



Accident! Driver fatigue was the cause of a three vehicle accident Saturday morning, May 13, south of Robert Lee on Highway 208. A 2022 Ford pickup was northbound and struck a Suburban causing it to spin off of the road. Debris from that then hit a second pickup. The first pickup continued off the roadway for 100 feet and went over the Butterfield Peak gate entrance and came to a rest 40 feet inside the ranch. The two occupants of the Suburban were transported by West Coke County EMS for minor injuries and observation. One occupant of the totaled Ford pickup was treated on the scene for a minor injury.



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he released the book “Seeing Silence: The Beauty of the World’s Most Quiet Places.” He discussed this project on the Mountain and Prairie podcast, with a sobering discussion of the proliferation of noise in our world. During the COVID—19 shutdown of 2020, the decline of human noise became palpable in the wild, and so did the positive impacts on wildlife. Outside of a global pandemic, it is almost impossible to free yourself of human sound. Don’t believe me? Sit inside your ostensibly “quiet” house and you hear the hum of electric appliances. Go outside, even in the “country” and see how long it takes to hear a passing automobile, a jet flying overhead, or clanking machinery in the distance. In wild places that enjoyed fifteen minutes of uninterrupted silence just a few years ago, it is very difficult to experience only five minutes of silence today. Our systems are so calibrated to the idea of “background noise”

that we almost feel compelled to turn on a television or play some music when we’re in the quiet at home or in the office. Amidst the clutter and noise, we yearn for something different. When did you ever hear someone aspire to be busier, have more clutter in life, or have more noise? We don’t. We long to get through those phases of life, telling ourselves that it will be worth it afterwards. We’re busy now to relax later. We suck it up and accept it because it is part of a “modern life” or whatever phrase you use. Must it be, though? Why do we have to enjoy life “later”? What if we are too tired to fully enjoy it later? What if it wasn’t worth it? What if later never comes? I am over the complexity, the clutter, and the noise. I am over sucking it up and dealing with it. My wife suggests that I have hoarder tendencies, so she might question whether I’m over the clutter, but in the aftermath of our housefire and unexpected

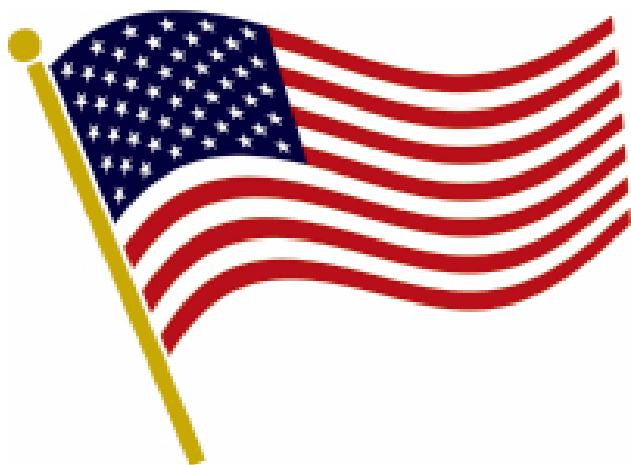
home renovation in 2022, we have worked to reduce the unnecessary “stuff” in our life. It is an ongoing project, probably a lifetime one, but the results have been very freeing. My idea of “counterculture” relates to a deep feeling that we as humans are not meant to live in the ways that we are conditioned to accept. The inertia of societal, economic, and technological forces have pushed us to a place that is not healthy, physically or mentally. In his book research, Pete McBride found that the proliferation of noise has tangible impacts on physical health. We need only look at the news to see that we are not mentally healthy. We need something different. We are in a man-made trap of complexity, clutter, and noise. We are not trapped. This is a choice. This might sound glum, but it’s not. I have discovered how much in life just really does not matter. We need the fundamental provisions of food,

water, shelter, and clothing. We need healthy connection with other humans. Beyond that? There’s a whole lot of life that is optional and negotiable, even if we’re conditioned to believe otherwise. There is no perfect, stress-free life, but we can absolutely pursue quiet and simplicity. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have weeds to hoe in the okra patch. *James Decker is the Mayor of Stamford, Texas and the creator of the West of 98 website and podcast. Contact James and subscribe to these essays at westof98.substack.com and subscribe to West of 98 wherever podcasts are found.*

Blackwell student inducted to Honor Society

Angelo State University’s chapter of the Alpha Chi national honor society recently inducted its spring 2023 class of 34 new student members, including Hannah Edwards of Blackwell during a special initiation ceremony. Alpha Chi is one of the nation’s most prestigious collegiate honor societies that is open to students majoring in all academic disciplines. To be eligible, students must rank in the top 10% of seniors or in the top 7.5% of juniors at their college or university. Edwards is majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies.

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