

IT WILL TAKE AS LONG AS IT TAKES

A lesson or two from Mr. Bull

BY SARA CAMP MILAM

ONE OF THE THINGS I'VE GRUDGINGLY come to admire about the children's cartoon *Peppa Pig* is that its characters make no pretense at being role models. Practically everyone on the show, children and adults alike, sucks a little bit. It's almost like *Seinfeld* in that way. As a parent, there's a subversive pleasure in watching a children's show that's all but devoid of morals, takeaways, or life lessons.

But, as with every rule, there's an exception: a *Peppa Pig* character with something to teach an overextended parent, if not a preschooler. Clad in a bright-yellow helmet and safety vest, construction worker Mr. Bull makes semi-regular cameos on *Peppa*. If he's not there to fix the perpetually leaky school roof, he's probably found an excuse—municipally mandated or otherwise—to dig up the road. "Digging up the road," in Mr. Bull's parlance, is his highest calling and his greatest pleasure. As far as I can tell, his boundless zeal derives from two habits of highly successful bulls.

First, Mr. Bull never rushes. In one episode, Peppa and her family are on their way to the playground when traffic stops. "We're digging up the road!" Mr. Bull bellows gleefully, before going on to explain to the family how he'll go about fixing a leaky underground water pipe. "How long will it take?" Mummy Pig asks. Mr. Bull's answer is practically Zen: "It will take as long as it takes!"

Second, he knows when to take a break. Mr. Bull usually works alongside two employees, Mr. Rhino and Mr. Labrador. As busy as they are, they never miss a tea break. Mr. Bull even keeps a folding table, chairs, and a china tea set at the construction site. He's a good boss in that way, setting an example for healthy work-life balance. That may explain why he's never had any turnover.

Mr. Bull relishes his work, and he seems to be in supreme command of his time. I admire both of those qualities, but (at best) I only share one of them. Too often, I feel like my time belongs to



Douglas Oliver (1961–2017) in the pit room at Sweatman's Barbecue in Holly Hill, SC, June 2012.
Oliver worked the pits at Sweatman's for more than 35 years.

everyone *except* me. So I've been trying to think of how to take a page from Mr. Bull's playbook.

I think I may have cracked his secret: Mr. Bull doesn't multitask. When he's digging up the road, he's digging up the road. When he's building a house, he's building a house, one brick at a time. ("You can't build a house in a day!" he scoffs to Peppa. "It will be finished...tomorrow.") And when it's tea time, he's enjoying his tea.

Of course, most of us believe we don't have the luxury of Mr. Bull's monotasking. In the past month, I've toggled between print and podcast *Gravy* stories, online Christmas shopping, planning a child's birthday party, and keeping tabs on the drama of the British royal family—sometimes all in the same hour. And I wonder: If I focused on one thing at a time, would I get them all done? Would I enjoy the process more? Might I even have time left over for a cup of tea? Actually, I don't *like* tea. But a knitting break sounds nice.

Many of the stories in this issue circle around

barbecue, a craft famous for taking as long as it takes. And maybe barbecue has some Mr. Bull-like lessons to offer. It alternately demands intense focus and hands-off patience. Between the carefully choreographed hog flips, there are times when you can, and likely should, shred the cabbage for the slaw (a fresh, addictive kimchi slaw, if you're Jiyeon Lee—turn to page 46 for her recipe), visit with customers, check your group chat (Farhan Mustafa has that story on page 30), or sip mezcals with new friends around the pit (as Gustavo Arellano did, page 24). That focus-and-relax rhythm goes a long way toward explaining barbecue's appeal, both as a business and a hobby.

And speaking of hobbies, thank you for reading. I recognize that this magazine, which is my work, is your leisure. And my wish for you is that you enjoy it, that you savor it, just as Mr. Bull does his tea. Leisure time is precious. Enjoy it, and then get back to digging up your road, whatever it may be. 🍵