Lover of God, nature, wildlife, birds, gardening, photography, travel, simple living, health, pets and seeking a peaceful, healing lifestyle. Life has many hurts and sorrows but within "the [divine] nature in us" we CAN overcome.

Wednesday, June 29, 2011

**Being 60, Finding Life in Today #56-60 Plus Two**

by Donna L. Watkins

When I was approaching my 60th birthday it wasn’t a comfortable feeling. I’ve always felt 20 in my mind and spirit, but this body struggling with rheumatoid arthritis and a few other health issues refused to agree with my mind. Turning 60 seemed to be a message that my mind should get in agreement with my body … but I decided it was a better choice to get my mind and spirit in control and let the body respond more favorably. It works!

Keeping a ‘today focus’ really makes life more enjoyable. I didn’t know if I could find 60 new adventures in one year, but was amazed at how many new species I saw when I put my mind on what was before me rather than what might be ahead of me.

We can’t control the future … and we sure can’t do anything to change the past. Jesus said, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” So each day I determine as best I can to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” and assume as He promises that all else will fall into place.

It’s not easy, but we have choices every minute of each day. Whether it’s a choice on what we will allow ourselves to think about or a choice on not to gripe and complain or count our blessings. An attitude cannot be affected by anybody other than the one choosing to display it, so why not use our energy to have a good one?

So, here’s the last of my 60 new adventures with a bonus of two before I stopped counting in mid-May. My 61st birthday isn’t until September 3rd, so it was definitely easy getting 60 new experiences within a year’s time frame … if you focus on it! It’s changed my view of life and living a little bit and maybe God will give me another idea before my next birthday to keep my focus more on His Kingdom and making Him first in all areas of my life.

It’s really been a big blessing to me to share these times with you. I get so many wonderful comments and so much encouragement from you. I may not have kept track of it all if it hadn’t been for my blog friends enjoying them with me. Thanks!

#56 of 60 - The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

was something Randial and I had talked about seeing for many years since we moved to Virginia over ten years ago, so we decided to make it our priority destination for an overnight celebration of our anniversary. We didn’t want to go, so we made memories.

On our way down the road to the parking lot, we were greeted by a beautiful turkey vulture. They provide such a great service to the world and I think they’re fascinating birds.

Being April 9th, it was a bit early for the migratory birds, but we did get to see a Common Yellowthroat Warbler which was an earlier “adventure” for me on the trip to Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina. I was really surprised that I’d never seen this bird and had now seen it twice in less than a month. Visit the Great Dismal Swamp by reading the information on each photo in this album.

#57 of 60 - Town of Suffolk, VA - After leaving the Great Dismal Swamp, we drove into the town of Suffolk, Virginia. Our first stop was at the Planters Peanuts Center which was established (built in 1899). Then I just had to see the 90-foot tall Coast Redwood Tree. It was wonderful to visit this tree.

The downtown area was very nice, dotted with quaint shops, restaurant and beautiful old churches. We parked the car at one end of Main Street and strolled around snapping some photos and enjoying the small town flavor.

We visited the Seaboard Passenger Station Railroad Museum, est. 1885, and also the Cedar Hill Cemetery which had 32 acres that included ancient cedar trees. Then we drove out to Sleepy Hole Park on the river. We were surprised to learn that Suffolk is the largest city in Virginia with city limits of 420 square miles. Very odd since the population is less than 83,000. Visit Suffolk, Virginia now through my photo album of detailed titles.

#58 of 60 - Chesapeake Arboretum - On our overnight trip to the coastal area of Virginia, we chose a hotel in Chesapeake since it was between the two places we wanted to visit. So when we headed out the next morning I had the arboretum on our schedule.

We arrived early and listened to the birds still singing their loud...
There was a farmhouse and garden area which we saw for last since we saw the entrance to the Tree Trail and headed right there. It was so dense from many vines and invasive plants, but the stillness and various areas of running water made it a delightful morning walk.

To get an idea of how large vines can get, this is a photo of one that had climbed a Swamp Chestnut Oak. That's my hand which only reached around half the distance. View photo album of Chesapeake Arboretum in Virginia.

- In Spring we usually see Rose-breasted Grosbeaks migrating through our backyard habitat. We saw them in Alabama when we lived there also, but I never noticed a female since they are pretty drab in appearance compared to the male Rose-breasted Grosbeak with its rosy red triangular breast patch. Somehow the male always reminds me of the book and movie, The Scarlet Letter.

- Our last visit on our anniversary overnight was to the Historic Seaport Town of Portsmouth, Virginia. There is a part of the town called Old Towne with a lot of interesting architecture and historical buildings. The two ladies at the welcome center definitely displayed “southern hospitality” and were very helpful. There seemed to be a lot of birds with various nesting activities and of course getting to see seagulls is always a treat for me.

- After walking the streets for awhile, we headed for a stroll along the waterfront. Randal loves to see big ships and they had one pretty close that he thought was an aircraft carrier, but I couldn’t imagine the deck being that short. We found out later that it was for helicopters. We learned about lightboats along the harbor and you can too by reading the photograph descriptions in the photo album of Portsmouth, Virginia.

- As I clean out some of the leaves in our pond with a net, I inspect everything very closely so we don’t lose any dragonfly larvae, tadpoles, newts, etc. Was I surprised to have a female bullfrog in the first net full of leaves. As I swung the net over to drain, she jumped out to the ground. One big lady. Bullfrogs are big and with frogs the females are the larger frog.

- I put the net in front of them so they could jump in and be dumped back into the pond and they were happy to comply, with the male still hugging his missy tightly. Read about mating frogs at the photo album.

- We had a problem with the bathroom tub leaking and it turned out a new fixture needed to be installed. So, when our friend, a plumber, arrived to fix it, Randal went to turn off the water at the street level to the house.

- When I lifted the lid my first thought was Leopard Frog just from its appearance. I had heard the name while on a Frog Walk but had certainly never seen one. I got our Field Guide on Amphibians and Reptiles and that’s exactly what it was, technically called a Northern Leopard Frog. It was so dense from many vines and invasive plants, but the stillness and various areas of running water made it a delightful morning walk.

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- After a 10-minute photo shoot of every angle with many praises for God’s beauty expressed over the frog, I encouraged him to go back into the world and do what frogs do. He sat on our deck for another 10 minutes and then took the leap to the ground. I do wonder where he is, but more than anything, I’m so grateful that God has entrusted yet another species to our backyard wildlife habitat.
So, I was especially thrilled to see a female in May this year. They winter in tropical forests and head north for breeding. They eat insects, seeds, fruits, and buds. They nest in deciduous and mixed woodlands, especially at the edges, and also in orchards, suburban parks and gardens. They are poor nest makers. It's so thinly constructed that the eggs can sometimes be seen from below the nest.

The male actually participates in the incubation of the eggs, so the female gets a break for about 1/3 of the day, and only she will incubate at night. When they exchange places, they sing quelling to each other. Isn't that sweet??

If you want to stroll around our backyard habitat to see what other visitors we have, visit the critters and or garden photo albums for the years since I've had a digital camera. There's also an album of short videos. And my favorite photos of all are the ones I took while on two trips to Costa Rica.

**When Suffering Seems Insurmountable**

Nobody wants to remain in a state of suffering and there is still the power of God in our lives and there are still people who are healed. Why some are, and others aren't, is a heated topic for discussion among theologians and the church.

Regardless, the fact is that we do suffer, and how we look at and handle that suffering makes a difference in our lives and the lives of those around us. Joni has some very deep thoughts and Scripture about this topic. Read carefully and allow God to speak to your own sufferings of life.

**When Suffering Seems Insurmountable**

*From Joni Eareckson Tada's book, *Heaven, Your Real Home*

Over the phone, I could hear the puffing and wheezing of Lisa's respirator as she labored to speak between breaths. "Joni, I don't....see why God....is putting me through....all this suffering....Why doesn't He just take me home....now?"

I leaned my head against the receiver and wondered, for the thousandth time, what to say. Lisa was a 21-year-old woman who became severely paralyzed as a result of an accident two and a half years earlier. I'd had many years in a wheelchair. Lisa, only a few. How could I expect her to grasp the things that had taken me ages to understand? What could I give or say to help?

"I'm a Christian," Lisa continued, interrupting my thoughts. "Why do I....have to go through all...this?"

I used to ask myself that many times. Okay, I'll accept this connection between hardship and heaven, but what if the hardship is insurmountable? Overwhelming? Unbearable? I'm paralyzed from the shoulders down, but Lisa is paralyzed from the neck down. She can't even breathe on her own. How can one deal with so much frustration and affliction?

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Another great natural enemy is the Spring Tiphia wasp, which was imported into America from China to control the beetles. The female wasp goes through the woods, we were getting free fertilizer since earthworm castings (their poop) is one of the best soil enrichments you can get. We were amazed at how our earthworm population increased. Earthworms don't break down quickly.

They prey on Japanese beetle eggs under the grass or around plant roots. Mulching is the easiest way to add organic matter to the soil, as it breaks down the bulbs, grubs and grubs. The soil is better able to hold air and moistures which makes the beneficial microbes very industrious.

Over the long haul, a good defense involves improving the soil in your yard so beneficial organisms that live in organic matter present and active. A fellow with a disability once wrote, "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same suffering we suffer." (2 Corinthians 1:5-6)

The fact that you hang in there does something for the rest of us Christians. I'm not talking about your being an inspiration. It's more than that ... it's a mystery. God somehow strengthens others by your faithfulness. You may feel like a burden to others, but God thinks the opposite. He thinks it's necessary that others take care of you. You will be doing more for their spiritual well-being than you can imagine.

Suffering always drives us in deeper and up higher.

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FDA Cigarette Warning Labels Get Graphic

The modest one-liners on the dangers of smoking, now featured on cigarette packs, will soon turn into graphic images and messages that cover nearly half the pack. But many experts say the new labels don't go far enough compared to the gruesome images displayed on cigarette labels in more than 40 other countries.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration unveiled the final nine graphics that will appear on cigarette packs, including images of a man smoking from a tracheotomy hole, and rotting teeth with short one-line facts such as, "cigarettes cause cancer." Read the entire article.

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Saturday, June 25, 2011

Japanese Beetles - Go The Natural Way

by Donna L. Watkins

Update: 7-25-11 (one month later after this article was written)

I am so excited that we seem to have reached a balance in our habitat. I have continued to look for the beetles and can only find a few on our four (4) huge Rose of Sharon bushes. I can’t believe it! In the past month I've only seen about 20 Japanese Beetles in our entire one acre yard. We do have a lot of birds and a lot of babies growing up, so I guess it’s all balancing out quite nicely. YEA!

They've arrived in our garden a few days ago, but I've only seen a few. We were plagued with Japanese Beetles every year when they took over our four Rose of Sharon bushes hardly allowing them to bloom since they eat the buds. We don't like to spray anything, even organic natural solutions, since we believe nature will balance itself out and there's a purpose for everything (well, that doesn't include mosquitoes and ticks).

One year I picked them off and put them in water and felt so bad about it. Instinct told me that something could possibly benefit by leaving them. So we began leaving them three years ago. The bushes get a bit messy while the Japanese Beetles enjoy their stay for a month.

There are many birds that benefit from Japanese beetles, so attract birds to your landscape with bird baths, feeders and nesting boxes that are placed near where you have beetle problems. Starlings are considered a nuisance, but you may get to like them knowing they eat adult beetles from the bushes! They also eat the grubs in the ground.

Next to beneficial insects (see below), songbirds consume the most pest insects in your yard. The grubs are eaten by grackles, crows, blackbirds, robins, meadowlarks, cardinals, starlings and caddisbirds as they move to the surface of the soil prior to emerging as beetles. The birds that eat the adult form of the beetle are starlings, robins, caddisbirds, purple martins, blue jays, and cardinals.

What’s very cool is that our pair of catbirds have made a nest in the Rose of Sharon bushes the past two years. What's very cool is that our pair of catbirds have made a nest in the Rose of Sharon bushes the past two years. I love to see things like this happen!

Over the long haul, a good defense involves improving the soil in your yard so beneficial organisms that live in organic matter present and active. They prey on Japanese beetle eggs under the grass or around plant roots. Mulching is the easiest way to add organic matter to the soil, as it breaks down with the help of earthworms. The soil is better able to hold air and moisture which makes the beneficial microbes very industrious.

We personally like to chop up our leaf matter from the previous Fall leaves. Since we have mostly oak trees, oak leaves have to be chopped since they don't break down quickly. We dump about 4 inches of the chopped leaves all over our garden and planting beds. The first year we did this we were surprised to see how the soil population increased. Not only was it wonderful to have a use for the leaves, rather than hauling them back into the woods, we were getting free fertilizer since earthworm castings (their poop) is one of the best soil enrichments you can get.

Another great natural enemy is the Spring Tiphia wasp, which was imported into America from China to control the beetles. The female wasp goes through the woods, we were getting free fertilizer since earthworm castings (their poop) is one of the best soil enrichments you can get.
“We have a lot of habitat in this country but we are losing it at a rapid pace. Development is consuming 6,000 acres a day, a loss of 2.2 million acres per year. Further, the overuse of herbicides along roadways and elsewhere is turning diverse areas that support monarchs, pollinators, and other wildlife into grass-filled landscapes that support few species. The adoption of genetically modified soybeans and corn have further reduced monarch habitat. If these trends continue, monarchs are certain to decline, threatening the very existence of their magnificent migration”, said Taylor.

To address these changes and restore habitats for monarchs, pollinators, and other wildlife, Monarch Watch is initiating a nationwide landscape restoration program called “Bring Back The Monarchs.” The goals of this program are to restore 20 milkweed species, used by monarch caterpillars as food, to their native ranges throughout the United States and to encourage the planting of nectar-producing native flowers that support adult monarchs and other pollinators.

This program is an outgrowth of the Monarch Waystation Program started by Monarch Watch in 2005. There are now over 4,000 certified Monarch Waystations – mostly habitats created in home gardens, schoolyards, parks, and commercial landscaping. “While these sites contribute to monarch conservation, it is clear that to save the monarch migration we need to do more,” Taylor said.

“We need to think on a bigger scale and we need to think ahead, to anticipate how things are going to change as a result of population growth, development, changes in agriculture, and most of all, changes in the climate,” said Taylor.

According to Taylor we need a comprehensive plan on how to manage the fragmented edges and marginal areas created by development and agriculture since it is these edges that support monarchs, many of our pollinators, and the many forms of wildlife that are sustained by the seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, and foliage that result from pollination.

“In effect,” Taylor argues, “we need a new conservation ethic, one dealing with edges and marginal areas that addresses the changes of the recent past and anticipates those of the future.”


[Related Articles]

Japanese Beetles And Birds
Japanese Beetles Life Cycle
Natural Predators For Japanese Beetles
Batting Japanese Beetles
Japanese Beetle Proof Your Roses
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0 comments
3 Easy Ways to Make Postcards from Your Photos

When we travel I like to pick up postcards for our sponsored children in Central and South America. They get so excited about them. On the last trip I noticed postcards are getting expensive and the thought crossed my mind that I could create a postcard from one of my photos ... surely somebody had such a service! I don't print my photos unless I'm sending pictures to them, so I wondered what the options were to do this.

Good 'ol Google. I found a great article with helpful links that gives you three different ways to do this. There's even an online service that you can use to upload a photo, key in your message and address and the Post Office will send it off for you. I decided to go with the peel-off backings to put on the photo. Read the article.

Thursday, June 16, 2011

National Pollinator Week

Pollinator Week- June 20-26, 2011

Five years ago the U.S. Senate's unanimous approval and designation of the final week in June as "National Pollinator Week" marked a necessary step toward addressing the urgent issue of declining pollinator populations.

Pollinator Week has now grown to be an international celebration of the valuable ecosystem services provided by bees, birds, butterflies, bats and beetles. The growing concern for pollinators is a sign of progress, but it is vital that we continue to maximize our collective effort.

The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture signs the proclamation every year. Pollinating animals, including bees, birds, butterflies, bats, beetles and others, are vital to our delicate ecosystem, supporting terrestrial wildlife, providing healthy watershed, and more. Therefore, Pollinator Week is a week to get the importance of pollinators' message out to as many people as possible. It's not too early to start thinking about an event at your school, garden, church, store, etc.

Pollinators positively affect all our lives - let's SAVE them and CELEBRATE them! Find Events.

Send a Proclamation Letter to your Governor asking to declare Pollinator Week in your state. Take action and contact your Governor.

Christ and Creation

"Shovel in one hand. Bible in the other. That's environmental missions. Love. That's why I'm an environmental missionary," Lowell Bliss, a church-planting missionary in India and Pakistan for 14 years, explains how, in missions work, the Good News of Jesus Christ can rarely be separated from the good work of ecological restoration. The lost can't survive without either.

Read more from Lowell's primer on the sort of spiritual and ecological renewal environmental missionaries, and organizations like Plant With Purpose, bring to people suffering a lack of both.

What Does Holistic Mean For Pets?

by Dr. Jane

Many use the word "holistic" without even realizing what it means. Thankfully, holistic veterinarian, Dr. Jane, is on-hand to discuss holistic veterinary medicine and how it can contribute to your efforts to provide the best care possible for your companion animals.

Holistic veterinarians don't only focus on physical aspects, they also consider the emotional, mental and spiritual elements. Holistic health boils down to balance; imbalance leads to dis-ease. It's important to remember that physical signs of illness may often be the last to appear, and that mental and emotional imbalance can lead to disease, too. Read the article.

National Parks For Free - June 21

Every national park will offer free admission on June 21, not only the first day of summer, but the longest day of the year. You'll have more sunlight to stay longer.

This is $25 savings for a carload at most parks. Go for more free visits on National Public Lands Day (September 24) and Veterans Day weekend.
Wednesday, June 15, 2011

Newsletter - 6/15/11

Hello Dear Friends!

We don't use chemicals and insecticides in our habitat because of the birds, so I'm always looking for new bugs to learn their names and whether they be friend or foe.

Stink bugs aren't known to be a friend, although there is a predatory stink bug that is. This guy is creating all sorts of problems in our area of the country with crops and gardens. We don't have a problem since this is actually the only one I've seen in my many wanderings around our garden. I doubt many of the eggs and larvae survive the harvesting of all the bird parents searching for baby food.

Besides, one person told me he had an invasion of stink bugs in a home he was building in Pennsylvania. When the house was left for a period of time, spiders seem to build webs everywhere and by the time they returned they noticed oodles of dead stink bug remains beneath the webs. I love it when nature is balanced enough in an area to make things right.

Some bugs are just pretty to me, and the pair of mating hoppers were just that with their tiny orange eyes against that lime green body. They're not considered a friend, but I've not seen an abundance of them, so I consider them to be delivered meals for our hungry residents. Bugs we have that like leafhoppers are praying mantis, assassin bug, robber fly, and damselfly.

However, I'm willing to bet it was one of the birds that placed the order since we've got many feeding wide-open mouths all day long. We have chickadees, purple finches, sparrows, titmice and wrens that love to eat leafhoppers. So, it's always wonderful to see a tiny bit of the "whole picture" of how God designed all of this to work, here in our own backyard.

On Sunday I was amazed to see a number of new additions to our habitat. This time of year everything seems to duplicate itself and on Sunday I had plenty of evidence in the baby birds that were at various stages of growing up. The red-billed woodpecker baby was still chattering away trying to convince it's mother that it was going to die if she didn't put one of those bugs into its mouth that she was digging from the bark of the dead tree no more than 2 inches beside the baby. Get a clue, little one. Watch and do as Mama does.

Of course, I don't think we have much of a stink bug that is. This guy is creating all sorts of problems in our area of the country with crops and gardens. We don't have a problem since this is actually the only one I've seen in my many wanderings around our garden. I doubt many of the eggs and larvae survive the harvesting of all the bird parents searching for baby food.

My favorite delight of the day was to see a young Brown Thrasher. He wasn't out of the nest but for a day or so and he didn't have a fear of me at all. I could get within 6 feet of it which I certainly enjoyed for the view, but not for its sake. Although I'm quite certain the parent was nearby and knew it was a safe situation. One day we will have birds on our arms, critters lying around our feet, and our heads on a lion's tummy as we gaze at the beauty of Heaven.

June 25th is this year's annual Great American Backyard Campout date. We didn't know about this event when our son was growing up, but it's never too late to have a good time. Besides, this is the year for my 60 new adventures, so why not?
We no longer have a tent and I don't think I'd make it sleeping on the ground for more than 10 minutes with this current body, so we're going to adapt it to sleeping on the screened porch on our chaise chairs. Adapt and be flexible, right? Here's an article with activities you can do while you're "camping out" in the yard, especially if you have children to keep entertained. You can make this a neighborhood event by getting other families to do the same ... choose one backyard and sleep under the stars and remember a bit of your own childhood delights. Surely you didn't lose all your curiosity and childlike joy of the outdoors.

One of the things we've been wanting to do is to hang a white sheet or blanket up with a light shining on it to attract bugs. This is easily done on our deck with a lamp that's on the wall. We'll just put a white blanket below it. There are some beautiful bugs out there, especially moths. When I was in Costa Rica at La Selva Biological Station, they had a place built with a roof and a white canvas with a light shining on it. There were some very interesting bugs that showed up there, so it was a favorite place to check-out at night since it wasn't but 50 feet from my cabin. One evening I saw a huge beautifully designed Orizaba Silkmoth. Such things cause me to realize the amazing endless creativity of our Heavenly Father.

This is the first year I've decided to plant morning glories on the deck. The deer eat them up in the garden, so I thought I'd add them to the deck where I grow all the other plants they love to eat. I love the deer just as much as plants, so I don't mind keeping them 'hIDDEN.' I was struck by its beauty one morning after a rainstorm. It reminded me that God's Light always shines through after the darkest of storms. When we abide in Him, we can shine in the midst of storms also.

May God’s peace overtake you on your most stressful day!

Love and Hugs,
Donna

© 2011 Donna L. Watkins - God's Glory in Morning Glory
Video: Herd of White Deer

Don't Use Colored Hummingbird Food

Texas Governor Calls For Prayer & Fasting

Friday, June 10, 2011

Building Faith

by Donna L. Watkins

Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time. — Oswald Chambers

It's easy to be full of faith when we can see the way and when life isn't falling down around us. It's when there is a crushing blow to our hearts or bodies that we have to dig deep for the faith we have stored up over our lifetime. To recall all the times God really did come through. To remember the great stories of the Bible when all looked bleak for many, but God was there because they trusted.

Remember Daniel? He didn't stop openly praying when a law was
On Saturday, June 11, 2011, will mark the third consecutive year of National Get Outdoors Day. Also known as GO-Day, the specially designated day encourages people everywhere to get outside and reconnect with nature.

Camping, even for just a night in a backyard, is a way to put children in touch with nature. A study in the 1990s found that people who grew up to be conservationists almost invariably had someone in their lives who introduced them to nature as a child.

Former president Jimmy Carter put it more eloquently: "It is good to realize that if love and peace can prevail on earth, and if we can teach our children to honor nature's gifts, the joys and beauties of the outdoors will be here forever." Introducing a child to the outdoors can create a commitment to nature that lasts a lifetime.

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The Great American Backyard Campout

National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout, slated this year for June 25.

Some of you participating in this camping event may wonder what to do after nightfall. Here are seven activities that may keep you and the kids amused.

Do It! The Great American Backyard Campout

National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout, slated this year for June 25.

Do Programmable Thermostats Really Save Money?

It turns out programmable thermostats aren't the miracle device we've believed all along. In fact, sometimes using a programmable thermostat costs more than not having one at all. But the fault doesn't lie with the thermostat.

According to the Energy Information Administration, about 42% of home energy costs go to heating and cooling. A lot of these costs come from heating and cooling empty (or unused) spaces, including heating and cooling while people are asleep. In plain English: People spend a lot to heat and cool their homes, and they're not good about turning things off when they're not needed.

Some folks think it uses more energy (and thus costs more) to turn the thermostat down at night and then re-heat the following day. They're wrong.

Recommended Reading

Grumble And You Crumble

Extraordinary: The Life You’re Meant to Live

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Read the entire article.

Do It! The Great American Backyard Campout

National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout, slated this year for June 25.

Some of you participating in this camping event may wonder what to do after nightfall. Here are seven activities that may keep you and the kids amused.

Do Programmable Thermostats Really Save Money?

It turns out programmable thermostats aren't the miracle device we've believed all along. In fact, sometimes using a programmable thermostat costs more than not having one at all. But the fault doesn't lie with the thermostat.

According to the Energy Information Administration, about 42% of home energy costs go to heating and cooling. A lot of these costs come from heating and cooling empty (or unused) spaces, including heating and cooling while people are asleep. In plain English: People spend a lot to heat and cool their homes, and they're not good about turning things off when they're not needed.

Some folks think it uses more energy (and thus costs more) to turn the thermostat down at night and then re-heat the following day. They're wrong.
So Many Christians Stressed Out

by Jennifer LeClaire

Stress. There have been so many books written on the topic you could literally fill a library—Amazon offers more than 32,000 books on the sore subject!

There are Christian books, secular self-help books, stress-reduction workbooks—even a Stress Management for Dummies book—all written by the “experts” from just about every angle under the sun.

I’ve read enough of those 32,000-plus books on stress to tell you about what anxiety does to the body. I know the common stress reduction techniques 10 ways from Sunday. I’ve taught on stress from the pulpit. I can parrot the Scriptures we’re supposed to confess when stress comes knocking on our doors. I get it.

And guess what? I still get stressed out some days.

Monday is a good example. I was stressed out trying to meet the deadline for my new book about “victorious Christian living.” My Christian designer was just as stressed out trying to finish the cover to my book. It was a ridiculous scene. And I’m not too proud to admit it. (If you’ve arrived, pray for me because most days stress still knocks on my door—and some days I still let it in.)

I figured I wasn’t the only born-again, blood-bought, Spirit-filled believer who gets stressed out now and again. So I put a prayer call on my Facebook page. It went something like this: “Anybody willing to admit they are stressed out? If that’s you, comment or like this status and I’m going to launch out in prayer.”

I was amazed at the response. Hundreds of stressed out saints wanted prayer. Others reached out to me privately for prayer because they didn’t want to publicize their stressful situations.

What were they stressed out about? Some were simply exhausted. Others were stressed out over finances. Still others were stressed out over health issues. The list goes on and on. It seems even the most spiritual Christians are pros at stressing out.

What’s going on? Read more.

Canine Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome

by Dr. Sarah

Thanks to advancements in health care and nutrition, our beloved family pets are living longer and longer. Senior pets are becoming the norm rather than the exception, and with the happy increase in the number of furry senior citizens, there has been a shift in health concerns for both veterinarians and pet parents alike.

One area of great concern for veterinarian and dog parent alike is the decline in a senior dog’s cognitive abilities or brain function. Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome, or CDS for short, is the term vets use to describe a degenerative brain disorder in senior dogs. Often, when pet parents are talking to their veterinarian, they will share that their senior citizen is uncharacteristically disobedient or soiling in the house. Other tell-tale signs of CDS include generalized anxiety (pacing or panting), confusion, decreased grooming habits, a changed appetite, acting depressed and forgetting regular habits.

Signs of CDS are typically irreversible and progressive, but with effective treatment and management, the signs can be slowed and some can even be reversed. It is important to know that many of the signs of CDS can be confused with other diseases, such as hypothyroidism, arthritis or even dental disease, so if your senior dog is acting differently, schedule a full checkup with your local veterinarian.

One of the first questions pet parents usually ask when their veterinarian mentions the possibility of CDS is, “Is it like Alzheimer’s?” The answer is “Sorta.” CDS shares many similarities to symptoms of Alzheimer’s in humans, including similar microscopic changes and oxidative damage to brain cells that correspond to the severity of the disease. In fact, the two diseases are so similar that many of the treatments that are used in Alzheimer’s were first developed in dogs.

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So if your dog has been diagnosed with CDS, what can you do? What about if you want to be proactive and take steps now to decrease the likelihood that CDS will mar your best friend’s golden years?

In this video, Dr. Sarah goes over recent advances in treatment and prevention of canine cognitive syndrome.

References:


Being 60, Discovering New Creatures #51-55
by Donna L. Watkins

Randal and I are certainly not your typical travelers. Our favorite places to visit are natural areas: national wildlife refuges, state parks, nature centers, etc. While many people head for the beach, big cities, a shopping or dining out, we head for forests, wetlands and gardens since we find the possibility of meeting another member of God’s Creation very exciting. This year’s 60 new adventures in my 60th year has brought many new friends my way and I’m grateful to be able to photograph them so we can continue to enjoy them for years to come, especially since some of them we may never see again until we reach Heaven.

So, here’s a few new friends plus a castle called Atalaya which was built as a winter home of Archer and Anna Hyatt Huntington along the ocean. It’s part of a state park so we found some new creatures while visiting the park. This couple was the creator and designer of Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet, SC, which was one of my dream places to visit.

#51 of 60 - Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs - I saw a bird that looked like a sandpiper and wanted Randal to slow down so I could take a few pictures. You’re not supposed to stop in such a place, but I’m grateful there was nobody behind us and that Randal did stop just for a half minute.

I didn’t expect it to be a new species for me and if it wasn’t for wonderful bird forums, I would never have figured out that it was a Lesser Yellowlegs. What a name for a bird. Wonder if it realizes there’s also a bird called Greater Yellowlegs. Our cat has short legs and we call her cute names because of it, but I wouldn’t say she’s “lesser” than any other cat.

Later while we were on the boardwalk at the salt marsh, I saw

Great Yellowlegs.

When I compared the photos and the tips that were mentioned on the forum, I did see the difference. So I was doubly excited to have two new bird species.

Since we’ve not spent much time at all around water areas, in comparison to most of the places I photograph wildlife, there’s always a chance to find something new each time and I’m delighted it was this year for my count.

#52 of 60 - Atalaya Castle, located within Huntington Beach State Park, was the winter home of Archer and Anna Hyatt Huntington, who lived in Connecticut and New York City. Construction of the beachside home began in 1931, without detailed written plans. The house and Brookgreen Gardens were constructed concurrently from 1931 to 1933. Archer, a noted authority on Hispanic culture, designed the house after the Moorish architecture of the Spanish Mediterranean coast.

Wanting to provide work opportunities for community residents during the Great Depression, he insisted that local labor be hired for construction. The home was named Atalaya (ah-ta-lee-yah), a Spanish term for watchtower. A tower built to hold water and provide a roosting place for bats was the centerpiece of Atalaya between two beautiful courtyards. View photo album of Atalaya Castle.

#53 of 60 - Yellow Rat Snake - Our first wildlife encounter after we headed down the trail to the lagoons at Huntington Beach State Park was to see this snake across the concrete pathway. We thought it was dead, but I hoped it wasn’t. Thinking it was a garter snake I readily approached to talk to it. Surely my voice would bring it back to life, right?

Rat snakes are pretty slow moving and will most often freeze when encountering danger. This is why so many are killed on roads. When freezing while crawling on the ground they often take a rippled posture, looking like a large unironed ribbon. That’s exactly what he was doing when we first saw him.

Later, we heard a cat meow and turned and saw Randal’s cat vacating the area. She was headed for the woods.

#54 of 60 - Yellow-bellied Slider - Another new adventure at Huntington Beach State Park was getting to see a Yellow-bellied Slider. I had to put it on a reptile forum to know what it was. He was sunning away on a log near the water. As I was studying about them I found out that they are called sliders because they lay near the water and have a smooth shell on the bottom (called a plastron) so they can slide right into the water if danger demands.

I thought it quite interesting he seemed to have so much algae on his back, but also after studying I realized this turtle was much larger than most yellow-bellied sliders from the dimensions listed, but it said that some have reached a foot in length. They have the chance to get very old. Guess this was great grands since it did seem more like a foot long when I was shooting the picture. I guess he’s seen a lot of alligators in his time.

I’ve seen Red-earred Sliders with my first being at Huntsville Botanical Gardens in the butterfly house. The best information and wonderful photographs of this turtle can be seen at Hilton Pond’s website about this critter.
So for 60 hours I was in. Queue weekend... For the first hours of the fast I was gold. Anorexia is a fear of gaining... cycle of binging and purging food, plus a very negative body image. Fasting is a test of discipline which takes inner strength and training, has many health benefits, and has nothing to do with anorexia. 

Fasting for 60 hrs is achievable for everyone as long as you have enough willpower to accomplish it. Our bodies were designed to last days without food. We're all just too conditioned to eating every few hours because we've been tricked by the fitness community that this is healthy and necessary to be healthy.

#55 of 60 - Aquatic Worms - Now and then I like to snoop around the pond looking for all the many forms of life that is in it. I have a net that I use to take leaves out now and then, but that is a bit slimy since I have to filter through all the leaf layers to be sure there's no dragonfly larvae in the midst of them.

I look for frog and newt eggs and also tadpoles from the current year or those who have wintered over in that stage. I even enjoy the various bugs that live in the pond.... but one thing I had never found before was worms.

Aquatic worms! I'd never heard of them, but these worms matched the pictures online and I learned a lot by reading about them. Read the post on Aquatic Worms for more information.

Continue the last leg of the adventure journey with me....

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© 2011 Donna L. Watkins - Yellow-bellied Slider Turtle

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Quotes

God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures. -- Francis Bacon

"It's never too late to be what you might have been." -- George Eliot

"I’ve spent too long waiting for what’s been taken from me, rather than enjoying what’s been given to me." -- Unknown

"In repentance and rest is your salvation (deliverance), in quietness and trust is your strength." -- Isaiah 30:15

"In God’s wilderness lies the hope of the world – the great fresh, unblighted, unredemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and the wounds heal are we are aware." -- John Muir

"Faith is the bird that senses the light and sings while dawn is still dark." -- Rabindranath Tagore

"To know something about trees—aabout even one tree—is to know something profound about the nature of the world and our place in it." -- Gerald Jenss

"I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out that there isn’t, than live my life as if there isn’t and die to find out there is." -- Albert Camus

"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher "standard of living" is worth its cost in things natural, wild and free. For us the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech." -- Aldo Leopold (1886-1948)

"It is clear that there is one main message creation has to communicate to human beings, namely, the glory of God. Not primarily the glory of creation, but the glory of God. The glory of creation and the glory of God are as different as the love poem and the love, the painting and the landscape, the ring and the marriage. It would be a great folly and a great tragedy if a man loved his wedding band more than he loved his bride." -- John Piper

"We will do better in all aspects of life if we learn to "let go" of all we hold so tightly to and realize that control is a myth and striving for it is insanity." -- Donna L. Watkins

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