

## WISE AND OTHERWISE

By Kent A. Stock



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were older kids too, the veterans. Beads of sweat broke out on my tiny forehead as sense of what could be described as dread crept into my soul.

NONSENSE! I told myself as I stepped out of the car and into the bright sunshine.... into the stares of thousands of children and their chaperones. My mother, who had been chosen to accompany me on this life journey, quickly found other mothers and fathers she knew and I hastily joined their children to run around aimlessly in unbounded excitement. All of us where dressed in what was, quite likely, the gaudiest pastel garments that could only be used once a year. Thankfully, we would outgrow them by the next year: only to be replaced, assuredly, by brilliantly hued garments of equally ridiculous luminosity.

Many of the parents were attired the same way too. It was as if the entire light end of the color spectrum had thrown up all over humanity. It was not, necessarily, a pretty sight. But we children didn't care. "They" were out there waiting....

The woman running the show was trying her best to get everyone's attention. She, not to her benefit, was being assisted by an oversized rabbit going by the name of Peter Cottontail, whose head and hands were terrorizing the children my age and younger while simultaneously annoying the older kids. There was also a giant duck who performed anonymously and had a gigantic tail feather that knocked several children over on their pastel behinds without ever seeming to notice or care. The duck

smelled vaguely of what I would later come to recognize as beer but that may have been the enticement for him to dress up so foolishly. They all, along with our minders, were trying to herd us into groups by age. We were finally set and The Hunt would soon be on.

We, as the youngest, were taken to one area of the hunting grounds while the "vets" were taken further away. I watched them, their battle-hardened eyes steeled to what lie ahead. They marched toward their own destinies, with a few backward glances to younger siblings, and were gone. We were all now left standing in what might be called a row but only if one's eyes were crossed. But it was clearly determined by the frazzled hunt leader that this was going to be as good as it gets and everyone had better like it!

We were ready. A zigzag line of freakishly attired children, some whose parents had regrettably placed bunny ears on their heads, clutching baskets of the quite possibly toxic grass, ready to burst forth into the world of The Hunt.

ON YOUR MARK! A chill wind blew across the park area. GET SET! Heart racing...focus...listen... be ready to run....GO! With an ear-splitting scream that could only be made by small children and sorority sisters we were off. The cacophony even drew the attention of the older kids in the distance who raised their eyes, the parents grimaced, and the hung-over duck grabbed his swollen head in what was probably real pain. We didn't care, the little warriors we were. We were running with the wind through our rabbit ears, the swoosh-

ing of our windbreakers, and laughing hysterically. Thankfully, that which we were hunting had no ears to hear this riot draw closer.

Later, I would learn that some had turned back immediately and ran crying to their guardians. Others wandered aimlessly. While at least one, sat on the ground, and began shoving plastic grass into his mouth. I, on the other hand, was speeding full tilt. Some chose to race toward the playground equipment; too obvious, I thought. The real booty would lie back in the trees. So I ran forward, my eagle eyes trained to spot the slightest pastel shade in the green of the grass.

LO AND BEHOLD! There it was; very near a tree, a pink ovate shape on the lawn. You are mine and only mine I smugly smiled at the thought. All I could see was pink on green and I ran as fast as my little powder blue clad legs would carry me. It was near...very near; all that was left to do was lean down, snatch, and keep moving. I had practiced at home; this was too easy. However, at home, I had been the only hunter. Now I was to know the agony of defeat.

CRASH! Two tiny little heads banging together. THUMP! Two tiny little behinds hitting the freshly mowed grass. There we were. Startled, I sat looking into the eyes of a huntress that I would later come to know as Michelle. That day, she, as was the style at the time for girls, wore a yellow dress with pink flowers on it. She had a pink windbreaker, which actually matched the knot on her forehead not to mention my own. We stared at one another for what might have been several of Shirley MacLaine's lifetimes but, in reality, was only a few seconds. The pink egg was there. Pink coat, blue cords, pink egg, green windbreaker, pink knots... NO PINK EGG!

We saw another youngster run off, an opportunist who cruelly took advantage of our distress. We would have names for a person like this as we grew older which I shall refrain from mentioning here. I looked back at the little girl and I saw my own pain reflected in her eyes, which began to swim with tears.

Somewhere on the planet there was a happy hunting ground but not at this spot. We fell, as if in slow motion, backwards in opposite directions on the luxurious green, spring battlefield. Two brightly shod prone bodies, wailing in anger, pain, fear and dejection. Would anyone hear? NOOOOOOOOO!

Laughter and shouting still ruled the day as others collected their prizes. Then, out of the frenzied midst, our mother-protectors where there to sweep us up in their arms with words of solace and comfort. As I remember now there was also the slightest hint of bemusement in their demeanor. In any case, our crying subdued, our limp,

little defeated bodies with empty baskets at our side were carried back to sit on our Mom's laps while the other kids returned, baskets brimming with the treasures we so feverishly pursued moments earlier.

Several children came offering to share only after being threatened by the adults who accompanied them. We accepted their offering in silence, only to be threatened by our own parents, who forced a weak "thank you" from our lips. It was time to go. The Hunt, was over.

I sat with the basket in my lap full of "pity" eggs I had not earned and imagined how bitter they must taste. I would refuse to eat them! I eventually did decide that I had better sample them just to verify how bitter they would be only to find out that these prizes so hotly sought really did taste, well....awful. I was not sure and I am still not sure as of today that they were actually meant to be digested as "candy".

Sensing my pain, Mom suggested we go to Dairy

Queen for chocolate sundaes and suddenly, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. After all, who needs those stinky old, hard, stale things in the basket when you can have ice cream and a Mom with which to share it.

The bump was gone by the time we got home. Dad was so upset when Mom regaled him with the story of the day's events that he was crying although, on retrospect, it might have been hysterical laughter.

The dog ended up eating the contents of the basket including the plastic grass. It turns out the grass was not toxic but could cause diarrhea resulting in an unusual, colorful, and festive holiday display upon the lawn. All who passed by surely would have agreed.

Mom would end up canceling the appearance of the duck at my birthday party the next month. And, I would go on to be friends with the little girl, Michelle, for the rest of my life. But, we would never, ever go on The Hunt again.



Community Unit District #305 junior high Science departments received a \$500 renewable energy grant in March for use on all three campuses. The grant was made through Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative. The "Empowering Education Grant" is designed to help fund projects that will inspire and benefit students. Through this grant students will delve further into the discovery of different types of energy. They will learn hands-on and be able to present their findings. Pictured are: Dalton Vanausdoll, Mickie Eheart, Arthur Grade School Jr. High Science teacher Pam Evans, Janet Slabaugh and Emmalee Nall. Evans applied for the money which will benefit Lovington Grade School Jr. High Science, teacher Jill Wulff, and Atwood-Hammond Grade School Jr. High Science, teacher Tim Manselle, as well. Photo submitted.

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Reports	7,195
Properties	2,143,265
Cash	\$378,420,798
Shares	17,128,581

Returned to Owners 09/01/18 – 02/28/19

Number of paid claims	166,551
Cash and share value returned	\$130,232,359.75

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