



Margaret Evans, Editor

Dear reader, I greet you from the leafy, violet-flecked banks of the Tennessee River, where we're currently spring-breaking with my parents and day-tripping to area colleges with our daughter. There are big things afoot in the world, reader. Enormous things, even.

But here at my parents' house in Alabama, FOX News is droning downstairs and MSNBC is droning upstairs – and they might as well be droning from two different planets – and I'm not entirely sure what to think about those big things, much less what to say about them. More and more often these days, the 'macro' overwhelms and confounds me, so I turn my attention to the 'micro.'

Speaking of which... my mom still has her Christmas wreath on the front door. Do not confuse my mother with someone who's lazy or casual about holiday decorations, reader, for you'd be wrong. No, she left the wreath up longer than usual on purpose, because it was so pretty, and now she's in a bit of a fix. Just as she started to take it down – as it was no longer pretty and was, in fact, turning brown and scraggly – she discovered a wrens' nest there . . . and a couple of week's later, a robins' nest. Both nests are currently nestled in the wreath, and both are full of eggs.

Typically, all this front door nesting would be 100 % delightful, but at present, it's somewhat problematic. My parents just put their house on the market, you see. They're downsizing. Mom worries potential buyers won't be entirely charmed by a brown, scraggly wreath on the door in springtime, and she has a point.

This is not the house I grew up in. It's my mothers "dream house," the one she and my dad could finally afford to build after their daughters grew up and moved out, all four of us. My

mother dreamed up this house and designed it herself – with help from an architect friend – then willed it into existence. She said she wanted a house that looked like “a mushroom that grew up from the river bank,” and that’s what she got. Basically. (Though, for the purposes of Zillow, she’s calling it a “contemporary English cottage.” Not everybody wants to live in a mushroom, especially a mushroom in Alabama.) My daughter has spent every Christmas of her 16-year-old life in this house. Santa has no other address for Amelia.

Which brings me back to the wreath. My mom’s been distraught all week because the mother wren seems to have disappeared from the scene, leaving her eggs behind. We wonder if, perhaps, she was bullied by the robin – the bigger, bossier bird that showed up late to the party and built a flashier nest at the top of the wreath. Mama Robin’s still fluttering around the front door, guarding the four blue eggs in her nest, but Mama Wren is nowhere to be found. It’s quite the drama and keeps my mother’s mind off the sad fact that soon she will have to leave *her* nest on the Tennessee River – the one she dreamed into being – because she and my dad are pushing 80 and need to be in town, near friends and family and doctors. Alas, their beloved mushroom by the river is just too far from civilization.

Mom’s been getting rid of clothes lately – which she doesn’t want to do, either, since she loves clothes – because she hasn’t worn them in years and they’re wasting space. She’s hoping I’ll take some back with me to Beaufort. My mother has always possessed far more elegance than I do – not to mention a fancier life with more dress-up occasions – and I’m not quite sure I can wear these clothes. Upstairs in the guest bedroom, I try on a marvelous blue dress I remember Mom just *rocking* decades ago – an Albert Nipon. It pulls across the middle – I never had my mother’s tiny waist – and isn’t really “me,” anyway. I wish I were a woman who could wear this dress. I smile imagining the delight of the lucky Goodwill shopper who *is* and will.

Meanwhile, we’ve just taken my daughter up to Sewanee for a college tour. It was strange exploring my alma mater after 30 years, where things seem beautifully unchanged yet not the same. In the splendid nave of All Saints Chapel, our enthusiastic young tour guide – a freshman – assured us that “nobody’s required to go to church” (whew!) and that “the student body is very intersectional.” Many of the medieval-looking buildings are now LEEDS compliant, the gorgeous new-ish dining hall has “chef specials” and a vegan bar, and campus activists in love with protest have just issued a “list of 10 demands” to the Vice Chancellor and board of regents. (Apparently, the vegan bar wasn’t enough for them.) In short, the eccentric, tradition-bound mountaintop college of my memory is growing up, and experiencing the same growing pains as other institutions across the country. Like so many things lately, this strikes me as both bitter *and* sweet.

And speaking of growth and change and bittersweetness . . . next weekend is prom in Beaufort. I remember writing a column, years ago, about the grandiosity and outrageous expense of prom, and all those awful parents who allowed their children to go to Fripp and Harbor for the weekend. Well, now I'm one of those awful parents. I caved. And not just on the beach house, either... but on the expensive dress, the hair, the makeup, and... well, all of it. I wasn't strong enough to "just say no." Not tough enough to be the Mean Mom. But I kind of always knew that about myself, secretly. Oh, I talked a good game; that's easy when it's not your problem. But my hope back then – when my daughter was just in sixth grade or so – was that all the moms and dads of Beaufort would band together and stop the prom madness before my time came. I'd like to blame them all for my current predicament, but now that I'm in their shoes and understand how difficult it is – the tears, the puppy dog eyes – well, all I can do is apologize for being so judgy... and offer the following advice: Parents of toddlers, start saving now. Prom happens, and it happens before you know it.

I started writing this column long before my prom girl was even a twinkle in her daddy's eye. In fact, some of you readers have been my constant companions for almost 20 years now. For sticking with me through thick and thin, macro and micro – through all this bittersweet changing and staying the same – I can never thank you enough.