

War Eagle!

Football, a Way of Life in the South

By Lori Darlin

(First published in *A Wiregrass Welcome* – 1995)

© Copyright 2017. All rights reserved.

Fanatic.

A person marked or motivated by an extreme, unreasoning enthusiasm, as for a cause. A person who is ardently devoted to a particular subject or activity. Enthusiast, maniac, devotee, zealot.

Auburn fans.

I don't know if the folks down here in southern Alabama have realized it, but they are in the midst of a veritable maelstrom of fanaticism.

I must admit, I'm not originally from the Wiregrass area of southern Alabama, but I was never so surprised as when I first saw these Tiger fans in action. My first full-blown fanaticism sighting was on a beautiful Alabama Sunday morning. The unusual sighting occurred while I was touring around the local countryside with a friend. I figured that we would likely encounter a bit of church traffic after a late sermon. Boy, was that an understatement! It wasn't long before we chanced upon a whole congregation of parishioners heading home after an enlightening morning, but that wasn't what really caught our attention. It was the steady stream of orange and blue items protruding from almost every window and door of the automobiles in front of us. I had never seen such curious vehicular accents and it wasn't until we got closer to the vehicles, that I could make out the big AU's and tiger heads plastered on flags and windsocks. How peculiar. Almost every car and truck had one and many actually had two! We were amused but didn't really give it any more thought until the next weekend.



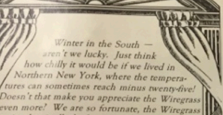



The following Saturday my friend and I were once again cruising the countryside and enjoying the beauty of southern Alabama. As a new resident to the area I was once again taking the opportunity to check out my surroundings. I turned on the radio but found only talk-shows. We finally settled on one station without paying a lot of attention. Before long, we heard a guy call up and instead of saying hi, hello, or giving any other traditional greeting, the caller hollered “War Eagle!” ... and then both hosts, in unison, shouted in reply, “War Eagle!”



My friend and I were dumbstruck. We looked at each other, both quite befuddled as to what THAT was. We listened in earnest, attempting to figure out what was afoot. The caller chatted awhile, then right before he was about to say goodbye, he abruptly called “War Eagle!” again and then he hung up.

Still puzzled, we listened further. Sure enough, the next caller dialed up, and once again, no hello or hi, just a loud “War Eagle!” Well I was buffaloes. I turned to my friend, and said, “What IS that? Why do the callers keep saying War Eagle? What kind of place is this?”

I had become convinced that this “War Eagle” thing was some sort of weird southern salutation, akin to a secret password that only TRUE Southerners used. I sat there in a state of confusion, determined to figure out what

determined to figure out what the true meaning of this vehement phrase was. After some of the initial confusion abated, I finally realized that I had tuned into some sort of football talk program. Well, that was good. I like football. A lot. But I've never heard anyone back home in Kansas answer the phone like that!

 <p><i>"Winter in the South — — oh yes! We lucky. Just think how chilly it would be if we lived in Northern New York, where the tempera- tures can sometimes reach minus twenty-five! Doesn't that make you appreciate the Wiregrass even more?" We are so fortunate, the best of Wiregrass region has it all: the best weather, the best food, and most of all the friendliest people in the world! So just sit back, relax, and enjoy the Southern hospitality at its Best!</i></p> <p>A Wiregrass Welcome to you!!</p> 	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Relax a While, Sit a Spell, Remember the Days, When All Was Well...</h2>  <p>Don't Miss Out On Another Issue of A Wiregrass Welcome!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Subscribe!</p> <p>116 S. Main, Suite 109 Historic Rawls Building</p> <p>Enterprise, AL 36331</p> 
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Your Toughest Real Estate Questions Answered For Free</p> <p><small>ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This publication contains copyrighted material from other sources. Reproduction without written permission is prohibited. THE REAL ESTATE BOARD OF ALABAMA is not responsible for errors or omissions in this publication. ADVERTISING INQUIRIES: Write to The Real Estate Board of Alabama, P.O. Box 1680, Montgomery, AL 36102. SUBSCRIPTIONS: Write to The Real Estate Board of Alabama, P.O. Box 1680, Montgomery, AL 36102. MAILING LIST: Write to The Real Estate Board of Alabama, P.O. Box 1680, Montgomery, AL 36102.</small></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Realty Company, Inc. Your Professional Team</p>  <p><small>The Real Estate Board of Alabama is a member of the National Association of Realtors®.</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Enterprise, AL 36330</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Table of Contents</h2> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Letters to the Editor 9 About the Cover ...Dix Crowley 10 Case Study ...Jim Welby 12 A Wiregrass Kitchen 13 Calendar of Events 16 Alabama's Most Unusual Festival 18 The Last Great Battle of the South ...Jim Dunn 21 A Friend Affair ...by Charlotte Penhoir Perry 24 Logging The Yellow Heart Pine ...E.W. Carwell 26 Memories ...Helen Taylor Andrews 30 Memories of the Wiregrass 32 A Wiregrass Spotlight - Stephen Malloff ...Jim Welby 34 The 115th Air Command Squadron ...Jim Welby 36 Wiregrass Salute 40 Kellie Foods of Alabama Jim Welby 49 Warlight! ...Lori D. 52 Jokes From The Past
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

[illegible]

Pretty soon my friend, (who had lived in the Wiregrass several years before and had just recently returned) hit upon the critical point of our mystery. “Ohhhhhhhhhhhh,” he said. “Yep! This is the Auburn Network. You know, Auburn University?”

“Ohhh. Yeah. Ok. What’s that got to do with it?” I queried.

“The Tigers. THE AUBURN TIGERS!”

Well, that only served to further my confusion. I mean after all, what does a tiger have to do with a eagle or war? They seemed like two totally different things to me.

The strangest part of the whole talk-show was the intensity of emotion of the callers hollering “War Eagle!” It was almost militant. I turned to my friend once again and straight faced, I said, “They sure are serious about this War Eagle business. I wonder if they raise their arm in a salute when they say that?” He thought a second and then laughed at the mental picture of millions of Auburn fans “saluting” while solemnly bellowing “War Eagle!”

I let the subject drop for the time, but it still perplexed me. Plus, I hadn't yet put the “War Eagle” together with the blue and orange flags and windsocks that I had witnessed the week before. I decided to ask someone to explain the exact meaning of this peculiar phrase. My curiosity had definitely got the best of me and I was determined it wouldn't be long before I started getting a few answers.

I began looking for potential Auburn-answer-candidates. My first opportunity happened at the gym. I was on a stationary bike, cycling along, and a fellow came up and hopped on the adjacent bike and began peddling. I noticed his Auburn sweatshirt.

Here's my chance.

What is A Wiregrass Welcome?

A Wiregrass Welcome was a local magazine, originally published quarterly in Enterprise Alabama in the 1990's. The readership quickly expanded past the tri-state region of Alabama, Georgia and Florida. Later, the magazine was printed on a monthly basis and renamed *Southern Discoveries*.

A Wiregrass Welcome was devoted to remembering “the best of the good old days, by featuring stories, photographs and illustrations of happy days gone by.”

The magazine hosted coverage of interesting events as well as a selection of articles, jokes, old recipes and tales often written in the vernacular. Some of the articles that were showcased had titles like *Logging the Yellow Heart Pine*, *Fire Ants Have a Practical Use*, or *The Arcane Art of Stump Burning*.

I worked on the staff of *A Wiregrass Welcome* from 1994 to 1996 and did much of the design and layout of the magazine, along with the contribution of occasional illustrations and short stories.

I got up my courage and casually asked, “You an Auburn fan?”

“Yeah,” he panted, “War Eagle!”

Oh great! He already used it on me! I can't ask him now!

Not wanting to seem rude, I returned a rather weak “Uh, War Eagle.”

Oh well. I wasn't going to let a little setback like that get in my way! I would simply find someone else and ask. Meanwhile, I kept catching myself wanting to say it. There was just something about those words. War Eagle! War Eagle!

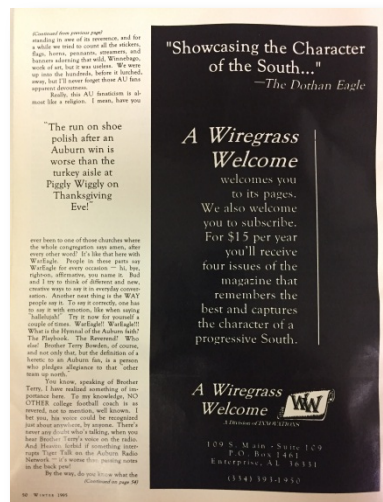
My next chance to discover the true meaning of War Eagle came when my friend and I dropped in at a local watering hole. Coincidentally, I was happy to find that the football team of my alma mater, the Kansas State Wildcats of the mighty Big Eight, was playing the Colorado Buffaloes on a television located at the end of the bar. A little later as I was rooting for the ‘Cats, the bicycle guy from the gym walked in. I figured I'd beat him to the punch this time, so I just blurted out “Sooooo, what's the meaning behind all this War Eagle enthusiasm?”

Visibly, excited, he said “MAN! It was like this: It all started when this guy, who was an Auburn student, brought his pet eagle to the first Auburn football game. (Don't ask me why!) Toward the end of the game, the eagle somehow broke loose and flew over the stadium. The eagle flew a perfect circle around the interior edge of the stadium and when the majestic bird got back to where it started, it dropped dead. Since Auburn won the game, the fans decided the eagle was a good omen and they kind of adopted it as a something of a mascot.”

What is Wiregrass?

Wiregrass (*Aristida stricta*) is a warm-season grass, native to North America, which dominates coastal plain ecosystems of the Southeastern United States. Wiregrass has a distinctive appearance and texture which looks similar to barbed wire, hence the name.

The prevalence of this native grass in Southeast Alabama, Southwest Georgia and the Florida Panhandle inspired locals to nickname the area “The Wiregrass” or “Wiregrass Country.”



I was quite impressed with this bit of folklore, but it wasn't long before I found out that there was more (or maybe less) to the story than the version I'd just heard. Since then, I've discovered quite a few alternative renditions of this oft told tale, and in fact, in these parts, it is almost up to urban legend status!

One of the more fanciful accounts asserts that a Confederate soldier had found an orphaned

baby eagle on a battlefield after one of the last skirmishes of the Civil War. He picked it up and cared for it, eventually making the eagle his pet. Years later, the same veteran attended Auburn University and took his eagle to an Auburn football game against an important rival, possibly Georgia. During the game, his eagle broke loose, flew around the stadium once and returned to his owner (but didn't die). Auburn won the game and their fans took up the chant of War Eagle.

Both narratives sounded pretty good, but whether they are fact or fancy, I couldn't say.

Many months later and with my first Auburn football season under my belt, I must admit I think I have picked an SEC favorite. Now, don't take me wrong here, I will remain forever loyal to my alma mater, but my partiality was decidedly slanted towards the blue and orange, at least during my sojourn in SEC territory. I can't precisely articulate how this came to be, but it's true – I'm a closeted Auburn fan. I am still in awe over the lengths tried and true AU fans will go to show their spirit. I really thought KSU Wildcat fans were going too far when, after many years of devastating losses, they started tearing down the goal posts after each win (any win – no matter how insignificant!). But the AU fanaticism is a little different. It seems to be all-encompassing. Auburn team spirit is even more prolific than kudzu, and in the South, that is a hard claim to stake. But, true it is. Everywhere I go, all I see is AU this, AU that. Big stickers, little stickers, blue stickers, orange stickers.

AU EVERYWHERE.

One time I was at the famous Mr. Henry's Amoco #8, out on Boll Weevil Circle, in Enterprise, AL. I was headed out the door, about to partake in my daily dose of Dr Pepper, when all of a sudden, there before me was the epitome of Auburn Tiger Spirit. It was a seventies model Winnebago literally covered in AU stickers. I wish I had a dime for every bit of Auburn paraphernalia that was somehow adhered to that rolling tribute to the Tigers. I had definitely never seen anything quite like it in my short 25 years. I immediately called to my friend to hurry and come see this Auburn homage. There we stood, transfixed and in awe of the reverence of these fans. We attempted to count the plethora of pennants, stickers, flags, horns, streamers and banners adorning that wild Winnebago work of art, but the task was useless. We were up into the hundreds before the AU wagon lurched away. But I'll never, ever forget those AU fans' apparent devoutness!

The collage consists of three distinct items:

- Top Left:** A newspaper clipping with the headline "War Eagle" and text about a baby eagle on a battlefield during the Civil War. The text mentions a veteran who attended Auburn University and took his eagle to a football game.
- Top Right:** A real estate advertisement for "First Ozark Realty, Inc." featuring the "COLDWELL BANKER" logo and the slogan "Expect The Best." It lists the address "821 East Andrews Ave. Ozark, AL 36360" and the contact information for Steve Reynolds, GRI, Owner / Broker, with phone number (334) 774-4818.
- Bottom:** An advertisement for "Kelley Foods of Alabama" featuring the company logo, a picture of a turkey, and the slogan "A Family Tradition For Serving The Very Best Meats". It lists the address "P.O. Box 409 Eba, AL 36323" and the phone number (334) 897-5761.

This AU fanaticism is almost like a religion in some ways. Ever been to one those churches where the whole congregation is really into the sermon and they tend to say “amen” a lot? It's something like that here with “War Eagle.” People in these parts say War Eagle for every occasion, hi, bye, right-on, affirmative ... you name it. Just for fun, I enjoy coming up with new and creative ways to incorporate “War Eagle” into everyday conversation. Another neat thing is the WAY Auburn fans say it. To say it correctly, one has to say it with emotion, like when saying “hallelujah!” Try it now for yourself a couple of times...

War Eagle!! WAR EAGLE!!!

The definition of a heretic to an Auburn fan is bound to be a person who pledges allegiance to that “other team up north.” What is the Hymnal of the Auburn faith? The Playbook. Who is the Reverend? Who else? Brother Terry Bowden, of course. No other college football coach is as revered or well known in the South. I would bet that his voice could be recognized just about anywhere, by anyone. There's never any doubt who's talking when Brother Terry's voice is echoing out over the radio waves. Heaven forbid if something interrupts Tiger Talk on the Auburn Radio Network – that's worse than passing notes in the back pew!

By the way, guess what the bestselling product in Alabama is during football season? White shoe polish. That's right. It is the solemn duty of every Auburn fan to stock up on a season's supply of white shoe polish, so as to have plenty on hand after every victory. The run on shoe polish after an Auburn or Alabama win is worse than the turkey aisle at Piggly Wiggly on Thanksgiving Eve! At least here in the Wiregrass, one never has to worry about forgetting an important football score – just check the back window of about any car or truck!

As a rather newer denizen to SEC territory, I must admit that I still don't really understand the whole existence of this War Eagle slogan. Here in Alabama there are more mottos, mascots and sayings for football teams, than there were slogans for Pepsi in the 1980's! Take that “other team

Why Write *War Eagle*?

War Eagle is based on a true story, as the reader has perhaps already surmised. This story was motivated by the extreme culture shock I encountered after moving from a small town in Kansas to Southeast Alabama. Imagine my surprise when I discovered the “Big Eight” was NOT a big deal! Things were very different, and I finally decided to write about a few of the dissimilarities from a football perspective.

I attempted to craft the story in such a way as to mesh with the other articles in the publication, as well as to appeal to the readership.

By today's standards, our world has changed immensely and my story is now a bit dated. The “Big Eight” is now the “Big 12” and the planet is a much smaller place with the prevalence of internet and satellite television.

But at the time, the story was a smash hit and I even received fan mail from readers who wrote to tell me how much they enjoyed reading about the perspective of bona fide foreigner!

up north” for example. They've got Crimson Tide, Roll Tide, elephants, toilet paper and likely more.

As new as I am to Alabama, I'm not sure if this trend is indigenous to southern living, or possibly to the entire Southeast Conference. But either way, there is one thing I have learned while residing here ... if it isn't in the SEC, then it just isn't. At first, I was a little disheartened to find that many of my Wiregrass compadres were apparently unacquainted with our friends in the Big Eight. But that's just the way it is. Face it ... In the South, SEC football is a way of life!

War Eagle!

© Copyright 2017. All rights reserved. Publishing requests may be sent to:
continuetheattack@gmail.com