

Masterful moonshiner would always return to his trade

PEACHIE CLARK moved down out of the Rappahannock County mountains when the government bought up the land that would later become the Shenandoah National Park.

I never knew much about Peachie's family

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except for one brother, who owned a small farm a mile or so down the road from us. Morris Clark

was a hard worker and a quiet man, a good neighbor who made his living raising cattle.

Peachie (his given name was William) had a different occupation. He was a moonshiner. He had learned his trade in the hollows of the Blue

Ridge Mountains and now, driven from his childhood home, he plied his trade in Culpeper County.

Peachie was in his early 70s when I first came to know him, but he looked like a man in his 80s. The life of a moonshiner had

been hard on him.

One look at this tough old bird, however, left little doubt that, as a younger man, he could have licked his weight in wildcats or revenuers. He still had the look of a brawler.

He got his nickname

from the peach brandy that he made and those who knew about such things generally agreed that Peachie made some fine whiskey.

No one ever knew all the ingredients in his recipe; a master crafts-

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man never gives out his secrets. Perhaps, like Coca-Cola, that formula remains tucked away in a safe in some big city.

One ingredient, however, was well known to everyone—chicken manure. Peachie made no secret about this and declared that the nitrogen is fowl excrement gave his whiskey its tang. In other words, the old man didn't keep a flock of hens around just for their egg-laying ability.

His reputation had spread over several counties and his customers were many. Larry Stringfellow, a well-known Culpeper physician, often told the story of how he and a traveling medical drummer decided to get drunk one day and bought a jar of Peachie's makin's.

I couldn't talk for a week after drinking that stuff," Stringfellow often joked. "My throat was raw."

Maybe it was the chicken manure.

For obvious reasons, Peachie never lived anywhere close to a public road. When I first met him, he lived on about 25 secluded acres over behind Walter Apperson's dairy farm.

His wife had died a few years earlier. Living in a rundown house with a dirt floor had not been kind to this elderly woman's health. Life with a moonshiner had taken its toll on her.

As far as I know, the couple never had any children, so when his wife died, Peachie lived alone—except for his dogs. He must have had half a dozen of them; most were part hound and all were as tough as their master.

Dogs were a vital part of Peachie's moonshine operation. Occasionally, the law would get hot on his trail and the old man was afraid to sleep in his house. So, he took his bedroll to the corn house until the heat was off.

During these times, he slept with two dogs at his side—to keep the rats away, he said—while the other hounds stood guard outside, barking in chorus if a revenue officer or the high-sheriff tried to sneak up on his house. While the law was at the back door, Peachie would slip out of the corn house and be gone until things cooled down.

Peachie was caught a couple of times. In the early 1950s, the feds nailed him red-handed

and hauled him off to jail. When he was brought to trial, the prosecutor, trying to be cute, reportedly asked Peachie, "Mr. Clark, is your whiskey any good?"

Peachie just smiled and replied, "Ask the judge. He's tried it enough to know."

For whatever reason, the case was thrown out of court.

Pretty soon, Peachie was back in business and pretty soon the law was on his trail once more. It must have been in the late winter of 1959 that they finally arrested the old man again.

This time, he was convicted and sentenced to prison. But Peachie, then almost 75, pleaded with the court to allow him to go home and find homes for his dogs before he started his sentence. Seeing the aging moonshiner as not being a flight risk, the judge agreed.

He was supposed to surrender himself in 10 days, but Peachie, born in the mountains, did not want to lose his freedom. So he took his dogs and some necessary belongings and disappeared.

He spent that whole summer living in the fields and woods up on the Bolen place, making occasional trips to my Aunt Dora's store to get supplies. Everyone in the neighborhood knew where he was, but no one ratted on the old man when the law came around looking.

And the law didn't try very hard to find Peachie. Every month or so, some deputy would ask about his whereabouts, but that was about it. Peachie was out of business and that was what mattered.

But as the fall wore on and the days got colder, the weather began to take its toll on Peachie's old bones. Suddenly, a warm prison cell and three meals a day sounded good. So he turned himself in.

We all thought we had seen the last of Peachie, figuring that with a five-year sentence he might just die in jail.

But then, along about the end of March, the old moonshiner sauntered into Aunt Dora's store. We were all curious, of course, and asked what happened.

"They said I was too old to work and that I ate too much, so they let me go," he said with a sly grin.

Then he asked Aunt Dora to order him two 50-pound bags of sugar.

Peachie was back in business.

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So, are you guilty of these basic grammar mistakes?

SOMETIMES I WONDER if grammar is even taught in public schools these days. If it is, I suspect most students are playing on their cell-phones instead of paying attention when the lessons are taught.

Have you ever noticed that most people can't start a sentence without prefacing it with some superfluous word that has no bearing on the thought?

This trait is particularly noticeable when someone is being interviewed or is talking to a person that they feel is of greater importance than themselves.

I watched a woman being interviewed on one of the news channels recently and she began every reply with "so."

"So, yes, I was very happy to be selected for this position" and, "So, I'm going to do my best to get this company moving again."

"So" has nothing to do with the woman's responses to either question. Apparently she was nervous about being on camera and "so" was her (heaven help us) comfort word. And she must have really been uncomfortable because she started almost every sentence with "so."

Let us leave "so" and turn to two other words that people use—but don't need—to start sentences: "actually" and "basically."

"Actually" implies contradiction, as if the person you are talking to has said something that either isn't correct or with which you disagree.

For instance, if someone says that the temperature rose to 65 degrees today, but you know it didn't, you might respond by say-

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ing, "Actually, it only got up to 61 degrees."

But many people just throw "actually" out there for no other reason than to start a sentence. They do the same for "basically," which means "fundamentally" and usually has nothing to do with what you're talking about.

Then of course that is "ah" and "aw" and "uh," which people use to start sentences and throw into paragraphs at will.

This first thing I had to learn when doing live

It seems people can't start a basic sentence without prefacing it with some superfluous word that has no bearing on the thought.

radio and television was not to start my sentences with superfluous words, but to just get to the point.

Just getting to the point is a sign of confidence. Starting out with "so" or "basically" or "actually" gives your audience the impression that you are unsure of yourself.

If you are mad, for example, you don't start your sentences with a comfort word (goodness, I said it again). You just jump right in there and get to the meat of the matter. In such cases, there is no question whatsoever that you mean what you say.

Starting a sentence with a superfluous word tells the other person you are either nervous, which immediately gives him

the upper hand, or that you are trying to fake your response. Either way, you give the other person an advantage.

While we're on the subject of overused words and phrases, let's go to a few that people use either to make them seem educated and important or extremely caring.

Watch the news and you'll hear reporters say over and over again, "We reached out to the company, but got no response."

Reached out? Reaching out is something you do with your arms and hands. The reporter "asked" the company for a response.

Then we have "articulate", which is a favorite word of athletes-turned-TV color men.

"Let me articulate what I'm talking about." I've heard that 10,000 times at least.

"Let me 'explain' what I am talking about" is what the guy means. Articulate means to speak clearly, which few athletes-turned-TV color men are able to do. To "articulate" what he is talking about would mean pronouncing each syllable of each word slowly and distinctly.

Finally there is "physicality."

"That running back has great physicality." Where did we come up with this word? The running back is "very physical" or he is "a good athlete."

But if he uses the word "physicality" the TV announcer feels he has fooled his audience into believing that he majored in something other than basket weaving.

Goodness, do we butcher the English language.

Ain't no doubt about it!

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Is the world right to call U.S. a hypocrite?

I HAVE a young relative who has worked in Europe for the past two years and during that time, he has learned much about how the rest of the world views Americans.

Sometimes, he says, they just shake their heads. At other times Europeans laugh and say, "That's so American."

Europe and the rest of the world must be shaking their heads this week. And if the situation in our country was not so violent and destructive, they would be laughing, too.

We start wars to bring peace to other countries (I know that's contradictory, but that's what we do) yet we can't bring peace to our own nation.

We can't understand why Muslim sects in the Middle East are at each other's throats, yet in our own country, we are divided—sometimes violently—by political party, race and gender.

We are a house di-

vided against itself and as Abraham Lincoln predicted, such a situation cannot stand for long. We are no longer one nation, but an endless number of splinter groups all seeking to remake this country in their own image.

Just look at the past five months. In January, Virginians were staging armed demonstrations in Richmond over gun issues. By April, some were calling the government socialists and communists because officials wanted everyone to wear masks in the midst of an epidemic.

Now we're burning and looting in the streets.

Weighing in on racial turmoil is a no-win situation and I understand that. But sometimes you just have to muster the

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courage to speak up or the situation never changes for the better.

Protesting is one thing. It is an American right. Looting, burning and stealing is another thing entirely. Those are felonies under United States law and rightly so. No businessman or property owner—no matter his or her race—should have to stand and watch his belongings burned or stolen.

George Floyd's death was wrong. That should never have happened. But the sad fact is that those officers might have applied the same tactics to a white man, a Hispanic or Asian.

I've had hotshot policemen—both black and white—smile and tell me that they've been trained to deal with those who don't immediately follow their commands. And many just can't wait to put that training to work.

Maybe police training is the problem. From the beginning, officers are trained

that every confrontation is a possible life-threatening situation, almost a kill or be killed scenario.

As a reporter, I've seen this policy in action. Instead of trying to calm a situation, cops just bristle and inflame it. You back anyone into a corner and he is going to fight. That's just human nature.

Still the "you've got to get them before they get you" mentality exists on today's police forces. I have seen it many times and I have talked to officers about it. Every time they respond that this is how they are trained.

We have reached the point where many of us are afraid of the men and women we hire to protect us because their training causes them to act first and reason later.

A few months ago, I was riding with a law-abiding woman who became petrified when she saw flashing lights behind us. Her first reaction was fear

that the officer would pull us over and shoot us. She breathed a sigh of relief when he passed by.

When we have reached this point, we are in trouble. I personally fear the police more than I fear the crooks. I know what to expect from the crooks, but I don't know what to expect from the police.

There should be protests following the George Floyd incident. Such police conduct is frightening and akin to what you might expect in a Third World country. But using Floyd's death as an excuse to loot, burn and steal is an inexcusable response to kneeling on a person's neck until he is dead.

Scarier yet was the fact that I heard newsmen and women on national and local television condoning the stealing, rock throwing and destruction of personal property. Walter Cronkite would be ashamed.

And so would the Rev. Martin Luther King, who

performed wonders through peaceful protests. There is no question that King would have condemned this week's violence, just as he did at the height of the civil rights movement.

Where are such leaders today, men and women who will stand up and say that protesting is right but looting and stealing is wrong?

President Barack Obama, a man I highly respect, categorized the rioters and looters in January of 2017 as "thugs." They had turned from being a protest group to being a mob.

It is the same this week. The peaceful protesters are overshadowed by the looters and the good that might have resulted will likely be remembered as bad.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world looks at us as hypocrites who preach peace and live violence.

It is no wonder they shake their heads and say, "That's so American."

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