

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

Columnist Recalls a Year of Writing

Tomorrow, October 23, marks the one-year anniversary of this column. I told you in that first column that I expected to write “about once a month on subjects that hopefully have some relevance and interest to you.”

This is my 17th “Loose in the Foothills” article, so I got a little ahead of the planned rate. The reason for that was the five-part series on “The History of the Catalina Foothills and the Tanque Verde Valley,” that ran on consecutive Thursdays back in April and May.

As to the “relevance and interest” part, let me briefly revisit those columns and share some of your responses – both comments from the postings on the *Star*’s website and comments you sent to me via e-mail.

Following my introductory column last October, in November I wrote (light-hearted fantasy) about inviting a bunch of different animals to the family Thanksgiving dinner table – animals Pat and I had encountered in the previous year, like a pool-savy gila monster, a roving bobcat, window-crashing doves, a road-walking buck, endlessly circling hawks, a house-invading cactus wren, a scrawny coyote, and a stinging scorpion. Readers (some from my own neighborhood) related their own scorpion stories and suggested that I might have included other animals like javalinas and rattlesnakes.

In December I told you about my Christmas wish list: finishing Foothills road improvements - including roadside landscaping; building a bridge on East Snyder road between North Kolb Road and North Sabino Canyon Road; and keeping Sabino Canyon open all year in the face of rain and flood damage, Buffel grass, and mountain lions. Several readers agreed that they too didn’t like the “Slow Down - My Mommy Works Here” roadwork signs. One of you took me to task for my slam against the faux landscaping, metal century plant on East Sunrise Drive that the reader insisted was a fine art sculpture.

January’s column told of Pat’s and my trip to Pasadena to view the Rose Bowl parade. Several of you e-mailed to inquire about the company we used (City Escapes) to arrange the trip. Others agreed that such a unique outing was on their bucket list also. I heard from a local mother, whose daughter attends Cal Poly, who had missed the TV coverage of the Cal Poly float that won the “Viewer’s Choice” award, and who appreciated the coverage in the *Foothills Star*. Most pleasing of all, I received a very nice e-mail from Cal Poly’s liaison to the Pasadena Tournament of Roses Association who greatly appreciated the article and invited Pat and me back to a future parade as special Cal Poly guests.

I hiccupped on January 25th when I noticed a letter to the editor in the *Arizona Daily Star* from someone who suggested that the Foothills section be eliminated, with serious news-worthy items integrated into other parts of the paper. Was it something I said?

Maybe so, because in February, I really stepped into it with a column (tongue in cheek I thought) about the need for a cross-town freeway in the Foothills. Boy did I hit a nerve; I was barraged with emotional comments to the online edition of the article. The nicest of these comments involved my moving somewhere else if I wanted better access to the freeway. This is the column where I learned that there are many readers who view the newspaper online right after it's posted in the middle of the night and aren't shy at all about commenting about the articles or debating other commentators.

I chose a non-controversial subject in March - attending a knitting retreat with Pat in Mexico's artistic community, San Miguel de Allende. I received several queries about the city from readers planning trips there. Kudos about the article from Pat's knitting friends helped allay some of the tirades from the previous month's "freeway" article.

I changed pace dramatically in April and May with the five articles on the History of the Catalina Foothills and the Tanque Verde Valley. I was greatly gratified at the positive response; many of you e-mailed or commented online about your interest and "really looking forward to the next article in the series." Others contributed insights, additional history items, or shared personal anecdotes to amplify some of the events I talked about. Several of you pointed me to additional sources for an expanded history. The series even sparked a couple of requests for me to present history programs to local groups.

Note: Originally intending the history series to be a single long article, I recently integrated the five parts – adding new information derived from your comments – into a 20-page paper. Pima County's Main Library (Arizona Collection), Dusenbery-River Branch Library, and Kirk-Bear Canyon Branch Library have copies. The paper is also viewable on my website and all five parts of the newspaper series are still posted at <http://www.azstarnet.com/special/foothillshistory>.

In June I wrote about taking the Diamond Express bus trip from Foothills Mall to Phoenix to attend a Diamondbacks baseball game. Several readers agreed that the trip is a very enjoyable bargain.

I squeezed two columns into the month of July – one on viewing the 4th of July fireworks and another on summer dining deals around the Foothills. Many readers were intrigued with my description of Pat's and my fireworks watching place and the use of the acronym FWP. I also received several comments on Pat's wonderful photo that accompanied the article.

The *Foothills Star* made a colorful food spread out of the article on summer dining deals. Since that article, Pat and I have discovered even more meal deals, some the restaurants don't even advertise – so be sure to ask. Unfortunately restaurants continue to close (like the Ventana Room at Loews Ventana Canyon Resort) in this difficult economic environment.

The August column on wine was fun to write and Pat and I certainly enjoyed the extensive research required. We helped Yvonne Foucher at CataVinos, our favorite neighborhood wine shop, celebrate her two-year anniversary along with more than 400 others at a rocking party on September 5th.

Last month I talked about the other monthly column I write, “Gym Rat Rantings” for the FitCenter newsletter. One of you middle-of-the-night online readers offered the opinion that this “cheesy writing” would not win the *Star* a Pulitzer any time soon. My friends at the gym liked the article though – even the ladies whose buddies e-mailed them that they recognized their backsides in the large photo.

I even received my first telephone call from a fan, a retired Foothills physician, who complimented my “sensitivity and humor.” I’ll tell you, writing for fun doesn’t get any better than this!

So that’s a year’s worth of columns (and photos did you notice?). Let me know if there are any subjects you’d like me to cover in the future.



Columnist Bob Ring picks up extra copies of the Foothills Star from racks at area libraries and selected businesses. (Photo courtesy of Pat Wood)