

WOODS 'N WATER™

APRIL 2023
45TH YEAR 9TH ISSUE
\$3⁹⁹

**Spring
Fishing
Edition**

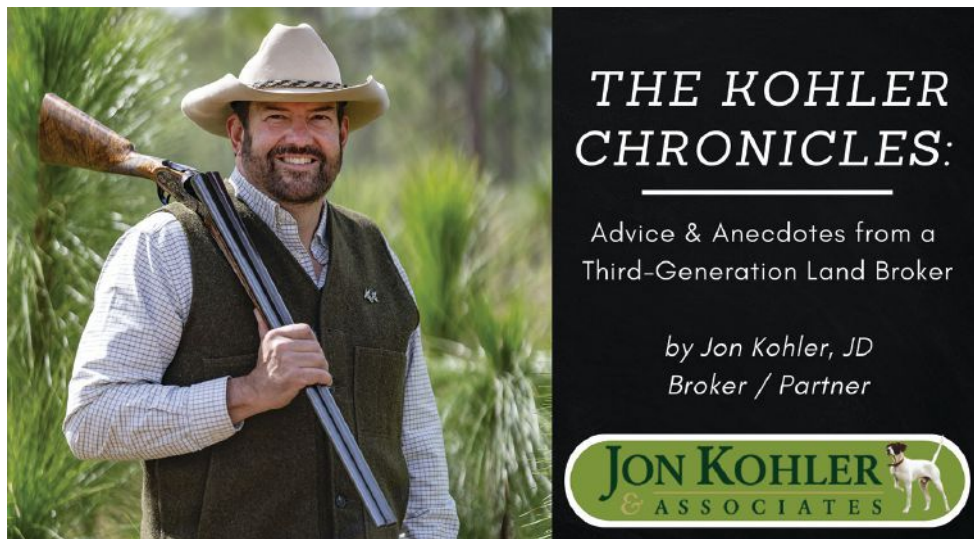
**Last Minute
Longbeards**

**Fishing
Reports**

**FWC Ready
to Talk Bear?**

**Real Estate
Listings**





A picture worth more than a thousand words

by Scott Sumner

There's one old picture I hold especially dear. It's a family favorite. A framed copy hung for years in the sitting room of my grandma's house. I can't be more than a couple of years old. My hands and knees plow the fine, loamy ground. My hair is sandy blonde, and blue overalls encapsulate my body.

It would've been probably October, evidenced by the turned peanuts nodding towards the sky, vines molt brown. They fill most of the frame. Off in the distance, a John Deere 4440 pulls a Hustler combine, and green trees are lost behind a sweeping cloud of dust. Must have been extra dry.

The most significant part of this picture, however, can't be understood by mere observation. My father is driving that tractor, you see. My Dad. My toddler mind knew exactly where Daddy was. I was determined to be with him.

With the click of a frame, a moment in time is captured. Time marches on. That moment in time represents the never-ending love a son has for his father, the land and the precious memories

planted in the ground.

I remember riding with Mom into fields on scorching days. We'd deliver cold cokes and sandwiches to Dad, his shirts saturated with sweat and on the verge of resembling a Pollock painting, stained by the dirt and grease he'd absorbed.

Another memory involves an orphaned calf Dad rescued and nurtured. Useless and small as I was, Dad allowed me to "assist," holding a bottle of milk to the calf's mouth as it desperately drew the sustenance which flowed from its nipple. More than anything, I remember simply "riding the land." While Dad drove his truck, the passenger's side dashboard would become my drum kit as "Golden Oldies" from Cruisin' 94 escaped the speakers. If we were so fortunate for "Peggy Sue" to play, Dad would never fail to offer up his best Buddy Holly impression.

Farming is, or should be, a way of life. As a calling and vocation, it is completely set apart in that one works with divinely created land, land that has been here for millennia and will remain



once we've met our maker. Farming is a partnership with God in the purest sense. No matter the science or technological advancement, in the final analysis, the farmer remains utterly dependent on forces outside himself.

The farmer handles his responsibilities, he prays and he waits. The process repeats. Farmers joke about never being satisfied. You'll never meet a satisfied farmer, they say. It's too hot or too cold. It's too dry or too wet. But the humble farmer knows who to call on and thank every step of the way.

Farmers are, by and large, some of the most faithful people on this planet. The best ones are wise and humble enough to understand the unique opportunity they are afforded and continue to grow as practitioners, while acknowledging the sovereignty God has over His creation.

Most of my farm labor growing up consisted of being a hand in summer watermelon fields north of town. I revere agriculture, but I have never farmed alongside my Dad. Sometimes this saddens me, but it is a selfish sadness, longing for the deeper respect gained between only those who experience such. Generations of Sumner men farmed and still do. My grandfather farmed with my great-grandfather. Dad farmed because it's all he ever wanted to do, and he sought to continue the legacy of his next of kin.

Baseball was the love of my youth. When I should have been paying attention in class, I often daydreamed of the day I'd hit a walk-off grand slam to win

the World Series. Overlooking a portion of the family farm stood a batting cage where Dad devotedly threw pitch after pitch, honing my skill for as long as my will demanded. If there is something that comes close to surpassing my Dad's love for farming, it is baseball.

Perhaps it surpasses his love for farming at this present juncture. I played college ball and clung to the game, but to this day Dad's grasp upon it is much tighter than mine.

As Jon Kohler often says, there is much to be gleaned from a backstory. Dad's sacrifice has been my family's reward, and for that I am forever grateful.

When tobacco went out of favor in the early 2000s, Dad had a decision to make. His rule of thumb back then was to pay off the operating expenses of the entire farm with tobacco income. Money "to live on" came from the income of other cash crops such as peanuts, soybeans and wheat. This was the objective, with each and every natural and man-made risk considered and prayed over.

With his main cash crop under fire and a buyout imminent, economics were at play. He determined by leasing his land, combined with earnings from the buyout, he would likely make at least the equivalent of what he would by continuing to farm. But his decision went far beyond economics.

At the time, my paternal grandparents were rapidly declining in health. This weighed heavily on Dad's mind, and his responsibility and duty to them was to be admired. Furthermore, my par-

(Continued on next page)

Now BOOKING FOR 2023-24 SEASON

www.WhiteOakCreekLodge.com



Dec. 2023
SPECIAL!
3-Days - \$1200

FIRST check out our website,
then call Mack Paulk, 334-701-8820

GOODMAN'S
BAR-B-Q

Ribs • Chicken
Beef • Pork
Barbecue Beans



Only the finest
quality meats
slow cooked over
an open pit.

Call Ahead for
Carry-Out
Drive-In Window

U.S. 19 S. • Perry, FL • 850-584-3751

A Southern boy's roots run deeper than an old oak tree

(Continued from previous page)

ents had been married 16 years before my birth. They were older parents relative to my age and had the self-awareness to understand the implications.

With the arrival of my teenage years, it was of the utmost importance to Dad to be more present and involved in my life. I showed great promise as a young athlete, especially on the baseball diamond, and his love for me as a father was exemplified by his sacrifice. Numerous unforgettable memories were created in the years to follow, with quite a few involving ball and bat. Dad is part of the majority of these memories. For his consistent presence, I am ever grateful.

I have visited much of our United States and traveled to parts of the world. After college, I lived in Nashville and Louisville. You can take a boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy. There's truth in that saying. Southerners love home. This is true of many people, yes, but place holds a much higher role in the Southern tradition. In part, place has defined the South. There is reverence for one's ancestors.

As a Southerner with roots as deep as a white oak, there's nowhere else I'd rather be on God's green earth than

Southwest Georgia. Specifically on family land. This land has always been my "place to come to." It at once brings solitude and joy. It grants me independence and sufficiency I could never find in city living. I can derive livelihood from it if need be. It develops patience within me when waiting for the harvest or a good bite.

In fact, I share it with the deer and turkey, among the multitudes of God's creatures. It makes a home for them and will continue to once I am gone. It teaches me of self-sacrifice and reminds me of the importance of community. It soothes my soul, and I long to leave it better than I found it.

For all these reasons, I seek to be a steward of the land. It is my goal to properly manage our land for years and years to come. I have a long way to go and much to learn, but I am thankful to those who have already graciously shared with me wisdom that comes only through first-hand experience.

There are numerous organizations doing fine work to protect and conserve our lands and way of life, and we have more tools and resources at our disposal than ever before. More resources mean fewer excuses.

I have never taken for granted the

land I hunted and fished in my youth. The same land I so often "ride" with Dad to this day. I just didn't fully realize what I had. All I have to do is examine the state of land ownership to recognize how blessed I am to have land of my own. I relish the responsibility and duty I have before me to manage and nurture this land. In doing so, I am honoring my ancestors, my family and, most importantly, my Lord.

I seek to maintain an intense devotion to my God, my family and my land. Remember and honor God above all else. Do not confuse the Creator with His creation. While we have a responsibility to care for every resource God has provided, the earth we inhabit is not a permanent planet. It is not eternal like the Creator. Understanding this is important to holding in balance our freedom to use the land for our benefit and our responsibility to maintain it.

Rediscover the outdoors. Hunt, fish and garden. Farm if you're able. Take time to enjoy God's beauty. Enjoy the forests and the waters. Thank the Lord constantly for the comforts they provide us.

I am fortunate to be in a unique position to help others conserve their lands and offer my knowledge and ad-

vice. Thank you Lord, for each and every "place to come to." Especially mine.

Sometimes a picture is worth more than a thousand words.



About Scott Sumner: As a Sylvester, Georgia native, Scott not only grew up on his family's farm in Worth County, but he also has a strong personal connection to land and is passionate about the stewardship and conservation of our natural resources. Farming and the outdoors are essential parts of his life. From working the land hands on, to guiding quail hunts in the Albany Area Plantation Belt, Scott brings a wealth of expertise to the Jon Kohler & Associates team. Scott can be reached at Scott@JonKohler.com.

NEW RELEASES

by Taylor County's own Monroe Morgan



Now playing on



Also available on many music store apps.

Available on



Watch and Subscribe



THE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE SOUTH!

21st Annual Florida State Bluegrass Festival

Mar 31- Apr 1 & CHILI COOK-OFF!!

Forest Capital State Park
Highway 19 South - Perry, FL



Appalachian Road Show



The Tim Shelton Syndicate



Rekindled Grass



Kenny Stinson



David Adkins



Rhonda Vincent

Rhonda Vincent, Appalachian Roadshow, The Tim Shelton Syndicate, Kenny Stinson and Perfect Tymn, Re-Kindled Grass, David Adkins, Remedy Tree, Dismal Creek, Grandpa's Cough Medicine, Belle & the Band, Tracy Starling and Company and more!

More to come...

Two Day Pass: \$40.00 in advance ONLINE or \$45.00 at the gate. (Friday \$20.00 or Saturday \$30.00) Crafts, Food Vendors, Chili Cook-off, Moon Pies, Kid's Fun Zone & More!

Campers: Movie Night Wednesday!
BINGO & Potluck THURSDAY NIGHT!

Event is RAIN OR SHINE
No Alcohol Allowed on premises

850-584-5366

FloridaStateBluegrass.com

