require harvesting every couple of days. Then there are tomatoes, and that's where my energies and imagination tend to get carried away a tad. This year, for example, I planted 144 tomatoes, and that doesn't count some volunteers I saved when they came up and a few plants raised from direct seeding (this is not the best way to get tomato plants, but it's quick). Now we can consume a passel of tomatoes, and if human physiology worked like that of chickens, my wife would likely just dry up and wither away from eating tomatoes.



She's good for somewhere between four and seven daily, and that's just fresh ones. Now free range chickens with access to tomatoes will eat them until they are not much more than skin, feathers, and bone, but it doesn't work quite that way with humans. Mind you, I'm not saying Ann is fat—she isn't—but a steady diet heavy in tomatoes doesn't make much difference in her weight (or mine). That's sort of an aside, but the real point is that two people can only use so many tomatoes. Accordingly, I sold some to a local restaurant specializing in locally grown foods, have given them to most everyone we could think of, but mostly we've followed the path set by our parents and "put away" a passel of them for winter. Probably somewhere around two bushels have been dried; another two bushels became some of the finest marinara sauce you have ever encountered; and several bushels have been scalded, peeled, and frozen to use in soups, stews, spaghetti, chili, and other dishes several months down the road.

Other things we have in an overabundance include blueberries and thornless blackberries, eggplant, squash, zucchini, and crowder peas (variously known as crowdies, hull peas, field peas, clay peas, and the like). All have been given away or utilized in a variety of creative ways, and the recipes which follow are a sampling of what we do when the garden threatens to overwhelm us with earth's wondrous bounty.

EGGPLANT PARMESAN

1 (or more) nice size eggplants
 1 egg
 Whole wheat saltine crackers (crushed fine)
 Olive oil
 Mozzarella cheese
 Parmesan cheese

Marinara sauce

Slice eggplant(s) into 1/8-inch thick sections and sprinkle with kosher salt on both sides. Place slices atop paper towels and then cover with paper towels. Allow to sit for at least 15 minutes. This will remove bitterness, which can sometimes be a problem with eggplants. Pat dry.

Beat egg with a bit of water and then dip each slice in the beaten egg. Then coat eggplant slices with crushed crackers. Brown the slices in olive oil on medium heat (high heat will burn the cracker crumbs). Remove the slices from the pan and add homemade marinara sauce (see recipe below). Place eggplant slices back in the pan and sprinkle tops liberally with mozzarella and parmesan cheese. Cover the pan and simmer until tender (about 15 minutes).

HOMEMADE MARINARA SAUCE

90 small tomatoes or 60 medium tomatoes
 2 tablespoons olive oil
 3 medium onions
 Large handful of fresh oregano and basil (or 1 tablespoon each of dried oregano and dried basil)
 ¼ cup sugar
 2 ½ tablespoons kosher salt (or to taste)
 7 medium garlic cloves, minced
 Lots of fresh ground pepper (to taste)

Blanch and peel the tomatoes.

Heat olive oil in a large sauce pan. Add the onions and garlic and sauté until limp. Add the remaining ingredients and bring the sauce to a boil. After it reaches a boil, reduce heat and simmer for about two hours or until nicely thickened. With a blender or immersion blender, blend the tomatoes on a low setting until smooth. Use now or freeze for future use.

Marinara sauce made with home grown tomatoes may not look quite as “red” as the store bought versions, but it far outshines them when it comes to taste. It’s a great way to use surplus tomatoes, and come cold weather you’ll relish spaghetti, chicken Parmesan, pizza, ziti, or any of dozens of other dishes calling for marinara sauce. For that matter, a nice serving of pasta and marinara sauce makes mighty fine eating.

BABAGANOUSH

3 medium eggplants
 1 clove garlic, roasted
 2 tablespoons lemon juice
 2 tablespoons (or slightly more) tahini
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 ¼ teaspoon cumin
 Dash of red pepper

Drizzle the eggplants with olive oil, slice, and cook on a cookie pan at 400 degrees for 15 minutes. When done, cool, remove peeling and squeeze any extra liquid from eggplant. Add other ingredients and mix in blender. Chill and serve as a delicious dip.

VEGGIE SANDWICHES

Don’t forget that you can make some mighty fine dinner (that’s the meal eaten in the middle of the day in the world in which I live) fixin’s by using fresh vegetables to fix sandwiches. A tomato and lettuce sandwich suits me mighty well, although I’ll readily admit a couple or three slices of fried bacon added to the sandwich is the culinary lace on the bride’s pajamas. Similarly, cucumbers and cream cheese, or cukes and mayo, can provide a

tasty sandwich. Or try tomatoes with pimiento cheese either as a sandwich or atop saltine crackers. I can go through this kind of food like a dose of salts (although that might not be the best comparison when one is talking of food).

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