

TALES FROM 7OAKS

by Mick Lavy

These stories are dedicated to my good friend, Thomas J. Sullivan, west Texas rancher, without whose generosity, all of this would have happened. It just would not have been observed by me.

Tom has been a friend for forty years. We met as insurance agents and became friends through professional organizations.

One day, I had a new neighbor. Tom and his bride Barbara were moving in. That day, I met his dad, Benjamin Sullivan, another rancher among many other talents. Later, I moved away and missed Tom for a few years. One day in HEB, I heard Tom's booming voice call out, "Is that my good friend Mickey Lavy" and the friendship resumed. Shortly thereafter, we took a trip to Bangs, Texas, and I was introduced to the 7OAKS ranch. We hunted doves, sat on the patio, went to town and ate some good Mexican food.

Another time, we went to the ranch and I got to see more of the ranch including the settlement, rock buildings built one hundred fifty years ago. More of that later.

Over the years, Tom has hosted many hunts and I became friends with several of his good friends there at the ranch. Tom has always been a great host and we've had many good times visiting on the patio. Coffee at daybreak and steaks on the grill in the evening.

I dedicate this collection of tales to Tom and his good nature, and to the ghosts of ranchers past, before our time.

THE LAND

The land has always been there. It has always been beautiful and has been populated since about 1870, but not continuously. The ranch is divided into two sections, called "84" and "99." Eighty-four is heavily wooded while 99 is improved pasture and is the location of "the cabin."

It's more than just a cabin. It's a solid masonry bungalow with kitchen, bath, and living room and a wood-burning fireplace. All the comforts of home, and best if you like being outside. The patio is almost as big as the cabin and oak trees that shade it and a grill and campfire. On "99," there are many clusters of live oaks scattered over the ranch. Great scenery.

From the patio, we can face north and sometimes hear the train. No traffic from Highway 84. Occasionally, we see a ranch truck pass by on the road, a quarter mile away. Heard a Harley once and a siren. First siren was on a rancher's truck as he called cows to get a snack.

We don't see many deer from the patio. One afternoon, I was sitting on the patio, looking at some prickly pear under an oak tree and marveling at how they looked so much like deer. Then she stood up and walked away. Last January, Jerry and I pulled through the gate and 50 yards off the road two does stood still while I slipped out and went to the back of the car and loaded a rifle. They were there the whole time and, at the last second, they were dust in the wind.

THE POTBELLY

The Potbelly is actually a beautifully shaped fiberglass Faberge egg with carpet on the walls, the floor and with tight fitting Plexiglas windows and sturdy steel steps leading up to the Mercedes-Benz gullwing-type door. The door is tight fitting and has another window. From the 12 foot high vantage point, one can see the entire shooting lane and, if we were lucky, look out the east window and watch the wonderful sunrise. Granddad's corn feeder and fence is 100 yards out and a clear view. I never saw a deer in the fence except when Tom and I were there in the January doe season. Tom liked to sit in the PB and text messages to his sons and to others. Occasionally, the text tapping would stop and I would heard the sleep rhythm breathing of Tom dozing. It was comforting. We both woke up one sunny morning to a magnificent mature buck who walked out of the woods, up to the fence and casually hopped over and had a corn breakfast. He then hopped back out and stood there for maybe 20 minutes while we watched him in binoculars. He was ten or twelve points, the boss. While we were watching, he vanished, like fog lifting. It was a good hunt, because seeing him lifted our spirits about the existence of large mature bucks.

I spent many mornings and evenings in the PB in the early years from about 2010. In the mornings, Tom and I would talk by text about what was happening. Usually, nothing much was happening but I was so much at peace with the quiet of the morning that I was really happy, even with nothing happening, hunt-wise. Usually, Tom would come through the woods around ten in the morning and we would go to town and get a good breakfast. Then it was nap-time. Always good.

One morning in the PB, it was really cold. Nothing was happening. No deer. Nothing. Then there were two coyotes jogging along together in lock-step, fur puffed out to keep them warm. Ten seconds from start to disappearance. It was beautiful.

Another cold morning, Bob-the-cat came jogging up the trail in front of the PB and spotted breakfast. It was a hapless cottontail and suddenly he was breakfast. That bobcat went from jogging along casually to lightning speed strike in a second. The rabbit went from leisurely munching to down-the-hatch in ten seconds.

HOGS AGAIN

One morning, a few years ago, Jerry (Erdman) and I were in the PB and out of the bush comes a parade of hogs. Well, we were deer hunting and were not interested in hogs. I beat on the outside of the PB and made my world-famous wildcat scream. The lead hog stopped the parade and squared off with the perceived threat. We were 12 feet up and were safe, so I resorted to calling him ugly names in English. He decided I was some kind of nuisance, but not dangerous and calmly lead the troop to safety. There were prob 12 hogs in the bunch.



SUNRISE AT 7OAKS

Sleep at 7OAKS is a luxury we all enjoy. We struggle with the almighty dollar daily, but on Friday evening, we sit by the campfire for a while then fall into bed. There are always air conditioners or fans or electric heaters making a quiet hum and sleep usually comes easily. Sometime around 5:30 or six, I might open one eye a bit and notice a faint flicker of light on the ceiling. Then I smell coffee, and I know Jerry is up and got the fire going. Soon he's in for the first cup and I have on enough clothing to survive by the fire and swill some warm brown life-saving fluid.



A word about Maytag. It's not that they built great washing machines. It's really that Jerry Erdman looked at an old one and like a sculptor of stone, could see a patio firepit, waiting to be carved and fabricated from a porcelain washing machine drum. The result is that this little round delight warms us every morning, summer and winter. Well not so much in summer, but we do have a pre-dawn ritual fire and sit farther away from the flames.

Sunrise at 70AKS is a treat for a city boy like me. At home, I can get up at six and observe daybreak but it takes a few more hours before the sun is over the trees to the east. At the ranch, the eastern horizon is about two or three miles away and we can watch the first glow and then flash of sunlight as it comes over the hill. We are usually on the patio, so we then face our chairs toward the west and watch the woods and pasture with the sun to our backs. Smoke follows beauty so we are always moving chairs to avoid the inevitable.

The view from the patio is of beautiful scenery, woods and pasture. And beautiful cows. One morning last spring, it was about ten in the morning and about six or eight mama cows and a calf were grazing in spittin' distance from our location when a coyote began trying to separate the calf from the herd. Well, all the mamas crowded around the calf and started trotting away while a few put their heads down and took a few steps toward the coyote. She just gave it up and trotted away, head up and looking for another meal.

Coyotes are not looked upon by the local population (by local, I mean anybody that lives in the country, anywhere in North America) as beautiful. However, there is some beauty about them. During the day, you rarely see one strolling along. You might see one running. He might run and run and run until he crosses the horizon and into to the next county. That's a bit of beauty. You never see a pack of coyotes in the daytime. You just don't. But they are there, napping, waiting for their day to begin at dusk. Then there's more beauty in their song as Alpha leads them into the prairie to hunt for breakfast and other meals throughout the night. She'll call to locate the kids and they answer almost simultaneously. Sometimes, two coyotes can sound like a dozen.

One night about midnight, I was sitting by the campfire on the patio. heard the first group call, maybe a mile away, to the east. Immediately, three other groups, scattered to the other points of the compass around me returned the call. It was soft, calm, slow and beautiful.

COWBOYS! REAL COWBOYS

One spring when there were no cows on the ranch, Melody and I were tent camping and enjoying the peace and quiet. She was reading and I was just gazing off into the green wilderness. Please note that peace and quiet is one of the nicest things about 7OAKS. Nothing much moves.

Rarely do you see change happening while it's happening. I sometimes doze off in my chair, just sitting there. And that's a good thing.

When there are no cows and suddenly there's cows, well that's actually change happening.

Off to the east of the driveway there came a cow running with her head up and her tail up. That's rare. She came from around the house and was heading for the road up front. About twenty yards back and three seconds later was a man on a horse and they were moving almost as fast but not quite as fast as the cow.

By the time I could say "Did you see that?", they were almost to the front gate and another cow came from the same place heading in the same direction as the previous cow and ten feet behind was another cowboy swinging a rope over his head. He was leaning so far forward it looked like his horse had two heads.

When he saw us on the patio, he slammed on the brakes and did a u-turn and stopped. He got off his horse, pulled his hat back up on his head and stopped and said "Howdy ma'am. Mind if I tie my horse to your tree?", motioning to a scrawny mesquite bush. He removed his hat and asked permission to enter the yard and came on over. He explained that some cows had found a gap in the fence and had come over to 7OAKS for some greener grass.

The remarkable thing about this fellow is that he was a real cowboy. Tall, lanky and somewhere between thirty and sixty years of age. He wore a long sleeved cowboy style shirt, Levi's, boots, leather gloves, and had the talk. After some courtesies, he resumed the chase. Not a real exciting event but there was some after effect. For a year later, whenever we would come to the ranch, there were two horses grazing in the open pasture east of the big tank. And there were three large unusual sheep. And then they were gone.

MORE ABOUT FENCES

Fences are an important part of any ranch. A fence down is cause for immediate action. Even if there are no cows on the ranch, they could show up tomorrow and if there's a fence down, the work could be quadrupled.

One June week-end my brother, loud-mouth-Tom Lavy came to fish the tanks. (Nobody calls him that but me. He's a pretty big ole boy). Sully and I took him to Lyndon's place up the road a mile and we caught a few nice size bass.

As we got back to the 7OAKS ranch, we noticed a highway patrol car and a sheriff's truck in the road near the gate. We went through the gate and saw a black pick up on its top and two teen-age kids standing there being lectured by the patrolman. Pretty soon, the boy's mom and dad pulled up and then the wrecker.

Well, it didn't take the wrecker three minutes to have the truck upright. Easy money. The DPS officer gave the kid a ticket for something and then took him aside and muttered something about all the beer cans that spilled out the back of the truck. Then they both shook hands and threw cans back in the truck.

Before the police left and the wrecker pulled the truck back to the road, the dad had a roll of barbwire and tools out, and he and the boy were repairing the fence. Sully had walked over and identified himself and agreed that if the fence wasn't complete by the next day, he'd call the officer and there would be some consequences.

Pretty exciting end to a slow day of tank fishing.

The second fence story also is the second siren story. Late one November afternoon, I heard a siren on Highway 84, three or four miles away. It got closer and closer till I could see red lights on the road in front of the ranch. I was in the windmill stand neat the pit area and could see him stop about half a mile away. At the same time, I heard a helicopter getting closer. It landed in a field near the police car. Turns out, a fellow was driving too fast and didn't make the curve near Charlie's gate and had some pretty serious injuries. He was unconscious when a motorist found him in the pasture near where he had gone through the fence. After the chopper left, I began to climb out of the stand and my deer, which was almost under the stand, spooked and disappeared into the darkness.

The best fence story also involves sirens.

One afternoon in April, Jerry and I were sitting on the patio after supper and were drinking coffee when we heard screeching tires, sirens and a big crash and thud. Then we heard more thuds, thumps and crashing sounds. Then we saw a black Dodge pickup mostly airborne as he roared across the pasture at about 70 mph. Four police cars came around the curve but didn't come into the ranch the same way. He had flown over a fifteen-foot ditch and through the fence that the kid had gone through, a year before.

One police car stopped at the front gate and I "ran" up and opened it and said "he went that-away." About that time, we heard the truck tear through the west fence. The Sheriff drove through the woods slowly and went through the "new gate" and found the truck upside down in a creek. The driver had left on foot.

Three hours later, the police car came back through the woods, slowly, with his red light on. He stopped and told us to stay in the house as the driver was an armed and desperate fellow. We told the policeman that we had been shooting pistols for the hour before the visitor came through and that we still had a hundred or so rounds. He grinned and said call 911 before we shoot him. He also said "we know who he is. He dropped his drivers license in the field. His parents are two counties over and their lawyer will deliver him to Brown County tomorrow, if he shows up." Turns out he was on parole, and had guns and drugs in his truck. There was no trial. Just a ride to prison.

That night Jerry and I patched the fence and somebody came later and put a good fix on it. Fences are important.

EARLY "BIRDS"

One of my favorite things about deer hunting is getting up before breakfast and dressing warmly in lots of insulated gear. Sometimes it's just two pair of socks and cotton gloves and sometimes it's everything I could find to wear.

One such morning, it was about 25 degrees. Not cold by Panhandle standards, but cold enough. The hike to the pit area deer-stand, a windmill-style perch, is about half a mile from the house. When you get there, you rope your rifle and snack pack, then climb up and pull up your gear. The stand is minimalist so you gotta tie everything to the rails. Once I had set my thermos on the narrow platform and it only took a slight nudge to send it twelve feet down, loudly.

This morning it was early and dark and cold and clear. No wind. No breeze at all. Lots of things to hear, mostly birds. Usually there are mockingbirds to be heard and always cardinals. Sometimes mourning doves.

Well, this morning I heard a chirp to my left. Then a chirp to my right. Some kind of bird. High pitched squeak. Then to my left again. My left was the east and the sun had just come up a little so things were clear enough to see.

Chirp from the right, very close to me but I could not see a bird in the trees around me. Then, the chirping from the left was closer and more rapid and getting closer and louder. On the right the steady chirp was getting even closer. Then, on the left, about twenty feet from the stand, I could see two tiny bobcat cubs running and tumbling toward momcat as she approached them. They all three crashed together, climbed on one another, kissed, licked, peeped more quietly and vanished into the brush. It all took about three minutes and it was a beautiful sight to see. Had I moved to retrieve my camera, it wouldn't have happened.

Another time, a warm November morning, I was sitting in the same stand, pit area. To my left, on a low mesquite branch, about two feet above the ground next to some thick brush, a happy mockingbird, was singing his heart out.

I was watching him when a hawk appeared like a missile, grabbed the mockingbird and hit the ground on his back, mockingbird in his talons. A half-second later, a coyote lunged out and got a mouthful of hawk tail feathers.

The hawk let go of the mockingbird and slapped the coyote across the muzzle. The coyote lost his grip, the hawk took off into the blue yonder and the coyote sprung back into the brush, hungry. All this was under four seconds.

MOVING DEER STANDS

In February 2021, the Sullivan boys were tasked with moving three deer stands a half mile to their new location: the front half of the ranch. Bonnie, new owner of part of the ranch, had given us till March to get anything we wanted moved to the north of the dividing fence.

These third generation Sullivans went to town and got a trailer big enough to haul the Potbelly and the two windmill stands up to the front of the cabin, facing northwest towards Charlie's fence. The Potbelly is nestled into the grove of giant oaks, a three- minute walk from the patio.

The next stand, a windmill type, is twelve feet up off the ground and is located 150 yards to the left of the Potbelly and is also nestled in a grove of oaks. These two stands both have wide attractive shooting lanes. The angle is such that hunters in either stand can't aim toward the other, by a long shot. Very safe.

The third stand is about two hundred yards to the west of the middle stand and is south of the creek. It too faces northwest and looks toward the area of a tall green abandoned water tank. Thick brush nearby.

These "boys" picked excellent locations and deer have been harvested from all three locations. Three other "boys," avid hunters too, installed three feeder fences and located some new modern feeders in them.

These cattle-panel feeder fences were scientifically engineered to be hog proof and to withstand 100 mph winds. However, these uncouth hogs have no respect for human intellect and made short work of our first attempt to keep them out. There are other attempts in the works.

One night at dusk, there was about five minutes of light left in the day. I was in stand number three, near the west fence when I heard a terrifying snarl that didn't end and got closer and louder. Grunts, squeals, oinks, pushing, shoving, ripping, tearing, this herd of boisterous porcine party peepers came tromping. They went to the feeder fence, cleaned up the apple slices and corn that was there, all in about eight seconds and were a faint memory in another 20 seconds.

TURKEYS WITH TOM

Once, I was in a blind and saw a flock of turkeys. I wasn't prepared to take one but it got me interested. Soon, Tom and I had purchased a few decoys. They were very life-like even to the beard, which was detachable. Tom loaned me two kinds of turkey calls and I bought one to use inside the mouth. I watched some videos about turkey calling and got pretty excited about going out next season. We put the decoys in the yard to see how they looked. You push the mount stick into the ground and set the hen on it. She's in perfect balance and moves with the breeze.

Next morning, Tom and I went out before dawn and set up in a grove by the creek which is near Charlie's old deer blind. As daylight arrived, we began to hear a little bit of gobbling and a hen calling as she flew down from her overnight perch. I started making hen sounds with a box call and the gobbler responded with a "well, he said" gobble. We played that game for twenty or thirty minutes with each exchange getting closer.

I'm told that turkeys have excellent eyesight. Probably true. Tom and I were fully camouflaged but our faces were exposed. Tom was in his chair, deep in the woods behind me. He was involved in a text conversation with a person or persons unknown so I'm pretty sure the gobbler caught a bit of my movement and the woods went silent. That's the way it goes. First your money then your clothes.

Jimmy and I tried the same tactics in another area. He was the shooter and I was the caller. We had the decoys about 30 yards in front of us. I called and the gobbler answered. Sully was across from us, 200 yards and he called. We could tell that the gobbler was moving back and forth between us. He just knew there was going to be sex before noon but didn't know if she was north or south. Finally, he spied something phony and the woods went quiet again.

In the meantime, cattle were coming along and spied the decoys. Two calves approached them cautiously and finally decided they were toys and played with them. Then they walked on them and then followed the rest of the herd. Disrespectful children. Luckily, the decoys were rubber and regained their shape. No poultry has been harvested at this ranch in decades, maybe generations.

THE COUGAR AND HIS BUCK

A few years back, Sully had put game cameras near a feeder. Early one dark morning, I was in a stand and I got a text message from a brother-in-law showing a large lion with a buck in his mouth. They were in front of a feeder in the picture. I forwarded the picture to Sully with the text that said something like "Tom come get me in the pickup there's a lion on the ground and I'm not coming down in the dark".

Well, before I could send out a retraction, I heard the truck start and the headlights coming up the road to my stand. That was the end of my morning hunt. My own fault, I guess. Sully sure thought so.



WEATHER AT 7OAKS

Weather is everywhere, usually. 7OAKS got its share in the winter of 2021.

In January, Jerry (Erdman) and I were there on a warm winter week-end. Around dark, the temperature fell rapidly and when Jerry got up to make coffee at daybreak, our world was covered with a foot of snow. We skipped breakfast, loaded up and grabbed some coffee. It was time to get outa Dodge. We took off up the driveway, slippin' and slidin'. When we got to the blacktop, an early-riser had made ruts for us to follow. The snow was still falling and when we hit Highway 84, it was pretty deep. We were aided by 18-wheelers making a little bit of track for us but it was treacherous driving all the way to Waco. Took us eight hours to drive the usual three- hour trip.

When Jerry and I came back in February, a large branch had been blown off the big oak tree. How big? Well, it covered the entire patio and parts were against the house. The metal bar-b-que grill was engulfed. We couldn't use the patio unless it was cleared enough and we needed a campfire. Jerry grabbed a saw and I grabbed a rope. He cut pieces off and I dragged them away from the patio. Oak is heavy. After two or three hours of this nonsense, it was nap time. An hour later we had a campfire. All's well that ends well.

A month later, March, there was an unbelievable cold week in the southern United States, including 7OAKS. There is not much you can do to protect the cabin from winter freeze. We had left the kitchen cabinet door open. That probably helped. There was a crack in the shower pipe. The cabin is so well built that it seems to have taken care of itself.

The drought continues. June first of this year (2023), Jerry and I went out a week after some rain. The fields were green and the grass was about a foot tall. We didn't return till August and by then all that grass had become dust and the tanks were dry.

COPPER AND THE RATTLER

Copper is a young short haired pooch-hound. Guess what color he is!

We were at 7OAKS in late August. Before dawn, Jerry and his sidekick Copper were outside for a stretch. I was not. Copper alerted but was staying back a safe distance. I was becoming a little miffed when some strange man burst in the side door hollerin' "Mickey! Copper found us a big ole rattlesnake."

In a flash I was at the front door with Mr. Smith and Mr. Wesson, and together, we put the poor feller to sleep. I was assisted by J. D. Erdman and a .45 cal peacemaker. We debated on what to do with the carcass. I went back to bed and when I woke, the snake was stretchin' a rope, hangin from a tree.

Probably still there.



THE HARVEST

Since nobody likes to listen to a braggart, I'll try to skip the obvious.

Over the years, there have been shut-outs and banner years. Hunter Sullivan took a spike at 8:00 a.m. on opening day, a few years ago. I think he was fourteen.

J.D. Erdman took two within five minutes. I think he took them with one shot but he fired two just to be polite.

Jimmy has scored and there are others.

Troopers Danny Smith and Bill Maley came one week-end and prepped a field near the pit, with an assist from daredevil J.D. Erdman. He earned his nick-name that day. He was really dirty and bruised. Bill dragged Jerry and another bucket of rocks around an acre of cantaloupe-sized rocks until most of the rocks were more pulverized than Erdman. They had improvised a sled and Erdman was the dead-weight.

He complained about that for years till somebody burned the chili on the campfire. Then he just poured a little coffee in it, and some hot sauce and ate it anyway.

Recently, it has been pretty good for some with each of us scoring most years. There's a legend going around that one of the hunters took venison at 200 yards while riding a bucking buffalo and sighting the rifle backwards with a mirror. Nobody likes a braggart, so I'll just say that it's a legend.

THE EARLY RANCHERS

Under all is the land. It has always been here. Sometimes, in the distant past, it was even far under water. There are some fossil remains of ocean creatures on the ranch.

Prior to the mid-eighteen hundreds, this land was strictly Indian territory. Around 1850, Europeans began to settle Texas. Previously, Spanish and Mexican settlers claimed much of Texas. Now, German-state refugees began flowing to the New World to build a life in freedom from oppression. They often would make their way across Germany to the port cities of the north under cover of darkness. Bribing authorities was a part of the journey. When they would reach the ports, they would buy a ticket on a ship that would make no guarantee of their safe arrival. When they reached Galveston, many would make their way to Indianola, near present day Port Lavaca. There they would try to form alliances with others to travel through the south Texas wilderness to the area that was being settled around Fredericksburg, named for the German king.

At 7OAKS ranch, there are a few rock buildings. This writer has little background training about the subject but I have read two novels about these settlers, both similar to each other. My fictional rendering of the story is that Wolfgang and Hans, a father and son and possibly other offspring, made their way north from the Fredericksburg area and found that there was an opportunity here. There were thousands of acres of oak and mesquite forest to be claimed by those brave enough to put down roots. And there was "the mountain," a rock formation that reaches almost fifty feet above the surrounding prairie and has many tons of building material. Rock, flat flagstones available right here where they wanted to build. Lumber was not available even if they could afford it. Using mule carts, they hauled hundreds of stones from the source and assembled the first building, a house. It's about fifty feet long and fifteen feet deep. On one end was a food prep area with counter-tops and work areas. The other forty feet was mostly bedroom. These folks lived and worked outside almost all the time.

This dwelling was a refuge from the winter elements and from rain. Cooking was done on an open fire in front of the house. There was no heat source inside. Windows were covered with canvas and opened for light and ventilation.

Wolfgang and Hans sent for the wife and mother and the daughters. When they arrived, the first requirement was a bedroom and privy. Thus, the other two buildings. The bedroom was a small room with a large south-facing window. The privy was forty feet farther to the east, near the corral. While I have little experience with a privy, I can attest that this one is still functional, after a century and a half. Solid rock, with a plank seat and two sitting areas. The mechanics of the underside is such that the two functional areas are divided by an upright separating wall. The floor is flat masonry and there was likely a wooden tray under each side that was cleared at regular intervals simply by pulling it out and dumping it near the corral. Very ingenious.

One of the first jobs of settlers is to locate nearby water. There are weather creeks nearby and, I believe, these folks relied on them at first. Soon, however, they needed stored water and the only practical way was with tanks. There is a tank near the rock ranch house and, I believe, they used mules and earth-moving blades to build a berm across the prairie, stretching about a mile to the tank. This allowed large amounts of rain water to flow into the storage tank.

There is a forth structure in the settlement. It appears that the residents were prosperous enough to build a modern frame house of lumber. It has three rooms, a porch, a fireplace and a kitchen. The house appears to have been built around 1900 to 1920. A modern bathroom was added, probably in the 1940's or 50's, a guess based on the style of the bathroom fixtures.

It appears that water was always in short supply. Clean water was rare, as they had to share the tank with stock and other creatures. There are the remains of a windmill but it likely didn't provide enough for the families and their animals. In the 1950's, there was a widespread drought and my thought is that this is when they finally abandoned the place.

SULLIVAN FAMILY OWNERSHIP

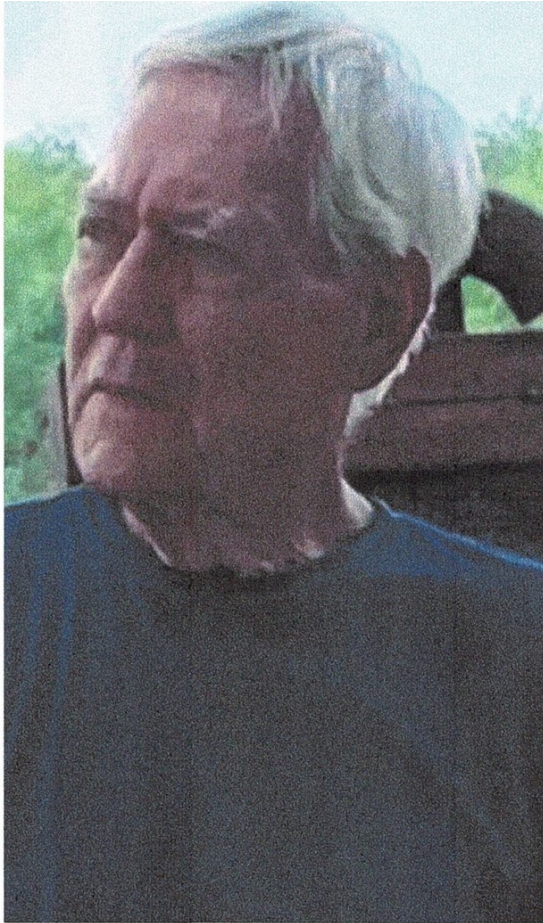
In recent years, the late Mr. Ben F. Sullivan acquired the ranch. He built the cabin under the oak trees and this place has provided a locale for rest and recreation for his family.

One of his heirs is Thomas J. Sullivan and it is through our friendship and his generosity that I have been able find peace and quiet in the company of friends acquired around the campfire.

Thanks, Tom.



EPILOGUE

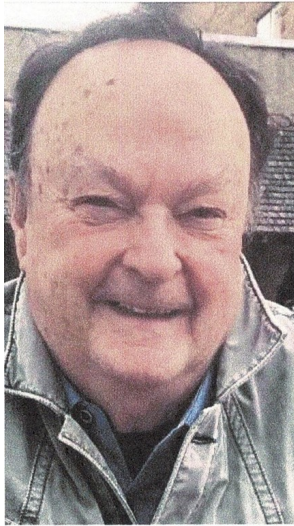


Jerry Erdman passed away May 1, 2023. He was not answering his phone when I would call to check on him. I drove to his house and found Copper looking hungry. Waco Police came to do a welfare check.

Jerry had gotten a diagnosis of congestive heart failure in March but we really didn't know how bad it was. The only good part of that day was that Jerry had always said that he was ready.

Jerry was a prince among men, my best friend, ever. At the deer lease, on a tree by the patio and firepit is a small navy-blue plaque to remind us that he is always with us. It says, "Jerry Erdman Memorial Maytag, 2023."

We'll see his face with every campfire.



Since 1955, I have had the pleasure of living in this beautiful growing city. When high school was finally over, I wasted two years in Denton and learned how to operate a ten key adding machine. I don't remember learning much more except that after two years, I still couldn't read much and fourth grade math was all I needed. My 11th grade typing class gave me the only life-long skill still with me.

In 1962, I left when my parents were transferred to New Mexico and in a year, I was in Dallas with a bride working as a galley slave at JCPenney's. In another five years, an employer (Uniroyal) transferred me to Waco. Lucky me.

Before long, I became a Farmers Insurance Group agent and learned what an easy job I had as a slave at Penney's.

No matter. What I wanted was self-employment. In 1979, I became a Realtor* and used my insurance business to get me rolling. In 1992, I opened Bluebonnet Properties with the help of my new bride, Melody. She's my partner in many ways. She has experience and talent with office machinery, software and people. I can sell this stuff all day but without her to get it processed, I would not have gone far.

Today, we are beginning to slow down, and I can see retirement as a possibility. Lately, one of the things I really enjoy is having lunch with kids from the "real" Waco High, class of 60. Hope you enjoy this little pamphlet.

Mick