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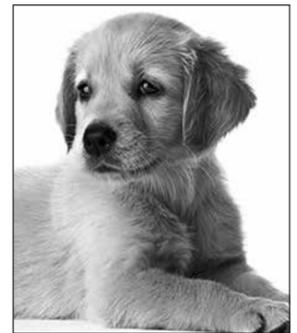
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Elections Matter: The Story of Two Chatham Referenda

by Randy Voller

On November 8th Americans learned once again that elections matter.

We spend months (and sometimes years!) listening to candidates, political parties, and special interest groups sharing their visions for our country and community, yet voters rarely take the time to place elections in context and evaluate their effects.

One reason we don't look back is the difficulty in making clear, coherent, and unambiguous conclusions when the political dialogue and the business of governing occupies many shades of grey. Fortunately, when an election involves a straightforward "yes" or "no" referendum, the results are easier to define and discern as time passes.

In Chatham County we've had two such referenda in the past 10 years. One had a significantly negative economic impact on Chatham County and while the other had a very positive impact.

The positive result was the campaign to make Liquor by the Drink available across Chatham County. This referendum was placed on the ballot in May of 2009 and passed countywide by a nearly two to one margin.

The leaders of the campaign worked with the Town of Pittsboro, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners, the Chatham County Economic Development Corporation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chatham County Democratic Party*, and a bevy of citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders to ensure that a positive and compelling message was provided to the voters through the political action committee known as Positive Revenue Options (PRO).

The opponents to the referendum engaged in a timeworn campaign of fear and loathing to scare voters into believing that a vote for Liquor by the Drink would lead to chaos on our streets, blood on county's roads, moral decay in our communities and the metaphorical end to motherhood, apple pie and the American way.

Luckily for Chatham County, common sense won and fear lost at the polls.

Since the referendum's passage in 2009, Chatham has experienced an increase of new restaurants and gathering spots such as Oakleaf, the City Tap, and the Bean and Barrel. These businesses have offered new jobs and opportunities—and since they purchase their liquor from the ABC stores—a better quality and well-funded ABC system.

Our Alcoholic Beverage Commission (ABC) store system can then distribute more funds to assist our municipalities and county to help fund law enforcement, public safety, and the general fund.

The victory of the P.R.O. Liquor by the Drink forces in Chatham County not only provided an extra revenue stream for public safety and government operations in our towns and county, but directly or indirectly enhanced the general quality of life in our County and encouraged business investment and development.

In fact, the happiest Town Board meetings in Pittsboro occur when the local ABC Board Chairman, Jim Nass, arrives to give another

glowing report from the store's success and hands the Mayor a substantial check representing the Town's share of the store's profits.

The positive outcome from the Liquor by the Drink referendum stands in stark contrast to the outcome from the Land Transfer Tax (LTT) battle in the Fall of 2007. The victors of this campaign won their effort by a two to one margin as well, but the citizens and taxpayers of Chatham County should wonder in retrospect whether this was really a "victory" at all.

For those who were not here or have forgotten the debate, the LTT would let county government collect additional revenues when land was transferred and recorded at the county's Register of Deeds.

Longtime county Commissioner, Mike Cross, and former county Commissioner Pat Barnes favored the idea with Commissioner Cross penning an op ed piece in 2005 that made this point:

"...It is beyond my comprehension that any

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Finding my Sister

by Judy Harrelson

I am adopted. I was born in Stratford upon Avon, England and at six weeks old became Judy Sharman to wonderful parents. My mother came from New Jersey, and my Dad was English. He came to the United States in the 1950s; met my mother; and together they moved to England, where they spent the rest of their lives. Having an American mother allowed me the opportunity to come to the USA as a Resident Alien and to live and work here legally until I became an American Citizen in 2015.

When I was very young, Mum and Dad told me I was adopted. As soon as I could understand words, they explained some babies came from mothers' tummies and others were picked up at the hospital. I was the latter. Without my birth mother's selfless act of giving up a child for a better life, Mum, Dad and I wouldn't have had the blessed life we had together. I have much to be grateful for.

In July 2012, a couple of years before Mum died, she said, "I'd like to find your birth mother and thank her." And so Mum and I began our journey of discovery. In England, back in 1960 when I was born, all records of births, marriages and deaths were held by the church parishes. By the '70s, the days were gone of people growing up, living, working and dying in the same town parish, so records were transferred to local county councils.



From left: Lesley, her grandson Jake on her lap, her daughter Nicola (sitting), back row: Judy Harrelson and Julie (records office lady who connected them).

We began our search with the Children's Officer of the local Warwick County Council. She was so compelled by our story that she went above and beyond to help with the research. "You see," she said, "most adopted children search for their 'birth family' heritage because they are not

happy at home. Their parents rarely know they are looking." The Children's officer was so pleased to see a mother and daughter happily searching together, and especially for the purpose of thanking the birth mother.

Records were given to us — a big book, in fact, that included letters from Marjorie, my birth mother, who explained that she gave me up because, at age 34, she was divorced, living with her parents and had a 5-year-old daughter. Wait a minute! Did she say she had another daughter? I have a sister?

Marjorie had to make a decision. She couldn't financially meet the needs of a baby, and it was too much for her elderly parents to care for me while she was at work. She was also concerned that I would be ostracized for being born out of wedlock. Marjorie decided a two-parent family would be in my best interests. Reluctantly, apparently, she gave me up for adoption.

I was born Sherryn Jacques. Sherryn Sharman clearly wasn't considered an ideal name, so my parents renamed me Judith Mary Sharman.

We had approximate dates of marriage and birthday for Marjorie, but not much on locations. On my next trip to England, we'd have to find out more.

That Christmas, my husband, Mike, and I went to visit Mum.

On Friday 29 December, we met with the Warwick Records Office. A lovely lady, Julie, assisted us. We knew

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Corporate Greed Greatest Environmental Threat

by Joe Jacob

When I was in graduate school working on the population dynamics of commercially important shrimp, my major professor suggested that I should attend a public hearing on a proposal to change a saltwater marsh into land. He went on to say that I owed it to the society that gave me an opportunity to get a higher education to inform the public of what I had learned through my studies and my research. To me, the answer to what would happen to the commercial shrimp fishery was obvious. Saltwater marshes are nursery areas for shrimp and shrimp are aquatic animals that don't and cannot live on land.

The hearing was conducted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, they were required to get public input on a corporation's proposal to fill in the marsh so that it could then graze cattle. Myself, two

other graduate students and three professors testified at the hearing that filling in the saltwater marsh would destroy the shrimp and fishing industry in the local area. We presented evidence of our research. Turns out that local fishermen did not attend the hearing because the corporation was such a powerful influence in their community. They risked losing a renewable industry that had been a family tradition in their community for over 100 years. A few corporate representatives testified in favor of the proposed land development. The permit to change the saltwater marsh into land was denied based on the scientific evidence we provided.

End of story? Hardly. Turns out that one of the members of the corporation's board of directors attending the hearing was also a member of the university's board of directors and the chairman of the state senate appropriations committee. Within the week, all three professors from the university had been fired even though one of them had tenure. So much for

academic freedom.

So, why am I telling you this story and how does it relate to you? This one event illustrates the importance of checks and balances in our society. It illustrates the importance of environmental law and how it is meant to give voice to an informed citizenry. It illustrates how the greed of the powerful can be tempered by the willingness of a few to get involved. It illustrates that democracy only really works when people do more than just vote.

I have been thinking a lot about the results of the past national election. Like you, I have not liked the dysfunction I have seen in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. I have not liked the influence of big corporations buying their way into the democratic process. I have not liked the name calling that dominated the election. I understand that many

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