

With No Malice by Vic Topmiller Jr.**A place of presence without reflection**

In explanation of this title, I suppose I was saying simply that

we should or could have a place of peace. I could have said, "My place of peace," or maybe, "Our place," or "Your place of peace." But in these times that "try men's souls," it is better that we find this place where we do not reflect, but that we bathe in the peace afforded by the serenity of the place, with psychological barriers that preclude the mental dominance of any tragedies of the unfortunate world back there.

I've been to a few of these places, and I have places that are special. And whether I'm there for a purpose other than to encounter peace or not, it soon comes over me like a veil.

There is a stream that I frequently fish. It is just such a place that, within a few miles' hike, I begin to get this sense of surreal closeness. Close to what? Well, I don't know. It's just a closeness.

I've talked to others who have enjoyed this closeness. While never being able to explain what the closeness is, other than it is what it is. It's individually specific.

Most of the places where I get this special feeling of serenity are far away. Not so much in miles away, but in the distance from the nearest population or habitation — in the woods, in the mountains, or in the desert. It is such a blessing to have all of these attributes right here in the Southwest. If a person loves or thrives on the adventure of the outdoors, they can spend the rest of their lives exploring the world close to home.

I could tell you a lot of stories that have taken place in the woods, mountains and deserts of the Southwest, and I think I will.

Previously, I mentioned a stream. I love to fish this small trout stream. The fishing begins less than a mile from the trailhead. The stream is not large or deep, which doesn't lend itself to classic fly fishing — but with a shorter rod, such as a 7- or 7 1/2-foot-long rod made especially for packing into mountain streams, designed to handle a light, weight-forward, typically floating line with no more than a 6-foot, 2-pound tapered tippet, a patient guy can work the pools and eddies and pull out some 8- to 10-inch trout, and maybe and occasional 12-incher.

And yes, this size trout is not all that big, but they are a grand delight to cook and eat right after they are caught, right there in your perfect camp, right there where you hear the

ripples of the stream.

Trout are fickle little boogers, and my experience bears this out. There are at least two things that you may as well accept in small-stream trout fishing. One is that through the middle of the day, the trout don't bite. I can toss any fly in my box at them, and they will watch it drift by with all of the similarities of "lockjaw."

This is the time to take advantage of your perfect camp and catch a nap. Or, if you can keep your eyes open, read a book until you can't keep your eyes open.

Oh, did I mention that one of the essential items in my backpack is a book?

The other thing that is a grand no-no: Do not position yourself where the trout can see you. If you do, they will go back into the shadows, and there they will stay for a long time. That means, frequently, you'll be approaching the stream on your hands and knees.

Now to lures. I'm not an expert on lures, and I've never attempted to make one, but my favorite is the Woolly Worm, especially when fishing in the spring under the mulberry trees.

There are a few things that are essential for me to have a happy backpacker's camp. I'll tell you what is the very most important — it must be a dry camp. That is to say that hitting a wet sack, or waking in the night to a serenade of pitter-patter on your sleeping bag, will literally ruin your night.

But, with a little creativity and a lightweight tarp, you can handle that situation. Not only a tarp over you, but one under you to keep the ground moisture from coming up.

The other thing — well, if you backpack on a regular basis, you could sleep on a rock, but if you're like me and only camp occasionally, you must have a comfortable mattress. A ground pad and a self-inflating backpacker mattress do the job for me.

Part of the grandeur of backpacking alone is that you have only yourself and your dog to talk to. Oh, I forgot to say that I almost always pack with my dog, Annie.

We started this dialogue on finding a place of peace. OK, get it.

And that's my opinion.

"With No Malice" is a general interest opinion column by an opinionated person. It runs Fridays.

Guest Column by Barrett Brewer and Bill Smith**Getting census right matters to all**

The waning hours of the 60-day legislative session are upon us. The frenzy is palpable, and the rush is on.

There are many pressing matters yet to be tended to, but among those issues most important before the Legislature is ensuring that New Mexico is prepared for the decennial census to take place in 2020.

The census determines many critical issues for every state, including New Mexico. It is the basis from which congressional districts are drawn; it sets a benchmark from which economic development efforts are based; state and local governments use the data to assess infrastructure investments; and perhaps paramount for us here in New Mexico, it establishes the numbers for the next decade by which federal dollars from innumerable programs are allocated to New Mexico.

According to a study by George Washington University, our state receives nearly \$7.8 billion from federal programs, such as Medicaid, food assistance, highway planning and construction, Medicare, Title I education funds, Head Start and housing vouchers. If there is even a 1 percent undercount in our state, we would lose approximately \$750 million over the next 10 years, which would require replacing that funding with precious state dollars, or the more likely outcome — cutting services. None of our communities can afford the latter. None of them.

As leaders of organizations that grant money to many organizations that strengthen our communities, we pen this column because we know how critical these federal dollars are for funding so many programs that support families. And in New Mexico, the census count creates special problems.

For one, our state is considered the hardest to count. This is the case for many reasons, but here in the southwestern part of the state, it is because of the vastness of our rural areas, which make obtaining an accurate count difficult. And while census forms can be completed online for the first time ever, our inadequate internet access will make the new online approach for filling out

the census very challenging.

Here in New Mexico, we have started work to capture an accurate census count. A group of private and community foundations came together with the state Legislature in 2018 to fund the initial work of the state demographer's office. Through that work, nearly 100,000 addresses were identified that were either new or needed to be updated. On average, each counted address translates into \$7,500 of federal dollars per year for New Mexico. That gives a picture of the scale of the work, and the dollars at stake if we don't get it right.

Before they end their session, the House and the Senate must come to agreement on how much the state will spend to ensure we get the census count right. The current proposal in the Senate recommends \$3.5 million for the tremendous outreach effort that needs to occur. That is well short of the \$10 million initially advanced by leading groups "in the know," like New Mexico Voices for Children. Still, it's better than the \$500,000 the House of Representatives included in their bill before it went over to the Senate.

This is a good start, but to be clear, other states are doing more to ensure they get their fair share of federal resources.

As the session ends, the Legislature needs to send the governor a budget that includes this money, as well as commitment that more may be needed if we don't want billions of dollars to vanish from our state.

Finally, efforts across our state, including here in Silver City, Grant County and our neighboring jurisdictions, will soon turn to a focus on creating local Complete Count Committees to ensure local communities are not left out.

Every one of us can play a role in ensuring New Mexico doesn't lose out over the next decade. But right now, we need the Legislature to do its part.

Barrett Brewer is the chair of the Grant County Community Foundation. She lives in Gila. William "Bill" Smith is president and CEO of the Santa Fe Community Foundation. He lives in Santa Fe.

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