

Thanks or no thanks



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I always view the holidays in a different light, compared to the average person. It is not that I am agnostic, nor pagan in my views, it's that I just see things differently. For example, lent was an important time in my family's year and my grandmother took it very seriously.

Unless my Sunday school teachers were overly optimistic about where I was going to wind up, I felt that I better take it serious too, lest I be condemned to the eternal fires of hell.

Weeks before the beginning of lent my grandmother asked what I was going to give up for the season. "Vegetables," I blurted out without hesitation.

Well, that idea died in committee very quickly and she made me come up with something else.

When I suggested school, she accused me of not taking this very seriously and planned on discussing the matter with my Sunday school teacher. She had no idea just how serious I was about giving up vegetables and school, but we compromised, and I gave up desserts, but under protest.

As we now look at Thanksgiving and all of the things we are thankful for, my mind races to the usual, family, wife, dogs, a great life in the outdoor world, fishing and hunting, although not in that particular order.

I also look at the things



This Thanksgiving, I am thankful I have been fortunate to spend most of my life outdoors, but there are still a few things I am not thankful for. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

I am not thankful for and jump immediately to whomever filled my world with warning bells, chimes, rings and beeps.

It seems that everything I own makes some kind of noise at me. The pager beeps, my truck makes all kinds of chiming noises, my outboard motor has a series of beeps and buzzes and my cell phone sounds like a deranged pinball machine. It's all very annoying and I have learned to ignore all of them.

My daughter set my phone up so that everyone of my regular callers has a different song for a ringtone. She claims that I will know who is calling by the song that plays. With as much as my cell phone rings, it is like living in a rock concert. I figure I am just listening to a 70s rock station and never answer the phone anymore.

I write down important tasks I must complete on three different papers each

week. The first is a list of the most important things that I must accomplish immediately, the second list are things that I should get done during the week, but next week for sure.

The third list are things that I need to get done sometime during the next decade. Most of the time, I get distracted, and either forget the lists or never remember to look at them.

Perhaps I am just out of sync with the rest of the world. It seems odd that I never show up on the river at the exact time the trout are feeding. Even more odd is that I have hunted elk for over 30 years and that my bullet has never rendezvoused at the exact moment a giant 350-inch bull has stepped out.

"Maybe you are a lousy shot," claims my hunting buddies, but I prefer out of sync.

My wife complains that everything she puts

on my list seems to never get done and that my priorities are all messed up. She is convinced that my problem is that I have no idea how to control my time.

She may be right. Time has always slipped away from me. I start out the day, head-on into the world, with full intentions of getting things accomplished.

Then it happens. Like a puppy chasing a ball, my life heads off in another direction. Later that evening, my life will show up again, covered head to toe in mud, scratches and bruise, but smiling intently as if it had a good time.

I will be driving to work, determined to arrive early and get lots of things done, thereby making my boss very happy. On the way in, my phone will ring, and it is my fishing buddy Ryan. Ryan will tell me that the

fish are really biting good on the Arkansas and we should take a sick day and head up.

Life got in the way again, as I spin a U-turn and head back home to get my fishing tackle. I have to hurry so Ryan and I can get to the river in time for the early morning rise. I leave a message on my boss's cell phone that I am feeling sick and won't be in to work today.

There was some discussion that my boss was going to fire me because I missed so much work.

When he was considering how he was going to terminate my employment, two problems crept into play. One problem was he was convinced that with all the time I was missing, I must have some terrible terminal disease. The other problem is, I was never at the office long enough for him to fire me.

Looking back, I have

always chosen to head to the woods or the water instead of doing anything else. When there were deadlines or problems, the outdoors seemed to call, and I always answered.

My wife says that if I didn't spend so much time traipsing off into the mountains, and more time applying myself, I could be successful and makes lots of money.

With lots of money we could have a bigger house and all the nice things that go with it. The problem is that if I were to spend that much more time at work, I would not have time to go traipsing off into the mountains fishing and hunting. It's all really heady stuff when you think about it. That's why I just go hunting or fishing.

I have a collection of scars to prove I have spent my life in maximum outdoor mode. Scars are the medals life awards you for participating in outdoor adventures. You don't get those scars sitting in an office at work, you get them in the classroom of the great outdoors, and I have never been truant. For that I am truly thankful.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and the Delta County Independent, an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com

A Montrose County "Big Year"

2021 is almost over and the opportunities to add new bird species to my yearly list are running out.

Back in January, I decided to identify as many bird species as I could within Montrose County. Many birders will challenge themselves or within their group of birding friends to identify as many bird species as possible they can in a year.

For my Montrose County "Big Year," I devised a strategy that I hoped would net as



Outdoors

By Bill Harris

many species as possible. But first of all, I needed a way to keep track of the birds I spotted.

Cornell University's Department of Ornithology

oversees a website called Ebird that allows birders to submit birds that they observe. The birds I enter into Ebird are listed by date and location. I have almost 10 years of historical data, so that helped me decide what, where and when for my year's birding quest.

To see birds, I needed to be out looking for birds on a regular basis. I checked for birds in and around my yard several times a week, and, depending on the season, traveled somewhere in Montrose County to look

for birds at least weekly.

Most bird species are migratory. They either move north and south with the seasons or move to different elevations seasonally. As the year progresses, various species can be found reliably in specific habitats.

The key element was to visit those places at the right time. I wandered all over the West End, the Plateau, local valley hotspots and the Black Canyon looking for birds.

Some of the hardest birds to find in Montrose

County are shorebirds. Birds like terns, most sandpipers, most plovers, and many wading birds with the exception of great blue herons, spotted sandpipers, and killdeer are not common. Most of these species are just passing through and the type of habitat they prefer is in short supply in Montrose County.

Other strategies I employed were birding early in the day and taking a few birding friends with me. After fasting all night, birds are active, looking for food early

in the morning. Having more eyes and ears looking and listening for birds really increases your chances of spotting more birds.

Identifying birds by their song or call can alert you to their presence. My hearing is not the best, so I struggle with that aspect of birding. I have found a phone app called Merlin that records bird songs and calls, then identifies the bird. It is accurate if it gets a clear recording.

See HARRIS page A11





Cross-Country & Back-Country Ski Equipment In Stock




10 SOUTH SELIG AVE
MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401
970-249-4226