

Growling and shaking our heads in disbelief



Highland Views

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Guest columnist

Frederick Douglass had his “growlery,” a rustic cabin behind his “Cedar Hill” home in Washington, D.C. It was his private retreat from a stressful, demanding life. Frederick Law Olmsted once wrote that, “growling is sometimes a duty.” A good growl provides an opportunity to express displeasure or disbelief in a way that sounds almost humorous. Growling is not only a duty, it’s a natural, primitive grumbling.

My wife Carol and I have a non-verbal way of expressing displeasure. All we need to do is shake our heads and make a kind of “Mmm, mmm, mmm” sound,

and the message is clear: leave it be; leave me be; I can’t believe that — those kinds of things. A simple roll of the eyes accompanied by a low “Mmm, mmm, mmm” is enough. Point made.

Driving to my mother-in-law’s apartment a speeding truck ignored a stop sign and flew across the road in front of me. Driving a tad bit faster I would have been hit. Laying on the horn was pointless. The guy raced on as I proceeded forward, shaking my head in disbelief, thinking, “I can’t believe that.”

We were walking on a snowy road in the Smokies when we came to a group of couples and their dogs blocking the way. They were nice enough, though they didn’t make much effort to move or keep their dogs from sniffing our legs and pawing at our pants. We walked on, shaking our heads, growling.

Mmm, mmm, mmm.

I read of a public school in Louisiana where every morning students hear announcements over the loudspeaker and then are expected to rise for both the Lord’s Prayer and the Pledge. Townsfolk explained that they consider it a “Christian town”— considered normal and expected to show your faith everywhere, including schools. A Christian woman is suing on behalf of her daughter who is ridiculed and bullied for not participating. I read the piece, shaking my head in disbelief.

You may have read about some ranchers out West who are angry they have to follow rules to use public lands to graze their cattle. I shook my head in disbelief, thinking, “What part of ‘public’ do they not understand?”

When we just can’t believe what someone is saying or doing in the name of their own beliefs, our heads begin to

shake and a low grumbling growl may naturally arise. We may feel like shaking the other person, trying to get some rational discussion going. Or, that may not be possible. Yet, who knows. Mmm ...

While I was writing the other day I heard a strange knocking sound at the window. Peering beyond my screen I was delighted to see a large turkey, pecking at the window. It seemed to want something off the floor, a dead bug perhaps. I shook my head in disbelief, and happy to see such a healthy critter visiting our home.

Disbelief doesn’t always mean disagreement or disgust. We may simply not “believe” what we’re seeing because it’s so wonderful, beautiful or just plain cool. As a secular person, “believing” is not a word I use anymore. I don’t “be-

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