**WILD TURKEY FOR CHRISTMAS**

*Contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock of him;*

*How he jets under his advanced plumes.*

William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

Back in 1973, shortly after joining the faculty at the University of Georgia, I chanced upon a story in a magazine about wild turkeys in Georgia. It gave instructions and information on how to get a hunting license, what kind of gun and ammunition to use, and even the best geographical locations in which to hunt. I became intrigued and eager to explore a new adventure. Imagine, wild turkey on Christmas!

I rushed to Franklin’s Gun Shop, then located on Hawthorne Avenue, Athens, Georgia, to secure the hardware, a word which now has a different meaning. Software, then, was a fairly soft orange hunting suit. I had not shot a rifle since I was a teenager knocking tin cans off fence posts on our Indiana farm. I used to be fairly good.

The next day, and without practice, I went to a remote, recommended location in Oglethorpe County, not the ones listed in the magazine, but the one the gun clerk had whispered to me.

Amazingly, within 30 minutes, I had shot a wild turkey dead in the head, which is much smaller than a tin can. I guess once you have learned to swim or ride a bike you can always swim or ride a bike but not necessarily vice versa. I took the prized bird home, defeathered it, eviscerated it, and cooled it overnight in the refrigerator.

The next day—Christmas—I cooked it: fried wild turkey. How great it was!

As I was divorced and living alone this Christmas (1973), I began to reflect and contemplate on my future hunting capabilities and, indeed, prospects. Perhaps I could write a book on wild turkey hunting or at least write a syndicated column for national newspapers. I had more and more wild turkey. Perhaps I would even write for the *New York Times*.

No, actually I would go into big game hunting, you know, like Ernest Hemingway, that great hunter, and become the next great American novelist, shoot buffalos on Ted Turner’s ranches, even shoot race horses, and mad cows—possibly bad dogs. This wild turkey is so good.

I would go on high-paying lecture circuits, be nationally and globally interviewed for my hunting expertise on what would later become CNN and Larry King Live, and even take President and Mrs. Nixon--for Christmas dinner—a wild turkey I had personally shot. (I remind you that this is 1973.) A private and presidentially conducted tour of the White House would certainly be an improvement over the tourist tour I took in 1963 as a mere graduate student, when I was too young to appreciate our great national heritage, a heritage that Ben Franklin—after whom our Arts and Sciences College at the University of Georgia was named—wanted the wild turkey to be named as the national bird. Unfortunately, as I now realized, it should not have been the eagle but the tasty wild turkey.

What the heck, I might find that President Nixon would encourage me to run for president of these United States one day. My goodness, this fried wild turkey is so satisfying. I really think I could be president of the United States.

But question number one is: who will be my vice president? Clearly, none of my faculty colleagues, as much as I admire them, are qualified, nor are any of the staff, and clearly none of our students!

Question number two, at what point in this story did you realize that instead of eating fried wild turkey from Oglethorpe County, I became fried on liquid Wild Turkey from bourbon county, Kentucky?

Merry Christmas and a Happy new Year to all!