

"The Critter Getter"

By Crystal Bartle Hasty

After a home cooked meal, Mr. Jerry Sawyer and his wife, Sallie Sawyer sat down to discuss his part-time business with me. Mr. Sawyer, better known as the "Critter-Getter" or Batman, explained to me what his business consisted of and how he conducted it. Jerry works out of his home located in Terra Ceia.

Mr. Sawyer was born in Washington, N.C., on July 9th, 1953. He grew up in Ponzer, most of his life. The family farm, however, was located in Terra Ceia. The farm was around 1800 acres. Working on the family farm with his father, Robert Sawyer and his siblings, transitioned into he and his brother (Ricky) farming their 700 acres of soybeans, wheat, and corn in Terra Ceia to this day. Mr. Sawyer managed the hog operations for the farm from 1976 till 1999, in addition to assisting with the 700 acres. The hog operation was closed during the Clean Water Trust Fund agreement in 1999.

Jerry attended school in Pantego and Belhaven public schools until high school. Mr. Sawyer attended Pungo Christian Academy until he graduated in 1971. Jerry and his father assisted in erecting the school. During high school, Jerry played basketball and baseball for PCA.

Mr. Sawyer took about a year off from farming to pursue another career as a truck driver. Jerry and his friend Mike were responsible for transporting explosives for the government, coast to coast. Jerry always returned with souvenirs of the places he had traveled for his children. Mr. Sawyer grew tired of being gone from home and returned to the family farm.

As we all know farming is a very time consuming profession. Mr. Sawyer does however take sometime off during bear season. Mr. Sawyer takes a few weeks when bear season is "in" to pursue his other passion. Mr. Sawyer has been breeding bear hunting dogs for about six years. Right now he has about 20 dogs at any given time.



Mr. Sawyer with one of his favorite hunting dogs Fannie.

Mr. Sawyer's prize possession is the bear that he killed and had stuffed in 1991. Mr. Sawyer even named his bear, Bruiser! Bruiser weighed in at a whopping 575 lbs, a beautiful black bear. Mr. Sawyer's three children: Kim, Crystal and Paul have been known to set out on bear hunting adventures with him and his favorite hunting dogs. His daughter, Kim, has even killed her own bear while out hunting with her father. Mr. Sawyer states, "(he) is just helping to carry on a family tradition."

Jerry started hunting with his father and family around the age of 5. Mr. Sawyer said, "He was small enough, that my dad would take you by the seat of your britches and help sling you over the ditches." Mr. Sawyer also spent a majority of his time catching snakes in Hyde County. When asked what he did with the snakes, he said he would sell them. His family did a lot of trapping of different animals too.

The trapping and critter-getting seemed like a natural progression for him. In 1999 after the Clean Water Trust Buyout, "Critter Getters" (now known as Adventure Wildlife Services) began and continues to be a part-time business for Mr. Sawyer. He thought there may be a need for his services, once a lot of local waterfront communities began development. Although, Mr. Sawyer states that

most of his calls do not come from these developments. Mr. Sawyer believes that the people living in these developments probably appreciate seeing the wildlife, because there is not much around their homes.

When asked about his first critter getting adventure, Mr. Sawyer begins to tell the story. While grinning ear to ear, he goes on to explain the time when he was about 9 years old and his first critter getting activity. "My mama was out back hanging out clothes, when I brought her the oatmeal can". He continues on to tell me how he captured a snake earlier in the day, and had placed it in the oatmeal jar. Laughing, Jerry he tells me, "When my mama (Joanne) opened that oatmeal jar, to see a water moccasin starring back at her, she gave me the worst whooping of my life. " Mr. Sawyer's wife of nineteen years, Sallie, chimed in with "it took him another 40 plus years to get back to "critter getting" after his mama got a hold of him!"

Mr. Sawyer is a licensed Wildlife Damage Control Agent. Jerry picks up where the animal control officers (dogs and cats) and wildlife agents (big game) leave off. Mr. Sawyer attended a class at NC State University to become certified to start his business. He is licensed and regulated by the North Carolina Wildlife Commission. Mr. Sawyer removes pesky wildlife such as: possums, raccoons, bats, birds, foxes, coyotes, squirrels, skunks, and bees, just to name a few, from homes and businesses. Jerry has even been known to get a cat out of a tree.



Photo above shows Mr. Sawyer cleaning up after blowing up a beaver dam.

Mr. Sawyer recently obtained his ATF explosives license to remove beaver dams. Jerry will go out to trap and remove the beavers and destroy the dams that are damaging trees in yards, flooding farmland and damming up waterways

Mr. Sawyer's calls vary from week to week depending upon the weather and the season, averaging 1 to 2 calls a week. Mr. Sawyer has worked as far west as Wilson and as far north as the Virginia state line. He usually receives several calls from Morehead City and other beach areas throughout the year.

The calls that keep him the busiest are: bats. The "Critter-Getter" will come out to your home and set an excluder, which is a small tool used to let the bats go out of a small shoot with a trapdoor, but they can not come back inside. Jerry fills other holes and exits so the bats are forced to go through the tool.

Then begins the task of caulking and filling all the holes the bats use to enter the house or structure. The bat removal takes anywhere from 2 to 5 days.

Bats are known for causing respiratory problems and rabies. Mr. Sawyer will, if contracted to, remove the bat guano. He takes many precautions when working with the bat population such as: wearing gloves, goggles, and a heavy duty mask.

Bats will continue to move from house to house or structure to structure. Holes only have to be dime sized for a bat to enter. Unless your house is sealed and protected, you could be next in line for an invasion.

Mr. Sawyer was asked, "What his most interesting job has been so far?" He and his wife both smiled and said "getting the squirrel out of the oven in the middle of the night". Mrs. Sawyer then goes on to tell the story. She says that it was after 10 o'clock pm when an elderly lady called the house, (Mr. Sawyer had just had gall bladder surgery less than two weeks before), saying there was something in her stove, and she could not get it out. So, Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer set out to assist the elderly lady.



This photo was taken of Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer on a recent vacation in the mountains.

Mrs. Sawyer is known for helping her husband on small jobs or when he needs assistance with a job. They arrived at the house located in Washington to find there was a squirrel in the oven. They opened the bottom drawer to the stove. The squirrel then ran farther into the oven. They tried about everything to get the squirrel out. They had placed a “tunnel” at the back of the stove, but the squirrel was “having no part of it”, Mr. Sawyer said. The decision was then made to go to Wal-Mart and purchase a set of screwdrivers (of course they did not have a set with them that they need for this particular stove, they explained). After returning from Wal-Mart and taking the stove apart, the group sat quietly for about 15 minutes. The squirrel then made a mad dash out of the stove and onto the curtain, and then jumped outside through open window, free to roam amongst the pine trees again.

Another story Mr. Sawyer told me was a call he had received from outside of Greenville. He had to go and remove some coyotes. The coyotes were stalking this person’s yard, and were watching the small children outside of their home playing in the yard. How scary this thought is, if you have small children at home?



The bobcat is one that, Mr. Sawyer removed for one of his clients.

Mr. Sawyer has had many adventures during his critter getting jobs. Mr. Sawyer's job can be dangerous at times, hanging off the edge of a roof with bats flying past. A few years ago, he fell off a roof and broken his arm (It healed nicely, no problems).

When Mr. Sawyer is not chasing critters or expelling bats from his customers' homes, he likes to spend time with his grandchildren. Mr. Sawyer has two granddaughters and a grandson. The girls Ashleigh (age 1), Alyssa (age 3), and Carson (age 4) can be found on nice sunny summer days with their Paw-Paw riding the combine or at their great grandma's home having lunch. Jerry's mother still prepares lunch for her two sons almost everyday. The grandkids are learning very quickly how to "get things done" on the farm. The children often help their Paw-Paw "feed up" the bear hunting dogs and the pair of emus Mr. Sawyer has at home.



Above are Mr. Sawyer with his grandson Carson and granddaughter Alyssa, at the local rodeo.

Mr. Sawyer and his wife had several pairs of emus in the early 1990s that they bred and sold to market. Mrs. Sawyer would decorate the eggs, as crafting projects during the winter months, when the emus laid their eggs. The Sawyers' gave up this venture after a few years citing there was not enough demand for the emus on the market at the time.

Our last interview took place after Jerry and his wife had returned home from Sunday services at his local church. Mr. Sawyer told me of many adventures he had.. There were so many, I had a hard time keeping up with my notes. When I left after our final interview, he was spending the evening with his grandson and wife playing a game of air hockey.