

Hunger Games passes Potter

Children forced to kill better than magical spells?

Harry Potter and his magic wand have taken a back seat to Katniss Everdeen and her bow and arrow as Amazon announced last week that "The Hunger Games" trilogy has now outsold all seven of J.K. Rowling's series about the boy wizard.

Really? How can books whose premise that a central government, in retaliation for an uprising 75 years ago, randomly picks boys and girls aged 12-18 once a year and forces them into a battle to the death surpass in sales one of the biggest cultural icons of the past decade? (Admittedly, the final Harry Potter movies stunk it up worse than the final Star Wars films.)

When the Harry Potter series made its debut in 1997, a decade before The Games, there was outrage and book bannings across the nation because of its content. Critics said the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, contained Satanic subtexts because of the wizardly while supporters likened the books to fairy tales like Cinderella. As the series progressed and the tone turned darker, more debate ensued about whether children should be allowed to read them.

As of last year, J.K. Rowling's magical creation had sold 450 million copies. Not too bad considering the opposition to it or maybe because of it. Adults never seem to learn that when you tell kids something is bad for them, it only increases their enthusiasm for it.

Enter *The Hunger Games* series, which includes the original book plus *Catching Fire* and *Mockingjay*.

In *The Hunger Games*, the kids aren't just forced to compete against each other in schoolyard games like Quidditch as in the Potter series, they are made to knife or bludgeon each other to death in their post-apocalyptic nation Panem, where the countries of North America once existed.

And what do these kids' parents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors do? Sit back and enjoy the show. The whole event is televised for all to watch. Sure it's bad for the 24 kids chosen each year for The Games but hey it's all good entertainment, right?

Maybe, like Harry Potter, the books have more to say about us than we realize. Are we really the type of society to sit back and watch while our government does the unthinkable right in front of our eyes, even forcing active participation? Do we enjoy seeing the devastation wrought when people don't stand up when our neighbors' rights are thrown over?

In *The Hunger Games*, the "show's producers" insert obstacles into the game to make it more entertaining for the "at-home" audience. The horrors unleashed on the players during the Games - the wolf-like creatures called Wolf Muttations, and Tracker Jackers, genetically-altered wasps trained to attack anyone who disturbs their nest - just made for better story.

Perhaps *The Hunger Games* aren't all that different from the reality show *Survivor* (except the death part, of course) or *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. As long as it's entertainment we're all good.

But, it still strikes us as telling that a decade ago libraries were banning a mostly-innocent tale of magic wands and haunted castles and to date no one has uttered a peep about a popular book series with a plot so dark that if a student turned in a plot-synopsis for an essay, they would be shuttled off to the school shrink.

The question is: have adults finally given up worrying about what kids read or have we all turned a little darker?

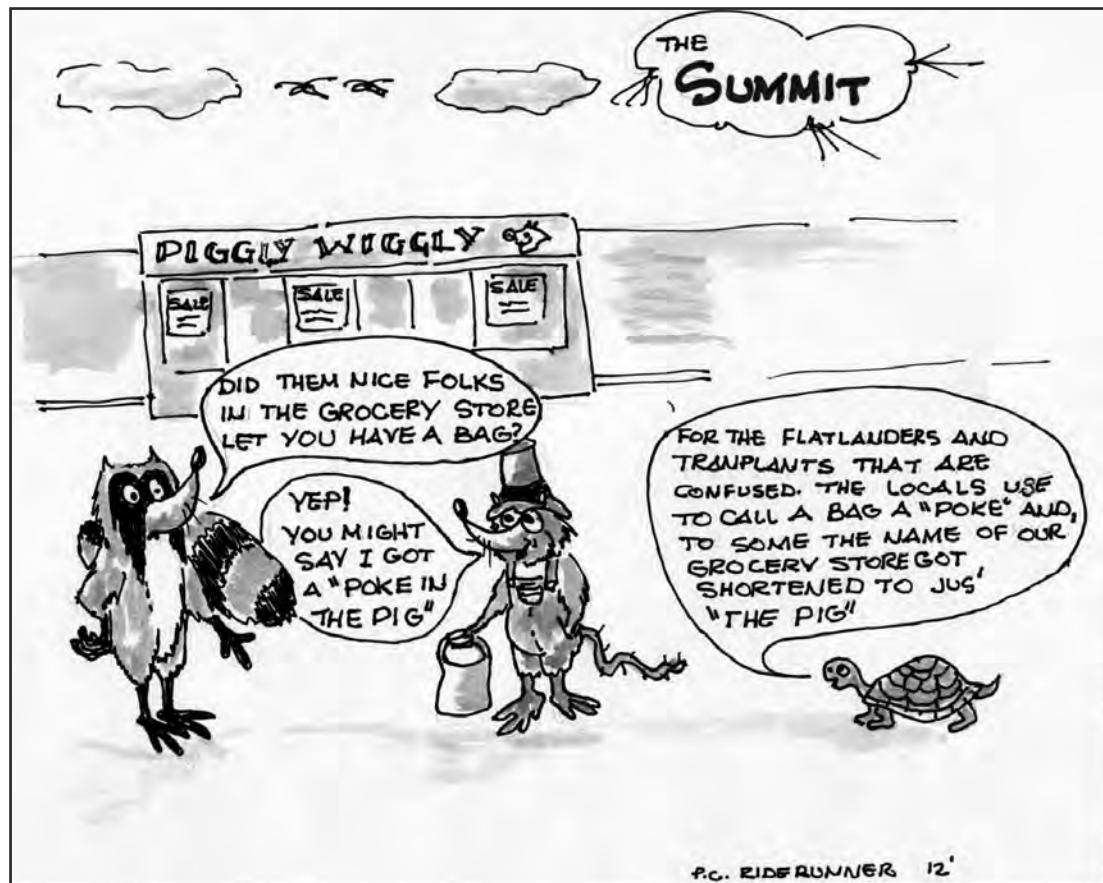
We'll ponder that one while we take a break from reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which is also bounding up the all-time best-seller list.

Move aside wizard boy, Katniss and her bow and arrow take over

This week's quotable quote

"Like a one-eyed cat peeping in a seafood store."

-From Bob Dylan's radio show



OTHER VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

1.8 billion seconds and counting

What goes punishable at forty is smiled at after sixty

By David R. Altman

60 seconds. Actually, I meant to say sixty years. There are roughly 31 million seconds in a year, so when you multiple that by sixty, you get one of those numbers that you cannot fathom, something in the range of 1.8 billion seconds.

T. S. Eliot wrote "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons." I am not sure how many coffee spoons nearly two billion seconds is worth - but it, too, becomes incalculable.

Turning sixty is something to take pride in (particularly since not having the chance to turn sixty would be even worse). There are no longer any of those good excuses like you've heard as you approach this birthday ("sixty is the new forty", "you're only as old as you feel", "the average lifespan is now 76"). That last one is really encouraging; I can live 16 more years before I get to the point when most people die. Dylan's "Man in the Long Dark Coat" is lurking.

But there are benefits to turning sixty. You worry less about what you wear. You can walk around the block wearing what you did to bed (particularly since few people over sixty sleep naked). While you are not quite to the age where you wear dark socks to cut the grass - you are moving in that direction. The good thing is that everyone accepts (expects?) odd behavior from seniors. They slough it off. What goes punishable at forty is smiled at after sixty.

But it is not all misery now, is it? You enjoy the things you missed the past three decades, like really appreciating your kids (they are adults now, and you get to see what sort of job you did). You get to see how they handle the things you were too busy to notice how you were handling at thirty. If you are really lucky, your parents are not only still around but are in good health. In their eyes, you see the convergence of love and patience - but most of all the grace and wisdom you are still trying to achieve.

Aging does have its benefits. All of us sixty-somethings want the 'senior discounts' but don't admit to using them. We secretly hide our AARP cards behind the donor cards in our wallets, waiting for the chance to cash-in while our bodies are cashing out. Some of us go to discounted matinees like we did in our first decade, eating popcorn at 4 p.m. and then home for dinner.

I find myself noticing signs more. The church sign reads "Good Intentions Die Unless They Are Executed" (note to God: only now, at age sixty, do I finally understand the curse of good intentions).

The older we get the more we like the music we remember. In my case, that decade was the sixties. It was the decade of the best music, followed by the seventies, the decade of the worst, followed by the eighties, which is tied for the second best decade with the fifties. See how this 'decade' thing works?

Turning sixty means you are taking more pills before breakfast than you did during the entire decade of your thirties. You learn the names of prescription drugs and have a PDR (for those of you under sixty, that's short for



Physician's Desk Reference) on your end table. Your pill box rattles like a child's toy. You understand the nuances of competing antidepressants--and are finally capable of diagnosing your own sinus infections.

I have noticed that my male friends talk more about their health than they do about the NFL. Women, who handle both pain and marriage better than men (not to mention stress), don't talk about their fatigue or their aches and pains because they have gotten so used to them (they play hurt). Besides, they know at this point that their spouses are not listening anyway, so why bother?

At sixty, you are finally aware, like the downhill racers, that you are beginning your final trip down the mountain - although you are not sure whether the lift will choose for you the Double Black Diamond slope or the Green Circle one. Like the

skiers, you may or may not have control over your skis, but you know one way or the other you will reach the end. We have become purveyors of our own mortality, just as we are increasingly aware of the minute hands of the clock as opposed to the next birthday.

There is in every restless heart the desire to live beyond your dreams. Or, at least the desire to honor them by continuing to pursue them. Like Don Henley's *Desperado*, our pain and our hunger are driving us home. While moving furniture and laying sod and standing on step ladders reminds us that our joints are much older than our imaginations--we alone must decide whether we can yield gracefully not just to limitations but also to inevitability.

Time has taken with it much of what it had enabled us to become. And, since we are now beyond middle-age, we must trust our instincts before they, too, have a chance to fail us.

But, enough ramblings from a sixty year old, as I have work to do. Besides, it's senior's day at Kroger and we are nearly out of Metamucil.

[Dave Altman and his wife Lisa are part-time residents of Jasper. Both turned sixty this year, but she is quick to remind him that he got there three months before she did.]

Agree or Disagree? Tell us your thoughts on this week's editorial either with a letter to the editor that will be published next week. Letters may be e-mailed to news@pickensprogress.com. All letters must have a valid e-mail address, full name and a telephone number for verification. We also still take them by regular mail at Pickens Progress/ P.O. Box 67 / Jasper, GA 30143



The Essential Bad Attitude
By Alan Gibson

Sorting out the werewolves

Start by admitting there's no way to preempt all the monsters who periodically murder groups of people. Sociologists and psychologists don't know. We may never know.

However, there is something we can do. Here it is: We can become the most civilized country in the history of mankind. The idea has a few flaws. It's utopian, impractical and probably impossible. It sounds like something from Deepak Chopra's backlist.

So, we could do it anyway. How? By talking to one another. Free speech protects not only social heresy and brazen obscenity, it is also the right to say good morning to a stranger, maybe even have a talk.

You don't want to invade the stranger's privacy? Go ahead, invade. There's too much minding our own business. Maybe it's time to mind someone else's business; to glance around and see who could use a little spiritual nurture.

I'm wrestling with the ques-

tion of whether Peggy Noonan's exquisite coinage - "a kinder, gentler nation" - is a possibility or a pipedream. It's probably the latter. On the other hand, if we could reduce crime even 5 percent; if we could dissuade one mixed up kid before he became a shooter; if a few teens on the cusp of crime could see a better way.

Point is, a civilized society is less likely to produce monsters.

Granted it makes sense to be the most powerful nation. But the concomitant obligation is to be the most civilized. Civility costs nothing, is individually acted and offers a sense of volition, of America going forward to a new place. Call it not the Arms Race or the Space Race but the Grace Race. (Not the most facile slogan, but I'm struggling.) We could give each other roughhewn gifts of behavior. Like the electrician who stopped to give me a hand when I popped a tire on a churning interstate; like the big-time radio host (a

lady) who had time to give me career advice; or the kids you mentored who might have become dropouts but now won't.

I'm no Good Samaritan, but I can see Samaria from here.

I think about my political friends whose gift is the knack of give and take without rancor. Naïve or not, they've taught me that with civility, society works; without civility, we're werewolves at each others' throats.

I think I'll test this idea of behavior as philanthropy. That elderly lady waiting alone in a parked car in front of the supermarket? I think I'll go over and say hello. Nothing earthshaking - just to ask how she's doing.

It's a start.

....
"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." - Anne Frank

[For more of the same, visit Alan's blog, essentialba.com]

Pickens County Progress
(USPS 431-820)
Published by Pickens County Progress, Inc.
94 North Main St. P.O. Box 67 Jasper, GA 30143
(706) 253-2457 FAX (706) 253-9738
www.pickensprogress.com
JOHN A. POOL DAN POOL
Publisher Editor
WILLIAM E. POOL
Managing Editor
Published each Thursday at Jasper, Pickens County, Georgia. Entered at the Post Office at Jasper, Georgia 30143 as Periodical Mail. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE PICKENS COUNTY PROGRESS, P. O. Box 67, Jasper, GA 30143.
One Year's Subscription: \$21.40 in Pickens County and in Gilmer, Cherokee, Dawson and Gordon counties. \$28.89 in all other Georgia counties; \$34.24 out of state.

Have you spotted an error in our pages? Let our staff hear about it.
706-253-2457 or dpool@pickensprogress.com

Weather
By William Dilbeck
August 14 - August 20

	HI	LOW	RAIN
Tuesday	80	62	.37
Wednesday	80	64	.00
Thursday	83	61	.00
Friday	77	64	.00
Saturday	80	65	.35
Sunday	76	61	.07
Monday	78	56	.00

Your Hometown Circuit-World For Less!
Sales, Rent-to-Own & Lease
120 DAYS SAME AS CASH
KEEP COOL... Here Comes Summer!
12,000, 15,000 & 18,000 BTU A/C AVAILABLE
Lightning Fast HP Laptop Computers
Only \$59 per month.
Only \$129 per month.
FREE 42" TV with lease purchase of our 7 pc. Living Room Group.
Simmons Living Room Group - Sofa, with two reclining seats, loveseat, with two rocker recliner seats. Coffee, two end tables and 2 lamps.
96 Craig Street, Ellijay, GA • 276-2626