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RANCH & RURAL LIVING

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SEPTEMBER 2013

**Photo Contest
Winners**

PAGE 8

PUBLISHED IN SAN ANGELO, TEXAS, SINCE 1920

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water

What's Best for Texas?

Electronics Whiz Kids Who Are Houseplants, or Computer-Savvy Kids Who Know and Love Nature?

OK, LET'S HEAR IT: What in the world is that crazy water guy writing about this month?! Kids and the outdoors and computers? What in the heck has that got to do with our water?

Well, I think it has *a lot* to do with the present condition and future conditions of our water resources in Texas and across the good old U.S.A—or world. As a former science and ag teacher, parent and Extension educator, I have been actively involved for 50 years in trying to bring up my kids and others to know nature, wildlife, livestock, gardens, and pets first hand and to experience camping trips to wild places.

Outdoors education is great, but not just via Saturday morning TV nature shows, in beautiful nature books, those great PBS nature series or computer videos on wildlife or ranching life. That is all really nice and I guess much better than nothing for kids raised in the inner cities with no way to get outdoors. But, there is no substitute for the real thing—the Texas outdoors!

There is a pretty strong movement going on now to bring agriculture, wildlife and the outdoors to city kids. Heck, I have done many Extension sessions with schools across West Texas whose students were often not much more knowledgeable than kids in Dallas. Now that is sad. They live in towns where nature and agriculture are just a stone's throw away, and many of their neighbors—relatives too, probably—are making a living ranching or farming. No excuse for that! “We,” as parents, relatives or teachers, should be doing a better job “naturalizing” our kids than that!

Milk does not come from Safeway. Meat does not come from H-E-B.

You know what I mean, about the innocent ignorance of many of our kids. It is really sad. I had a cute little 7-year-old girl over to my place a couple of years ago visiting from Chicago. She wanted to see my chickens and get some eggs from the real “egg factory.” She was scared to death of the chickens, would not feed them or go in the hen house with me to gather eggs. She cried and cried—poor little gal. She and millions others—many are grown now—missed a major part of their education on life and nature.

A “mature” friend here originally from rural Kansas, not New York City, went to the San Antonio Rodeo recently for a first in her life! And, she has lived in small towns from Indiana to Texas. Rodeos and stock shows can be an introduction to agriculture and where our food and fiber products come from.



Kids learn about nature while doing as they plant a spring garden. Photo by Margaret Brizendine of Florence, Texas, was an entry in the 2012 Ranch & Rural Living Photo Contest.

It takes adequate water resources to produce all of those agricultural products we take for granted and need so badly—not counting the huge amounts of ag products Texas ships overseas to help feed and clothe the world.

Without a basic knowledge of the outdoors, science and agriculture, will our future Texas voters know enough to make intelligent decisions on representatives or laws regarding water? Will they understand the real issues in building new dams, pipelines or bridges on our state's farms, ranches and waterways? Will they know what a water catchment, or watershed, is and its importance to the purity of our water, and in some places the amount of aquifer recharge or of soil penetration of rainwater needed to grow forage for livestock?

Are they getting enough basic sciences and then taking science outdoors to know the applications that are crucial to our world? We not only had better hope so—we'd better get

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off our duffs and be sure, starting with our kids and grandkids. They will not only be smarter voters, but happier kids and adults—able to transfer those feelings and that information to future Texans in their lives.

It is wonderful and amazing to me to watch toddlers and elementary school kids operate fancy cell phones or computers. The older high school and college students can run circles around me on electronics. That is a great ability that they are going to need in their careers and lives; we are in an electronic

age for sure. But, without a good grounding in nature and the outdoors, will new biology, agriculture or engineering graduates truly relate to projects they are exposed to or developing? If they miss that outdoors connection as small kids I think it will be very tough for them to do so.

Take the kids to the pond or creek in the back pasture or to a state park and teach them how to fish and to understand some of the biology and ecology of our rivers and lakes. Teach kids which fish are bait or for-

age fish and which ones are food or predator fish. Teach them why fish like certain areas and how to use the right bait. If they tire of fishing—typically with no fish in 15 minutes—show them how to catch crawdads or minnows along the shore. That will be just as much fun for them and another great memory.

To me, having that lifelong connection to the outdoors and animals brought daily proof of God's love of us in giving us all the wonderful living and natural things in our world. How can you not know there is a God, watching a ewe give birth to a new lamb, or a new foal nursing or an egg hatching into a fluffy baby chick or turkey.

Watching a sunrise in a deer blind with your dad and enjoying the nosy squirrel checking you out is a lifelong memory. As is the thrill of watching a well driller go deep into a pasture and yell out as good, pure water flows, providing water for livestock and wildlife, or maybe to irrigate a crop.

Kids will learn a lot seeing their folks hold hands and look to the sky praying and thanking our Maker for that precious water. These and other outdoor and ranching experiences are special communions with the Lord that town folks never get to experience, as a rule, and that is a shame. Make a pledge to change that when you can!

KIDS BELONG OUTDOORS! ♦



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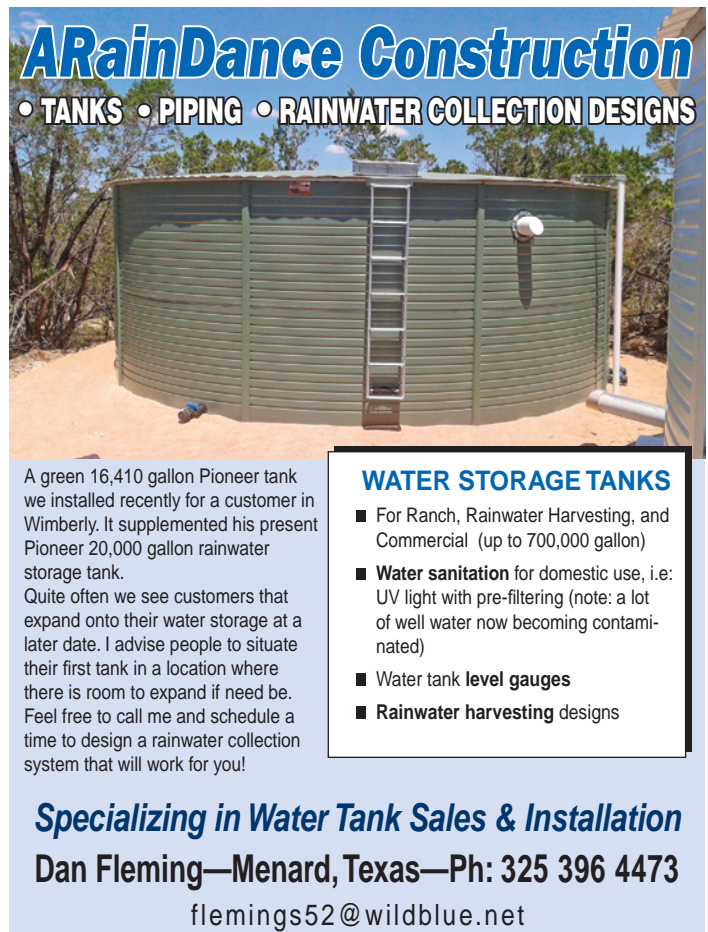
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