



### **Arkansas Birds: Funniest Home Video**

Junior Titmouse perches on the birdbath. After checking to make sure he's alone, Junior walks the rim, examining the water, first with one eye, then with the other. Completing the circuit, Junior extends an experimental talon to touch the water. Drawing back, he circles the birdbath a second time. Checking again to make sure no other birds are watching, Junior steps into the water, stays a moment, and then hops back to the edge. Another circuit. This time Junior walks boldly into the center of the birdbath. He takes a sip and throws his head back to swallow. Gaining confidence, Junior flips a tablespoon of water with one wing. Suddenly, Junior ducks his head and begins flinging water with joyous abandon. Turns out the rumors about a dip in the water were true!

### **Gabby and the Cat Nap**

Last time I told the story of my battle for the birds with Gabby. In case you wonder why a bird lover harbors a determined hunter, I want to introduce you to another side of Miss Gabs...

Yesterday I set myself up in the recliner with my laptop to write for an hour. After about ten minutes, Gabby sidled up to the chair and eyed the computer. I refused to acknowledge her presence and kept working. *Suzanne 1; Gabby 0.*

Negotiating the books on the floor, Gabby leapt onto the arm of the recliner and gave the laptop a baleful stare. I kept working. *Suzanne 2; Gabby 0.*

Undeterred by the lack of welcome, Gabby stepped onto the keyboard, adding a few nonsense syllables to my work. I gave in and moved the offending machine to the lamp table at my elbow. *Suzanne 2; Gabby 1.*

After a bit of kneading, Gabby found the best place in my lap and settled in for a bit of face-washing. Ignoring her, I twisted in the chair and went back to writing. *Suzanne 3; Gabby 2.*

Grooming complete, Gabby curled into a compact ball, tail over nose, and began to purr deep in her throat—not a sound, just a gentle vibration. I continued to write. *Suzanne 4; Gabby 3.*

When the vibration changed to an audible purr, I stole a glance at the soft gray bundle in my lap—the embodiment of peace. I looked at the screen and back at Gabby. *Suzanne 4; Gabby 4.*

With a little sigh, I saved my work, pushed the computer away, and leaned back in the recliner to join Gabby in a cat nap...

**For Sundays you can't make it to church**, watch the service at Duke Chapel (Duke University, Durham, NC): <https://chapel.duke.edu/dukestream-video-fallback>

## My Writing Life



It's been a busy writing year for me. I...

\*completed *Guardians of the Canyon*, a romantic suspense novel set in the Grand Canyon.

\*signed a contract with literary agent Jim Hart to represent my work to publishers. Jim has three of my books to pitch to editors: *The Copper Box* and *Guardians of the Canyon* (Romantic Suspense) and *Kokopelli's Song* (Young Adult Fantasy). It's been a great boost to my writing to have a professional believe we can sell my books!

\*attended the American Christian Fiction Writers Conference (ACFW)

\*launched a website at [www.suzannebratcher.com](http://www.suzannebratcher.com) with the help of professional website designer Linda Fulkerson. The process catapulted me out of the category of "hobby-writer" as I began wrestling with the basics of writing as a business.

\*began to engage social media through Twitter, Facebook/Professional, a weekly blog on my website, and a monthly newsletter to people who sign up to receive it.

The learning curve continues to be steep as I deal with computer issues only when necessary. (Read *when dragged kicking and screaming*.) I was anxious about the process until I realized I only had 7 people "following" me. Then I relaxed and let the mistakes happen. The theory is that *when* (not if) my books get published I'll have a web presence to welcome readers. I must admit I'm beginning to enjoy this new world. I hope you'll visit my website and see what you think.

## Fun with Words

Hattie was out walking two Chihuahuas when her neighbor Joann stopped to admire the new pups. "Meet Rolex and Timex," said the octogenarian. "They're litter mates, so I they needed matching names." Joann looked puzzled. "Those are unusual names for dogs." Hattie shook her head. "Oh, no. Remember the nice policeman who came to my house when it was broken into last week? He told me I should get a watch dog."

## Musical Discovery

Fernando Ortega is a song writer and singer who has been releasing albums since 1998. His music ranges from folk ballads to sacred music and includes solo piano and vocal as well as the occasional choral piece. I first discovered his music on Pandora and went on to buy his albums. For a good overview of his music, visit his website, [www.fernandoortega.com](http://www.fernandoortega.com) and watch the four-minute video that includes clips of a few of his songs.

## Reading Award [Over 90 division]

With no serious competition, my father Ed Bratcher won his division in the 2015 Amateur Reading Contest. At 91, he read two one-thousand-page books: a biography of John Adams and a biography of Charles Lindbergh. Other books Bratcher read included *River of Doubt* about Teddy Roosevelt's trip down the Amazon River as well as biographies of Thomas Jefferson and

Abraham Lincoln. When asked for the secret to his reading success, Ed said, “Don’t worry about housekeeping. Just sit down, open the book, and read. Take it one word at a time.”

### **Riveting Book Series**

While we’re on the topic of reading, my vote for the best fiction I read in 2015 goes to Dee Henderson’s O’Malley series: *The Negotiator*, *The Guardian*, *The Truth Seeker*, *The Protector*, *The Healer*, *The Rescuer*. Although the series was published 1999-2003, I only discovered it this year. Lots of suspense, intriguing characters, and themes worth thinking about.

### **An Opportunity for Giving—International Work by Someone I Know**

Because we don’t know the people behind the projects, it’s sometimes hard to decide which organizations to give to. I want to introduce you to a worldwide project being built by my longtime friend Dr. Michael Minch (Professor of Philosophy at Utah Valley University) build **Summit**: The Sustainable Mountain Development and Conflict Transformation Global Knowledge and Action Network. **Summit**’s mission is to empower people by connecting them with information, technology, collaborative partnerships, and resources.

The Haiti Project is an exciting prototype for future **Summit** projects. **Summit**. Dr. Steve Emerman (Earth Science) will map hydrological data using low-cost innovative practices to capture vital stream flow information and Dr. Eddy Cadet will test water samples across the country for mineral contamination. **Summit** brokers connections between community groups and scientists, so both projects receive input from—and engagement by—the communities.

Michael and his colleagues continue to pursue foundation grants, corporate grants, institutional partnerships, and individual donors. I hope you will consider giving to the *Summit Knowledge and Action Network*. Perhaps you can give \$15 or \$25 a month. To give, visit Summit’s website at <https://www.donate.supportuvu.org/summit>