

Michelle Sawyer

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S.O.B.'s STORY (spouse of boss) DAN HAMMES

Tom Sawyer's got nothing on Michelle Obama.

While that may not be praise on the caliber that the national media has foisted upon the First Lady n what with those well-muscled arms and all - it is saying plenty. What's more, it's being said by a person that is a bit weary of all the Obama adulation.

But dang' - that woman is wily.

In fact, decent argument can be made that she has the more developed acumen of the family. And I don't say that simply because she is the one who can talk without a teleprompter. Nah, the remark merits making because she can charm the stripes off a zebra.

How else can you explain the garden?

For those who missed it, Michelle Obama declared recently that the White House needed a produce and herb garden. She figured that with a little effort a section of the vast lawn that surrounds the home could be transformed into a garden. Not only could the First Family enjoy fresh vegetables but any surplus could be donated to the local food bank.

That's how some people operate. While the Obamas give very little of their own money to charity when compared to other wealthy people they are more than willing to give away the fruit of other people's labor.

(Mea culpa. This is not intended to be a political diatribe. But the fact nobody took note that the Obamas, while very wealthy, are quite stingy has bugged me ever since they released their tax returns before the election. Not that it's up to me to decide how much money people should give to charity. But doggone n if someone believes they should have the authority to take money from people they deem rich and give to people they deem poor n they oughta' practice what they preach.)

But enough of that.

The point here is Michelle Obama wants a garden and I know something about gardens.

The First Lady of the house in which I was raised was big on `em. She had it in her head that gardens were a great way to teach young boys about work, responsibility and nature n all rolled into one.

The problem is n at least from the perspective of a young boy - gardens are a whole lotta' work. Combine that with the fact my colleagues on the garden work crew n my older brothers n were little more than scallywags when it came to honest labor, and one can appreciate how little I appreciate gardening.

Sure, it's true. Fresh garden vegetables are one of life's great pleasures. They rank right up there with fine Scotch. But after years of pulling more than my weight in the family plot, I now take my vegetables out of the can.

Which is why Michelle Obama impresses me so. She figured out how to get other people to do the garden work.

Judging by media accounts, it was quite the occasion. The First Lady was surround by 26 kids from the local school, who themselves were surrounded by a gaggle of reporters, as she

turned the first shovel-full of dirt.

I don't know if the occasion sparked any applause, but it should have. Not because it was such hard work. Not at all. Michelle Obama deserved applause because she got all those people to make such a big fuss over one shovelful of dirt. Everyone knows it's not the first bit of dirt one stirs when working a garden that is so arduous, it's the 10,000 bit of dirt one moves that really wears on a person. And that's what it takes to make a decent garden.

Lotsa' weeding, lotsa' hoeing, lotsa' hot, hot work when there are way, way, way better things to do.

Now I'm not completely stupid. I know there are people who love to garden. And I know they are really good at it. George Pfeifer and all those volunteers who make the community garden such a huge success come to mind.

But I'm guessing Michelle Obama is not one of them n more evidence still that this is one sharp woman. So instead of going out in the hot sun to weed a garden, she got a bunch of kids to do the work. Kids, who according to the reporters on the scene, actually thought gardening was 'fun.'

And that is a way better trick than getting someone to paint a fence. - DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.