

BUSBEE'S RECYCLING FAIR

Driving to the county administration offices to drop off some paperwork, I passed by the county fairgrounds, where I noticed dozens of huge tents sprawled across the exhibition area. The large sign out at the edge of the road said, "Welcome, Busbee's Recycling Fair". I decided to stop by the event on my way back to Cedar Crossing. Not that I had a tremendous interest in the subject, but I did just remember that one of my parishioners might be there.

Emmett Moore was the current owner/operator of Moore's Environmental Emporium and a member of St. John's. Emmett's father and grandfather previously operated the family business under the name Moore's Junkyard, but Emmett felt the new name and remodeled retail area offered a more attractive ambiance to the new ecologically minded generation. The old-timers around Cedar Crossing still call it the junkyard, but that doesn't seem to bother Emmett because he figures he already has their business, anyway. Emmett had a

huge vinyl sign hung in front of the Emporium that said, “See you at the fair. Proud to be a sponsor.”.

I pulled into the parking lot and followed the attendant’s orange-flagged directions. Once you were out of sight of the attendant, it was an “every man for himself” type of system. Dodging two large potholes in the rock and grass drive, I grabbed the first empty spot that looked like it had ample space between the two existing vehicles. I opened the door and narrowly missed stepping into a puddle. The first goal of my visit was to get to the back of my car and put on the spare pair of old shoes that I carried around—a nugget of knowledge not taught in the seminary that I learned early in my career as a rural spiritual shepherd.

As I strolled from tent to tent, I found it to be a lot more interesting than I thought it would be. It seemed like there was just about anything the mind could imagine being recycled, from manure spreaders to hundreds of objects made from shredded tires. I did, in fact, purchase a welcome mat made from strips of shredded tractor tires. I’m sure my wife will consider it a fine addition to our home in the event we need to welcome anyone coming in our “backdoor”.

I stopped at the Moore's Environmental Emporium booth and talked with Emmett for a while. He seemed quite satisfied with his presence at the fair, as well as his sponsorship of the event. Feeling a certain obligation to not leave his display area without purchasing something, I took my time looking at his goods for just the right item. Then I saw it. Tucked away in a far corner was a carved wooden eagle lamp. For those of you not familiar with that particular object, it had been in circulation in the community of St. John for years via countless numbers of The Ladies of St. John Annual Rummage Sales for Foreign Missions. I almost felt like I had found an old, long-lost friend. I didn't mind it being recycled within the family of St. John, but now . . . it sat in a lonely corner for sale to the public. What if an atheist ended up buying it? No, God must have led me to it and purchase it, I must. I'm sure, or at least I'm almost sure, that my wife will get a chuckle or two when she sees it again.

The two objects in my arms were a little too cumbersome to carry around and do additional shopping, so I took them out to the car. I don't know why I did it, but I sort of tucked the lamp up

under the mat in case I ran into any other of my flock on the way to the car. It is important to not have valuable items like these in view even with the doors locked, so I put them in the trunk. My hands were now free to make the exploration of other offerings within the tents more enjoyable.

Toward the far corner of the lot, I came upon Sally's Garden Creations. Miss Sally Crumpet, an art major at an upstate university and a garden enthusiast, expressed her passion for both interests by converting yard sale merchandise into ingenious garden art. A frugal person by upbringing, she typically hit a yard sale right about the time the sellers were ready to close and just dump what they had left over. Sally got her raw materials at a price that even a cash-strapped college student could afford while reducing the strain on local landfills as a plus. Even though I have always felt the appreciation of art to be far too subjective for me, I left Sally's place with a plant stand made of old plumbing parts and with a mind satisfied that I had helped an enterprising young student pursue her career.

I became so enthralled with the creative talents of the participating vendors that I lost all track of time. I only looked at my watch when I heard a

voice on a loudspeaker say that the fair would be closing in twenty minutes. Since I was right near the exit, I figured I still had time to take a leisurely browse through Zachofsky's Knowledge Boutique. Zach's Place, as so named by the man who greeted me with a "Welcome to Zach's Place" when I came through the door, was a recycler of used books and other mentally stimulating goods. I left Zach's endeavor with a used copy of *Roget's Thesaurus of the Bible*. I became intimately familiar with *Roget's International Thesaurus* in college, but I was unaware that one had been done on the Bible. Such recycled knowledge—when you think about it, almost all knowledge comes from someone else's discovery or labor—would surely come in handy in my profession.

Fortunately, I had no critical schedule for the afternoon, so I arrived home with no crisis from my losing track of time. My wife rolled her eyes at the items I brought home, but she made no disparaging remarks—always a positive sign regarding purchases I make. That evening, as I flipped through the pages of the thesaurus, I came across a folded-up piece of paper that the previous owner had most probably tucked away for safekeeping. There was

no way of knowing who wrote the words on the paper or even if they were true, but, in the spirit of recycling, I pass those words on to you for your edification or just pleasure. I thought it quite humorous myself.

A woman wrote:

Opening the freezer door, I stood in a foggy mental daze. The entire bottom two shelves were empty, and I knew I had just filled them with meat yesterday. At least I thought I had. Yes, I know I did because I remember running into Emma Dodson at the grocery store while I was putting the meat into my cart. Emma complained about her rheumatism all the time, and it surprised me that she never said a word about it yesterday. That alone made the encounter memorable.

I picked up the phone and called my husband, Jeff. “Hi, honey. I was just wondering if you did anything with all the meat that was on the bottom two shelves in the freezer.”

“No, Sandy,” he replied. “Why would I have done anything with it? You know I don’t cook.”

“I know,” I said. “But before I investigate it any further, I just thought I’d ask, in case you had something going on that I didn’t remember.”

“No, it wasn’t me,” answered my husband.

“Okay, thanks. Have a good afternoon.”

My little gray cells told me to look for the receipt from the grocery store as further evidence. I found it stuffed inside the checkbook with some coupons that I forgot to use. It vindicated my memory, for the receipt showed that I had purchased a sizeable amount of meat. The question remained, though, why it no longer lived in the freezer.

As I sat at the dining room table pondering the mystery, my young daughter approached me. “Mommy, have you seen my little red wagon?”

“No, sweetie,” I answered. “I’ll help you look for it later. Right now, I’m trying to figure out what happened to the meat that was in the freezer.” In desperation, I asked, “You haven’t seen the meat, have you, Christie?”

“No, Mommy.”

I made a mental checklist. Husband didn't take it. Daughter hasn't seen it. I didn't use it. I haven't asked my five-year-old son about it, but what would he do with all that meat? Wait a minute. A missing wagon and missing meat! Could there be a connection? Could the wagon have been used to carry away the meat? What kind of thief would use a little child's wagon to steal meat?

As my mind continued weighing all kinds of sinister plots, I heard a loud commotion outside the front door. It sounded like a bunch of dogs barking and growling. Walking toward the front door, I stopped and looked out the living room window. I saw the back end of a red wagon with a dozen dogs around it, all competing for a portion of what the wagon contained. The front porch column blocked my view of the front of the wagon. I went to the front door and peered out the peephole, but I couldn't see anyone. Cracking the door slightly with the security chain in place, I had an unobstructed view of the front porch scene. I removed the security chain, took a step outside, scooped up my son, and closed the door.

“Did you see all the dogs that followed me home, Mommy? Can we keep them?”

Of course, I had a brief chat with my son. It's hard, though, to administer any discipline of substance when you're trying to contain a smile. I did make him help me pick up the meat wrappers strewn across the neighborhood.

I recycled this little story I found in the book several months later as an illustration in a sermon on "What it Takes to Follow Christ"—the little boy certainly knew what it took to get the dogs to follow him. A further twist came when Pastor Fred and I attended a seminar that featured a noted "Shepherd" and his thoughts on giving the parish more of the 'meat' of Scripture so they can become better followers—more on that seminar in another story.