



I don't get hate mail.

That is to say, I don't get hate mail about what I write in Lowcountry Weekly. In my role as a county councilwoman, different story. But I'll save that for later.

In the past couple of years, however, I have received two I don't know what to call them. Complaints? Chidings? Critiques? However you want to categorize it, the letters were from people who were unhappy with something I wrote.

Specifically, they were unhappy because I had written disrespectfully about places that were precious to them. Even more specifically, those places were Palm Key and Allendale.

Keep in mind that these were not emails. Emails are a dime a dozen. The correspondence I received was in the form of true letters -- hand-written on pieces of paper (in beautiful handwriting, I might add) and placed into envelopes, thoughtfully and accurately addressed, with postage stamps purchased and precisely applied.

In other words, these readers felt strongly enough to invest time and creative energy and actual CASH to communicate their feelings to me.

It hurts when someone criticizes something we love deeply. I forget this sometimes because I came of age in a strange, snobbish, sharp-tongued social milieu. It was the type of heady intellectual environment in which, in everyday conversation, people use phrases like "social

milieu.”

It was called College.

In academia the name of the game is critical thinking. You score points by identifying other people’s weaknesses and attacking them. In that way it’s a lot like the military.

In addition you get bonus points for making fun of people, places and things that are considered appropriate targets for disdain. For example, the military.

See what I mean? The military is a popular target in certain sectors of academia. Sometimes it’s for good reason, other times it’s just because it’s a dependable conversational crutch.

Unless, heaven forbid, you should go up against someone who’s getting their PhD in Defense and Strategic Studies. Then you can kiss that crutch goodbye. And, depending on the degree of your anti-Defense offensiveness you may even find yourself needing actual crutches.

So what does this have to do with Palm Key and Allendale?

Good question.

I think the short answer is this: stories are never really about their title. Even in newspapers, those steadfast bastions of solid factuality, you can’t count on the headline to convey the essence of the story that follows. And when it comes to creative writing, there are pretty much no limits.

The story with Allendale in the title – Allendale or Bust! – was a whimsical piece about how Beaufort County’s emergency operations will get relocated in case of a disaster. We could have

staff and other support people located as far away as Allendale County, and to me that is amazing. I mean, it's several counties away. Most people in Beaufort have never even visited Allendale, much less considered making it a temporary home.

I poked fun at the fact that the workers who would be housed in Allendale would be the ones who are not quite as essential to our relief and recovery efforts. The A-team gets to hang out in counties that are a bit closer to Beaufort.

It's a pure accident of geography, and I didn't see it as anything more meaningful than that. But in retrospect I can see why one would get the impression, based on the story title, that I had written about a fun-filled trip to Allendale.

So Allendale, I owe you one. And I'm good for it. As I'm writing this, I'm sitting nearby, in a cottage on a farm in Blackville, I find I am in love with the South Carolina Backcountry.

Please don't take offense at the use of "Backcountry." It's used in the region's tourism commission literature, so I assume it's legit. And it sounds so cool – reminiscent of the Australian outback and all of its adventure and romance.

In fact there's an opportunity coming up for one blazing-hot amazing Allendale-centric activity: doing archaeological field work at the Topper Site. The artifacts at Topper date back 16,000 years, indicating that humans occupied this continent thousands of years earlier than scientists once thought.

Starting in May, the SC Institute for Anthropology and Archaeology is hosting five field expeditions. A six-day expedition experience costs \$466 – \$400 of which is tax deductible. The price includes free camping, lunches and dinners, and the honor of hanging out with sweaty archaeologists whose dirty fingers hold some pretty significant advanced degrees. And probably, on a regular basis, some pretty magnificent craft beers.

To sign up for the dig, visit www.allendale-expedition.net. And a just a quick heads-up – if you are the kind of person who A) likes to avoid ridicule, and B) thinks the earth is only 6,000 years

old, you might want to keep your mouth shut.

And, oh yes, back to Palm Key. It was in the title of this story, so I assume you expect more than just a passing reference to it.

The last story I wrote about Palm Key came in the wake of a meeting I attended there. It was a workshop with the SC Arts Commission Institute for Community Scholars, and it was AMAZING.

I love Palm Key, and was sorry that my snide little asides about my cottage decor (sage & beige) detracted from my message, which really should have been one of pure, unadulterated joy. Although I have to say, I still favor bright colors and wild patterns -- pretty much anything you would find on Key West hand print fabric. But I'd probably expect that from anyplace with "Key" in the name.

So Palm Key, I also owe you one. I'm looking forward to joining you for one of your evening events -- especially the one with dinner and a moonlight kayak tour. And I'm looking forward to eating your healthy and freshly prepared dishes.

And most of all I'm looking forward to visiting with your artist-in-residence, the venerable Vertamae Grosvenor. I'm learning a lot from her about all kinds of things: storytelling, southern cuisine, life's simple gifts.

And most of all how to be an irreverent, uppity woman -- who is also full of reverence and gratitude.

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