

Along the Sappa

Trees, Planes,  
and a House Fire

This starts in the middle of the night, maybe 5 a.m., in Augusta, Georgia, where we were staying the week with our daughter and son-in-law.

I looked out to see the blue lights of a police car parked at the curb out front. At first, I thought the cop had stopped someone out there, but then I noticed people were turning right or left off of Broad Street, so I figured he was blocking the street off. I noticed there were no barrels or barricades, even though the squad car was not blocking the street.

By morning’s light, I realized what was blocking the street: a large limb off a big ol’ elm tree in my daughter’s yard. I hadn’t even heard a storm, and neither had anyone else, but there it was.

A crew from the city soon showed up, checked the limb out and called for a man with a bucket truck. While they waited, they distributed orange barrels left by a street crew across the blocked lane. (I guess tree crews don’t have their own barrels.)

Anyhow, the limb did not last long once the bucket truck got there. The guys dropped, it, cut it up and threw it into one of the dump trucks they’d arrived in.

That was not the last of the downed trees, however. Later that day, our son texted from Lawrence to say a big, hollow mulberry tree next door had blown down the same night, just missing his 120-year-old house. He hadn’t noticed any wind, either.

Later that day, he added pics of yet another downed tree in his east Lawrence neighborhood, taken by his fiancée Kait, plus a house fire down the block.

Next day, Saturday, we started the 1,400-mile, 19 1/2-hour drive home. We had two overnight stops, in Clarksville, Tennessee, and Topeka; had barbecue with son Lacy in Lenexa; and made it home Monday in time for Cynthia’s hospital meeting.

It was uneventful except for smoke and flames in Kansas City from a huge fire in the East Bottoms, where a big warehouse had been burning for three days. News reports said it drew a four-alarm response, quite rare, but not a problem for us.

It was a huge problem for more than 200 fire fighters and 50-some fire units that responded. The heat from the burning building and from piles of shipping pallets outside was intense, reports said. Fire fighters were called off the front lines in shifts to go hydrate, get new air tanks if needed and rest before being sent back in.

Sunday, smoke and flames still rolled out of hot spots.

We just sailed on over to the Gates and Sons by I-435 in Kansas for dinner.

In all, it had been a beautiful trip, from the forests of Georgia to the mountains and lakes of Alabama and the fields from Kentucky and Missouri to the green, growing wheat of Kansas. The trees were mostly a deep summer green and the big rivers, the Ohio and the Mississippi, high but not flooding.

Good Kansas prairie remained, but in Kansas, the roads were better, construction areas fewer and shorter and traffic noticeably lighter, big trucks fewer. Driving the Interstates in the East and South is not much fun these days, no matter how pretty the mountains and trees are.

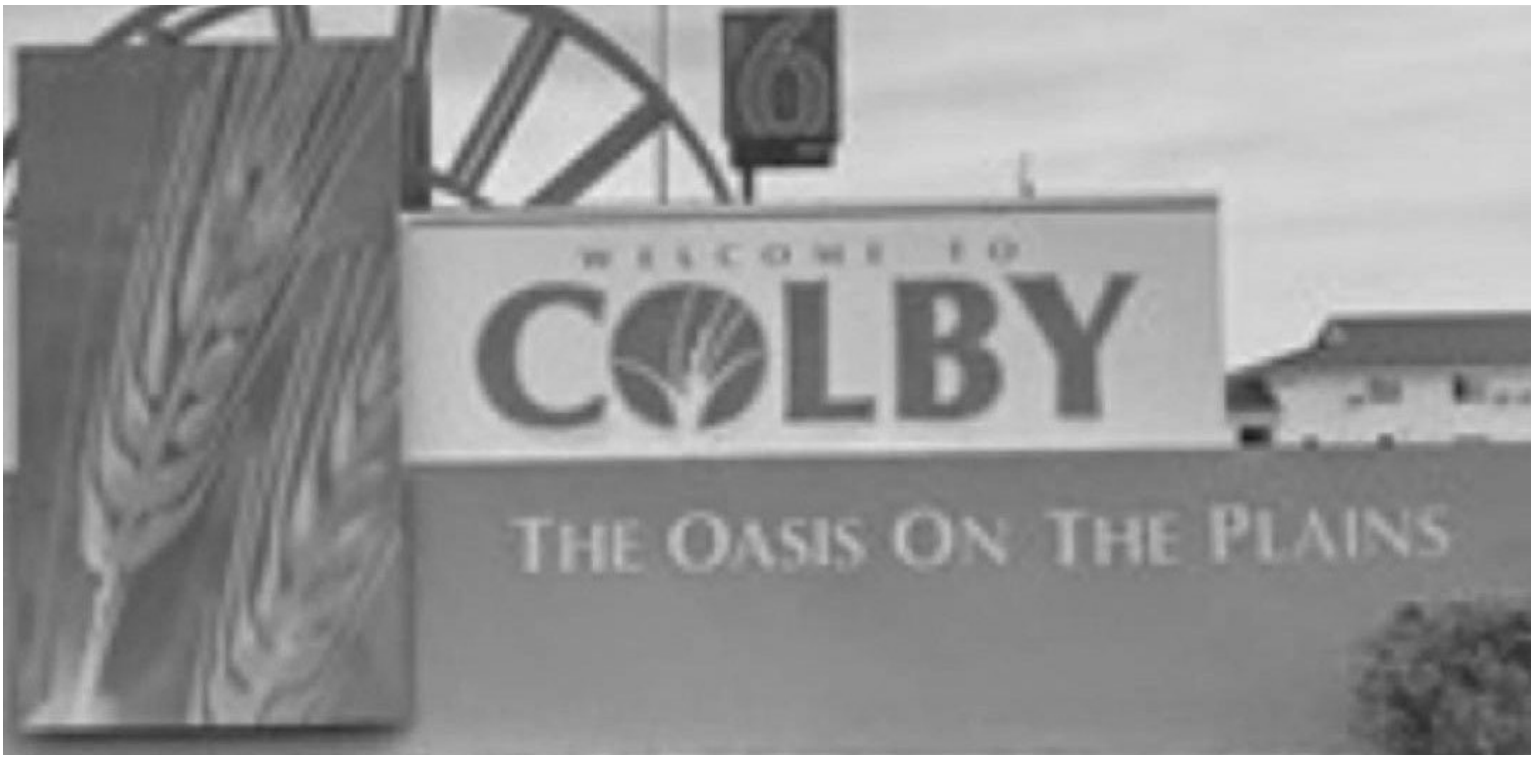
But the trip ended as it began, with downed trees.

Our neighbor Aaron was sawing up a big, dead hackberry between his house and the street as the rest of the family carried off broken limbs and chunks of firewood. In our driveway, we found a medium-sized limb off the pear tree behind our house.

A friend had kindly cut it into three pieces and stacked them by our tie pile, clearing the driveway. It had been a weekend of windstorms clean across the country.

Still, while it had been fun to see the kids, it was good to be home.

—Steve Haynes



Just Me and My Coffee

It was one of those days that don’t often come my way. I was out sitting on the porch with my 1st cup of coffee for the day.

Today was special. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, her daughter and granddaughter went to St. Augustine for spring break. They would be gone for about three days.

In the meantime, I was here but not alone; I did have my cup of coffee. What more could anyone ask for?

What would the world be like without a nice, fresh, hot cup of coffee in the morning? I don’t know, I’ve never had such a day.

I had no agenda for the day. I finished my latest book and sent it to the publisher. I was also caught up on my radio ministry and syndicated weekly newspaper column.

Everything was up to date, and I had nothing on my schedule.

I don’t know anybody who can do “nothing” as well as me. And I say that unanimously.

Unlike The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, who has no idea what doing nothing is. As long as I have known her, there has never been a day she has done nothing.

She usually does something in her craft room when she has nothing to do. Even when she is sleeping, I think she dreams about doing something. Believe me, I have never asked. Some things are better not to know.

The one area where I outshine The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is my talent for doing nothing. When I don’t have a project, I grab a cup of coffee, go to the porch, and think about nothing. Staring into space has become my hobby.

While drinking my coffee that day, I noticed a large lizard climbing up the screen on our porch. I watched it for a little while, then it stopped, looked at me with a quizzical look which said, “Who are you?”

I just stared and suddenly stuck out my tongue, and the lizard disappeared faster than



out to  
pastor  
• james snyder

anything I’d ever seen. I now have another productive use for my tongue.

Sure, there were a lot of things I could be doing. I could sit in my office all day and work on future projects down the road. I could work in my library, getting caught up on reading. There were 1,001 things I could be doing instead of sitting on the porch doing nothing but drinking coffee.

I can’t remember the last time I didn’t have to do anything. But I wasn’t going to spend any time trying to remember. I was going to spend all my time doing nothing. I will have nothing to show for doing nothing. And I like that.

When younger, I thought it was terrible not to be busy all the time, and I fulfilled that expectation to a great degree.

I thought if you weren’t doing something, you were being lazy. But looking back, I ask myself, “What’s wrong with being lazy?”

I’m in my 70s, but I don’t have to live like I was back in the 70s.

Sitting on the porch in my rocking chair I felt so wonderful not doing anything.

If I were The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I’d sit here thinking of things to do once my coffee cup was empty.

I must confess that she is excellent at doing anything and everything. She far outshines me in that department. But, on the other hand, I far outshine her in doing nothing.

After sitting there for a while, I began to think of what I could do for the rest of the day, and the list began to grow.

Suddenly, I said, “You’re not going to do anything today. This is your to do nothing day.”

I often don’t listen to myself, but this was the best time to start. If I have nothing to do, then at the end of the day, I have done nothing; I have at least succeeded in my day’s expectation. What kind of reward comes with that? (An Apple Fritter?)

One great thing about doing nothing is that you don’t have to stress about doing nothing at the end of the day. I usually try to figure out what more I could’ve done that day. What a waste of time.

I took another sip of coffee, sat back, took a deep breath, and appreciated my state, which has no governor, so I don’t have to respond to anybody. Oh, how I love doing nothing.

Giving my brain a day off is usually a good thing. At my age, I need to respect my brain’s activity and slow it down as much as possible.

I was beginning to feel a little guilty. Is this OK with God? Is God OK with me doing nothing for a day?

While pondering this, I read a verse of Scripture. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9-10).

Sometimes, I think I need to work to impress God. In this regard, my activity is more important than stopping everything and simply resting in God’s grace and mercy.

As I finished my coffee, I thought about what it would be like for me to simply enter into God’s rest.

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Lifestyle & Wellness  
Store Bought Bread and the Label

Have you read the back of your store-bought bread lately?

It seems like a no-brainer for convenience—I mean, I have a big family. Convenience is HUGE. It saves time, reduces stress, and helps me survive the middle-of-the-day lunch rush. A pound of bread at one meal? Gone. A quick round of PB&Js and we’re out.

I was spending \$2 per store-brand loaf, and the organic options? Sometimes \$6 or more. If we were eating a loaf a day, that would cost over \$300 a month for lunch alone. That just wasn’t going to happen. So, like a lot of people trying to stretch their dollars, I stuck with the cheaper bread and tried not to think too hard about it.

Until one day, I read the label.

Months ago, I had already ditched store-bought cookie dough after checking its ingredients. I started baking cookies from scratch and now it’s second nature. I memorized the recipe, figured out the perfect bake time, and even calculated how many Weight Watchers points were in each cookie. Baking cookies had turned into a kind of habitual science in our house.

But bread felt like a different kind of mountain to climb. It seemed time-consuming, too easy to mess up, and honestly a little intimidating. I told myself I’d get around to it someday—maybe within a year. That was my goal. But after one glance at the back of the store-brand whole wheat bread package, “someday” came a lot sooner.

According to the NOVA food classification system, the bread I was buying was considered ultra-processed due to its additives and preservatives. Diets high in ultra-processed foods have been linked to chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Chronic diseases? I thought we were trying to raise healthy kids—not quietly risk their health with something as basic as sandwich bread.

The more I read, the more unsettled I be-



from  
other pens  
• Rachel Redlin

came. There were dough conditioners like azodicarbonamide and ethoxylated mono- and diglycerides, used to improve texture but questioned for their potential health impacts. Preservatives like calcium propionate and sorbic acid extended shelf life but can cause sensitivities. And then there were mono- and diglycerides, sodium stearoyl lactylate, and soy lecithin—all commonly found in ultra-processed foods and all flagged by studies for their connection to health problems we try so hard to avoid.

It made me put the loaf back on the shelf. I didn’t stop buying bread completely—but I started buying it less regularly. I also started telling myself the usual excuses: I didn’t have the time, the money, the emotional energy to learn how to make homemade bread like my great-grandmother might have done. I had already sacrificed so much convenience—was I really ready to take on something this big?

But then it hit me.

A bread maker.

What if the machine could do all the work for me? I’d just have to provide the ingredients. No preservatives, no dough conditioners, no artificial anything—just real food. I did some research, found one at a reasonable price, and bought it for \$120 after a discount.

I picked up five pounds of organic flour for \$8. Each two-pound loaf uses about four cups of flour, which meant I could make about 4.5 loaves from a single bag—just \$0.88 worth of flour. Yeast cost \$5.50 for a 4-ounce jar, and I only needed 1.5 teaspoons per loaf. That jar would make 16 loaves—so just \$0.17 per loaf.

A block of Kerrygold butter was \$4.64, and with only one tablespoon per loaf, I could make 16 loaves—\$0.145 each. Salt and water were already in my kitchen.

That meant a two-pound loaf of wholesome, homemade bread cost me just \$1.51.

The math was hard to ignore. Store-brand bread costs \$4 (\$2.00 for an 16 oz load) Organic store bread? \$10–\$12 for the same size. Homemade bread using high-quality ingredients cost less than \$2—and that’s without a single chemical or health warning attached.

Even better, the time I spent making it? Less than five minutes to put the ingredients in the bread maker and press start. Four hours later, we had fresh bread, ready to eat. No kneading. No stress. No guilt.

I realized I’d just hacked simple living.

I was feeding my family healthy, delicious bread—without spending extra money, stressing about time, or compromising on ingredients. I had found a rhythm, and even better, I would recover the cost of my bread maker in just two months based on how much I was saving per loaf.

It made me think about what we’ve been told. That simple, healthy living takes too much work. That convenience has to mean compromise. But maybe that isn’t true. Maybe we’ve just stopped asking what’s really in the things we eat, or stopped believing we could do it differently.

With a little research and a small investment, I discovered a better way—and it worked. Homemade bread became part of our everyday life. Real ingredients. Real savings. Real peace of mind.

Could you throw a loaf into your own bread maker now, knowing what you know? It turns out that the simple life—with simple foods—isn’t only doable. Sometimes, it’s actually easier, healthier, and more affordable than what’s been marketed to us all along.

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