

New
Direction

AUGUST 2011

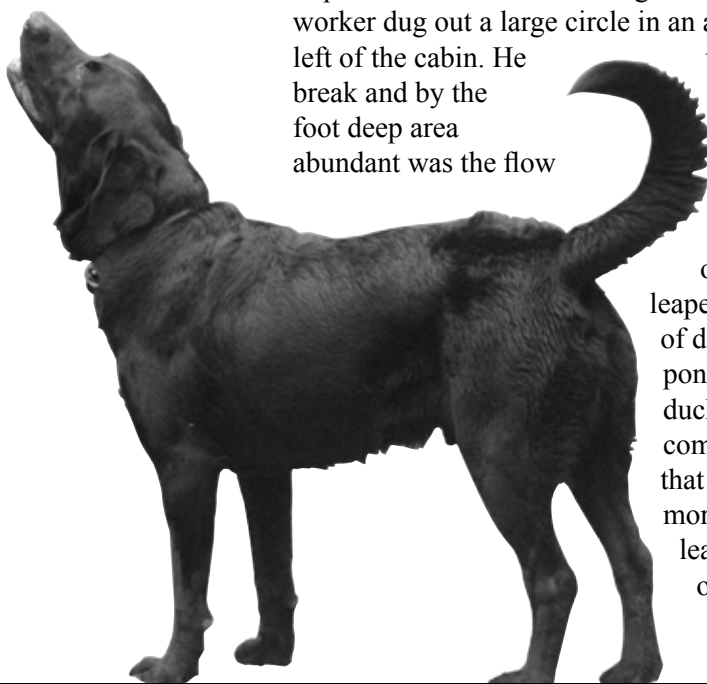
PO Box 968 Mars Hill, NC 28754 (828) 689-4850

Dear Friends,



Sometimes, on this mountain, we have been privileged spectators of some pretty amazing encounters which occur in the animal kingdom. Those of you who are familiar with the story of New Direction Farm know that we inherited a man of the mountains with the farm. Twenty years prior to God's opening the chapter of New Direction on this property, Will moved into a shack that had been occupied by some cows. He and the landowners shook hands on Will having use of the home in exchange for watching over the property. We hired him on as caretaker of the farm since our repertoire consisted solely of a lawnmower in suburbia.

Will was not a tall man. The weeds far eclipsed his person when we first took possession of the land. There was his cabin, a barn, two large gardens, and acres and acres of weeds. Will had always dreamed of having a pond. Once we had a road put in so we could actually drive onto the property, we requested the contractor to dig out a pond within view of Will's home. The worker dug out a large circle in an area about a football field's length to the left of the cabin. He worked for a few hours, took a lunch break and by the time he returned the scooped out ten foot deep area was filled to the brim with water, so abundant was the flow



worked for a few hours, took a lunch break and by the time he returned the scooped out ten foot deep area was filled to the brim with water, so abundant was the flow of dog chow tossed into the air over the pond. Somebody gave us the gift of some ducks to float on the water. Will's dream was complete. Beau, our black Labrador enjoyed that pond as much as Will. He had a daily morning exercise whereby he would run, leap high into the air, plunge into the center of the pond and then swim around the perimeter, repeatedly.



Being a bird dog posed a particular threat to the ducks who would squee-daddle as soon as they heard Beau approach. One particularly cold morning one of the ducks stayed in the water. Beau commenced to swimming in chase after the duck, lap after lap after lap. So intent upon catching the bird Beau wasn't wise enough to get out before he reached exhaustion. As his energy waned, he sunk deeper beneath the surface until all that was visible was a bit of a head and some ears. At this point Dave had to dive in as Will cheered him on from the shore. We could just imagine Will's rendition of the event on the front page of our little local newspaper if he had been given a chance to share the story. More than likely he would have embellished the report with "and once I gave Dave and the dog CPR they came back to life."



Up the hill to the right of Will's home, about two football lengths away, we built a large chicken coop and filled it with chickens. Of course this was our first experience of raising chickens, never realizing that all eggs were not white. I don't know if you have ever seen a chicken who has molted. Not a pretty picture. Just imagine a chicken that has lost all of her beautiful white feathers, the end result being a red, naked chicken.

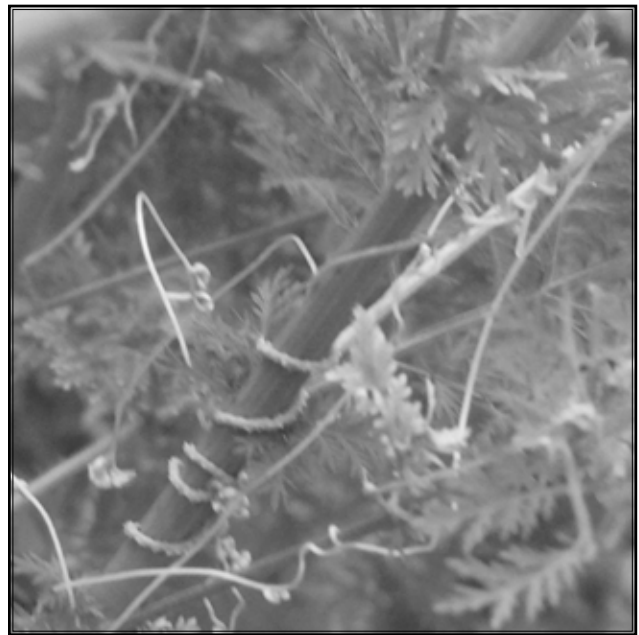
One sunny autumn morning all seemed well on the mountain: a blue sky, slight breeze, harvest ready for picking. All of a sudden came the most horrible clatter from the chicken coop. The rooster. Let's stop a minute and discuss roosters. I think the word "cocky" must have evolved from the "cackle-doodle-do" that is the rooster's morning bugle call. If you have ever spent time with roosters they strut and are narcissistic. Well Xerxes, the rooster, must have gotten his first view of Ethel's state of molting. He marched her right out of the coop, down the path to the road in front of Will's cabin. With one last remark which I assume must have been "and don't come back", he turned on his spurs and indignantly marched back to his palace and harem. We watched as Ethel stood in the road all alone. Before long she began to head over to the sound of quacking coming from the pond. Didn't matter to the ducks that Ethel wasn't one of them, nor that she was naked. They took her right in and it wasn't long before she became a vital, happy member of the pond community. Within a period of time her feathers grew back. And who would appear at the pond one day but proud Xerxes. Surely he must have heard through the grapevine that Ethel was back to her good-looking self. He had come to tell her it was time to come home. We watched a stand-off whereby the ducks stepped in front of Ethel, squawking at the rooster,

wings on hips, heads bobbing left and right, as if to say “absolutely not Buster. We will not allow our sister to go back to your abuse. She belongs with us. We love her. You only love yourself”. Xerxes tilted back his head, gave Ethel the familiar domineering look out of one eye. Time remained suspended for a brief minute as all of us said, “no, Ethel....don’t go”.

It is uncanny how we can taste freedom and a new sense of life only to find ourselves slipping back to what is familiar, even if the connotation is one of imprisonment. With great disappointment we watched Ethel head back with the despised Rooster. I recently told this story to a group of women who were here on the mountain for a retreat. “Even in the animal kingdom it happens” was the wise response of one of the ladies acknowledged by nods all around the table. Each had either experienced similar about- faces in their own lives or knew others who had fallen back into a trap.

You will be glad to hear that although the ducks and all of us humans had a disparaging night of “tsk, tsking” Ethel’s demise, a most interesting intervention occurred in the middle of the night at the poultry palace. The rooster was found stone dead the next morning. Truly. Dead as dead can be. At first sight we thought that maybe when Ethel came back and told the other chickens about real, abundant life outside of the coop, the group righteously rose up to declare their worth. Or could it be the ducks snuck in during the night and trampled him? Remember the game of Clue which taught us to look for evidence left by the criminal? Well, it just so happened we had a beloved mule named Socks who came to live at the farm for his retirement years. Right near the dead Rooster were hoof prints. All we can surmise is that Socks decided that someone needed to release the captives from the Rooster’s evil reign. You can just imagine the celebration which occurred on the mountain that day, which went well into the early morning hours among the harem who were now free.

If you have ever smelled the herb, Sweet Annie, you would want to plant it every year in your garden. It grows into a huge, sometime 7 feet tall bushy tower that fans out, has an aroma that evokes a sense of freshly, laundered sheets hanging on a line to dry. We use it to make wreaths which we sell at craft shows and stores. A couple of weeks ago we noticed the strangest vine beginning to grow in our Sweet Annie bed. We are fortunate to have a neighbor who is a horticulturist who was able to tell us that the vine was parasitic,



air born, grows very rapidly, will choke out the plants as it wraps around each one cutting off circulation and can only be treated by gently but aggressively removing it by hand. Which we have done, day after day after day as it seems to sneak back during the night. It is quite a picture of what occurs within so many families. Although that which entwines a family is not visibly seen as the vine on the Sweet Annie, it is just as invasive and oppressive and will insidiously wrap around individuals preventing them from thriving. Unfortunately many simply succumb to the power of the stronghold resigning themselves to a false belief that this is how it has been and will continue to be. Scripture says that “without a vision the people perish”. Another translation says “without a vision people cast off restraint”.

Some of the young men who come to live on the farm have missed having a father in their lives. They have a deep wound of rejection which often festers into resentment, the bitterness of which is often poured upon a mother who has faithfully maintained as the faithful, present parent. Oftentimes a mother may share that she has lived for many years with the “peace at any price” motto. Many admit they have come to not even like being in the presence of their sons. What a huge cost has been paid ! These mothers , as well as most others in relationship with a young person whose heart is set upon dominating, feels like one of our Sweet Annie plants.

Donald Miller, who wrote Father Fiction says “I wonder if those of us without dads aren’t making mistakes in our lives we wouldn’t make if we had a father to guide us. I wonder if people who grow up

with great fathers don't walk around with a subconscious sense they are wanted on this planet, that they belong and the world needs them. And I wonder this" Is there practical information we are supposed to know about work, relationships, decisions, authority, leadership, marriage, and family that we would have learned if there were a guide around to help us navigate our journey? I wonder if some of the confused emotions I was feeling weren't a kind of suspended adolescence from which the presence of an older man might have delivered me."

Our mission is to walk alongside these boys and their families through this piece of their journey. We can't change what has occurred in their lives nor can we change their hearts. Only God can do that. But we can lead them to live by a standard of respect and responsibility not only toward their mothers, but everyone else as well. "Our prisons are full of men whose first real crime was running away because they didn't have courage enough to face punishment for a smaller offense. A man always made his troubles less by going to meet them instead of waiting for them to catch up with him or trying to run away from them."

We are not a behavior modification program. We simply live by good old-fashioned but never out dated Biblical standards in which there is only One Lord.....and He is not the young man. Thank you for the role you are playing in the lives of these young men and their families. Just envision some of those strands being removed from a Sweet Annie plant and the resulting growth and fragrance. Much the same is occurring in these young lives as well as we help remove the old stuff that is restricting a purposeful life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brent Lane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

EXCHANGED LIFE MINISTRIES
dba New Direction Ministries
P. O. Box 968
Mars Hill, NC 28754-0968