This is the end; the end of our weekly Home and Garden column for the Sunday section of the Osceola Sentinel. Management is changing the print format. Some might be consider this the end of the trail. For me, it is the beginning of a new chapter. Our doors are open and we will continue to help you with solutions for your life. If gas prices limit your travel, we are as close as your phone or your computer.

I and other University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Osceola County Extension faculty members have been writing about gardening, landscapes, nature, agriculture, wildlife, and 4-H for more than 18 years. We want to thank the Orlando Sentinel for giving us a forum to provide you with information on important issues like water conservation, mower safety, recycling, food safety, surviving tough financial times, pesticide safety, green building and exotic weeds. We will continue to be your local source for research-based information.

Our office is a cooperative effort with the US Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS and the Osceola County Board of County Commissions. Though we get some federal and state funding in addition to county support, and base our educational programs on local needs. We work with local citizen volunteers who help us identify priority issues to address.

When I was first hired, many moons ago, we were called extension agents. The term agent came from our federal roots. You have heard of secret agents, IRS agents, and ATF agents? We are considered change agents because we provide research-based information to help citizens address problems and make changes that improve their situation. We are really off campus faculty of the University of Florida and serve as informal educators. We help folks make changes that improve their quality of life, health or economic situation or improve our environment.

I feel my purpose in life is to help others. Today, I would like your help. If we have helped you solve a problem or make a change, I would like to hear from you. Has something you read in one of our articles helped you live better, save water, stop worrying, or take action to do something differently? If so, please write us an email or send a letter, even make a phone call if you can spare the time. We would love to hear your stories. So many times we answer a question, move on and never really know the outcome. This is your chance to tell us how we have made a difference in your life. Help us write a chapter in our book of memories.

I have built wonderful memories during the past two decades of writing this column. I remember funny things like sending an article from a phone at a t-shirt shop in the Florida Keys. Once, when I was in Virginia, I had to dictate the column to Jovida Fletcher, my editor at the time, from a phone in the hotel lobby.

I have built articles off family stories and memories of activities with my mom and dad including camping, fishing and gardening. I have written about the tragedy of my beautiful giving tree, the live oak that fell on my house during Hurricane Charlie. I wrote about planting thorny shrubs under a teenager’s window at the time my daughter would have loved to escape out hers. From squirrels and raccoons to turkeys and Easter bunnies, the wildlife in my yard has inspired me.

I have built columns around your questions. You have helped us know about what to write. Whether it was how to thaw a turkey or how to plant a butterfly garden, how to kill the caterpillars
or how to make compost, how to save water or how to shop for a light bulb, we have answered your questions. We will continue to do that.

Traditions continue. We will continue to teach educational classes, write newsletter articles, make consultations, have exhibits at community events and do television shows. We are using new methods to get you what you need when you need it. We are writing web pages so you can access them day or night. We communicate a lot by email. We are working on webcasts, podcasts and blogs to provide you information on important topics in a format that meets your time schedule.

This column is ending and one door is closing, but we have many more open and you are welcome to come in and join us. Upcoming hot topics include drought tolerant turfgrass varieties, solar power, biofuels, locally grown agricultural products, financial security, carbon trading, healthy living, climate variability and vulnerability, and sustainability. Let us continue to help you find solutions for your life.

Help me know how we have helped you in the past. Or, let us know how we can help you now. Our office is located at Osceola Heritage Park on highway 192 between Kissimmee and St. Cloud. Send me an email at efoe@osceola.org or call 321-697-3000. Remember, we are with the government and we are here to help you. REALLY! Tell others and help us spread the word.

Happy trails to you, until we meet again.

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