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ASU Won the Game, But Michigan Takes the Cake

By Cindy Ball

I was present at the Game of the Century in Ann Arbor, Michigan, when Appalachian State University beat nationally ranked Michigan 34-32. I was there. Yes, I was.

That game is something I'll likely remember forever, though there was something else I saw in Ann Arbor, totally unrelated to college football, that also made a big impression on me. While the game was making us feel superior to Michigan, something else up there -- the way that state deals with its trash -- tarnished our pride somewhat in the Old North State.

I was raised in Ann Arbor. When we found out, over a year ago, that ASU would be playing Michigan, we just had to get tickets. After all, this would be the chance of a lifetime. I was ready to wear my "looser gear" (my ASU sweatshirt and my husband's old ASU baseball cap) and cheer for ASU until the bitter end.

We had heard that Michigan fans were rude and could even be mean -- we might get beer poured on our heads or something worse! I laughed. Balderdash! But what did I know? This was to be my first big-time college sports event, and I guessed that anything was possible. I was more than a little apprehensive.

But Ann Arbor was also my ancestral home, and I felt defensive about the place where I grew up. I wanted to feel proud of Ann Arbor too, even though I was rooting against the Michigan team. What if the Michigan football fans really did pour beer on our heads as they slaughtered us? With my somewhat divided loyalties, I couldn't think of anything worse.

The famous day arrived. It was clear and beautiful out, a perfect day for football. As we drove to "The Big House," my stomach churned. I wanted Ann Arbor to behave nicely. No beer could be poured on our heads! And I wanted ASU to score. Please, God, don't let it be a rout!

We arrived at our tailgating spot, and though there were revelers and parties all around us, the place was clean, amazingly clean and free of litter, very unlike the tailgating I've witnessed in Boone, unfortunately. At first I couldn't put my finger on the reason for this. Then it dawned on me, as I saw folks sweeping by with bulging bags and carts full of cans and bottles.

Michigan has a ten-cent bottle deposit law. That makes the difference! I had grown up with a bottle deposit law, and I had totally taken it for granted. From my earliest years, I learned that cans and bottles were not merely trash to be tossed, but potential currency. If

you've got recycling hardwired into your psyche by state law, it simply becomes hard to litter. Almost unthinkable, actually.

I can remember that while growing up in Ann Arbor, homeless people and poor high school kids would scour the streets of Ann Arbor, and some of the industrious ones would realize a big chunk of change on football Saturdays. I remember in college having raise-the-rent parties, mainly an excuse to drink a lot of beer so that the bottles could be returned the next day for those cash deposits. Those returned bottles made rent that much easier to make.

My husband noticed how clean Ann Arbor looked. "Why? How?" he asked.

"Bottle deposit law," I wisely responded.

Someone in the North Carolina legislature attempted to move this state toward the Michigan model this year, but he was shot down by the bottling industry. We can get there eventually, because other states have shown the way, and it'll be as big an upset victory as "ASU Humiliates Michigan!"

Nothing left to tell, except this: Nobody poured beer on our heads. Seeing our shirts, a Michigan fan even approached us and said that he had underestimated us and that we had a good football team. Other Michigan people were actually very kind to us. Quiet after our victory, but kind. I was proud of Yosef dancing around the field. I was proud to be a Mountaineer. And I was also proud to be from Ann Arbor, a place with a clean stadium, where anyone willing to work and pick up "trash" would be compensated nicely. It was more fun than I could ever have imagined!

While waiting for the next time ASU meets Michigan on the field of battle, write your state representative and your state senator and beg him for a N.C. bottle bill!