

Pirates vs. Cards Game on Saturday

July 27th, 2011

Petra and I took Emi out to her first pro ball game. Classic American thing to do. Cheap seats, Cracker Jacks, dogs, biiz, got some good photos despite the crappy game.



Petra & Emi



PNC Park eats--also part of the stadium



Oh yeah.



Random Couple # 1



Random Couple # 2



These appear to be die-hard Pirates fans.



This group at right made the digital marquee. Big congrats, Eric & Rachel!



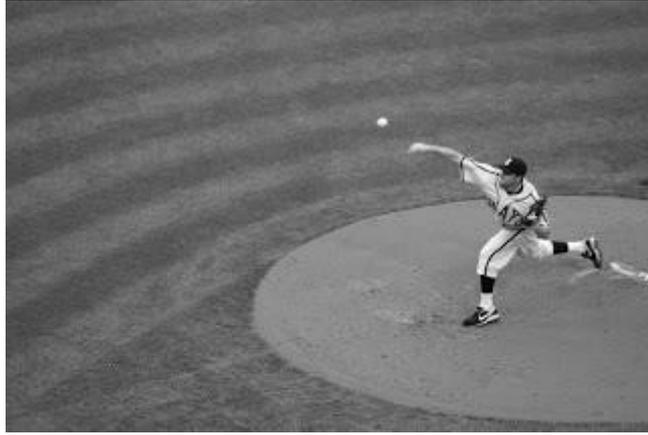
PNC PARK

HOME OF THE PITTSBURGH PIRATES

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Pittsburghers are fanatical. About Pittsburgh.





7th Inning Stretch



Vader Boy, the rollerskating Pirates fan and juggler of glowing bowling pins? Poor, confused lad.

Salsa on Monday Nights @ Seviche

July 28th, 2011



When I first met Petra, she took me to a huge club in Germany called *Caribe*, of which her brother-in-law to be was the owner. As Timea's younger 'available' sister, Petra was the hot-to-trot choice of dance partner for the smokin'-feet, hip-swingin' Latinos. Merengue, Salsa, Cumbia, Bachata...she was SO good. And I was SO jealous. We were



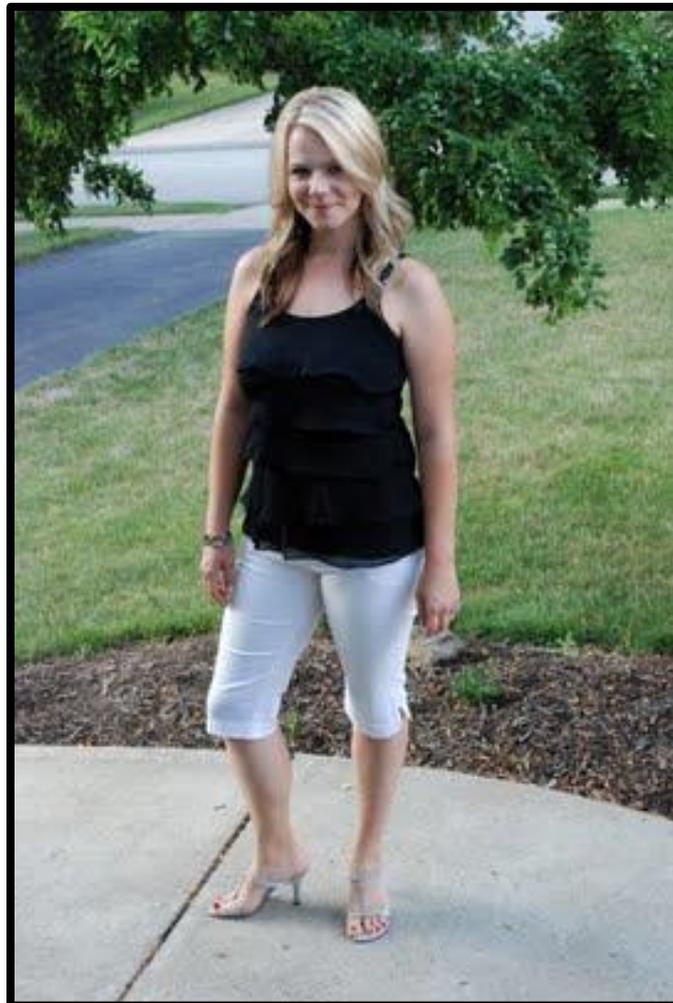
Seventeen years old, and we were married within months.

We have since attempted the Latin dance scene on several occasions. Every single time was a flop. She was, as always, an exceptional dancer. I have always been a goofball--not a bad dancer, I'm told--and certainly not afraid of a dance floor. Nevertheless, somewhere between Petra always correcting me for using the wrong steps to a particular song, me not caring and just trying to have fun, she being embarrassed by my flagrant Salsa *faux pas*, and every guy in the house wanting to dance with Petra (because of course, she ain't the hardest thing to look at... or dance with for that matter), our Latin dance dates always ended in a fight.

Well, this was NOT one of those dates. For the first time since we were Seventeen,

I'm proud to say that we had an amazing time at *Seviche* on Monday night. *Seviche* is located at 930 Penn Avenue in the Cultural District of downtown Pittsburgh. It's a Cubano-themed tapas / sushi-style restaurant, and on Monday nights around 9:30, they clear the tables off the floor for a good old-fashioned ho-down, South-of-the-Border style. There is another place in Pittsburgh, *Bossa Nova* on 7th Avenue, that does the same thing on Thursday nights.

Like most Latin dance scenes, there were a few instructors that were giving free group lessons for a short period during the night. I even let two of them dance with Petra and she was proud of me for not stabbing anyone in the throat with a broken beer bottle. Wow, she's hot when she dances! We enjoyed a nice meal, shared some good wine, and left late after a lot of dancing; enough where Petra's feet were hurting by the end of the night. Petra didn't nit-pick my dance steps. We laughed a lot. I'd say that qualifies as a great time. The perfect bookend to our two-week vacation from being parents!



Petra's got her fun clothes on



I love that girl's smile! Shanice and Orphan Annie would agree that she's never fully dressed without it.



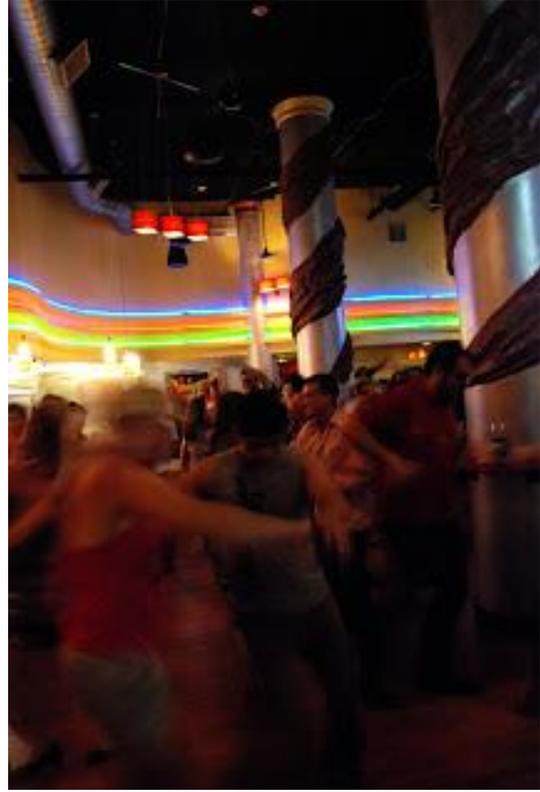
Some of the first sets of legs on the floor to replace the legs of tables and chairs



Petra's not quite ready to dance yet. The level of expertise looks intimidating, and she thinks she's a little rusty. I could care less... I may look like a dancin' fool, but I'm the fool whose dancin' with her!

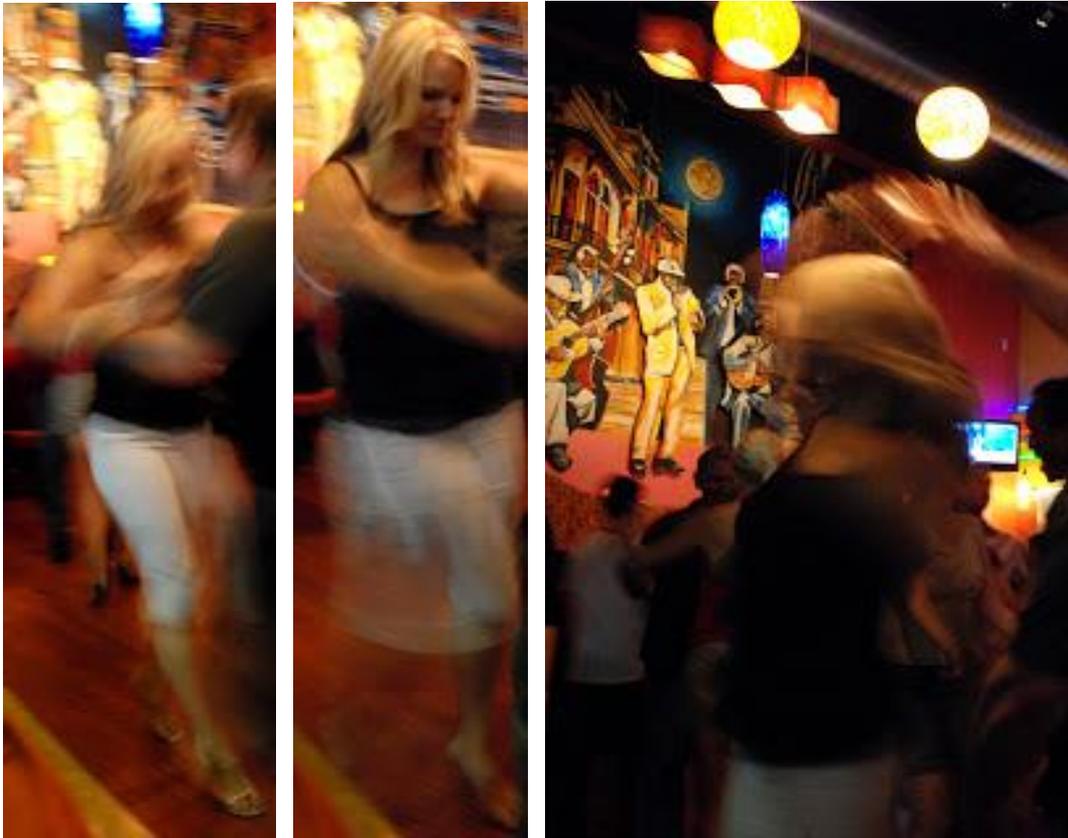


She's really good



He's really good, too





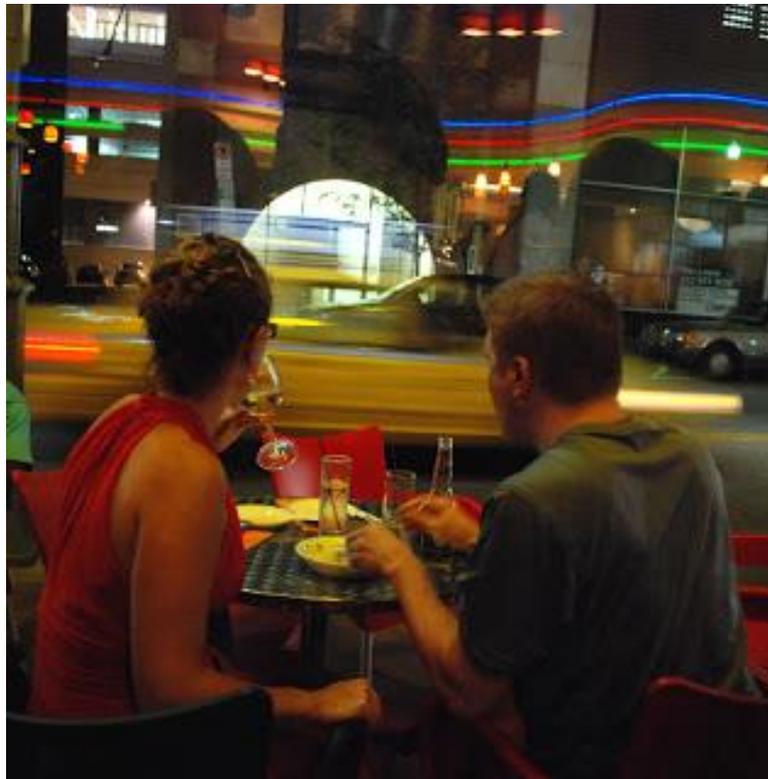
She's freakin' awesome



Hot, too



To be honest, there are a lot of great dancers in here



Food was pretty good too. All said and done, this was a nice date.

Kids Meals

July 28th, 2011

You can stick a kids meal where the sun don't shine. Do you regularly order kids meals at restaurant for your kids? Don't feel guilty. I think everyone does, or at least, everyone has. Here's this: let's stop making it a regular occurrence. Poor freakin' kids!! Have you tasted the garbage you order your kids? Hot dogs, mac & cheese, pizza, chicken tenders, and oh yeah--broccoli--so the restaurant looks like it gives a crap about your kids' health. No wonder your kids hate broccoli! The broccoli on your plate is drizzled in some sort of creamy Marsala Alfredo balsamic to-die-for magic stinking sauce and all you can say to poor Kaylee is "eat your [cold, bland, unsalted, scared-of-a-choking-lawsuit-overcooked] broccoli right now, young lady."

Meanwhile, you're dipping those fat, succulent sticks of crab meat in garlic-seasoned butter--you know, the kind you hold up proudly after messy extraction, as if you had anything to do with how massive the meat is. Shame on you. Yeah, I'll say it again. Shame on all of you. If you can't afford to feed your kids the right way from the very start, don't go out! Share from your plate or box up what your kid doesn't eat. You are responsible for introducing them to new flavors, tastes, sauces, blends, and cooking styles. By no means am I saying that kids have to like everything, but don't blame me when I send your kid packin' from the sleepover for blatant refusal to eat anything--breakfast, lunch, or dinner--except Fruit Loops or chocolate chip pancakes.

You know what I'd like to see? A children's restaurant that serves quasi-gourmet kids food in a playful, kid-friendly environment... with an adult menu that consists only of the cold, crappy cafeteria food like we expect our kids to eat at every other restaurant.

The Parasite

July 29th, 2011

Here's a harsh one. It's a story about a particular type of person; one whose existence thrives upon the disruption, manipulation, and mutiny of someone else's life. A human parasite.

Parasites deplete the lives of their hosts. When they have achieved their selfish objective, they move on to other hosts. Today, I'm concerned with one set of hosts in particular: a family. A delicate family hangs in the balance as a home-wrecking psychopath leeches the lifeblood out of each member.

So here it is. I've been privy to this way too long, to not call this nasty spade. I know

all the parties involved. Meet the Doe Family. Jane and John and children. Jane is a party girl in a church outfit. John is a generally quiet "can't we all get along" genuine nice guy. Jane, John, hers and theirs have been together for years. Meet Sally. Sally is a closet bull dyke; super overbearing with a jacked up living arrangement between her husband and her female friend. She's best friends with your kids. She's knee deep in your life. Then she pulls a knife. Sally is a sugar-coated parasite. See Jane leave John to move in with Sally. See John do everything to entice her back, for several months. See the kids get manipulated and pulled and tugged and trampled. See Sally buck up to John, exercising control of his kids and cussing him out, where she has no right to open her freaking mouth regarding his own flesh and blood. See Sally ruin another family. See her do it again someday.

Parasites are relentless. Once they're in your life, they're hard to get out. The best defense against parasites is this: come hell or high water--to not let them in, to not give them a footing. Keep your eyes peeled for the parasites of society, people. They're everywhere.

When I Grow Up, I Want to be a Big, Fat Jerk

July 29th, 2011

Just a quick note to my buddies in blue: don't become jerks, please? I see it happen to the best of you. I'm at the Pittsburgh Airport the other day, disgusted at how the cops were slamming the average citizen for driving too slow, waiting too long, stopping for an instant, whatever. No, nobody bothered me. But it was disturbing to watch. Minivans and SWAT-style approaches. How embarrassingly gay is that. It's a freaking airport, and there's no short-term place to park within walking distance of a terminal for less than a full day rate (\$12). That's not Joe Citizen's fault. That's bad airport design.

This week, we drive back into Virginia to see cops hiding around every corner like the boogeyman. No longer viewed as the protectors of the people, rather the predators. Selling out the people to the City, the State. Is that what you wanted to be when you grew up? Officers of the law, I understand your distrust of human nature. It is borne inherently as part of your job--being shot at and all that. I get it. But the majority of people are still inclined to be good. Ask the Marines. *"No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy."* They still live up to the "friend" part as well, generally without becoming big dumb jerkoffs.

Last October, I had just filled up my coolers with ice, and I was on my way with the boys to Peanut Park in Suffolk, VA, to coach their team. The busiest intersection in Suffolk had a stoplight down, and you should've seen the cluster of vehicles creeping past and honking at each other. Looked like a POV grenade went off. I

parked on the shoulder, called the police, and stepped in with my coach's whistle and some rigid arm signals to facilitate traffic until the police arrived, some ten minutes later. Instead of a thanks or an "Okay, I got it," I got my hindparts chewed up and down by some female Chihuahua cop for the next five minutes in the middle of the intersection. To her, it was not about the people. It was about power. Control.

Years ago, Washington, NC, the cops were yelling at me from a bridge. "Sir, get out of the water!" I was crossing the bridge with Petra and the boys late one night when a fisherman was hit by a drugged driver and knocked off the bridge into the Intracoastal Waterway. I hit the brakes, jumped the bridge and searched the ebbing brackish water frantically for the victim, for ten minutes. "Out of the water, now!!!" Found him. A heavysset black man, still alive, with his skull split open. I yelled in the dark for a rescue boat while I struggled to keep him afloat. A local boat assists, I pin the guy to the ladder on the back of the boat, ride like that back into shore. No thanks, no nothing. By being a first responder, I had stolen the glory of some cock & swag young cop. A cop who planned on saving the guy with a flashlight and a bull horn. This was not the first, nor the last time I had 'interfered' with police, fire, or EMT business by beating them to the punch.

We are all humans. We're in this together. It will be a cold day in hell when I don't do everything in my power to save someone, or help someone stranded, put out a fire or otherwise 'interfere.' Buddy John Mac calls it our protector mentality.

Okay, so what I'm writing pisses you off. I have no clue why. Chances are, you piss people off all day long. Now, if you can look in the mirror, do some soul-searching and find yourself to truly be a good cop... not sneaking around corners waiting for average Joe to screw up... not buying into the primadonna mentality... and you're able to stand up to your uniformed buddies when you feel convicted, without being backed into a corner... and you wake up each morning with the motivation to really make a difference, protect the people, and stand on a wall to keep our children safe at night... well if that's you, then I want to thank you for being that guy / gal, and making a positive impact.

But if being a cop fulfills some inadequacy, keep it in your pocket. I don't want my kids to grow up fearing or hating cops. As a uniformed professional, you use the words "Sir" and "Ma'am" in your speech regularly. Kudos. You are polite and you mind your P's and Q's. Bravo. However (comma, pause for effect) you can be condescending, self-inflating, and patronizing with Sirs and Ma'ams sprinkled into every sentence. I'm not asking for anything more than common courtesy, decency, and a little less aggression toward the good folks that pay your salaries.

Okay, I'm back off the soap box. But just remember, if you're a public servant, and you're not all about looking out for the people, you're freakin' wrong. You don't have to be a butthole to uphold the law.

Dear Swatara Township (PA) SWAT Team Member

July 29th, 2011

Dear Officer X,

It was lovely meeting you in the parking lot at the Comfort Suites in Exton, PA two weeks ago. While I would have loved to further explain why I was upset with you at the time, my wife was bleeding profusely and we were enroute to the ER.

The MARPAT digital camouflage utilities that you wore while checking into the hotel were out of line. I did not correct you at that time because I did not want to make a scene. What I saw was either (1) a slovenly Marine wearing an unauthorized belt and unsatisfactorily-rolled sleeves on his blouse--on a working uniform that Marines are NOT AUTHORIZED to wear off-base, (2) a paintballer who bought the digis on ebay and didn't know any better, or (3) a well-groomed officer of the law who has been trained in the customs, history, traditions, value, and importance of uniforms.

Furthermore, you were impersonating a uniformed federal employee--a United States Marine--and doing a very bad job of it. Be thankful that you were not greeted by any other number of Marines who would have balled you up in the hotel lobby, SWAT badge or not. In the future, I expect that you'll exercise good judgement in what you wear and how you wear it. Keep your Marine Corps "digis" for operations in the clandestine tactical environment; if you want to wear the uniform by day, join the Marines.

Sincerely,

--MJ

Photo: On Lake Drummond, 2011

July 30th, 2011



Counterpoint for the Boys in Blue (& Gals in Blue)

August 3rd, 2011

My friend Matt just replied to me in regards to last week's post, [When I Grow Up, I Want to be a Big, Fat Jerk](#). He tried to post the following as a comment, but was unable to for some reason (presumably length of content). To preface, I would like to say one thing: while it's no secret that I've never been fond of cops in general, I am grateful for the impact they have on our country's population of true bad guys. Special thanks to a few in blue come to mind, for weighing in on my perception of the 'good guys:' Uncle Ken, Aunt Cheryl, Uncle John, Anthony D, Terry C, John M, BJ S, Omar H, Brandon G, Tim B, David S, and the number of my service buddies who are now Marshals, SS, FBI, Sheriffs, State Police, or City Police somewhere. Thanks Matt for this letter... I needed to be set straight in a couple of areas. P.S., if any of you have become overbearing, primadonna jerks without me knowing it, then I can't stand you... but I still love you.

MJ. You're one of my best friends and I'm not hurt by your comments towards my brothers and sisters in law enforcement (L.E.), because it's true there are those out there we deem as "badge heavy." I'm hurt by the amount of anger you have (two anti cop posts in a row...ouch), that you (being one of my best friends) were treated that way by those I view as my brother's and sister's in L.E., and also by your lack of understanding as a former warrior and defender of our nation. I'm sorry some jerks didn't recognize you for the incredible man you are, and your true desire to protect and help others. I want to address everything, but I don't know I have space or time. :) I think I am a good cop. I go to work each day asking myself "If I'm killed today I hope I had an impact on at least one person's life for the better." I'm a school resource officer working hard to let kids and their parents know not every cop is not out to get them because many have negative experiences with law enforcement. Just like when I worked in the jail, I encouraged people to look at the individual as a person...not as a uniform. Now for my soap box (wink wink). First of all, much of law enforcement is comprised of current (National Guard) and former military. So you are also talking about many of your own brothers and sisters from the military. Unfortunately they also sometimes don't see the person...just another "citizen" or "perp." Secondly, if I got on a soap box rant about the military based off of the few negative encounters with current and former military personnel I've met that have argued with me and physically fought with me (usually because they're drunk or think they're entitled to special treatment for they're service), and then said something like "just because you join the military and have fought for our country doesn't mean you have to be a jerk and act like you're all tough," and make some broad statement about how cops are somehow better than the rest of society because of a motto, then I know you would probably take offense to it (and I would also be wrong because most join the military to help and protect...and I love every one of my military brothers and sisters who go out every day knowing they might be called to lay down they're lives to protect us). The fact is it doesn't matter what

industry or job you're in, you're gonna run into jerks in every line of work (see above statement about seeing each as an individual and not the uniform or company as whole). Thirdly, now keep in mind your time overseas fighting those that would happily come to our country and kill our citizens. If I told you "the majority of the citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq are good people and we're only fighting a few that are terrorists" you would either agree (yes this is true most are decent people) or disagree (no the majority are terrorists or sympathizers of terrorists). I've heard both from those that have served overseas on tours of duty. Your experiences can change your perception. If you've ever seen combat (which I'm sure you have seen your fair share) remember your time over there fighting insurgents and terrorists, most likely you did this almost every day, and out dealing with the public once things settles down. On routine patrol were you ever unsure of what was around the corner or who was in the crowd? Did you ever have to be on your guard when out of the military base (or sometimes in the base)? Were you worried someone was going to come out of the crowd with a bomb strapped to them or just start shooting at you and your team? Did you worry about going into a house and being met by some 12 year old with a gun ready to kill you? Do you think it would (or did) change your perception of people? Did you ever find yourself after some type of incident telling yourself that "everyone" are terrorists, and find trouble trusting everyone in the general public? If you didn't, do you know other military personnel that had/have that mindset (I know some)? If you were on patrol did you drive around totally complacent waving from the turret of your Hummer or APC like the home coming queen or walk through the crowds totally oblivious to those around you like some politician kissing babies and shaking hands? How long do you think a soldier would survive if they did that? Now think about your combat experiences and having to be on high alert when you were out on your patrols every day just watching for the next threat. Now imagine being on a permanent tour for your entire career (10, 20, 30+ years at eight to ten to twelve hours a day...with no visits to the State's where you get to be mostly surrounded by good people). Do you think that would affect your thinking? That's the reality for cops. Being a cop is like being at war on our own country's shores every day. It's hard not to have it mess with your thinking/trust of people in general when all you see day in and day out is the dark side of people...the "terrorists" in the U.S. like gang bangers and other evil people in our own country killing each other, killing innocents (oops grandma happened to standing in line during the drive by or she had a purse that might have some money in it to buy drugs), random people shooting from a crowd or into a crowd because of your uniform, using kids and women to attack you because they know you're more likely to hesitate, kidnapping sweet and innocent children and doing the worst things imaginable (rape and torture of innocent children) before killing them, wondering if you're going to go into a house or into the school and face a 12 year old with a gun today, wondering if someone walking by on the street while your sitting at a traffic light is going to take out a gun and blow you away just because of your uniform, when someone calls 911 for help but it's really someone who is laying an ambush to kill you when you arrive to help, when you want to have some coffee at the local coffee shop and someone walks in and wants to you kill you and your team

members, when you stop a car to get a drunk off the street who could potentially drive into the other lane and kill your family but when you stop their car they fight with you...does any of that sound like anything that happens in war zone (or maybe worse because the people out there are so much like you and they're supposed to be good Americans)? If you don't think cops go to "war" every day (to keep our country at peace internally) then read the newspaper or do some research on gangs or domestic violence situations or anti-government groups. Those in the military/or formerly in the military that have been to a war zone ask yourself what you think/thought of civilians running around in the streets, even if they were helping people? Were trying to help for the right or wrong reasons? Anyway, I'll tell you it tends to jade you and change your perception of even the good people. It's hard not to look at people who are truly trying to help and think "what's this idiot doing out here, they could get themselves or me killed." It's a battle every day not to let it all affect your thinking and perception of people and society. Fortunately I have an awesome wife and kids and friends (like you) for support to ground me and remind me most people in life are good people and truly want to help, but like I said it can still be a battle. A couple of years ago (before starting to work at my current department) I started falling prey to taking that path of thinking and the way I talked to and treated people (including my wife and kids and was probably more like the cops that treated you the way they did), and it almost ended in divorce for me. From my experience most get into the job of police wanting "help people." I hear this all the time when I ask people why they want to be cops. If it's not during an oral board for hiring, and just someone interested in the job, I have to tell them that our help as cops isn't like fire fighters. We don't often run into burning buildings to save the day. This can also jade a person's point of view when they meet the frustration that it feels they can do little to help. We arrest the drug runner or child molester or wife beater or drunk over and over and over again only to see them walk away with a slap on the wrist only to go out and do it over and over again. Ultimately our job is to be sheepdogs (Google: Lt. Col. Dave Grossman's article "On Sheep, Wolves, and Sheepdogs" for a better understanding...he's the foremost authority on Killology and one of the top people who have studied killing and trains military and L.E. worldwide). Our job in "helping" is to take the aforementioned evil people off of the streets as much as we can to keep the rest of the good people safe. So if anyone out there has had a bad run in(s) with a cop then I'm sorry (I've had them myself so I know, and think how much more frustrating and a slap in the face it is to get treated that way by someone you think of as your brother or sister). But keep in mind they're only human, they have good and bad days like you (they may have had a bad day dealing with someone who molested or just shook a child to death and you caught them at the end of it), or they could honestly just be a jerk or "badge heavy." Don't throw out the baby with the bath water...as the saying goes. We're not psychic and it takes time to figure out what's going on when we arrive on scene for something. What we first see as someone who jumped off the bridge for a swim, or the person who pushed them off of the bridge and now they're trying to drown the guy, could turn out to be a true hero saving someone (like you did). If the cop didn't thank the hell out of you then shame on them and they were in the wrong. I'm not going to

make excuses for your traffic cop here, but here's a personal take to help enlighten you that she was probably thinking "why the hell is this guy out here he's gonna get himself run over." She probably thought she was helping you because we're paid to take risks and the civilian is not. Why would she be angry and maybe not want you out in the street? It could be because when you (like me) see things like a construction flagger in the middle of the day in full orange with a flag and lights flashing get run over by some driver and then they get dragged 300 feet under a car while screaming leaving a long bloody streak, all while others around were waving and screaming at the person driving (by the way the driver was completely sober)...well you just don't want to see that happen to a civilian. So here's my final take... 1)Cut 'em a break and don't take it personally, 2)Sorry and thanks to anyone out there who was yelled at for trying to help, which leads me to 3)don't ever lose the attitude "It will be a cold day in hell when I don't do everything in my power to save someone, or help someone stranded, put out a fire or otherwise 'interfere.'" They may not appreciate you at the time, but they may later kick themselves and with they had your phone number to call and thank you once they're out of the moment (I'm guilty I'll admit it). For everyone else out there if you don't understand why a cop does/did what they do/did I recommend going on some ride-alongs, taking a citizens academy so you get an idea of what it's like, or find a friendly cop and ask them "why?" (I'm always available...hehe). They might not be able to tell you exactly why, but they might be able to give you an idea based on their experiences. Love you my brother. Stay strong and keep that positive attitude.

--Thanks again, Matt. Got me thinking. --MJ

Posted 3rd August 2011 by mj

Labels: norfolk pd bad cops cop hate soap box swatara police story city pd chesapeake pd

[View comments](#)



Snyderman1 August 4, 2011 at 3:45 PM

You're a true friend MJ. If I ever get that way I expect you to come out and set me straight Marine style (with a gentle boot to the...well you know where). But you don't have to wait until then to come out. Lol



Snyderman1 August 4, 2011 at 3:51 PM

P.S. Keep rockin' out your posts. We all need reminders that we are truly here to "protect and serve" the public...emphasis on serve. No matter what job you're in. Remember, it's okay to see a counselor/psychiatrist if your job (L.E., first

responders, and others who see the dark side of life) is starting to change you from the person you are into what MJ so well described as 'primadonna jerk.' And to our military we love you and keep up the good fight to keep us safe. I check the lists of those who have gone on before me (died) in the good fight often and I pray for you and your families. We love you guys!



Snyderman1 August 4, 2011 at 4:10 PM

P.P.S. Thanks for posting my reply. You're a great friend. See my replies, which posted this time, and keep us on the straight and narrow my friend. We need guys like you. I will tell you I work with a Marine teacher, I believe she's a Gunny Sergeant, and I know she's in charge of the funerals for all Marine's in a 4-5 state region. She has also had some bad run-in's with cops. She had one cop in a town in Minnesota (if I remember right) take she and her Marine's to the police station for shooting their guns within city limits at a Marine's funeral (hello...it's called a 21 gun salute). That's what you properly labeled a primadonna jerk! (By the way they were released and the cop got the ass chewing of his life from his Chief which was good). I thanked her for her service when she told me about it, and she comes to me often with cop related questions (both good and bad). I'll tell you, I had a bad car crash one day with a car of kids and two other cars full of people (the kids were not at fault by the way). When I arrived she was rendering aid, and then she went and started to direct traffic. I gave her my traffic vest and gloves and let her do her thing while I helped the people in the cars because it was just me and the injured and her (and the gawkers who wanted to photograph/video and sit on their thumbs while trapped/injured people screamed for help). So there are those out there that appreciate all the help we can get. I've made several post crash "thank you" calls to helpful people who went out of their way to stop and were rendering aid at bad traffic crashes until me and the paramedics arrived. So thank you from me and the other cops that are still good and thankful.

Coming Soon: The Montour Trail Review

August 3rd, 2011

For those of you who may be looking... the book will find its way back to the bench soon. I'll be posting the first wave of comments by the end of this coming weekend.

--MJ

Virginia Beach Photos I

August 8th, 2011





















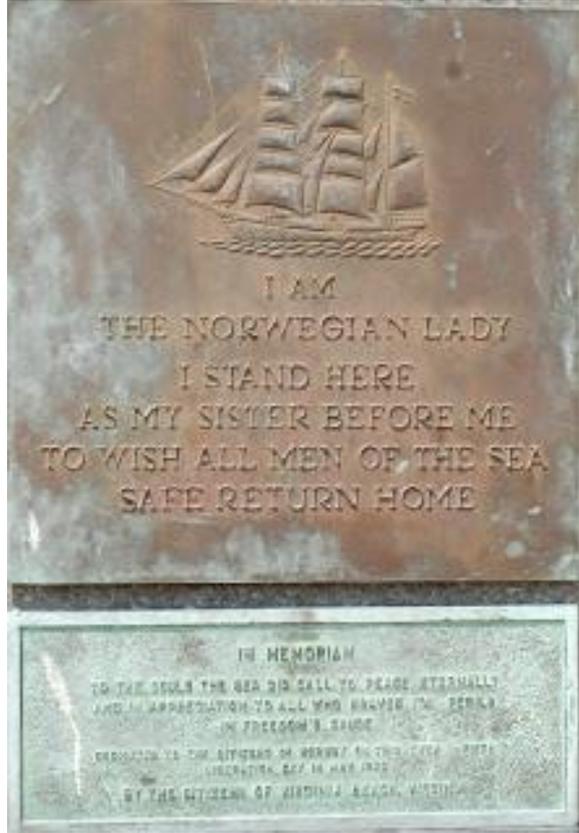
Virginia Beach Photos II

August 9th, 2011

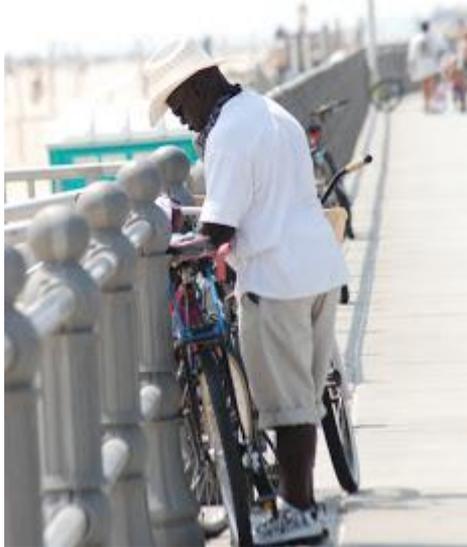


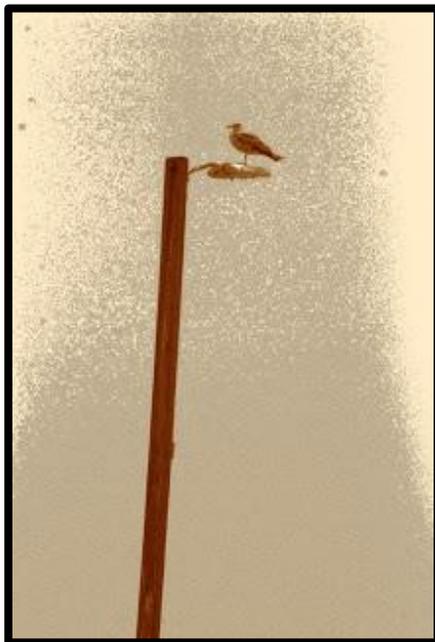












The Montour Trail Review, 7/25/11 - 8/3/11

August 9th, 2011

On the 25th of July, I placed an empty book on a bench on the Montour Trail. On the cover, "The Montour Trail Review." On the inside, I posed a simple directive: "Make a Statement." I wanted to see what was on people's minds as they sit on that bench, overlooking the horse ranch. I let the participants know that their ideas would be published to this blog. Here's what they wrote:

I adore my wife! --MJ, 25 July 2011

I heart my snooks! --SK, 25 July 2011

biked with VN, SK, hot! --KM *heart*

God is good! --MR, July 26th 2011

Great view, we enjoyed it, God certainly is good to us. Thanks.

Thanks for helping to spread the word. "Through Him all things are possible" They really are I know I am an ~~an~~ His example of a reversal of destiny.. I was an orphan.. now I am rich with Family.. a wonderful family.. God bless you all... --July 26th, 2011

I am really not sure what I'm supposed to be writing in here. About God? Q: What's God?

(1) A: Who is God?

(2) A: The great "I Am"

(3) A: The Reason

I don't have anything to say... but at least it looks like I contributed, at a glance. Montour Trail Forever!

7/25 --Riding bikes with the family.. enjoying the evening w / little traffic on the trail.. listening to the birds & viewing nature.. enjoyed reading..

7/26 --Good experience. Beautiful trail. But we are really sweating to death. Biking is wonderful. Thank You.

7/26 --Riding bikes.. practicing for my tri this Sunday. Got frustrated with my bike and today in general, stopped at the first bench I found. Made my day to see inspiration. Very cool idea whoever this is!

7/26 --Ride this trail often.. Love it, Beautiful.. Can't wait till the new bridge opens at Clifton Rd. We are all so lucky to have this asset.

7/26 --Husband and I riding bikes enjoying a beautiful evening. We are blessed and thankful to our Father God for all He is doing in our lives. God is good All the time!

7/27 --I'm visiting from N.J., enjoying our walk. I was born in Pa, and love it. I visit this trail once a year, don't have anything like this in N.J. God bless us all!

7/27/11 --Came to the trail to go geocaching with my daughter from Boston. PTF
www.geocaching.com

(the daughter from Boston) Good to be here spending time with mom walking the trail. God has been teaching me lately to rely completely on Him and His strength, not on my own power. Especially in these challenging days in our world and country. He will give us complete strength if only we let Him. "His power is made perfect in our weakness."

7/27 --Absolutely love living so close to the trail. I have a three year old son and we enjoy our runs together. God has given us so many blessings and we are very thankful. My son's favorite part is looking at the horses and resting on the bench. >and finding flowers. "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isiah 40:31

7/27 --I am never closer to God then when I am in Nature.

July 27th --I bike on the Montour at least 3 times a week. My goal this summer is to bike 1000 miles. I've biked 480 so far! Thank you fro spreading God's word, that is awesome! This trail has been such a huge part of my life, and I'm glad to see it can be used to spread God's Love! I'm 15 by the way, and I'm incredibly blessed and thankful for all God has done for me. I've been on 2 major mission trips with my youth group and help out at food banks too sometimes. It's great to see God work in the most random places --like here-- I love it!

28 July 2011 --Splendid experience! Best train conditions anywhere. RJY
Canonsburg, PA

Another fine day on the trail --JMN

July 28th, 2011 --We were taking our kids for a walk and wanted to stop to see the horses. When we got to the bench we sat down to talk, while the kids were looking for horses. Mysister in law saw this bag with a book inside!! We were a little afraid to open it, but we did!! It was so refreshing to open this book and know that God's word is always true!! Thanks for enlightening us!! :-)

July 28, 2011 --Today is my Birthday! My mom and I decided to go for a nice walk and see the horses! It's very hot out, and this was the perfect place for a short rest!

7/28/11 (the mom) --LOVE THIS SPOT!! Are there any swimming holes around?? This trail would be perfect w / a place to jump in + cool off!!

7/28/11 --Rekindling friendships with old is wonderful. On the trail with an old friend who is so sweet. God is looking out for all of us, we just need to seek Him. I know without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ lives and that through Him we can be redeemed of our sins. God is great :) Ask Him & you'll know too! ...I'm Kristin, I'm a Christian, and I'm a Mormon :)

7/30/11 --This reminds me of the rebirth of wonder. Wild horses... wish they'd drag me away

July 30th --This is a sweet idea. What a pleasant surprise. The entries are great. People can be so good--when you least expect! Today is beautiful -hot- too hot for the horses to be out :(I miss them! But I hope they are in the shade. :) Nature is God. It has been our church. It seems there is hope for us all when we remember to express and share love. BJS PS--I just love my husband who introduced me to these wonderful trails! BJS

7-30-2011 --God bless everyone who has written in this book and especially the person who started it. God is everywhere.. you can feel him in the quiet moments on the trail.

Date: July 30th 2011! --We come here all the time.. we love it.. thanks to those who take care of this trail! Please everybody be good, enjoy your life, and thank god for everything! Veronika, 10 years old!

July 30th 2011 --I've been riding on this trail ever since I could ride a bike and I love it! Looking out over the horse fields is so peaceful--we stop here for a rest every time we come! The horses are playing with one another today! -Jessica : D

July 31 --Enjoying our weekend bike ride. Stopped to sit and look at the magnificent things God has created. DS & PS =-)

July 31, 2011 --1st time on trail. Scenery is beautiful - Enjoying it immensely! Paul / M---(?)

July 31, 2011 --Nature is good for the body and spirit - Enjoy it anytime - Anywhere you can -EMC

July 31, 2011 --Perfect trail - Slight incline up - easy return! Enjoy the bench & horse farm view. Great place!

July 31st --WC *heart* smoking cannabis RIGHT HERE =)

Aug 1, --Thank God for this bench!!!

8-1-11 --A perfect day to enjoy the wonders of nature + the joy of living. I will be seeing my granddaughter in a few days which again will remind me how blessed I am.

8-2-2011 --What a GREAT break on this bench, as I make it up this hill, as I am reminded of the GREAT wonders of God's creations and reflect on all of my blessings that include Good Health that allows me to bike 30+ miles as a senior citizen. A wonderful family He gave me. And many other blessings too numerous to mention. God Bless you all

8/2/11 --This is a great spot on the trail. It is so peaceful here! My daughter loves to go & see the horses! Jess D.

8/2/11 --Kody and Dad were here... today was 92 degrees. We are able to see a white and brown horse. As I ride the trail w / my son I thank God for everything And then some. My health & son's, free country, clean air

8/2/11 11:56PM --We should not be on the trail right now. We thought this was drugs. God is good. Watching Petey. *heart* Cate + Frank :)

8/3/11 --Removed this book from the bench, recorded the data, will post to blog on or about August 7th. You should be able to keep up with the updates online by typing "The Montour Trail Review" into a Google search. Thanks All! --MJ

Elk Country, PA

August 10th, 2011

Just ran into a bunch of elk last night. Awesome! I had no clue that there were elk in Pennsylvania. Saw 6 bulls, three cows and a calf over a 40 mile stretch around St. Mary's / Jay area. I wish I had Petra's camera with me right now! These were taken with a cheapo 12-megapixel digital Sony.





Saturday in Gotham City

August 14th, 2011

Filming for the latest (forthcoming) Dark Knight movie wraps up in Pittsburgh next weekend. Here's what we saw downtown yesterday... if you look closely, Batman (or a Batman dummy, presumably) is sitting inside the Batwing--which made its debut appearance yesterday. The coolest thing to note this week in Pittsburgh, is that several blocks are covered in 'snow.' Pictures below don't really do justice. Fun place to be right now.







Saturday at McConnell's Mill State Park

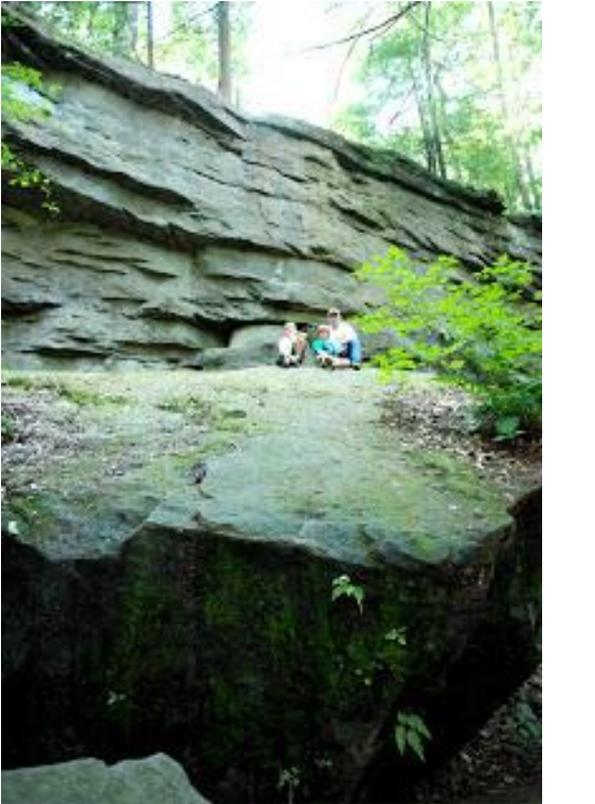
August 14th, 2011

Spent the afternoon at McConnell's Mill State Park, an awesome outdoor adventure spot that we discovered with the Natchers a few weeks ago. There is no end to the amount of cracks, crevices, cliffs, canyons, and caves to explore! Photos to follow.























The Montour Trail Review, 8/01/11 - 8/13/2011

August 14th, 2011

Here's the latest bunch of entries in the Montour Trail Review, a notebook that sits on a bench overlooking a horse pasture (around Mile 28?) on the Montour Trail. Since there have been a lot of entries in the last week, I just took pictures of the pages instead of writing them all out. Hope you enjoy as much as we have been. The first page shown is where we left off with the last set of entries.

8/2/11 11:56 pm
We should not be on the trail right now. We thought this was drugs. God is good.
Watching Petey.
Late + Frank :-
8/3/11
REMOVED THIS BOOK FROM THE BENCH, RECORDED THE DATA, WILL POST TO BLOG ON OR ABOUT AUGUST 7TH. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO KEEP UP WITH THE UPDATES ONLINE BY TYPING "THE MONTOUR TRAIL REVIEW" INTO A GOOGLE SEARCH. THANKS AG!
-- MJ

8/4/11
Riding the trail with the family today. It's our tradition to always stop at this bench and look at the horses. It's a great trail! R.K.
8/5/11
I love this trail, it is the best trail ever!!! I love stopping at this bench and relaxing.

From my two girls (4+2) :-

17-10-11
#1008

8/5/11
This is a beautiful trail and a beautiful view. I have never sat at this bench. Too bad the horses are not out. I have yet to experience the magic of watching them play. I hope everyone has a blessed day.
"Cast all your cares upon God for He cares for you."

8/5/11
 I Love this trail
 its so relaxing.

8/5/11
 Psalm 62:5 Yes, my soul,
 find rest in God, my
 salvation comes from
 him.

This spot, this trail is
 a gift from God. Blessings
 to all that volunteer their
 time and resources to
 maintain the trail. HTO

8/5/11 This is such a gorgeous
 trail! It makes exercising

a great experience. And
 what a beautiful view of
 the horse farm!
 God bless!!

9-5-11

This trail is the closest thing to
 a girlfriend I have 
 I Love it as if it was my only
 child!

forever
 alone

aug 5 2011

This trail is the
 shit yo, love to
 stop here an chill
 with wit my homie
 an smoke a Newport
 n enjoy da view yo.
 God Bless w/educater
 people an beautiful
 view, P.S. I white
 and my name is Jamal
 Jacobson hit me up
 on twitter

This one
 never learned
 how to speak!

aug 5

I agree with this
 white  

love
 for life
 Kellen
 Williams

mark
 of da
 Newport

Aug 6 I HAVE BEEN WORKING
HARD, FEELING STRESSED, AND HAVE
NOT KEPT UP WITH MY CYCLING,
STOPPED TO REST HERE TODAY ON A
COMBINATION ROAD/TRAIL RIDE. I
NEED TO REMIND MYSELF THAT RIDING
IS IMPORTANT, LIFE IS SHORT, AND
SOME DAY I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO
ENJOY THIS WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE.
Paul M.

Aug. 6

"LIFE IS WHAT
HAPPENS WHILE YOU'RE
BUSY MAKING OTHER PLANS"
- John LENNON

TAKE TIME TO RIDE
& ENJOY LIFE BEFORE
LIFE GETS IN THE WAY.

-RON R.

August 6
This has been the most eventful,
wonderful, stressful summer of my life
and I don't want it to end.
-Dominic R.

The pickets are
making a joyful
noise. MB.

8-6-2011
Training for my
first marathon in
November. KJ.

8/6/11
Enjoying time with my Family,
Love to ride!
JC

8/6/11
This trail is beautiful we
love it.
~ ADAM - KOSICE, Slovak rep.
D March

August 6th 2011
At this time I'm
sitting on the blue
bench looking at the
horses! 7 days until
vacation (Florida)
Can't wait! Me
and my friend are
going to compete there
as a bike race!
Training right now!
I'm totally going to
win no doubt about
it! C U later
everyone! Enjoy the
trail!
Veronika!
10 years old!

Aug 7th 2011
Me and the family
(Sally, Samantha, +
Stevie) rode the
trail on our vacation.
Beautiful trail with some
great scenery. Samantha
loves the horses. Second
time Stevie + I did the
trail this weekend. Will
do again when we come
back this way.

Thanks
Kelly Stemmler
Forty Fort, PA

max 8-6-11
I was walking on the trail
I saw some spiders,
butterflies, ladybugs &
snakes) and more

8/7/11 9:30AM
thought this was a
geo cache. This spot is
such a pleasant interlude
especially when the
horses are in the pasture.
Great spot for a winery
Disappointed that coffee
shop is not open on Sunday
mornings - its near the beginning
of TRAIL
Nancy + fam, McCandless

8-7-11
No entries so far today.
Hot & Humid - best time
to be on the trail.
please ALL Dog owners
CLEAN up! Thank-you
I hope this Trail
will be here for generations
to come. Good way to
teach children about the
County of Nature!

8-7-2011
My family & friends love this trail! I am
glad see so many enjoying it and exercising.
So grateful to have a place close
to home to enjoy nature and
recreation. -Ben

8/8/11 and I
My sister love ~~climbing~~ an
timed walk to this bench
and sitting for a while. Very
peaceful. Unfortunately we
still have to run back so
next time please enclose a
motorized scooter.
♡ E J + E J

8/8/11
Me and my friends love
coming down so we can each
eat at nearby food places! It
is also nice to have benches
for a resting spots with
great views of horses! Amazing
- Kaurlyn ♡

8/8/11
WE LOVE HOW THE TRAIL
IS NEXT TO A HORSE FARM.
IT HAS A GREAT VIEW!
-EMMA

8/8/11
- The view is amazing
and we love how you can
just admire the horses. Also,
We love that there is a bunch
of ~~food~~ food places and NO
ADVERTISING. Great!
♡ Bailey

8/8/11

Beautiful days are
even more beautiful on
a bike. Thanks to all
the volunteers for
making such a lovely trail
possible!! We're lucky
to live in Western Penn-
sylvania. L.H.

8/3/11

Me and My family
come every summer
to ride our bikes. Toby is
the fastest ~~we~~ we've ever
come to the finish. I think
it is very pretty (without a
6 year old brother in front
of you + a 9 year old sister
~~behind~~ behind you when
you are 11.

Life

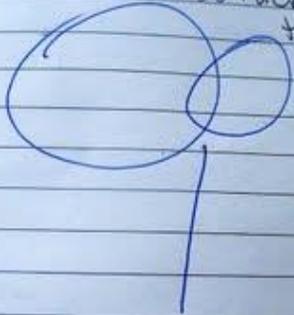
My Mob For Life



8-11

I Love this
trail because
my family ~~we~~ go
to this trail
every year. I think
it's great because
it's good exercise
and really fun going
down. It's 8:14 pm
and we are just
here talking then
we will ~~go~~ go on.
I have had a
big day we went
to the creek
and saw a snake.
From ~~and~~ Anna Burt

8-8-11
Love and enjoy the
trail. I enjoy resting
on the bench and what
a beautiful view! Thank
you God. BLY

8-10-11
Gay Penis
abstract trees

ANONIMOUS

Christopher, McKenna, +
Christian
HAD A blast, stopped
often to enjoy
scenery. THE Little
Guy needed water
8/10/11
This trail is just what I
need. It's lovely - I've been
hiking here for at least 15
years - long before it is as
finished as today. HX

8/10/11

Enjoy this trail for the scenery
and exercise. I've done two long trips,
to DC and Eoisland, and use this trail
to prepare.

Nice to rest here with the
horses. *(signature)*

Audrey
2 1/2

I am walking with my 2
little girls on a gorgeous
Wednesday evening. They
were so excited to see the
horses. A GREAT way to
get fresh air + exercise.

Sally J.

If only there were a
river!
↑
there is.
6-7 miles
farther out.
Great view from
the bridge that
runs over it.

8/10/11

Noah and I are out
for a bike ride now
that the weather has
cooled a little.

Steve C.

8/10/11

What a great evening for a bike
ride - finally cool + less humid!
The horses were very frisky tonight,
running up + down the hill. We're
thankful for this great trail, this
awesome view, and our health to be
able to enjoy it all. God is good!
Steve + Joanne

TOO MANY PEOPLE ON MY TRAIL
- LEAVE FOR RECOVERING ---
FRIEND OF BILL W.

FINALLY GOT MY LAZY BUTT
OUT FOR A RUN!
--MJ

8/12 8/13
Susan came into town
with her bike. We had
an evening ride + a
8 AM ride. The weather
and the scenery was
fabulous
Maude + Susan

August 11, 2011
Farmhouse coffee
is awesome, but a 2-3
mile bike ride for it is
Killer!

The best drink -
Frozen HOT CHOCOLATE
drank ~~the~~ it all
then felt fat as an
elephant!

It is 4 stars. I wish it was
up hill on the way to
farmhouse and down hill on
the way back.

I wish I had friends to share
my great experiences on the trail
with....

Nate M. 8/12/11

Today I saw
a yellow airplane.
And I went to
farmhouse and got
the best chocolate
cookies ever. Then
I got apple juice.
I hate riding
back because it
is up hill.

||
C

8/12/11

We're from North Bay,
Ontario, Canada and have
been using this trail
every summer for the
last 15 years. We have
great memories visiting
our grandmother and
using this trail!

Alex & Andrew B.

8/12/11
Allison S.
I'm 9 years old and finally I am tall enough to ride my sister's bike. And she's 16. I absolutely LOVE Bike Riding!
Thanks for leaving this cool notebook. Great idea!
Allison's mom (Abbie)

8-12-11
Tom E.
Just spent a wonderful day on the trail with the most beautiful person in the world (day well spent).
Emily R
Today I went on the trail with the man I love and it was one of the most amazing days.
Family ♡ Always & forever





On Parenting. Man Up, America

August 20th, 2011

"It's really tough being a parent these days." That's the snippet I heard yesterday as I was flipping through radio stations while driving down the road. I paused for a few seconds, letting the man continue. Sounded like a typical Christian radio program. I kept channel surfing until I found no static and some mindless tunes. That's when it started to get me.

It's really tough being a parent these days. No, it's really not. It's tough being jobless these days. It's tough being homeless these days. It's tough losing your spouse these days. With recent natural disasters in Thailand, Haiti, Japan... how can we say that anything in our life is really tough, short of a tragedy? Ethnic cleansing / genocide. Famine. Drought. Could you fathom the difficulty of a decision to triage your children? To take only the healthiest among them on a 120 mile death march with hope of finding food and water in Ethiopia? This is the decision that Somali mothers are making in Africa at this very minute. It's really tough being a parent in Ethiopia these days. Not in Wichita. Not in Boston. Not in Denver.

With all that we don't have, with all we see going wrong, we have lost sight of what we have. With what's going *right* in our country and in our lives. Eggs and bread and milk and water are just some scrap aluminum and a Wal-Mart away. Most of us have no clue what tough looks like. Man up, America.

Being a parent isn't tough. It's challenging. It's a test of your character. Losing your legs is tough. Battling cancer or MS, that's tough. My friend lost his daughter in a four-wheeling accident last year. On Father's Day. "One minute she was riding down the road with her sister and her sister's boyfriend." The next minute I was being pinned down at the scene of the accident because they wouldn't let me see her. I had a heart attack and woke up in the ambulance." **That's** tough. Another friend just lost his sister and brother-in-law. An uncontrollably-swelling brain tumor was discovered in his brother-in-law. He died within a week. Loving husband. Loving father. Sole supporter of his family. His wife (my friend's sister) killed herself the next day. Their children are forever lost in the catastrophic events of a single week. How does a child endure life after such events? And we think *parenting's* tough.

Our conglomerate toughness meter needs adjustment. I mean badly. Man up, America.

Your Kids Need a Spanking

August 20th, 2011

Last night, we ate Italian at Pazzo. I cheated, because I chowed down at Cracker Barrel with a guy from work who was visiting our region from Texas. So I was just having wine, and tiramisu to go. Of course the kids always want a taste of wine. A finger drop for each of the girls, a sip for Caleb, Josh was at a football Chalk Talk at coach's house.

The meal was great, the atmosphere was aggravating. Right beside us, was a family with a screamer. You know the type. On the plane, in the restaurant, in a movie theater... it's the single most certain ambiance-ruining date ender. I was mentally popping that kid on the butt with a pointing finger and a firm voice that said, *"NO Ma'am! You will not act this way in a restaurant or anywhere."*

Mom used to bust out the wooden spoon and chase me around the house with it. Seemed like a daily occurrence, and I was a good kid! "Don't you EVER (crack) EVER (crack) EVER (crack) EVER (crack)... and then came the bar of soap in the mouth. Broke one of those spoons over my butt one time. Tried padding my butt with books, toilet paper, and even got my knuckles in the way a time or two. I remember the one time my dad was made to bust out a belt on my hindparts. He couldn't even hold it together afterward. Yeah, he was never good at administering punishment.

Victory Christian School, Springfield Ohio. Reverend Jerry Stinger, the pastor of Victory Baptist Church and the Principal of the school... Discipline dealer. Wielder of the giant King James Bible. *"Y'Ought not come into the Lord's House with dirty hands and no belt on your slacks, bless God!"*

So I'm sitting in class. 12 years old. Flipping staples at Mrs. George, our teacher, whenever she had her back to us. Probably showing off for Angela Bolton and Michelle Lindsay. Mrs. George calls up the Reverend Stinger on the intercom. I didn't get called into his office upstairs. Instead, he came downstairs, to the basement where the four or five classrooms were. There was a small dark room--barely a closet--attached to my classroom (which was roughly under the back right side of the sanctuary upstairs). Inside this small room was an even smaller desk and a thick carved walnut stain-colored paddle hanging on the wall. "Hands on the desk." Three cracks across my nearly teenage butt and I was sat back down in class with tears streaming down my face.

It wasn't my first encounter with corporal punishment. Voice For Christ Christian School, 2nd Grade, in the school's inaugural year. Assistant Vice Principal Les Burnett, a friend of my parents at that time, called myself and my teacher in from recess after I pushed someone off that metal bar half-dome thing. First the phone call to my mom. Then the butt whoopins.

But hey, I remembered their names!!! And I remember that they meant business. Thanks, Jerry Stinger and Les Burnett. Thanks Mom!!!

Not my style these days. We did, we do, and we will spank our kids, from age 1 to 18, but it's different. LOTS of love in this family. We'd have it no other way. These days, we probably dish out one spanking every month or two, to one of our four kids. They're great kids!!! Used to be more often... usually when one of them was young and not listening. First comes the warning. Then comes the action. No spoons, no paddles, no 'pull down your pants' or 'bend over my knee.' just one good swift hand to the butt, followed by a thorough 'talking to' and a 'do you understand me?'

Parents of screamers, of fit-throwers, of scratchers and biters and kickers and "NO!"ers and "MINE!"ers... I'll tell you like my brother Larry would. "Yo' kids done BEEN needin' they ass beat." C'mon parents--soft and pasty parents with the 'hands off' parenting policy and the time-outs and the consequence-free 'counting.' *"Don't make me count to thirty-six, buster!"* Stop doping your kids and sending them to counseling--let's hear some butt pops before your kids grow up and get their teeth pushed in by somebody's elbow... all because you raised some selfish, rotten brats.

Country Music Season

August 20th, 2011

Well, it's country music season again. I listen to all sorts of music, and when one type gets old, I rotate to the next genre for a few months, in a lifetime of musical roulette. These days, the songs on a country channel are all new and fresh to me. I'm digging on Jason Aldean's *Dirt Road*, Brantley Gilbert's *Country Must be Country Wide*, Toby Keith's *Made in America*, Jake Owen's *Barefoot Blue Jean Night*, Brad Paisley & Carrie Underwood's *Remind Me*, Lady Antebellum's *Just a Kiss*, Eli Young Band's *Crazy Girl*, Trace Adkins' *Just Fishin,'* and Aaron Lewis' *Country Boy*.

From time to time, I think everybody needs a little country.

The Bug That Gives Me the Willies

August 20th, 2011



Just found a new bug to hate on. Up until this point, the only bugs I didn't particularly like were fire ants, mosquitoes, and CENTIPEDES. Well, please join me in welcoming to this family of bugs that I hate... The *Eastern Dobsonfly*. Saw one for the first time the other day in central PA, just above the door as I was walking into Wal-Mart. Googled it, found the pictures. Ugggggh! Heebie Jeebies! Oh yeah, variations of them are everywhere, by the way. There's probably one in your basement.

And for the record, no... that's not me holding it. *Carnies... small hands... (Austin Powers)* No thanks. This is some Google photo. The one I saw was like 8" long!!

Giuseppe's Pasta House: A Sad Farewell

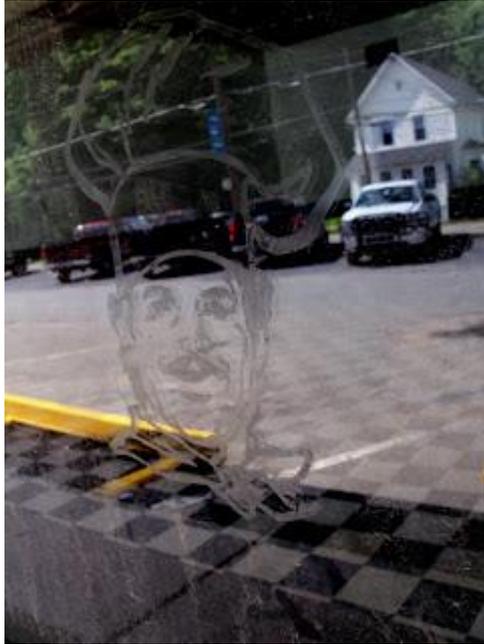
August 21st, 2011



Because our rigs move every couple months on average, it's been quite a while since I passed through the town of Dushore, home of Giuseppe's Pasta House. For those of you who do not know about Giuseppe's, please read some of my previous stories about Gianni Bumbaco and his fabulous little Italian restaurant.

Well, since my last visit, the town of Dushore fell victim to serious flooding. Homes and businesses in this sleepy town were devastated when water depth exceeded four feet in many areas.

I had no idea about the flood. In a recent visit to my company's Northern region, I swung by Birdsong to score a few bottles of game red before heading to Giuseppe's. I heard the preliminary news from John at Birdsong. It turns out that Giuseppe's is no more. He shared some of the sketchy details with me, and was visibly disheartened about Gianni's loss. I needed to see for myself. Giuseppe's was the one and only place I loved to visit in this half of Pennsylvania, and the one spot where I felt a strong sense of family away from my own.



I stood in Giuseppe's parking lot and stared. Nothing. Three clean walls and window frontage. The only shred of proof that Giuseppe's existed here is the shadowed image of an Italian chef on the front window.

I called the number that I had for Gianni. His home number, it turns out. I spoke with his wife, and she told me that the damage that the restaurant incurred from the flood was too great for recovery; they were forced to count their losses. Gianni now works--and has for the last month--in the oilfield! He collects data (via surveying & measurements, I believe) for the Marcellus Shale's natural gas industry. He enjoys that type of work, and his wife can appreciate the regularity of pay... and the fact he's home more! Giuseppe's was taxing, as I

imagine would be the case in running any restaurant.

I look forward to seeing what's in store for Gianni and his family. While I already miss Giuseppe's, I am happier for Gianni's family in this new chapter of their lives, and I'm curious about the positive impact of the regionally-unpopular gas industry on their future! God used that industry to change our lives as well, and ten months in, my family and I are still really excited about it.

God Bless Gianni and his family. Closing the door on some great memories, I'm thankful for Giuseppe's and what it has meant to me. Thanks for the times, thanks for the people, thanks for the espressos & tiramisus. Thanks for sharing your magic with my family. Goodbye, Giuseppe's... ..and thanks, Gianni.

Older Posts about Giuseppe's:

1. Giuseppe's Pasta House
2. Saturday Evening at Giuseppe's
3. Bring Your Own Bottle to Giuseppe's
4. Bird Song Winery II... and Giuseppe's

Labels: italian restaurant dushore pennsylvania gianni bumbaco giuseppe's dushore giuseppe's pasta house food



Melissa August 23, 2011 at 10:10 AM

hmmm. not sure what happened! I commented on this yesterday and there's no comment. Strange. What I said was that I'm sure they really appreciate your interest, concern and passion for their little restaurant! So sad they had to close but so glad he was able to find another job.



Chris August 27, 2011 at 7:18 PM

I'd have to agree, that was the only restaurant in town I'd order out from... and I've lived here all my life. The servings were huge, you never left there hungry. None of the other places are worth the time. April 26th it happened, and it came so fast, with out any warning that we couldn't do anything at all. I'm a volunteer fireman in Dushore. And I always have a camera in my gear...

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/29794680@N08/sets/72157627533172508/>

Brother American: A Story of Pride and Humility

August 22nd, 2011

A few weeks ago, I was the recipient of a first-rate compliment that I count among the highest I've ever received. It was a truly humbling experience. Petra, the kids, and myself were returning from a week-long vacation in Virginia. Nearing Uniontown, we passed a broken down vehicle on an exit ramp with a woman in the passenger seat. It was around Midnight. A late-fifties black man was walking away from the car with a five gallon gas can. Our 5-seater Envoy was already crammed with six butts, a couple of suitcases, and a bunch of other stuff for the kids from grandma & grandpa. There wasn't much we could do to help, so we prayed for them and hoped God would send someone quickly to their aid.

At the bottom of the ramp, we could see an unlit gas station just to the right... then a mile or more of nothingness beyond that. We turned left to follow our original course, and discovered after a few minutes of driving that there was not a gas station within walking distance. I turned around.

We saw under the waning distant streetlights that the man had taken a right at the

bottom of the ramp, headed toward the nothingness. We intercepted the wanderer and I explained that our overfilled Envoy was far from the rescue wagon I wished it could be for him. "Let me see your gas can," I said. He gladly handed it over, and I told him we'd meet back at his vehicle as soon as possible.

After filling the can up a few miles away, we drove back to the downed vehicle and I jumped out. The stranger approached me with a big grin. "Hey man, wow--thank you so much!" His grin turned to a wide-open smile, revealing a few missing front teeth. He took the gas can and grasped my hand in a firm handshake, locking eyes with me. "You from around here?" "Bethel Park." I said. "Just moved there. Loving this State!" He continued, "My name's Barry. I live just up the road about ten miles from here. I tell you what... (shaking his head, as if in disbelief that I would even return his gas can) ...man, thank you!" While rapidly coupling and processing his gait, his tone, his eyes and his gestures, one thought resounded through my mind: GENUINE.

Then Barry rocked me with the following statement. "Man, I'm gonna tell you something I don't think I've ever said in my freakin' life, for real. You make me proud to be an American. I really mean that."

I'm certain I've never heard that compliment before, and I don't think I'll ever forget it.

Labels: leadership development patriotic american proud american live free or die



Melissa August 23, 2011 at 10:16 AM

That's awesome! We love you guys and are so proud to call you our friends.



Anonymous August 23, 2011 at 11:19 PM

Thanks Melissa! We love you guys too and are likewise proud to call you our friends--you're fun and adventurous and big-hearted! And we're only friends with cool people. Big thanks to you and noogies to your 3 boys! Huh... have to post as Anonymous for some reason. --MJ

EARTHQUAKE TODAY!

August 23rd, 2011

Petra just called me about an earthquake. Shook the house up, scared her and the girls...boys didn't notice. She called me, said it was crazy... I didn't feel it at work, Ron said it was probably beavers under the house... then the whole office piped up... Mike thought he was going crazy because his water bottle was jumping on his desk. Jennifer: I just told her my desk was moving! More than half the office felt it or saw it. Occurred at around 1:54 PM today. Petra checked online and said that Virginia and North Carolina are both reporting earthquakes right this minute. Huh. The world's going to crap... and my internal earthquake sensor is broken.

Labels: pennsylvania earthquake

The Montour Trail Review, 13 August - 25 August 2011

August 25th, 2011

Nearly two weeks have passed since the last time I checked the book and recorded the entries online. Yesterday, I went to check it out, and when I walked up to the bench, the book was gone! A bit disheartened, but not crushed. Whoever took it may have really needed it. Before leaving, I decided to look around for the book, in case it was hidden or misplaced. After almost giving up and leaving, I investigated a piece of trash deep in the bushes near the bench. It was the book! Only a day-and-a-half's worth of entries had been made, so I presume it disappeared early on.

Anyway, here are the entries. I'll get the book back to the trail bench tomorrow.

8/13/11 -- Tomorrow's my birthday! Went for run w/my girls... Hurtin! Going climbing w/boys later. --Data from book recorded. Google it (roughly a week from now).

8/13/11 -- Came with the family for a run as the kids ride their bikes. Stopped to see the horses. I love the trail in the summer--all the canopied trees provide shade and beauty...

8-13-11 -- New bikes. New adventures. Having a great time w/husband on trail. :)

8-13-11 -- Max's first walk on the trail... headed down to the coffee shop. Enjoyed his first adventure... wide awake observing every minute of his day. Our sweet baby crashed on the way back. Many more adventures to come... life is great. Love all things! Mammao! (*or is it Mamma O?*)

8/13/11 -- I came to see the horses, I really wish they were here. Oh well, I'll just come another time.

8/14/11 -- I had a great day biking on this trail! It is awesome and this is a great idea.

August 13, 2011 -- Had a pretty rough day at home so I decided to go for a walk. Great view, calming, good choice. Glad to contribute, it's good to spread the word. - CDT

Aug 13th -- I get scared every once in awhile. It sounds like tribal Indians are behind me. New bench--awesome!! There is a fly to my left, now it sits on my leg. Too many clothes. On people--help! Red jeep--wave if you have one.

Aug 13, 2011 -- What a beautiful time for a bike ride in nature--very bucolic, peaceful, serene--reasons all the more to return time and time again! CTC

8/13/2011 -- For Jeff, my husband + love of my life, thank you for the love + the memories--Enjoying life still, always thinking of you as I sit on the bench w/your name. Beautiful Day -- Hope peace + love fill the hearts of all who enjoy the God-given view ahead of them in their eyes. JBS

hey! this is my fav spot. sunday. farmhouse closed? rllly --unknown date-- mc

I think it should have more water fountains --[omac]

I really like the trail but it should be wider. Bike racks at every bench. More trash cans.

8/14/11 -- Enjoy walking on the trail with my wife and at 76 and 71 am thankful that we are able. Not sure what a god has to do with it though --Alan

8-14-11 -- Enjoying a ride on the trail with my daughter -- Her 1st trail ride! You Rock, Girl! --Dad XOX

8/15/11 -- Riding on the trail with my son Alex, who is a great adventurer! He's 10 a teaches me a lot. --Todd

8/15/11 9:40 PM First ever night ride -- very cool! Lots of crickets, cicadas & bugs. Paused here to look at the moon--& see the galaxy. Need stronger headlight! -- Melina & Dave



Anonymous September 3, 2012 at 3:29 PM

I found a book in mcconnells mill labled review. where do I go to post on it



mj September 4, 2012 at 12:37 AM

Post it here... or anywhere... I'll make a place for it. Really cool that you wrote in, that book's been out there for a while. Figured it had become the shredded bottom of some racoon nest somewhere. Do raccoons make nests? But yeah, post here or send me an email... mattyspeights@yahoo.

Leadership by Design

August 27th, 2011

At my workplace--the Pennsylvania division of an oil & gas drilling company--there is a ridiculous turnover rate. By and large, it is positive, meaning that the numbers are attributed to promotions and subsequent transfers more often than to attrition. Regardless, when turnover occurs, it creates voids--a number of gaps that need to quickly be filled by qualified individuals.

Usually, the "who" decision on filling these gaps gets hashed out in a roundtable discussion, and it looks something like this: "Well, what do you guys think about Joe?" "*Joe Smith?*" "Yeah. He's been here a couple years, he hasn't really screwed anything up, and I think he'll move up here to take the promotion." "*Is he ready?*" "I think so. I'll talk to him to find out." "*Okay, put his name in the pool. What do you guys think about Dave?*"

Now, there's an outside organization that is contracted to provide a 'leadership coaching model' for our company. It is a good company, they have sound processes, and their coaches are continually honing their leadership instructional skills through training, required reading, and practical application. The program that they provided to our company is called *Pathways to Principled Leadership*. Having read through the syllabus, and after having attended a couple of the principled leadership classes, I've applied some of the program's tenets and found it to be pertinent, effective, and generally well-rounded.

The problem is that only the company's leaders attend the principled leadership classes. Perhaps your company's leadership training agenda looks like this as well. In a way, it's putting the figurative cart before the horse; it can also be viewed as teaching old dogs new tricks. Please join me in looking at this from a different perspective.

The term *Pathways* eludes to a developmental process in becoming a leader. A decade's service in the Marines taught me that leadership development begins at the lowest level, when boot camp inductees recite leadership traits and motivational quotes and 'General Orders' verbatim. This is where one learns to shave the right way, to tie a necktie, to properly shine and press, and learn tips and tricks about dressing sharply that most men are never formally taught... etiquette, propriety, hygiene, battle skills, history, personal bearing, decision-making, command voice... these critical baseline subjects are hammered into you at inception, and honed over the course of a career. Now, these young Marines-to-be do not look like anyone that you'd want to invest precious time or money into. They're puny, pimply, pale, skinny, and squeaky. Average age between seventeen and twenty. They haven't "earned" the right (by seniority) to receive expensive training within their new company.

Make no mistake, the average boot is scrawnier than an unexperienced new hire on a drilling rig... yet from the the get-go, characteristics and principles of leadership will be directed toward, and spoken into, this puny kid repeatedly. Conversely, a new hire on a rig will work for years without knowing what professional leadership training looks like. And *everything* 'rises and falls with leadership.' Attitude. Retention. Total Recordable Incident Rate. Maintenance. Safety. Fraud, waste, and abuse. In summing up this comparison, you'll note that the Marines employ two types of people: today's leaders, and tomorrow's leaders. What a great developmental example to emulate. This is **leadership by design**.

When any company fills leadership voids with individuals who have not been developed as leaders... who simply have time-based seniority and who do not necessarily display any strong characteristics beside 'git-er-done,' then that company is practicing leadership by default, not leadership by design or development.

Retain people through motivation and a General Maximus-style field example (that's another blog post). Then begin the leadership investment early. It will pay off big dividends later.

MJ's Oilfield Chronicles, Part I: Intro to Appalachian Gas Drilling Operations

August 28th, 2011



Eleven months ago, I couldn't have told you what a drilling rig's derrick looked like. Now I'm knee deep in the drilling industry, working the maintenance operations side of a 30+ rig gas drilling operation in the Marcellus Shale and Utica Shale regions of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, and just outside the New York border.

To begin, here's a nickel's worth of oilfield history, to include the regional

significance of my current geographic area: the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As early as 200 B.C., the Chinese began hand-drilling aqueous salt formations using iron bits and bamboo pipe. Often, gas and oil seeps were the undesirable byproducts of tapping into a salt dome. Okay, flash forward 2,000 years. Wood and coal are the natural fuel products for producing heat and light. Whale oil, extracted from blubber, is considered premium fuel in the pre-dawn of America's Industrial Age. Early 1800's, crude oil is intentionally drilled in Russia. Kerosene--a crude oil derivative--is discovered, fast replacing whale oil as a cleaner-burning fuel for heating and lighting. 1859, Colonel Edwin Drake drills the first successful U.S. oil well near Titusville, Pennsylvania... creating the world's first oil boom. The 152 years between that first well and today have shown forth a number of improvements and advancements in this infantile 'Age of Modern Drilling,' the most notable of which occurred in the last forty years, with previously unimagined advancements in deepwater technology, deep land drilling, and most recently--in controlled directional (horizontal) drilling. With minor changes to equipment and requisite technical expertise, oil and gas drilling operations are the same.

The Marcellus Shale--aka "The Mighty Marcellus"-- is the largest known source for natural gas in the United States, and is recently believed by geotechnical experts to be the second largest natural gas source in the world (behind a large source formation in Iran). In 2002, the USGS presumed the containment of some 1.9 trillion cubic feet of natural gas within the Marcellus Shale. In 2004, Range Resources Corporation drilled the first Marcellus well... the company continues to be a strong, reliable, and community-involved presence in the Marcellus. In the short years that followed, small regional gas companies grew; new gas production companies emerged; oil and water drilling outfits transformed to foster the extraction of natural gas; investment groups began to capitalize on landowners' resource mining & extraction rights; competitive land lease rates saw overnight exponential growth (one

internet report showed an increase from \$200/month per acre in one county to more than \$10,000/month per acre over the course of a decade); and local small businesses began catering heavily to the fiscally-promising infant gas industry. In 2011, Chevron began gas production operations within the region, and as the first major worldwide oil & gas company, offers an exciting glimpse of what may be in store, in terms of future development by other oil & gas 'majors.'

The Utica Shale formation is situated below the Marcellus Shale and covers a broader area than the Marcellus--beginning in Canada and extending South beneath eight U.S. States including Tennessee and Virginia. It is [questionably] being projected as the largest single-formation source of natural gas in the entire world. Given the boldness of these projections, and rapid advancements in geological surveillance equipment and technology, such claims are sure to be challenged, further developed, and solidified over a short span in the forthcoming future.

In 2007, larger Texas-based drilling companies began actively scouting their future respective bases of operation in the Marcellus and Utica regions. My current company arrived here in 2009 with four drilling rigs, and operational growth since has been consistently steady. Currently we have 32 drilling rigs in the Marcellus and Utica regions, growing at a rate of roughly 1 new rig every month-and-a-half. We currently employ more than 650 personnel in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio; a focus on local and veteran hiring helps ensure a strong economic future for the region--and hopefully, for my company's longstanding future within the region.

The recent--and rapid--aforementioned developments have deeply divided communities in the Marcellus and Utica Shale regions. When I moved to the area, I noted a rough 50/50% split among locals that love what we're doing for the economy and locals that hate what we're supposedly doing to the environment. I say 'supposedly,' because I can **see** the tangible signs of economic development everywhere on account of the gas industry, but environmental concerns are argued two ways with no visible hard, direct correlation to gas drilling operations. The largest single-ticket antagonist to gas drilling operations, as far as I can tell, is Josh Fox's video *Gasland*. I have not seen the video, but from what I understand, it harshly criticizes the well hydro-fracturing operation more commonly known as 'fracking.' The most commonly-referred to part of this video is a segment wherein a local citizen lights the water coming out of his or her sink faucet on fire. The argument is that in certain sections of Pennsylvania--which is the first U.S. State in which crude oil was discovered and drilled--petroleum contamination of water tables has occurred for centuries; long before hydro fracking ever occurred. Oilfield experts adamantly defend that a properly cased wellbore will safely pass through any potable aquifer, and with termination being several thousand feet below said water source, allows for the safe and efficient fracking of a gas well.

In the recent years of Pennsylvania's gas extraction operations, there has been one major water contamination incident that resulted in a flurry of lawsuits. These

stemmed from a water well explosion in Dimock, PA. The gas operator who was blamed for the accident, Cabot Oil & Gas, is one of North America's largest independent natural gas producers. This company has painstakingly gone out of their way to daily prove honest and dedicated commitment to the region. They denied wrongdoing in the aforementioned incident, and as a result, the 'neutral' locals (that is, the few indigenous folks who will talk about the incident "objectively") state that Cabot's denial of guilt only exacerbates the non-permissive populace's demonization of oilfield workers and drilling operations in general. I work around Cabot all the time, and I have personally seen no reason to believe that their operations are anything other than straightforward, ethical, and environmentally sound.

What I have a difficult time understanding, is that this stretch of the United States--in a straight-across-Pennsylvania-line from NYC to Western Ohio with branches North and South to Michigan, West Virginia, and Kentucky--was defined by industry. Steeltown. Motor City. Oil City. Coal Nation. Our country's pillars are rooted in the sweat of hard working men and women, who sacrificed to give us every modern convenience we have today.

Electrical power generation and combined vehicle emissions comprise the world's top environmental impact concerns. The overwhelming majority of Marcellus / Utica region residents use electric power & light, and at least one personal vehicle. Being that so much of America's power, light, and fuel originates in this region, I would've half expected that the booming gas industry would usher a rebirth of regional industrial pride.

Putting a human face on the situation, communities are rapidly changing for the better because of the oilfield. At Duncan Tavern--a small, locally-owned bar & grill near Wellsboro, PA--the proprietor claims a tenfold increase in business since one of our rigs relocated to within a few miles of the establishment. She began accepting credit cards and she extended her hours to accommodate the rig hands' 24-7 working schedule. One surprising report is that she feels "safer" on account of the constant presence of those loud but respectable gentlemen roughnecks--the *Texylvanians* as I like to call them (the intended topic of Part II in this series). Hotels and restaurants across the region have seen a similar economic boost, not to mention the increase in hope for the local workforce. One of our rigs in Washington County, PA has recently made regional history, by employing its first local girl in one of America's historically toughest working roles...as a roughneck. Turns out that she's just an average American girl with a hard work ethic... and the men on the rig have given a good report on her ability to keep the pace, accepting her as an equal part of the crew. Stories like this speak to the heart of the oilfield, its workers, and my company's commitment to equal opportunity and relationship-building in the heart of its new home: the exciting and sure-to-be-historic gas fields of America's Appalachian region.

Pittsburgh's Cinema Under the Stars

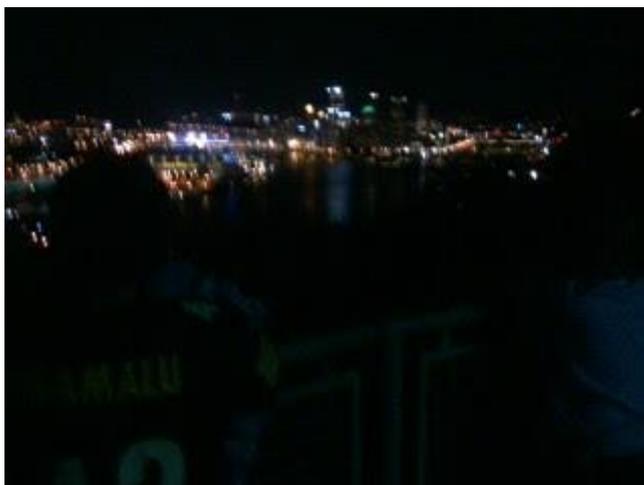
September 4th, 2011



There are several FREE open-air theaters that play in and around Pittsburgh during the summer months. We went to see Disney's *Tangled* the other day, at one of these spots in the West End. What a cool experience. Lots of opportunities to catch up on romantic movies and classics as well, like *The Notebook*, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. For locations and listings, [click here](#).



I particularly loved the idea of checking out one of these screens so that we could bring our own snacks and not have to worry about the \$50 we'd spend on them at a normal theater. The view was a definite plus. I took a few pictures of our experience with a low-quality cell phone camera, to at least give you an idea.



The Montour Trail Review II

September 5th, 2011

On Saturday, I went for a bike ride. Stopped at the bench overlooking the horse farm to see what entries had been made in *The Montour Trail Review* over the last week. The book was missing. I finished my bike ride and went home. "Well, the book was missing off the bench," I told my wife. "Aw, that really stinks," she said. "Did you look around for it?" "Yeah, I looked all over the place. I think somebody must have walked off with it."

"Daddy, do you mean the little book on the bench that people write in?" asked Lily, our four-year-old. "Yes, Sweetie, that's the one. It's not there today." "Well, maybe somebody took it home to read it and write in it and then they'll bring it back when they're finished!" *Wow, genius four-year-old, you read my mind!* I, too, hoped that might be the case. Nevertheless, I had a new book at the ready, so I doubled up zip-lock bags and stuck it inside. On the cover, I wrote "*The Montour Trail Review II*." Just inside the cover, I wrote that this would replace the first book, and if it ended up disappearing as well, I'd place a new book somewhere farther along the trail, and folks could track the comments online.

Yesterday, the Clifton Road bridge officially opened on the Montour Trail. I wanted to go for a run to explore the trail beyond that bridge. Then I changed plans, to run in the other direction toward the horses. So last night, I took the new book as I went for a run in the rain, and dropped it off on the bench. I remember when running 10 miles a day was easy. This morning, my scale read 236 lbs. Last night's 2.5-miler felt like a marathon. Anyway, as I was approaching the bench that overlooks the horses, I noticed some trash in the bushes on my left. I stopped and grabbed the piece of trash. It was one of the zip-locks that held the last book! And it had large holes gnawed through the bag by some animal. Ha! An animal got hold of the book. I looked around in the thick brush for the book itself, but didn't find a thing. Before long, I lost the sunlight.

"It was an animal," I told my wife, showing her the bag. Our oldest daughter was already uncannily in tune to the conversation. "An animal took the book away?" "Yes, Sweetie. It was probably a raccoon that took the book so that it could use the paper to make a nest for her babies." "Oh, are you gonna let her do that then?" "Of course, babydoll. Anything for the raccoon babies." "That's cool. But dad, maybe the raccoon just wants to use some of the paper, and then all the raccoons can write in the rest of it and bring it back to the bench!"

Last Night's Lilyisms

September 5th, 2011

Last night, Lily was on a roll, and I was rolling. What a cutie.

Description of her new stuffed animal: "Muffiny."

Me: "Do you know how much I love you?" Lily: "Ummmm... Thirty bucks?"

Me: "Girls, to help you go to sleep, you need to think about all your favorite things. Think about kitties, and puppies... think about little baby bunny rabbits... and little baby birdies... think about snowflakes... and sunshine... and rainbows... and big puffy clouds... think about goin' down the slide on the playground... think about swingin' on the swingset..."

Ayla: "And Andrew."

Me: "Andrew?"

Ayla: "Mm-huh. He pick me up. An... he pick me up... nother one."

Me: "Wow, he picked you up twice? What a big, strong boy! Do you like Andrew?"

Ayla: "Mm-hm."

Lily: "And think about Andrew, and Noah, and beer."

Then Lily pondered the projection of stars and the moon upon their walls and ceiling. "What if there was one big star in the sky and a whole buncha little moons? That would be tool (cool)."

Labels: lilyisms kids say the darndest things home and family a day in the life



Anonymous September 8, 2011 at 6:38 AM

Have I told you guys lately how much I love your girls (and boys)!!!! - Ashley



Anonymous September 8, 2011 at 1:31 PM

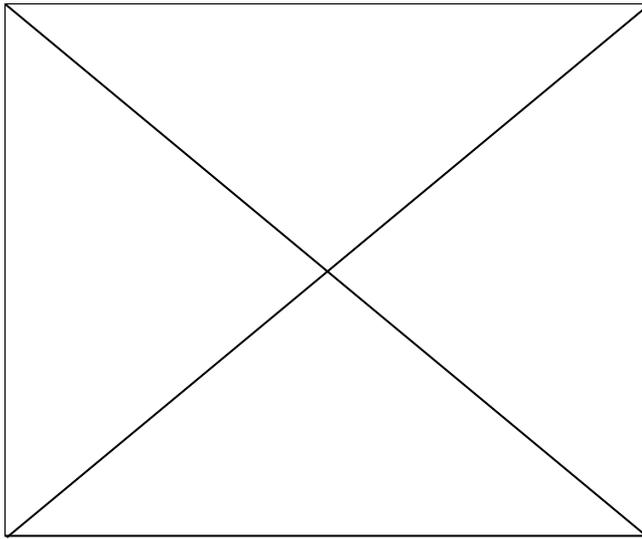
Haha! Thanks Ashley, the feeling's mutual! Wasn't that cute though? Petra and I were just smiling when they were talking up your boys. --M

An Evening Without Cable TV

September 7th, 2011

When the power goes out at our house--or in this case, when the cable goes out--things get interesting. Among the made-up stories, the singing, and the sock puppets come dad's shameless impersonations, from the Chinese tourist, to the German airline pilot, to the Russian mechanic, to Pee Wee Herman. Here's one round that momma captured on video, recently uploaded to YouTube.

Be sure to pause the music on the right side of this page before pressing play.



Grounded in Wysox, PA

September 8th, 2011

I am a field maintenance supervisor for a drilling company. My company drills for natural gas in the Northeast region of PA, and also in the Southwest region (including WV and OH). Due to current manpower deficits, I am not required to travel to the Northeast region unless a critical maintenance issue exists. But I'm a glutton for punishment. I travel to our Northern region every two or three weeks, to check the pulse of those rigs and get dirty if the need exists. I'm up there now. I get every other weekend off--a long weekend that in this case begins tomorrow--and intended to be back in Pittsburgh tonight, hugging the kids and snuggling up with momma.

So I went to a meeting in Clarks Summit this morning, then stopped by two rigs near Montrose. I was headed to Towanda to poke my head in at the Northern office, then

off to a rig near Wellsboro, then 5 hours home. On the way to Towanda, I got held up by some fast-running water that covered the road. It was 3 PM. The two trucks in front of me wouldn't cross and turned around. I followed suit. Then another truck drove up to the water, popped his truck into 4Low and crossed. I whipped a Uey and did the same. As I descended lower and lower out of the Endless Mountains, the severity of flooding became more apparent. Farms were flooded. Fields were flooded. I got trapped on a lonely 5-mile stretch of road near Camp Town; by the time I tried to backtrack, the water was too high. Off-road navigation up some dirt road that was more like a waterfall, to the top of a mountain.

5 miles from Towanda, a half-mile stretch of really, really fast water. I trailed some rednecks across the road. Drove around two downed vehicles that didn't make it. Found out later that a dually floated off the road and was towed in by winch, and that a fourth vehicle got swept away completely. Bystanders didn't know whether there was anyone in the vehicle when it disappeared. After crossing the long stretch of flooded road, I got to within half a mile of civilization... Wysox, PA. Made it to a five-way intersection with a 'Dandy Mart' gas station. All five directions were closed to traffic, including the way I just came from (which I wouldn't cross again if somebody paid me). The rain picked up steadily, and continued into a torrential downpour for hours. Still coming down hard and steady. It's 10:45 PM. Rain is projected nonstop through Sunday. Finally got hold of Petra.

I just discovered the Wysox Fire Station a half mile up one of the closed roads. That's where I'm at now, wired in at their conference room. They're packed with evacuees and out of blankets. One old guy here came into town for a doctor's appointment, can't make it back to his wife who's in the deep flood zone near Camp Town. No phone service, little emergency help in that area (inaccessible) He's worried sick. Trees in the area impede helivacs. Ran into one guy today who couldn't get to his kids at school. No phone service. No cell phone service either in this part of the State (Sprint, AT&T, or Verizon). He's hoping (presuming) that the school's keeping kids overnight. Fire station radio just barked up... emergency rescue of two people needed near the intersection of Battlecreek Road and Comstock Road.

Midnight. Went on call in an ambulance. Dumped nose of ambulance into a 5' hole. Vehicle took water. Another road was indistinguishable. Victim refused treatment. Went back to firehouse. Never a dull moment!

2AM... "State of Emergency" declared. National Guard mobilizing.

2:30 AM... Just evacuated a trailer park. Highlight of my effort was fireman's carrying an 85-year-old woman 300 yards across 3-4' of rapid water. Then going back for her heart meds. And her dog. Then came the two-man buddy carry of a 79 year-old woman in worse shape (and much heavier). My partner kept slipping, which made it even more fun.

Water evacuation of a man hanging on a branch with the toes of his boots barely resting on the grill of his truck. Then the water evacuation of an old couple...the heavy woman with replacement hips... Zodiac straight down Main Street in Wysox. Load folks into fire truck with us. Two more attempted water rescues. It's 5:51 AM now... the pictures below are nothing compared to what the water looks like now. Rapid and deep in areas that were high and dry earlier (Dandy Mart, for instance). National Guard rolling in in droves. Contemplating Army helicopter rescues.

Without further adieu:

This is how the flood started for me (Obstacle 1):





Obstacle 2:





Obstacle 3 (not going that way!) GPS is going crazy on me...



Obstacle 4:







Obstacle 5:



Photos of big waves and rapid water:





Obstacle # 6









Obstacle # 7: Impassable. 5-way intersection, blocked each way by Fire, State troopers, and PennDOT.









Camera battery is dead. Last few daylight photos taken with crappy cell phone camera. Night photos worthless.

Labels: flood camp town wysox pennsylvania wyalusing towanda wysox flood photos



Anonymous September 10, 2011 at 11:57 AM

Thank you very much for taking the time to report the flooding in Wysox area. My brother lives in Alice Hollow (off 187) and this gives me a very clear idea of what condition he and his neighbors are facing.



Anonymous September 10, 2011 at 12:00 PM

I should have added that I am very familiar with this area and recognized most if not all the places in these photos. Wishing all a speedy recovery from this!



Anonymous September 10, 2011 at 2:07 PM

Absolutely! First, I'm glad this helped. Second, I'm with you... wishing all a speedy recovery! --MJ



Raymond D'Astous September 11, 2011 at 10:34 AM

Hey I was there from wednesday to saturday. I was suppose to pick a load in Tunkhannock at the Proctor and Gamble but had to turn around and park the Elgin Motor Freight rig behind the Dandy and stayed at the River Stone Inn room 203 until saturday then came back to Canada. You guys are great people.

Back in Pittsburgh... and Clean

September 9th, 2011

So last night, 220 opened for traffic after the flooding receded in some areas (it continued to swell in others). I shook hands and exchanged info with Jeff, Andrea, Bill, and others on the Wysox EMS team. I did the same with Brett the Fire Chief--whom I accidentally kept calling Cliff--and the members of his team who I rode around with. I thanked Chad, the SBU / Small Boats Team Leader, and Greg, a former Marine comm guy who volunteers at Wysox and North Towanda. Said goodbyes to the ladies who run "The Dandy" across the street. God bless their willingness to open the store (in specific times of need, when they could) and accept handwritten credit card transactions.

Andrea sent me on my way with a 'Wysox EMS' shirt; Chad, with a 'Wysox Fire' shirt. Chad also--along with a couple of his boys--kept my lip stocked with fresh Cope when we began operating beyond 24 hrs. Volunteers kept us fueled and fed in both Wysox and Wyalusing (we drove the boat trailer down the railroad tracks to a splash point, splashed in, then fought the turbid current away from a danger zone after busting the prop on a bridge guardrail [underwater]. We drove to the other side of the water, splashed out, got picked up by a truck, and drove the strapped boat to Wylusing, where we fixed the prop).

Most of the action took place that first night, which went by so fast it was a blur. There was a point when the water overtook the Dandy Mart intersection, and was rising and gaining speed so rapidly that we literally had about one minute to mobilize a remote team to occupy the ambulance garage down the street (important so that the rescue teams were spread out and not boxed in by flood waters). I grabbed my stuff and rolled over there, along with eight or nine others. We took a fire rig, Ambulance 2 (which was older and less of a loss if it floated away), and a squad truck with the boat & trailer.

Last night I was glad to hear that my route was cleared. It was tough to get my laptop back from one child of a five-kid family who I'd loaned it to... he was blissfully watching Spongebob when I came over and popped his bubble. Driving away, I realized that I now have a new spot to stop in when I roll through here every few weeks. I saw some new devastation my first time going over the big river bridge in Towanda. I couldn't take a night picture with my cell phone (it wouldn't turn out), but the water was up to the Courthouse and the buildings across the street from the river. That's some hella rise. I overheard "27' depth" at one point yesterday, and 41' in Wilkes-Barre. This flood, by all accounts, was as bad or worse than their last 'big one' in 1972.

The route home was not completely clear. A few stops and detours and big rig trucks stuck in ditches blocking the road... so I crashed out on the side of the road. Just got

home and washed up. With that, the last of my pictures. I could kick myself for not having a charger for the Nikon's battery with me.



In the ambulance, responding to a call





Chad chose me for his three-man boat team. Mustang suits these days look much cooler than they used to!





Chad evaluates the waters at a splash point



Greg readies the boat for trailer dismount and low boat carry



I forget this guy's name, but he was our "1 Man"



Assessing some of the receded flood areas yesterday afternoon in the squad truck... what you can barely see at the treeline is a big white pickup truck with a welder's rig on the back, propped up vertically against a tree.



Somebody's trailer rolled over and floated away



Another trailer that relocated



One of several road washouts (bottom right of photo). This one's near some big lake vicinity of North Rome.



This was probably someone's lush green lawn a few days ago. The creeks and rivers turned up lots and lots of flat sandstone, coarse rock and boulders, completely covering the road in one area (I was not quick enough with my phone camera).



I wish I could remember this guy's name. He wanted to be a Marine, but was passed over--this was back when the DoD underwent major cutbacks in the early 90's.



Three tired firemen. After the bulk of the rescue work is over today / tonight, rescue workers will begin the tedious process of cleaning, moving, rebuilding, and pumping basements and flooded living areas.



This guy (photo at right) thought he could make it because the waters had receded. The good thing is, there was no significant current here.



WRITE UP PUBLISHED IN COMPANY-WIDE PATTERSON-UTI NEWSLETTER
(NOT PUBLISHED ON BLOG):

September 15, 2011

Long days off

The dictionary defines integrity as, "Adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty".

I am writing this to make everyone aware of an exceptional employee that I have the privilege to work with just about every day. He is what the definition of integrity is to me.

As some of you might know, we have been struggling with all different types of extreme weather throughout the summer. In the south it is a drought, and up north we have too much rain. It's funny how things just don't seem to want to mesh. Anyway, up in northeast PA it has been nothing but miserable for many families after the flooding that just took place.

There was a man, trying to go on his days off after completing his work, stuck in a bad situation, only to get worse. On Wednesday evening he found himself trapped on road that had rising water all around and decided that he wasn't going to wait around for the inevitable to happen, especially being without food and water, so he took a chance and drove through the rising water and made it to a local store about a ½ mile away. Once he arrived he realized that all 5 roads that lead into the intersection where closed. Looking back he had noticed just how high the water had risen and high a sigh of relief. Once he arrived, it was estimated that there were 80 people there who also were trapped but yet safe from the rising water.

After entering the store, he was able to get what he needed, and politely made some small talk with some of the locals. Shortly afterwards, he left the store, venturing out to see if he could make it out and get home to his wife and kids. Instead he found himself, at a fire station, which was over crowded with refugees of the storm.

Before long, he found himself riding along in the ambulance assisting anyway he was asked. He was noticing that the waters were continuing to rise, and he was not the only one. Just at that point, they decided to drop off some of the rescued people at the fire station, since that is where they were taking refuge. They went back out on a fire engine searching for more people in need of help, until they realized the waters were just too deep.

Shortly after entering the station, the firemen were talking about getting the rescue boat out,(Zodiak)and inquiring if anyone had the qualifications to help. Well this guy said, "I am a trained EMT, naval rescue swimmer through the Marine Corps. I am

certified to be in this boat assisting you, all we have to do is go to my computer and pull them the certifications up”. The rescue man welcomed him, and before he was aware he had spent a total of about 36 hours rescuing people from roof tops, cars, houses underwater etc. But in the end, he still had time to give; compassion and humanity.

When walking through the midst of people in the station, some of the people had thanked him and ask him if he was a fireman, EMT or even policeman. They noticed a symbol on his front that was not recognizable. He simply said, “No, I work in the oil & gas field”.

Before long, he had befriended quite a few people consoling them with regrets of their losses. He had spent most of his time off helping others in need.

I would like to formally recognize this man, Matthew “Matty” Speights a former active Staff Sergeant with the United States Marine Corps and now with Patterson-UTI in the Eighty Four offices as a field service tech. Thanks to people like you, the world truly is a better place!

And by the way, the strange symbol that people did not recognize was our Patterson-UTI logo; he was wearing his FRC’s the entire time.

Way to go Matty and thank you for being the “Unknown Hero”!!!!!!!

From: Harvon Jordan

Sent: Thursday, September 15, 2011 7:52 PM

To: Ron Swegheimer

Cc: Matthew Speights; Mike Holcomb; Mike Garvin; Cheryl Thomas; Kurt Bailey

Subject: RE: UNKNOWN HERO

Ron,

Thanks for sharing. This morning I was listening to the news and a living Marine was receiving a Medal of Honor for the first time in 41 years. I wondered why the honor comes after the flowers in most cases.

Today, you answered that question. It doesn’t come after the flowers. Honor does not need a medal. It lives inside the honorable. It’s the center of men like Matty. They are recognized by the individual life’s they touch, the decisions they make that defines the size of their heart. He probably never thought twice about what he was doing. It just needed to be done.

The people he helped probably will never look at all oilfield hands the same because of the actions of one honorable man. He is truly a HERO!

From: Ron Swegheimer

Sent: Thursday, September 15, 2011 4:49 PM

To: Arthur Foltz; Brian Griffin; Brian Thomas; Clayton McDaniel; Deric Dixon; Emilio Villarreal; Heath McDaniel; Henry May; Jerry Fitzgerald; Joe Scott; Jonathan Deutsch; Kevin Calverley; Leonard Stefaniak; Mark Unrein; Mike Unrein; Robert Moore; Zach Vandervlist; Rig 154; Rig 163; Rig 227; Rig 251; Rig 252; Rig 253; Rig 254; RIG 255; Rig 256; Rig 257; Rig 259; Rig 260; Rig 261; Rig 312; Rig 315; Rig 316; RIG 317; Rig 324; Rig 325; Rig 328; Rig 329; Rig 331; Rig 332; Rig 334; Rig 337; Rig 480; Rig 538; RIG 56; Rig 61; Rig 622; Rig 738

Cc: queenofspeights@yahoo.com; Harvon Jordan; Kurt Bailey

Subject: UNKNOWN HERO

Please take the time to read about a person that I am very proud to have as a part of my team, family and operation here at Patterson-UTi.

Ron Swegheimer, Assistant Area Manager
Division 20
207 Carlton Drive
Eighty Four, PA 15301
Phone 724.239.2812
Fax 724.239.2822
Cell 724.249-3866

Lily's Paris Promise

September 10th, 2011

The artwork that hangs throughout our house is Paris themed. Lily stares at the photos and paintings as if she's been there and knows the cross streets just beyond view. It was about six months ago that she asked me in front of momma, "Daddy, what is that place?" "*That's Paris, Sweets.*" "Oh. When are you gonna take me there, daddy? 'Cause I really wanna go there and I wanna go see that (pointing at Le Tour)." Admittedly, there is something magical about the place. And about France in general.

Of course, Petra just gave me that '*Oh you're SO nailed*' look. "Should we visit Travelocity tonight, or wait until this weekend?" Yeah, it's coming. Don't know exactly when, but we're going to get that girl to Paris within the next couple years. It's on my mind every time she stares at those paintings. "You'll go there soon enough, babydoll. I promise."

America, Still Beautiful

September 10th, 2011

Several weeks ago, I was traveling historic Pennsylvania Route 6 between elk country near St. Mary's and the *Pennsylvania Grand Canyon* in Wellsboro.

Imagine, if you would, a land without homeowners associations. 100 miles of gorgeous gorges, greenery, waterways, camps, lodges, and outfitters. A four foot lane to my right, marked occasionally with an "East Bicycle PA" sign. The absence of any cell phone signal would surely make this an ideal vacation for someone up to their neck in paperwork and office drama right now.

I drove past the *Pennsylvania Lumber Museum*. The *Tioga State Forest*. Multiple State Parks. A sign that says "Canyon Country: East Rim 12 Miles." One region's official welcome sign states: *Welcome to Potter County: God's Country*. A fleet of shiny freightliners roars past while I'm taking a roadside photo. American thunder. Back to driving, I notice that heavy laden apple trees grow wild along this route like scrub oaks and sweetgums in coastal Carolina. Goldenrod. Sumac. Occasional patches of wild blue spruce! Photos in the local gas stations, of large black bears and beautiful rainbow trout.

Near Wellsboro, fresh sweet corn and blueberries are sold at provincial stands. Wild honey and "Pennsylvania maple syrup" is sold at an unmanned roadside stand... on the honor system. One man takes a breather after splitting some two cords of wood, collecting these so-called nuts in prep for the cold winter. The weather outside is beautiful... it's been a windows-down day, all day.

Down at the water to my left, some huge lily pads occupy the West rim of some big steaming pond. Along the roadside, miles and miles of baby blue flower heads on hardy stalks. "*Chikoria!*" My mother-in-law would pleasantly exclaim. Petra has accurately noted that the grass really *is* greener in Pennsylvania. And the autumn leaves were pretty cool in the short time we saw them. Looking forward to that again.

Today, as I browse my notes in recollection of this great memory, I note that it's the eve of the 10-Year Anniversary of 9-11. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania--second State in the Union--is a fitting place for both a self-proclaimed patriot and natureboy to find himself. This is the home of patriot farmers, great Americans, and free-for-all public libraries. Sections of Route Six are dubbed Grand Army of the Republic Highway and Roosevelt Highway. Not only on this route, but elsewhere in the Commonwealth, you will find five, six, seven residential yards in a row that proudly fly Old Glory. And not just on September 12, 2001. As I drove Route Six those weeks ago, I was enveloped by those feelings of pride, patriotism, and nature when I jotted a quick addition to *America, the Beautiful*.

*Oh beautiful for winding roads
Through hills of Queen Anne's Lace
For towering cliffs of jagged stone
Springs bursting from each face!
America! America! Your beauty never ends!
For when fades one majestic scene,
Another one begins!*

Leadership in the Real World

September 10th, 2011

For years, I have been biased in believing, flatly, that real leadership is the kind you find in the Marine Corps. I have recently begun to alter that thinking.

The military is unparalleled in its historically-measurable development of everyday leaders in this country. This is especially evident in the Marines. Sensing bias? Abso-freakin-lutely. The proof is in the pudding. Granted, the Marines produce a high number of whack-jobs, too, but that's another topic for another time. Marine Corps leadership begins at entry level, and is honed every minute of every day along the course of each Marine's career.

But the actual practice of leadership in the Marines is easy. It's easy to lead Marines because they've been taught how to recognize a certain type of leadership, and because they've been taught how to follow. The ability to follow, by the way, is an important part of leadership development.

Wait until you're out of the Marines. Or out of the military. Back-on-the-block Joe doesn't care about all your training, about your leadership under fire, about how many stripes you had or how shiny your oak leaf cluster was. He will backtalk, defy, and counter everything you try to do or say. Eventually, all your acronyms and military stories and talk about tactical employment and planning and 5-paragraph Ops Orders will only (yawn) cause others to label you a freak.

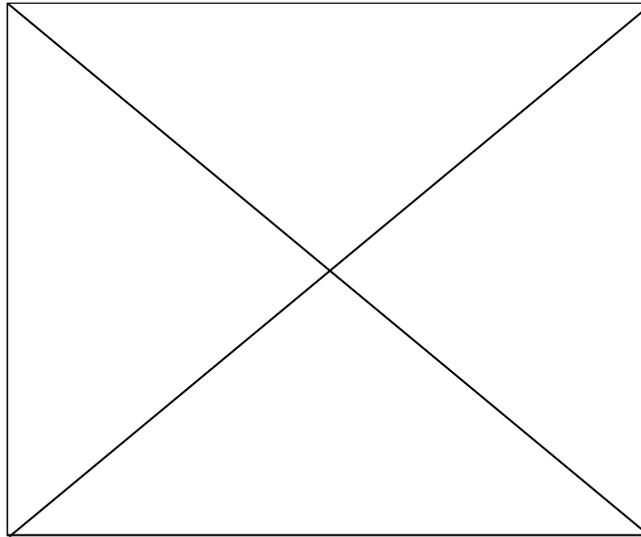
On the flipside, you may luck out. Persevere to the fifth phase in the Kuebler-Ross Model ("Acceptance"), and you will see big dividends in the fruits of your labor. I'm fortunate to be part of a company that loves their military employees and the leadership concepts they bring to the table. Even in this permissive environment, there are ideas and cultures to overcome which pose long-term challenges.

In closing, my point is this: Leadership is tougher in the real world. 'Real' leaders are the guys who have been filing their TPS reports properly for the last 20 years. Damn their personality defects and their blatant inability to manage people... or time... or anything, frankly. Make sure to plan for this disappointing reality before hanging up that uniform!

The Management of Change--Peyton Manning Style (Video)

September 10th, 2011

Just saw this last week at a company leadership meeting. Stresses the importance of COMMUNICATION. Not sure how old it is, but it's a really good video!



A Picture of Character

September 10th, 2011

You're not supposed to take photos of Amish people. Conversely, if the old adage rings true, then I need to write a thousand-word description of my Amish subjects to equal a clear mental picture on your end. Ludicrous. Here's my attempt to create that picture in far fewer words.

I'm driving to Punxsutawney by way of Smicksburg (Amish country). There is a nine-year-old boy walking down some shoulder-free strip of road facing the 50 mph traffic coming around the curve. And here I come. Hit the brakes and give wide berth into the opposing lane. I notice instantly that the boy has a proud, almost defiant, stride. No...aha... protective. Tucked just behind and outside of this Amish son, is his five- or six-year-old sister. She is gratefully and purposefully treading in her big brother's steps while tightly shadowing him. The look on his face says that he will honorably throw his sister to safety and take a Mack truck to the chest for her.

Where has that manly culture of honor gone? As late as the 1950's, when someone's mother or sister was insulted, there was a general expectation--even for a young boy--to fight for her honor. Recently Pastor Jack finished up a series called

"Honorology," which taught about the honor culture, and our responsibility to be its catalyst.

In the case of this story, I'd like to highlight and honor the Amish people. Though they may not typically venture beyond an eighth-grade education, the Amish excel head over shoulders in building and displaying an impressive amount of character, even among their youth--especially impressive for such a tiny demographic of Americans. I am very proud of what they accomplish for the good of our country... for the flair they add, the quality products they provide, and their constant exemplary reminder of our roots (for those of European descent). I am very proud to call them 'brother and sister American.'

9-11-01 Ten Years and Still Rolling

September 11th, 2011

Ten years ago today, our country was rocked by those infamous terrorist attacks. I was a Sergeant of Marines, and we were living in the Brynn Marr apartment complex in Jacksonville NC (just outside Camp Lejeune). I remember that I didn't have to go in to work that morning because I was on leave. We were sleeping in after a long drive from Myrtle Beach... our son Josh was six months old and he was crashed out in his crib. Grandpa Speights (Opa, to my kids) called and told me that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. Petra and I got up and turned on the TV. We stared in astonishment as the building was burning. I remember at that point we didn't know whether the crash was accidental or intentional. I had suspected that it might have been intentional.

Then we watched everything else happen in real time. The realization that it was not an accident--confirmed by the second tower strike--that was a moment when time stopped, when every American thought, "Sweet Jesus, this is real." Watching people hanging out of windows... when the video footage was freshly hitting TV screens worldwide... and watching the first people jump out the windows... that was tough. Just putting yourself mentally in their shoes... to have to choose between flames or falling... very difficult to even imagine still.

I remember when the U.S. deployed fighter jets and there was a frantic battle of wills and decisions in determining whether to shoot down any planes suspected to have been hijacked. I can't remember ever having such a hopeless feeling in the pit of my stomach, up to that point or ever since. We tried frantically to contact dad, who worked in and out of the Pentagon regularly (still does). Everybody we knew was okay.

I called in to work to ask if anything was going on. I couldn't get in contact with

Gunny Simmons, so I started to get dressed like I was going to war. Finally I got the call that nothing was going to happen immediately, and to just be prepared for the call to mobilize at any time. I felt useless and vulnerable. "Let's go," I told Petra. "Go where?" "To New York. I've still got two days of leave, maybe I can get it extended." "What are we going to do in New York?" "HELP!! I don't know exactly. There's plenty to do. People are trapped." Petra felt very alone, empty, and scared. It was the wrong thing to ask her to do right at that moment. Not to mention, we were probably every bit as broke as we seemed to be every day I wore that uniform. Probably didn't even have the gas money to support that trip.

Of course, the flag-waving and the hugging and *God Bless America* being sung on every corner of this country, including on the Capitol steps with all of Congress in unison, that was a great feeling. Somewhat short-lived, but necessary to the healing process and a great feeling nonetheless. I ran the Marine Corps Marathon a month later--a race which I'd previously run and continued to for years under different last-minute names--and we circled the Pentagon with its gaping wound. Temp tattoos were being handed out at the race that everybody was wearing--some 20K+ participants--"United we Run." I'll never forget the shirt that read "Yo Mama, Osama!"

The entire day of September 11th, 2001, we heard some of the most heroic stories ever. Todd Beamer, Flight 93--"Let's Roll" instantly became our national statement to terrorism worldwide. And we followed through on that spirit! No action ensued for a year-and-a-half, which outraged most Americans that I knew... but then we started running down terror cells at their root locations and we haven't stopped since. We proved that we're a bad hornet's nest to throw rocks at.

By the evening of the day after 9-11, news stations unanimously decided to stop replaying the footage of what happened. They stopped showing anything else that might be disturbing or upsetting to an already shaken American people. I was upset about that decision. Petra's family called from Germany, from Hungary, to see if we were okay. For days, weeks, months... we questioned whether we were okay. Ten years later and I think that most of us (Americans in general) have healed. Still scarred, but healed. We are doing really well.



MJ, Memorial Day, 2001



Snyderman1 September 11, 2011 at 4:23 PM

Such a similar story. I remember I worked a 12.25 hour shift at the jail the night before, and Angela waking me up after the first plane strike. I remember watching the second plane come in and strike and sitting there in shock. I also remember the feeling of wanting to help, but living in Colorado we weren't anywhere nearby. I remember praying for all of those first-responders who were risking their lives, running up and down those stairs, helping people to safety. I remember the feeling of outrage after finding out it was attack! Just being shocked. I remember going back to the thoughts of reading all those Richard Marcinko books from the mid '90's and his writing in them that an attack was going to be coming to our soil, but this was nothing like I expected I guess. My thoughts and prayers go out to all of those lost friends and loved ones. My thanks and prayers go out to all of those who still care for the safety of this country both here in the States and abroad! God bless you all and keep you safe!



Anonymous September 12, 2011 at 9:39 PM

Great words Matty...just as your service to your country, not to mention your family and friends. Yours words are inspirational...and God Bless you and yours!

Garry Powell, Georgia
Former co-worker, always your friend.

Power Line Down

September 12th, 2012



Going backwards in time on this story, actually. About a month ago, I was driving around the big gas operators' mountain between Wellsboro and Williamsport (South of Morris Twp. and East of Watersville, I believe). I gassed up at this little country store / gas station. The power went out

while I was pumping. Rain started screaming down. When I left, I rounded the corner behind another pickup truck when he slammed on his brakes. "What the heck is he slamming on his brakes for?!!!" Woah! Okay, the power lines just fell and blocked us in on both sides of the curve. One of the lines is just over the roof of my truck. A tree had slid down, fell across the road, and brought down the cables. Ended up removing some branches and pulling just enough tree off the road with the truck to slide by. No help from bystanders, thanks guys. Firemen arrived just in time to disappear in my rear view mirror.

Deja Vu, Middle of Nowhere, Southern Kosovo, November 2002. Rarely-traveled road. I drove up to a telephone pole and power lines that fell across the road between two tiny towns. Vehicle-borne travelers were camping out for who knows how long on both sides of the obstacle (looked like a whole day or more). Big cliff to my left... five clicks earlier down that road, a Marine rolled a 5-ton down the cliff and got medevac'd yesterday. Squeezed the HMMWV (Humvee) along the inside of the curve, past traffic, and drove slowly into the telephone pole. Pushed it off the cliff... and it pulled another telephone pole off the cliff with it... and another... and another. The domino effect probably screwed everyone's power for a long time, but it helped travelers in the short term, and they all seemed pretty happy. True story.



Flight 3144: A Confirmation of God's Timing

September 19th, 2011

When people are choking with a partially-blocked airway, they scream with a distinct gurgling sound. To me, it has the ring of a waterboard torture victim. I've been one and I've watched two. At the same time, I'm no stranger to choking children, either.

After the northern PA flooding incident one week earlier--and having pondered a lifetime of recurring similar situations--I asked my wife whether she thinks God just puts me in the right place at the right (wrong) time, or whether I'm a trouble magnet, prone to being a part of every type of debacle and accident and emergency that transpires. She firmly believed it was the former, though the latter weighs heavily on my mind from time to time.

I flew back to Pittsburgh from Houston Saturday. An interesting series of events caused me to miss my connection flight, get bumped a couple hours, and now I find myself boarding US Airways Flight 3144, Charlotte to Pittsburgh.

My seating assignment is 5C. I sit down next to some lady, and as I begin to get comfortable (as comfortable as may be reasonably expected on a tiny plane), one of the lady's friends is chatting with her as she brushes by my shoulder walking down the aisle. "There you are, grrrr!" I offer to swap seats with the standing woman, so that she can sit next to her friend. She accepts, they both thank me, and I ask for her original seat number. 6D.

An inadvertent glutton for punishment, I realized quickly that my flight would be agonizingly long, as I hear the kid directly behind me whine, then throw a fit, then start screaming. "Keep it in your mouth," his mother says. "If you take it out again, I'm going to take it away. This is your warning." He quiets down, and I begin thumbing through the first couple pages of Conde Nast Traveler. "Spit it out," says the mother behind me. "SPIT IT OUT!!!" Her voice sounded frantic. That's when I heard the gurgling.

**Clink!* Out of my seatbelt in a flash, along with four others. I'm closest. I turn the corner to quickly glimpse a two-to-three year old kid, drooling out his open mouth, scared to death, holding a white lollipop stick with a candyless end. Mom's slapping the hell out of the kid's back... PARENTS!!! Stop doing this! Just because our parents and grandparents did it to us, doesn't make it right. I learned that this was wrong when I took my first CPR course... I was 10 years old then, so I know this info's been around for a while. What you don't want to do is dislodge the foreign object just so that it can get lodged deeper on the trachea (windpipe) side of the epiglottis. Last thing you need is for the object to get into your kid's lung... an automatic and ugly surgical extraction, I understand.*

The kid's screaming with fear. I talk to him as I snatch him up. "Stay calm, buddy,

this will take just a minute... I know it's scary but you'll be okay." I need him not to scream. As he forces all that air out around the Dum-dum, he expends all the air in his chest, then frantically sucks air back into his lungs like a vacuum cleaner. Now, according to his age, the Red Cross would have a rescuer perform the Heimlich... *by the way, we officially don't call it the Heimlich anymore... apparently because the Heimlich family wants too much money every time the phrase is used.* I personally believe that the Heimlich in this case would be less effective and potentially more dangerous than inverted back blows, as is recommended for infants. I think they only say to do standing abdominal thrusts (Heimlich) because most people cannot comfortably hold a 3-year-old kid in the head-down 'choking infant'-style position and accurately perform downward back blows. But I'm a father of four, and Lily used to choke on everything (scared the crap out of me! I'd pre-chew her food like she was a baby bird!) so I've had lots of practice.

So now I'm beating on this kid's back. One of the female flight attendants (there was a male one there also) tells me to give him back to his mother and let him keep coughing. "I've got him, I'm an EMT." I only say that to shut people up (it works)... and I'm waiting to get trumped one day by a field surgeon. Truth is, my certification's not in Pennsylvania and it's expired. Maybe it's time to renew. Anyway, I sit the boy up after fifteen or twenty seconds to assess him, still not good. Back to the back blows. After another round, I stand him up to give him the Heimlich... but as soon as I stand him up, the Dum-dum pops out like a cork out of an old-fashioned children's pop gun.

Mom heaved a long sigh of relief. Surrounding passengers finally exhaled. The sobbing little boy hugged his mom as she held him. The plane erupted in ovation. Many people stood up and shook my hand. The boy's mother, who introduced herself as Britney, wouldn't stop thanking me. "I'm a father of four young kids," I told her. "Choking comes with the territory." Her son's name is Roman. Over the course of the flight, I received back slaps, more handshakes, anything I would like on behalf of the flight crew, and eventually Steelers tickets by the man who sat beside me. This continued to the point where I was picked up outside the airport. Outside the plane, Britney and Roman approached me, and she asked him, "Aren't you going to thank this nice man for saving your life?"

This incident was a confirmation of what my wife told me. Intentional placement at specific times and places. I believe in God's timing.

The Sideline Dad

September 23rd, 2011

"What do you mean, '*you forgot your practice jersey*'? Go stage your gear, son, then start running laps until coach stops you."

He didn't run laps. Coach told him not to. I was frustrated, but only because I've been my boys' baseball manager and football coach for the last five years. I know their strengths and weaknesses on and off the field. And I have expectations for their performance and conduct based upon what I know of them... what I've seen them do, how I've seen them play, and what I know they're capable of.

It all started with Pony baseball. Ironically, we now live right next to the home of Pony baseball, Washington, Pennsylvania. Josh signed up for the Shetland (T-Ball) Reds team with the Deep Creek Baseball Association (DCBA), Chesapeake, Virginia. I managed his team. Didn't have the first clue about the rules, or about fundraising, or the location of different fields, the volunteer schedules, bingo nights, or Team Moms (thank God for them!). We quickly learned that Faye "Ma" Rutherford (the DCBA President) and Derek Bennett (DCBA VP/Commissioner)--two of the most dedicated volunteers we've ever had the pleasure of knowing--ran a tight ship. They demanded volunteering excellence.

The following year, Caleb wanted to play T-Ball too. It was a last-minute decision. Josh moved up to coach pitch... I think it was the 'Pinto' division. I had already committed to managing Josh's team; we had a lot of repeat players and I was looking forward to seeing the growth & development. Caleb's team was on the verge of disestablishment for lack of a manager and volunteer coaches. I took Caleb's White Sox team on as a manager in addition to managing Joshua's team... WOW that was a busy season! I managed the 8- & 9-year-old All Star team that year as well... (and did a horrible job of it).

The next two years would see the boys shedding their ball gloves and donning football helmets and pads. The Suffolk, Virginia Titans (a Pop Warner league)... Mighty Mites Division. Last year I helped to hone the physical fitness, spirit, discipline, volume, and motivation of their team to a point where it peaked (the Marines would be proud) and became contagious across all divisions. At the height of our season, I walked into the bleachers and 'fired' all the parents during one game, yelling like a lunatic that these boys (and our token girl player, Ziah) needed motivation and encouragement. *"There are three elements to this football program, people. There are the players who sacrifice their bodies out on the field. Then we have the coaching staff who volunteers to build and direct this team. Finally there are the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends who come out here to support their team and you have failed in that mission. You're doing a lousy freaking job and all I hear behind me is grumbling and complaining! So you'd better start firing up your team or else not even bother showing up... I mean it, if you so*

much as think about showing up dead like this again, I promise I'll have each and every one of you running laps!!!"

This year, Caleb took a break from sports. Josh is in his third year of tackle football, presently with the Bethel Park Black Hawks, locally known as 'the Hawks.' It's different here. Now, we're in Steeler Country, not ten miles from Pittsburgh as the crow flies. Football's kinda serious around these parts. Between the four regular coaches and the three to four assistant coaches at every practice, the boys here have plenty of leadership. Still, I can't help but critique. On one hand, the team's smart... unlike herding cats--which I'm used to--it's easy to get them to listen and understand what to do. They were running complex plays by the end of the first week's practice. The coaches are very knowledgeable and very professional. On the other hand, there is less discipline, less motivation, and less vocal volume than what I would expect of any football team.

Unity is my personal pet peeve; without 'team,' without esprit, without unity there can be no winning consistency. I have a knack for sniffing out division and bullying, and a zero-tolerance attitude toward both, whether at home or on the field. Now, this year Josh is not the all-star player. He's not a fullback and he's not a defensive sacking monster this year. He's one of the younger kids on the 10- and 11-year-old team, he's 2nd string, he's the new kid on the block, and he started off a little intimidated... an attitude we're not used to seeing. Last year, he was doing fifty push-ups in his own puke. This year, he barely puts out and he's been hurt a few times. Don't know what the deal is and I'm not around enough to do much about it. Nevertheless, some of the kids on this team are relentless at bullying. It's blatant, and boy it pisses me off. Josh seems to handle it okay.

The struggle within the struggle is that I do not have the time to really work with Josh this season, or contribute to his team. I've only been to one game and a few practices... work's been unforgiving. So this year, I'm on the sideline with the moms... with Petra's cow bell ringing in my left ear and steam coming out my right... this year, and for an unknown distance into the foreseeable future, I'm the sideline dad. It's pretty frustrating.

Our Montour Trail, in Photos

September 25th, 2011

The Montour Trail runs within sight of our house. This trail, part of the Rail to Trail Conservancy, is one in a system of trails that connects Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. It's a dog-walking, running, biking, skiing trail... part paved, part fine hardpack gravel, part flat and part hills. It runs along major thoroughfares, horse pastures, scenic creeks and rivers, golf courses, and plenty of wooded areas. Bridges and tunnels wind over and under train tracks, roads, and waterways. Near our house, we have regular encounters with fearless deer and turkey of every size, red and black squirrels, chipmunks, orioles, and lots of monarch butterflies.



Shake that honeymaker



My girls... never without flowers



Ayla holds a wooly worm, or wooly bear... which will later turn into an Isabella Tiger Moth



Ayla enjoys pieces of black walnuts as daddy smashes them



Ayla clings tightly to a teeny, tiny feather



Ah, the wild grapes that will continue my wild grape wine... kept alive since 1997.
Grow, my pretties, grow.





Mr. Ed Junior shows off his pierced tongue



Petra und Pferd





Forbidden Love



The bench that overlooks the horses... one-time home to the *Montour Trail Review*





Bull Thistle -- Uncle Mark taught me as a kid that the purple part is also known as 'Indian tobacco.' I've chewed it ever since!





Rat Snake / Lily Bean / Washington, D.C. -- 336 miles



The trail skirts this inviting courtyard shared by My Big Fat Greek Gyro restaurant and Farmhouse Coffee. We stop at Farmhouse for ice cream and coffee all the time; BFGG for dinner on occasion.





Beautiful Sassafras leaf specimen



Our section of the trail is always busy!



This guy was noisy! / Caleb checks out a trail marker







Lunesta, Tic-Tac Warnings

September 30th, 2011

We've all seen or heard those drug commercials... you know, the ones that give you a one-sentence drug solution followed by a book's worth of crazy side effects. Have you seen the most recent Lunesta commercial? Just watched it tonight. My family was patient enough to rewind it a few times so that I could transcribe it accurately. Mark my words, before you know it, they'll be listing the harmful side effects of carrots, cheeseburgers, and M&M's on every respective box and bag. I wrote a sample tic-tac warning below, but first—without further adieu—I give you... Lunesta! *We know a place, where tossing and turning have given way to sleeping... where sleepless nights yield to restful sleep; and Lunesta can help you get there... like it has for so many people before.*

When taking Lunesta, don't drive or operate machinery until you feel fully awake. Walking, eating, driving, or engaging in other activities while asleep—without remembering the next day—have been reported. Abnormal behaviors may include aggressiveness, agitation, hallucinations, or confusion. In depressed patients, worsening of depression—including risk of suicide—may occur. Alcohol may increase these risks. Allergic reactions, such as tongue or throat swelling, occur rarely and may be fatal. Side effects may include unpleasant taste, headache, dizziness, and morning drowsiness. Ask your doctor if Lunesta is right for you...

Tic-tacs. Small, minty candies that freshen your breath.

Do not snort tic-tacs. Stuffing tic-tacs into your eyelids may cause itching, burning, minty eyes, and foul language. Performing such an act may also be the sign of an incurable brain disorder. Other side effects may include cataracts, myopia, hyperopia, stigmatism, blindness, eye fatness, and uncontrollable tears. Loading frozen tic-tacs into a pellet gun and firing them into one's ear may cause a perforated eardrum, hearing loss, and brain injury to the person being shot. This may also cause death in toads, chipmunks, and certain small endangered animals. Shooters may suffer cramped trigger finger if tic-tacs are fired excessively. Dropping tic-tacs onto small insects, if performed by everyone on earth whenever they saw a small insect, may harm the world's ecosystems, causing crops to fail, food stores to diminish, and ultimately—worldwide starvation. If tic-tacs are crushed, mixed with Kool-Aid, and needle-injected into the bloodstream in sufficient quantities, death by freshness may occur. The same effects could occur when mixed with Sunny Delight. Contrary to the internet, tic-tacs will not work as fuses in your car, or as replacement light bulbs on your Christmas tree or other illuminated ethnic holiday decoration. Death or coma, induced by electrocution, may occur. Do not throw tic-tacs off the Empire State Building. Tic-tacs are not intended for use as heart medication, birth control, or as shark or vampire repellent. Tic-tacs may increase the strength, size, happiness, and lifespan of tapeworms or other intestinal parasites. Tic-tacs are not designed to be meal replacements, even in massive quantities. Tic-tacs must be

removed from container before consumption, or choking and severe throat swelling due to plastic splinters may occur. Death is also a remote possibility. Do not feed orange tic-tacs to parakeets. Tic-tacs, when incubated, will not hatch into baby hummingbirds. Tic-tac boxes are not approved floatation devices. Tic-tacs may not be suitable for ingestion by infants, cattle, or snails. Death may occur if tic-tacs are poured into a biker's gas tank as a practical joke. Ingesting tic-tacs while wearing certain hygiene items may turn you into *the Joker* if Tim Burton is directing your movie. Children should not accept tic-tacs from strangers. Giving out tic-tacs during Halloween will most certainly cause your house and your family to be considered LAME for the rest of the year. Do not leave tic-tacs unattended at airports. Tic-tacs are not tall enough for any amusement park rides. Tic-tacs are not love. Dating a tic-tac may cause loneliness, heartache, and depression. Ask yourself whether tic-tacs are the right choice for you.

Groundhog Day

October 7th, 2011

Monday: Drive 2 hours from Pittsburgh area to Punxsutawney. Breakfast at McDonald's. Work at FEMCO Machine, our sister company of sorts, rebuilding the Rotating Link Adapter for one of our rig's Top Drives (8-10 hours, in and out, then drive home). Well, it didn't take 8-10 hours as planned, because we found a few other major concerns with the Top Drive. Around Midnight, sleep 4 hours in truck with Ryan.

Tuesday: Wake up freezing. Coffee, Copenhagen, McDonald's breakfast on the fly, back to work. Continued to find multiple critical issues on the Top Drive, not related to the job we were doing. Some of the items we found were outside the scope of even a one-year inspection and rebuild. Work all day, work all night, skip out on sleeping that night (work straight through).

Wednesday: McDonald's breakfast. Coffee. Copenhagen. The critical fix list has grown to 25 items. Transmission flush. 400HP traction motor swap. Replace 600V power cables. Wash parts off with a torch, bend back into place, re-attach, replace hydraulic lines, etc. Roll on all day. Roll on all night. Should be on 'days off' right now. Gotta grind so this doesn't eat up the whole weekend. At 4AM, crashed inside the machine shop for 5 hours.

Thursday: McDonald's. Coffee. Copenhagen. Work all day. Work all night. What day is it? It's Midnight already? 4:30 AM Friday, catch two hours of power behind my eyelids.

Friday: You guessed it... McDonald's, coffee, Cope. Still grinding. Function test soon. Light at the end of the tunnel? We'll see. Feels like Groundhog Day. Ironically, this is all taking place in the sleepy town where Groundhog Day comes from... Punxsutawney, PA, home of 'Punxsy Phil,' the groundhog.

Lemon Ants

October 8th, 2011



I was playing outside with Lily & Ayla. We made chalk drawings on the driveway, rode bikes up the street and back, and we hid from monsters and thunder in their plastic play houses. Then I laid down on the grass to take a few pictures of the girls, and smelled something familiar.

I turned my nose to the grass I was laying on... lemons! Fresh-squeezed lemons. Pledge furniture polish?

Lemon balm? Where's it coming from? Then I discovered that I was laying on a mound of lemon ants!!! Perhaps you have never heard of them. They were my regular snack in Brunswick, Maine, during the first week of SERE (survival) school, some fifteen years ago.

So I had my wife and kids try them. They loved them. We snacked on lemon ants for 20 minutes and loved it... every one of us. Ayla ate lots and lots of them. Josh and Caleb went back outside to look for some. The ants smell and taste strongly like lemon drops. It was cool being able to share that with them.



Olive Garden's Social Triage

October 11th, 2011

We love Olive Garden. In our family, it's simply referred to as 'Oh Gee' (O-G). But Olive Garden has a horrible flaw. Their blatant triage of social classes has become so bad is on the freakin' borderline of discrimination.

You see, if you have small children--as in the manner of most restaurants--you'll be sent to the chair of shame... that is, you'll be seated in the section specially reserved for families with small children, where there are puke stains on the carpet and noodles between the seat cushions, boogers wiped under every table and at least one screaming child at any given time.

Usually, I have the foresight to specifically ask that my family is not seated in the aforementioned section, vouching for the prime behavior of my children. Tonight it slipped my mind. After we were seated, I tried to numb myself with Cabernet as we waited for our meal. Instead I pointed out my conspiratory observations to my wife for half an hour. "This particular establishment doesn't just set this room aside for the families with small children," I told her, "but for a cornucopia of societal outcasts, bottom-dwellers, and blue-collar types. And it's in-your-face obvious."

"There's the Redneck table. Camo hat and camo shirt and a handlebar mustache will do it every time. Then there's 'fat people corner,' because Olive Garden is apparently very concerned about their image and obese people do not fit the bill. I felt so sorry for the poor gal seated next to us who was all spiffed up, primed for her date... but with the Ted Hamilton that wears a skullcap to Olive Garden with no intention of taking it off. *Marissa, seat them in Section D* (with the screaming chunky Redneck babies)."

Now, I understand that every establishment in the world is concerned about their image. There are proper, traditional ways to control that image, though. Restaurants that want to discourage families with small children should not have a childrens' menu, nor booster seats, nor crayons. They should also bump their prices. Viola, 80% of small children eliminated from the seats. Restaurants who would like to discourage overweight guests? Serve small portions... and bump the meal prices. Now, to keep hunters and bass fishermen from squeaking and squawking into the restaurant in thigh-high waders reeking of doe-urine... then have a dress code.

But if there's no dress code, your atmosphere is kid-friendly, your portions are ginormous and reasonably-priced... then you need to recognize that your special room for window-lickers accommodates the very people your business campaign caters to, and most appeals to... this is your target audience. So stop alienating them. Embrace them or change the way you do business.

Chats with Mac: Attention-Deficit Huh, Backseat Leadership, and Death Rodents

October 12th, 2011

I have a great job these days. I owe that fact to two great men... the first being John Natcher--a person whom I met in the Marines about fourteen years ago, who took me under his wing to teach me about the wild until it became a part of my soul, and whom for this reason holds my lifelong utmost respect. Natcher told me about the job opportunity that I would eventually seize, to hold the position which I presently occupy.

The second person, John McInerney--another Marine, was also Natcher's pupil of sorts... like myself, he would learn the finer points of the lost arts of firemaking, forging and knapping, giggering and spearing, trapping, snaring, skinning and tanning, clay molding and weapon-making and mineral prospecting and wine-making... McInerney and I met for the first time at Natcher's house, not long after I'd made Natcher's acquaintance, along with the three of our wives. We sampled wines and told stories all night... and that, as they say, is all she wrote.

Today, Natcher and I both work for our buddy, Mr. John McInerney, who is the Director of Maintenance Operations for the company that employs us. We affectionately refer to him as 'Mac.' Mac hired us for our blend of hard and soft skills, our core values, and for our loyalty--which continue to positively reflect upon Mac, and upon the maintenance program as a whole.

Now, Natcher is in Oklahoma, I'm in Pennsylvania, and Mac is in Texas. We can't all just sit down and have a beer together so easily anymore... so we talk over the phone. Natcher and I have had drinks together over a long-distance phone call. The two of us talk about maintenance-related activity and trends in our own geographic regions, and of course jump at any spontaneous opportunity to get the families together and talk life instead of just talking shop.

With Mac, more oft than not, I'll call to report on general maintenance operations in Pennsylvania, and the next thing you know, we're deeply lost in an attention-deficit discussion from left field, regarding Christianity, business, politics, jokes, warfighting, storytelling, motorcross, sheepdogs, wives, kids, the apocalypse, or a conglomeration of these subjects over the course of an hour. Usually the idea train jumps track so many times in a conversation, that lost in the middle are two patent-worthy ideas, a cynical view of something the government is trying to choke us with, a business plan, three new book proposals / outlines, and the cure for chronic stupidity.

These conversations, albeit mindless rants at times, have been dually enjoyed for their value as exhaust vents, as well as for the melding of military minds... to find a tactical solution to every technical or personnel-related challenge. Leadership is

among our foremost discussion topics... leadership, character, ethics, mission accomplishment... Marine Corps 101, if you will, with a twist... and then we talk about fighting and killing, basic electrical theory, and raising chickens. By and large, our opinions and views eerily mirror each other's on several wavelengths, a discovery we'd both only recently made. Our combined attention spans during a conversation don't amount to squat, and we're as helpful to each other as two cracked-out lemmings when it comes to saving any original subject or idea from barrel-rolling off the cliff of insanity.

Now, following is a general rule for having two or more Marines together at the same table when any amount of beer is served, written as an algebra equation: $(>2 * M) + (B * ?) = \textit{Enough Storytelling to Power a 30-Cubicle Office for One Week}$. Mac made the mistake of thinking that we could have a reasonably cordial 10-person conversation over dinner somewhere... inevitably somebody in the local (regional) heirarchy orders a round of tall ones... and on more than one occasion, Mac and I have found each other passing war stories back and forth across the table in boistrous, fully-hand-illustrated Marine fashion all night, as one story segues into the next. "Talking guns," a Marine might say. Just like Forrest Gump works a ping pong ball. This particular occurrence, by the way, is every bit as predictable when our joint service counterparts are at the table (in our company, we're stacked high with prior-military, and almost entirely so in the maintenance division). But that's a whole 'nother beer math equation!

One of the key topics of our discussions over the past several months has been on 'back-seat leadership.' The premise of this concept is that you do not have to be in the figurative driver's seat to affect your surroundings. Maybe you work for a bad boss, a corrupt chain of command, or you're part of a stagnant system. You can still--in any role--influence and positively impact your environment... planting intangible seeds; making ripple decisions that will become the waves of change.

This is one of the few subjects we've recently discussed writing about in a joint endeavor. A lot of really good points have been shared on the subject. Depending on a few different factors, this could come to fruition in a relatively short time, so I'm hopeful. We may become famous, or--hey, wanna ride bikes? Let's go eat, I'm starving... but I'm loving the company. Thanks Natch. Thanks Mac.

Wrapping Up Summer... Random Photos

October 14th, 2011



Joe laughs while holding the gun he won off of Mike's raffle ticket... you could only win one prize, so Mike gave up the extra tickets he was hogging after he won... a phone charger



Lily's first day of preschool



"C'mon babe, let's blow this joint"



Josh loves football season. This year, he's with the Bethel Park Blackhawks, aka the *Hawks*



Caleb didn't play ball this year... good to see him still playing off the field



Erika, John, myself, & Petra at Primanti Bros. in the Strip District



Block Party? Our block does it right! Bounce houses for kids and adults, bonfires, fire truck rides, popcorn machine, & ample margaritas



Let Freedom Ring! Castle Shannon Police/Fire/Rescue...
9-11 Ten Year Anniversary Tribute



Caleb feeds carrots to deer in the backyard



Been following pro baseball since I was a kid... never knew that locals & fans referred to the Pirates as the Bucs!



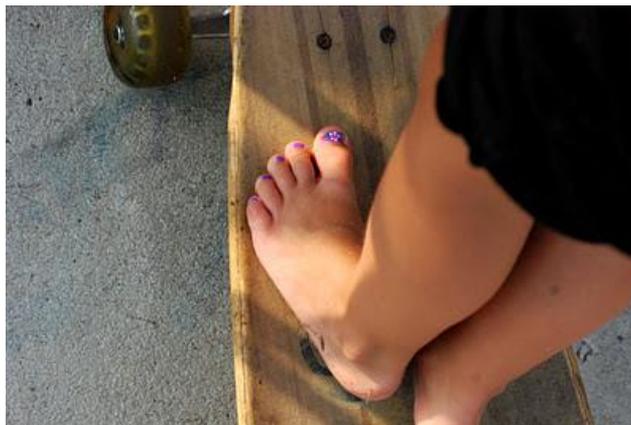
Josh & Lily run the bases during Patterson's gratis Doubletree box game day



Just to set the record straight... Jesus is a Steeler's fan. In fact, I think He's everybody's fan.



Jess Wagner makes the world's most awesome cupcakes! She's on Facebook...
Cake Eaters Sweet Shoppe



Longboard Lily



Miles of crates...



Our family's 2011 trip to the Big Apple

Breakfast with the Speights Family

October 15th, 2011



When I was a kid, cereal came six ways: *Cheerios*, *Corn Flakes*, *Shredded Wheat*, *Grape Nuts*, generic puffed rice (unsweetened) and *Rice Krispies*.

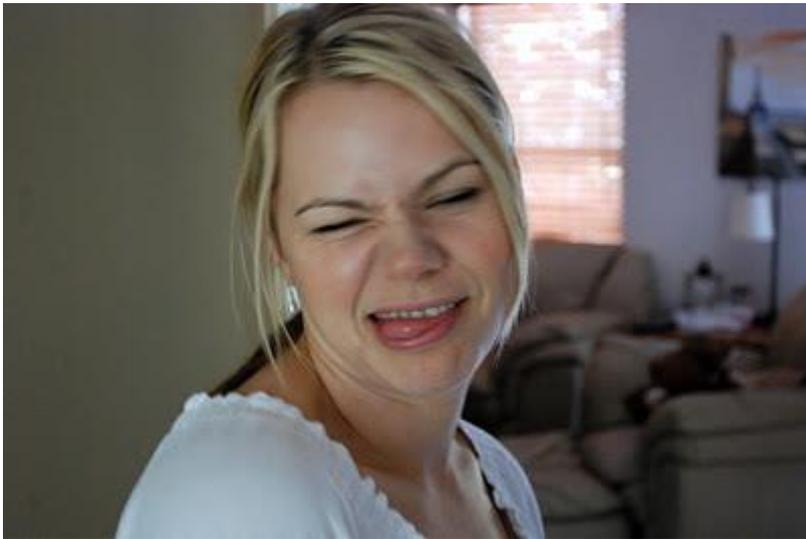
Cheerios were the norm. Their 'unsinkable taste' got me in trouble when I was supposed to eat all of them and I dumped them down the toilet and expected them to flush. Next in line was Corn Flakes. The

Shredded Wheat and *Grape Nuts* cereals were almost exclusively dad's. *Shredded Wheat* has come a long way... there never used to be any sweetener or frosting, and it wasn't miniaturized into bite-sized pieces. Each cereal box had three plastic packages inside; inside each plastic package were two ginormous blocks of shredded wheat, which you would crunch up into your bowl. Jaw-breaking Grape Nuts? Dad could have them!!! Those were an acquired taste, anyway. Then there was the (gag) moster bag of puffed rice that would last a month... that is, the uncrispy, unsweetened version of *Super Golden Crisp* or *Sugar Smacks*. They taste just as bad whether they're fresh or stale. Finally, Rice Krispies. The iconic snap, crackle, and pop of this cereal actually made it an exciting breakfast for me... it was my favorite.

Now, in our house, all these cereals were eaten just as they came out of the box. On special occasions, mom or dad would sweeten my cereal with about two spoonfuls of sugar or honey. Then, by the mid-80's, the cereal market had exploded into something more akin to what we see today. Saturday morning commercials (between WWF, GI Joe, and the Smurfs) highlighted the new era of frosted, sweetened, fruity, chocolitized breakfast cereals. The only of these cereals that we would buy were Alpha-Bits, Pops, and Peaut Butter Cap'n Crunch. Cocoa Puffs and Trix were "too expensive." Boo Berries and Count Chocula promoted monsters, which incite fear, which is not of God, and therefore--Bobby Bouche--Count Chocula is from the devil! Fruity pebbles and Cookie Crisp were not nutritious. "You shouldn't be eating chocolate chip cookies for breakfast."

So these days, my kids get exposed to the full spectrum of breakfast foods, from fruits and meats and eggs every which way they come, to--well, Cookie Crisp. Life's too short for just Cheerios.





No Posts for a While... Behind on Life, e.g. (Any Time, Calgon)

October 24th, 2011

I'm running away. Downhill, legs wobbly, out of control. Behind me, an Indiana Jones-sized rock nipping at my heels. The rock is my list of things to do everyday. Work, home, whatever. The list accrues 30 new items each day, and if I'm lucky, I'll usually knock out three or four. That ball is freaking huge right now. Part of the problem? People. At work, my office moved from a secluded haven in the back corner of the building... to one akin to the customer service center at Wal Mart. Now I feel like I'm working behind a fast food window. So I move my office to the truck and I take a drive. That doesn't work, by the way. Neither do hotels, once people know where you are.

The first problem is, I work more than you. Bold statement? See me when you've busted a 150 hour work week. That's my record week this year. It's not that bad usually... average 90-120 hours for a 7-day work week. It's not the job. It's me. I've been working like this all my life. To do this all the time, all your life, you first need to master the art of wicked insomnia.

Speaking of Fast Food... Meals? HA!!! I am the KING of ducking. Duck in, duck out, grab-n-go, fast food, cold is fine as long as it's quick!!! Now that I think about it, I can't remember the last time I actually sat in a restaurant because it was my choice to do so (friends, family, romance exceptions)... I usually have too much to do and eating in seems like an unnecessary luxury.

At the personal level... Every day, I think of probably fifteen things that I'd like to write about. I'm talking stories on various topics. The ideas get roughly scribbled into a book full of daily notes that go back--oh, let's say about 16 years. I'll never have time to tell all the stories, let alone write them.

I know I need to exercise... don't even go there... chronically, I have no energy because I spend it all elsewhere. Result? 240 freaking pounds at the scale.

Then there's my recent infatuation with photography. No, not trying to be a photographer, but since I can't find the time to paint every cool picture in my mind's eye, I now hundreds of them with little effort (thanks to the marvels of modern technology in the digital age). More oft than not, they simply back up my stories or get sorted into personal / family photo albums (folders). I stopped taking pictures after the wedding double-header two weekends ago, because I'm also behind on sorting.

I'm way behind on emails. Haven't checked any in a couple weeks. I need to respond to hundreds. Can I take a mulligan on that one?

Oh yeah, and phone messages. I clear the messages on my work phone every two

or three days like clockwork, or else the mailbox is full. Ever have your voicemail fill up twice in the same day? "Dude, you need to clear your messages." *No, I need to clear my life.* I gave up on trying to juggle two phones... so if you've tried to call me on my personal cell in the last month, now you know why you couldn't get me. Because I stopped caring... not about you, but about answering my phone.

This last weekend, I turned my phone off. My work phone. Felt amazing. Boycotted computer use in the household for the weekend. Still too busy. House work, youth football playoffs, church, sick family. Yeah, I know, I know... sounds like life, right? Well, I'm putting together a global petition--dig this--for four more hours a day. From now on, I propose that a day is defined as 28 hours. Ladies, that means you can stay younger longer. Laborers, more overtime in your workweek. More sleep all around.

I'm out. Calgon, do your thing.

Foolish Americans. Shut Up and Take Your Medicine.

October 25th, 2011

I hate bullies. Especially adult bullies. Teachers--God love 'em--can be some of the worst. I had this biology teacher once... he'd use his position to back me into a corner every chance he got, because he knew that I was a Christian who does not believe in evolution. I mean no-holds-barred low blows, all the time. The teacher calls the student a moron, the other students follow suit, and it snowballs. Now the poor kid is commonly known as a moron and nobody knows why. Happens all the time. I've got lots of analogies for this one, but I'll spare you the agony.

"Intelligent Design" or "Creationism" violates the Separation of Church & State clause in the Constitution... so the Supreme Court has ruled it out of public schools. Might as well push American history out of schools, too, because Quakers and Pilgrims were God-fearing--and it reflected in nearly every document they produced. Also, how come the Pledge of Allegiance hasn't been ruled out (under God?) And why do capitalized words like God and Our Lord and Creator appear in our country's organizing documents, and our modern legal documents, and on our currency? I'm not seeing the "separation." Ten Commandments in government buildings. Kids in private Christian schools and homeschools in every city across the country... are allowed to graduate high school, transfer between public schools, attend colleges of choice... just like any kid in public school. And they can do it while learning about creation instead of evolution. So what's the problem? Where's the controversy if we're supposed to be the most diverse country in the world? Amish can follow their beliefs. Muslims and Hindus can be exempted from high school science requirements. But screw the Christian majority. Religious colleges like Notre Dame

and Virginia Wesleyan have historic roots in our young nation. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court smacks down Intelligent Design like Charles Barkley rejects a layup. Is the presiding Supreme Court Justice just throwing flags because he's from New Orleans? I smell a rat. Bad call, ref. I challenge the play.

Oh, wait, maybe something was misconstrued somewhere along the way. Maybe our country *WAS* founded on Christian principles, after all. Maybe this whole '*Separation of Church & State*' has been misconstrued, because *MAYBE* our Founding Fathers could not have fathomed or imagined Columbine. Or a government without prayer. Or a justice system that allows parents who murder their children--and party on their grave--to be found "Not Guilty" by a Jury that has *NO MORAL CONCEPT* of *RIGHT* and *WRONG*. Make no mistake, Separation of Church & State was meant to keep the Church free from corruption, *NOT* keep the Law free from God. No laws, no principles of right and wrong were ever known by our Founding Fathers, that did not originate from God's law! Don't listen to me, do the research yourself! Just don't trust the first website you read. Dig deep and see where America's early laws came from. See where England's laws came from. Spain's. Italy's. Germany's. France's laws. Nearly all European laws... upon which our laws are based... are founded on the Bible. Islamic law... founded on the Kuran. Regardless how you slice it, there can be no separation of Church & State, because our State was ultimately founded on the Church. On second thought, don't research anything for yourself. I prefer you all as sheep. Just take your medicine.

Right now, I'd like to attack some political bullying. Americans, I'm asking you to think for yourselves. Do you know what propaganda is? Propaganda is a cheap, third-world tactic to make simpletons believe what you want them to believe, so that you can control the way the people act. It is best cultivated through fear... and bullying.

In Virginia last year, there was a vote on "The Idiot Bill," which imposed stiffer penalties for people who do not wear seat belts. I believe that seat belts are safe, but I do not wear them in my own vehicle. I hold personal freedom to be more precious than personal safety. So that makes me an idiot. Call our revolutionary forefathers idiots, then. The whole lot of them. Their votes were unpopular. Don't question authority, just take your medicine.

You know what's unpopular these days? Peaceable assemblies. If you participate in a peaceable demonstration long enough, you might just get zip-tied and detained. Happened in Chicago last night. Don't protest injustice, just take your medicine.

Opposing or questioning Obama, his regime, or his ideals has cost many people their jobs. I remember when Obama said that Americans were not to use the words "Radical" or "Muslim" when referring to radical muslims (Islamic extremists, e.g.). But we can call Republicans radical all day. I am not a Republican. But I am *PASSIONATELY PATRIOTIC*. I guess that makes me a radical too. I remember

when, before the Republicans won the Congressional majority, even as the President of the UNITED States, he referred to the congressional assembly as "us" (Democrats) and "them." "Divided we fall," warned President Lincoln regarding our country.

Tonight I heard a Democratic talk show host's pot-shot on TV. It was aimed at Republicans, and it hit me instead. Apparently, "Republicans are trying to force women to have children against their will." That's my last straw. Life... LIFE!!!! LIFE IS NOT A POLITICAL BARGAINING TOOL. That makes me sick. Abortion? Unfortunately necessary sometimes. But a general RESPECT FOR LIFE is missing in this country. If you support life, you're part of the *RADICAL* right. Right? Wrong!!! *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are LIFE, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."*

Okay, I can go all night like this. I'm out.

--MJ

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like... Halloween?

October 29th, 2011



Woke up an Autumn Wonderland this morning... here's the view from our backdoor!

A Tale of Two Weddings

November 1st, 2011

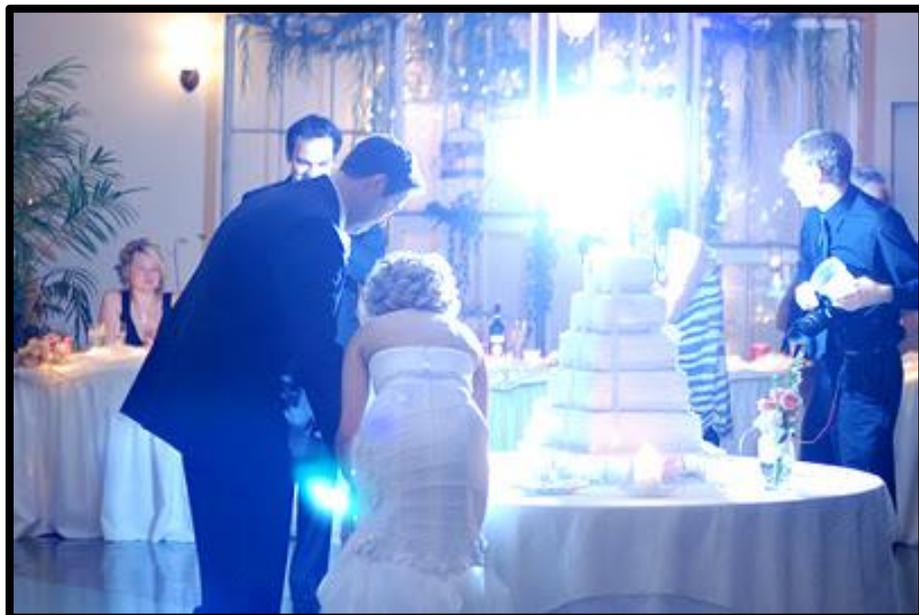
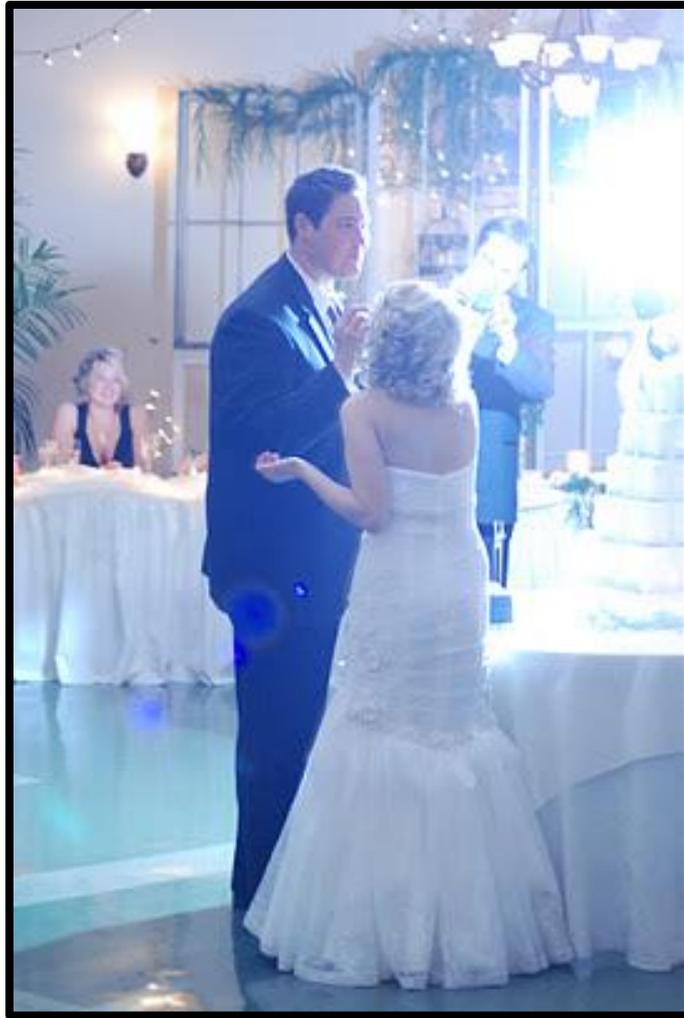
Going on three weeks later than I wanted to, I was finally able to sift through some of the photos from our wedding double-header weekend...

Charles & Alina Raper Wedding Photos

November 2nd, 2011



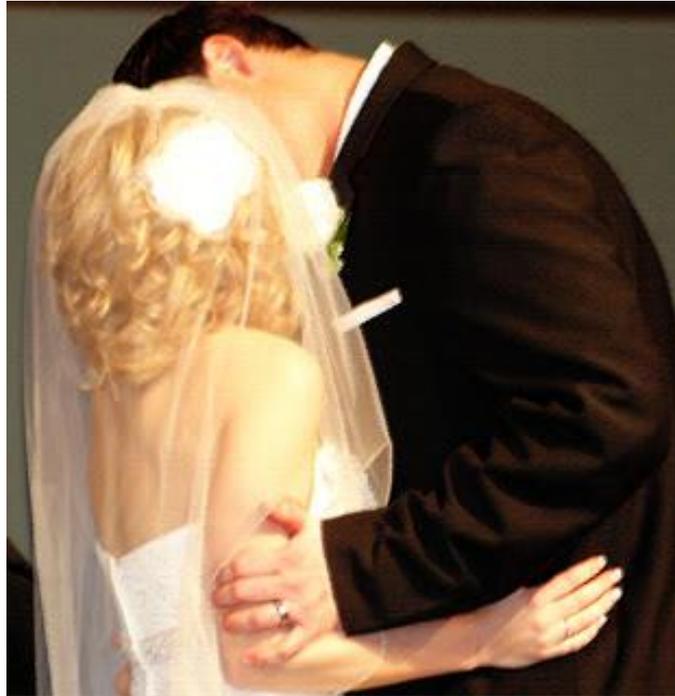


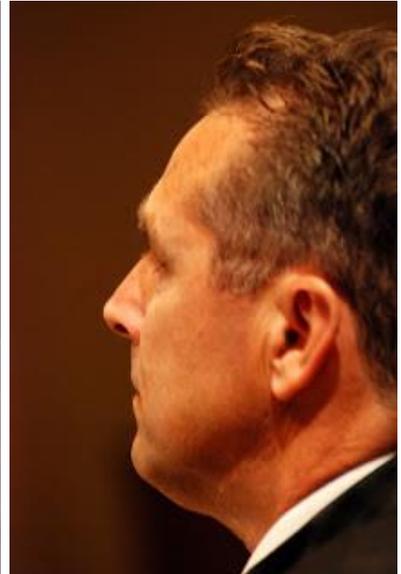
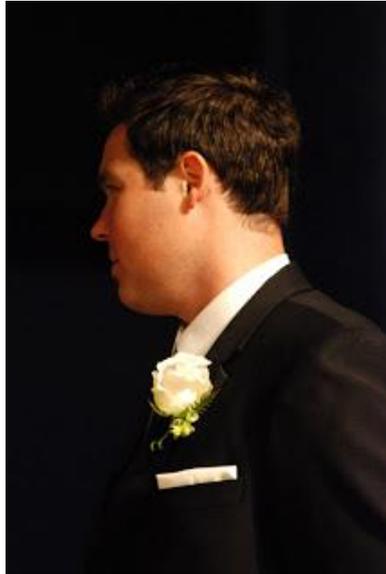
















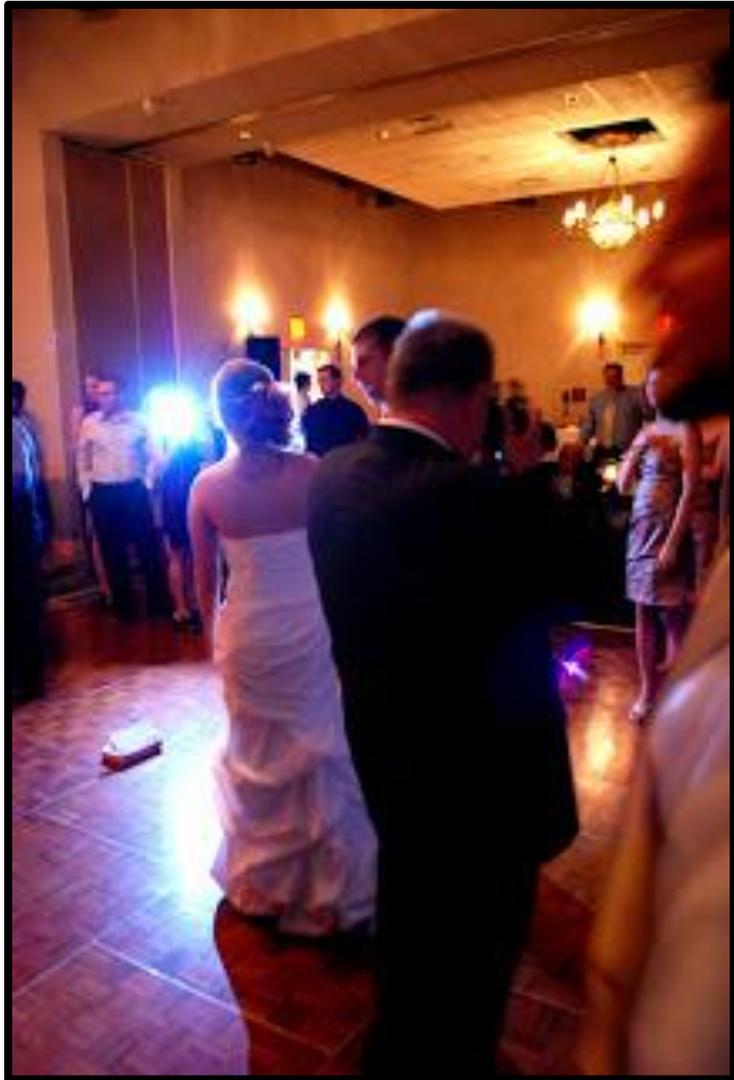
Jim & Erin DiNardo Wedding Photos

November 2nd, 2011















Mike Unrein on Pushing--and Being Pushed--to Greatness

November 5th, 2011

Following is the speech that closed our Q3 Principled Leadership Meeting for Patterson-UTI's Appalachian Division. Over four days, all Rig Managers, Drilling Superintendents, Safety, Maintenance, and Human Resources personnel were in attendance from across the region, which currently includes Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio. The speaker, Mike Unrein, is Patterson's Appalachian Area Manager.

This could have been written as a clean story, excluding any "um's" or broken sentences or stuttered words... but great speeches throughout history have been unpolished and unfiltered. (Digitally recorded with prior permission)



Our leader takes the floor. Mike Unrein. He's stocky, walks with a swagger... has a deep, quiet, raspy voice that's akin to a classic movie mob boss. Part cool guy, part counselor, part cowboy... all business. *Cock-diesel*, in a collar. He's a young thirty-something, but you wouldn't know it... With our white-haired Regional VP Ops presently covering multiple regions from a mid-country location, the burden of command weighs heavily on this young leader's shoulders. His poise, his gait--very confident. He has a leader's "power stance." His attitude and presence command respect.

His audience is stoic. Patterson-UTI is the second largest land-based drilling company in North America. The hardened men surrounding him are this company's regional leaders... leaders who represent hundreds of combined years' experience in the world's historically-toughest field of work--oil & gas drilling. Standing center in the horseshoe-configured conference room at one of our normal venues (the *Clark's Summit Ramada*), Mike begins to speak.

"I'll tell ya... now lookin' at our division... you guys think we're on top... here with Patterson?" (*favorable responses from audience*) "Do ya? Well I'll tell ya something... We Are, men. We are. We're the pacesetter... and I'm proud o' that. And I'm proud of every one of you guys for being a part of that... a huge part of that."

He looks around the room... "Who else has been on top... any time... in their life?" Old Man Ed (Rig 538) Responds: "*I been on top in the oilfield*" Our leader, Mike Unrein, points at Ed. "**On top in the oilfield,**" Mike repeats loudly so all the attendees can hear. "*Six years,*" continues Ed. "Tell me about that," says Mike. [*Ed recounts a zero incident rate when drilling offshore*]. "That's great, that's great. And that's where we're trying to go, guys. We're trying to get there... and we Can! We've got the right people." "*We will,*" says Mark Hasting, Drilling Superintendent. "**We will!**"

repeats Mike. [*Raul, Manager of Rig 738, recounts drilling on Rig 40 in Senora / San Angelo for four years... made 522,000' of hole in 2002... mostly air drilling*]. "Wow," continues Mike. "It feels good, doesn't it? To be there. Feels good. Let me tell you a story about when I was on top."

Mike begins his story with a lighthearted half-smile. "I was in high school, going into my senior year... My junior year... you know I was... had a great... great wrestling career. Senior year ranked # 1. Ranked # 1 in State. Boy I went all the way to the State Championship match 36 and 0. Nobody touched me, all season long. All season long, you know I was... big man... 8-pack... believe it or not, you know, muscles comin' outta everywhere... I w... I was good. I was *damn* good. Nobody touched me all year throughout—no—I didn't go in the third period with anybody... didn't even go into the third period. Pinned my way through my almost... I had... I think I had thirty-some pins and only six matches that... were in... (point win matches)."

The audience was notably surprised. 36 and 0... *undefeated*... is a record that speaks for itself. Truth is, while many can relate to being quote-unquote 'on top,' hardly anybody can relate to being undefeated as an individual, *mano y mano*, against thirty-six equally-classed fighting men in this same manner. As I scanned the room, it became instantly apparent that some of these hard-tack guys started viewing their young leader in a new light.

Mike never talks about himself. In the year I've been at this company, I see him almost every day, and he never talks about himself or his past. He talks about his dad from time to time; a proud, salty Rig Manager in Texas--or *Toolpusher* as Rig Managers have historically been called in the oilfield--who apparently diamond plates and polishes everything he owns. That's about it, though.

I've gleaned other tidbits about his family... hails from Colorado, pretty wife, four kids, several brothers--four or five I believe. All competitive. State champ wrestlers & football players. One of his brothers plays for the Denver Broncos. I imagine that when they were growing up, the Unrein boys left their mark wherever they went.

Mike continues. He's using his hands now, talking excitedly, reeling us into the story. "But anyway... here I am going to the State Final match. I'm good... remember I'm damn good. (ahem) Going into the State Final match... 20,000 people. One-on-one. Right there. Everybody watchin' whole family everybody's there everybody... y'know... cheerin' n... what have ya... Well guess what happened... I lost."

"I lost."

Mike's demeanor changed. This was not simply a story anymore. This was not the speech of a leader who's standing in front of his men because he likes to hear himself talk. This was his life. From the looks of things, this story still *is* his life. Very

much a part of him still today.

"I didn't lose by a little... I got... pinned. Does anybody know what that means in wrestling I mean that that's bad... I hadn't been pinned since my... Freshman year in high school. Since my Freshman year in high school. I made a mistake. A mistake that I live with for... and it it still eats me up guys. To this day I still think about that. You know and now--you ever been there? You know and you think about it you're like *dammit... I coulda got... if I could go back there...* what I'd done differently."

As I watched Mike and listened to his story, I began reflecting. I can relate... again, not to the *undefeated* part... I was never the uber-athlete. But I remember being the Honor Graduate a couple times... top of a thirty- or hundred-man class... in prestigious schools in the Marines. Receiving the top leadership award... from NCO Leadership School. Being nominated for *Recon Team Leader of the Year*. Became a Staff Sergeant of Marines. Highly experienced and respected. I was invincible. Then I got complacent. Did something stupid. Got locked up and crapped away my career. Eleven years combined time... flushed. I can relate to this story. Hell, like the *Coldplay* song starts, '*I used to rule the world... now in the morning I sleep alone-- sweep the streets I used to roam.*' (*Viva la Vida*)

Mike continued. "After that that you know I... I done a lot of thinkin' about that... What happened? I had all the tools. I was supposed to win... y'know... worked hard... I don't understand... you know... *www*what happened."

"But thinkin' about that, I remembered back to practice. Practice and my team... I had nobody in practice that could **push** me. Everybody I wrestled with on my team... nobody could push me. I mean it was... I'd just float through practice... float through practice I'd play around with them for a little bit you know and do all that... there was *nobody* there that could push me. Nobody there could **push** me. So and I was good, but I wasn't great... cause my team wasn't pushin' me. My team... wasn't... pushin' me."

Mike's right. We've all heard it before. It can be lonely at the top, when there's no one to sharpen your skills against. To get better at anything, you've got to surround yourself with people who are better, faster, stronger than yourself.

"I'm askin' you guys... we're good... b'we're not great. So we need to push... we need to push eachother. To be great. Cause we're good and it hurts men when you're at the top n something happens... and you fall. We've got to continually push each other. I mean and it's uncomfortable when we get pushed sometimes isn't it? ...You get asked some tough questions... you get pushed a little bit... it's uncomfortable the same way... in sports n stuff... you get pushed hard... it starts hurtin' a little bit. That's what we gotta get to guys. We need to push eachother. Cause I'm gonna be pushin' you. I'm gonna be *pushin'* you guys. To be **great**. **That's what a team has to do** and I expect you to be pushin' me a little bit too."

Mike is now pacing the floor. He's pointing. He's in the face of every Rig Manager in the room. He's invaded their space bubbles. He's unseating and disrupting these managers inside their comfort zone. Shakin' the house. This is a great motivational speech. It's perfect right here, right now. And it's *timeless*.

"We've gotta push eachother to be great. We've gotta push eachother on every little thing we do, to be the best. Cause if we don't, we will fail. In that big match. We will fail. In that big match I say... LIFE. Getting people hurt. We will fail! If we do not push eachother to be the best at Everything we do."

"So I'm askin' you guys when you leave here... what do *YOU* need to be pushed on. What do you need to be PUSHED on? And what are you gonna push somebody else on. Y'think we can push our hands a little bit harder... in the right direction... you think we could? *[fully engaged, affirmative responses]* You think each one of us needs to get pushed a little bit harder? We do. That's the only way we're gonna get great guys. ***That's the Only Way we're gonna get great. So that might be a little uncomfortable... we're not doin' it because we don't like you, we're doin it because we KNOW you can be the best. We KNOW it.*** So why don't we push. THANK you guys."

Now, there's no possible way to transcribe or write a speech... in such a way that the audience is captivated in the same manner as when received in story form--through a speaker that has lived the experience. Written stories simply cannot carry the tonal inflections... the long pauses... and most importantly, the listeners' responses--or 'pin-drop' lack thereof. Goosebumps and frozen stares and watery eyes will never find an adequate, accurate place on the page of any book.

Regarding the speech above: in addition to being real, and being a first-person account, it was well-received and exceptionally stated. I rate it among the top ten widely-pertinent and valuable motivational speeches I've heard.

The Family that Shoots Together...

November 6th, 2011



Last night, we all went shooting at a local public range. It's a 300 yard range, it was unoccupied by other shooters, and best of all, it's free. God bless Pennsylvania. In case you were going to ask, no, there were not any pheasants in the middle of the range when I was sighting Gaff (.300 Win Mag) in at 250 yards. So I didn't shoot any through the neck. Because they're out of season and that would be illegal.

Right now, it's Sunday. I'm sitting at home enjoying the kids before I head off to Texas for the week. There's some tender pheas...*chicken* simmering in a white wine pepper sauce on the stovetop right now. Sweet potatoes to complement. Mmm, mmm. Smells like November.



Of the metric buttload of guns we possess--which, by the way, get fired once in a blue moon (years apart)--the Springfield 1911 .45 ACP turned out to be the most popular to Petra and the kids. Correction: the Springfield 1911 .22 LR (Long Rifle) Automatic Pistol. You see, among other things, Grandpa Speights (resting in peace at Arlington, WWII / Korea / Vietnam) was a gun enthusiast. And he just happened to pass a .22 LR upper receiver conversion kit on to dad when he died. Dad, like myself, could really give a crap about guns except for their value as hunting tools and intrinsically-valuable heirlooms. So he passed me the upper receiver, to the great credit of my family. For any non-shooters reading this, here's the gist:

I've got this really big gun that most gun nuts love: a Springfield Armory, "Model 1911" .45 caliber Automatic Pistol. It's big and loud, it kicks and needs to be manhandled, and it puts large holes in things. Then dad gave me a modified part that converts that same gun into a pea-shooter. So last night, Petra and the boys had a great time shooting really cheap ammunition (\$15 for 550 rounds) rapidly through the pistol; practicing failure drills, rapid magazine reloads, and basic in-close defensive shooting tactics. Since the gun is heavy and the round is small, it doesn't kick. It's not really as loud and it's a lot of fun.

Of course, this kind of fun requires discipline that cannot be taught in a single day at the range. Several years ago, my boys learned to shoot, and learned the rules of shooting, safe weapons handling (verbatim), weapons cleaning / care & maintenance, animal cleaning, animal prep, and cooking. They learned with low-power BB guns, and most adult hunters I know would do well to learn gun safety from my boys. Now the girls are learning in the same fashion.

Anyway, without further adieu, my family... bonding. As they say, the family that shoots together... um... loots together.





"And she thinks we're just shootin." (*Just Fishin'--Trace Adkins song*)







Brass check



Caleb clears a jam



Guns don't kill ~~people~~ targets. My kids do.



Josh presses on an existing groundhog silhouette target



Mmmm. *Chicken.*

Viva la Revolution

November 16th, 2011

80-somethings and clergy and pregnant teens getting maced? Seriously? Police spokesman in Seattle says pepper spray's safe for everybody... who is he, Doctor Marcus freakin' Welby? (Even though normal people worldwide are allergic to peanuts, milk, and things a lot less harmful than pepper spray) Occupy the U.S. Protest what you will. The 1st Amendment to the Constitution preserves that right.

"Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble."

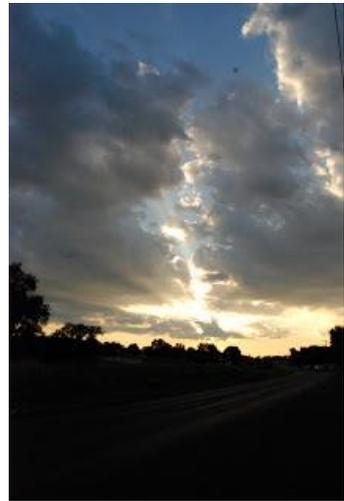
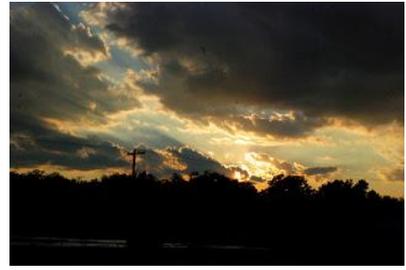
For crying out loud, people, fight. What are you waiting for, bulldozers and brigades of riot troops?

Top 50-ish Photos of Pennsylvania's Skyline in 2011

November 17th, 2011

We love the skies over Pennsylvania. Most of these are fresh photos, but there are a few that have been posted on this site already.















A Random Weekend in November 2011

November 20th, 2011

There is no elementary school on the planet that emphasizes shooting skills. Grandpa just bought the boys some shiny new Ruger precision pellet guns—perfect for knocking down rabbits, squirrels, turkeys, and other small-skulled edible critters—with virtually no rapport. At 100 yards, it's like hunting with a truly silenced (not suppressed) .22 long rifle. With Pennsylvania's short hunting window for supervised youth, and with a schedule that keeps me physically separated from my family roughly 75% of the time, I told my boys they could skip school last Friday to go sight in their weapons.

Caleb opted to go to school. Ha! Petra and I laughed about it, noting the irony. "I'm very proud of him for making the sensible decision," said Petra, "but I don't want him to be a nerd, or a belt-fed member of society, either. He needs to know how to shoot... and spend some 'man time' with his daddy when the opportunity is there." God bless that woman. John Wayne couldn't have married a better wife.

Here's the rundown on our family, in the Campbell's condensed version. Our youngest, Ayla, is infatuated with yips. Yips is how she pronounces 'lips,' in which she usually means lipstick. She wants lipstick five times a day. She applies it very delicately, then pops her lips like a pro. Ayla is losing some of her wonderful speech impediments... the intricacies of childhood development that, after having four kids, we realize we miss the most. For Ayla, her beautiful "tawshee" has taken a more pronounced and adult-like form... she now says coffee instead. At two years old, she drinks more coffee than some adults we know. Petra and I were raised the same way. Never gave a crap about the kids' coffee intake. Disagree with our views? Spend a couple months with a coffee-drinking European family. Ayla's other phrase that we love is "Ya-Ya-Ooshie," which is how she pronounces her favorite [brand of] doll, La La Loopsie.

Lily is shedding the last of her perfect speech imperfections as well. For years, the letter "C" in her words was replaced by the letter "T." For example, a car was a tar. A cupcake was a tuptake. When she'd say, "cute," it sounded like "tyute!" Oh, I loved hearing that!! Well, it's all over. Our four-year old is a bona fide big girl now.

The biggest thing in Lily's life right now is White Teddy. She's had this white teddy bear with soft little pastel flowers printed on it, ever since she was a newborn. It's from the Amy Coe baby collection (discontinued). Well, she beat that teddy up. After much patching and re-stitching by momma, White Teddy finally got to the point where he was incredibly tanned from dirt, and worn to the threads. After much painful deliberation with Lily, we hopelessly relinquished the bear to Anyu (grandma on momma's side), who is the resident sewing and stitching genius of the family. Anyu found some very, very similar material, and she asked Lily whether that would work. Lily was excited that Anyu would be fixing her bear. Anyu was somewhat

frustrated. Re-working the bear would be extremely difficult. She was incredibly relieved... and so were we... when Petra found an identical bear on ebay, and in new shape!! Lily was ecstatic!

Lily is in pre-school this year, lovin' it. She's crazy independent, and not too sentimental... so dropping her off for her first day of school was like, "Otat, mom & dad, you tan leave now (you're embarrassing me)!" She and Ayla have worn out the Barbie Mermaid Tale, Princess & the Pauper, & Three Musketeers movies this year.

Speaking of movies, we've watched fewer this year than ever! This year's top pick of the family is Soul Surfer. We also loved Rio, and we all liked Transformers 3 about as much as the previous two. Hop was horrible, Gnomeo & Juliet was okay, Diary of a Wimpy Kid 2 was pretty good, Puss & Boots 3D was (yawn) okay, Battle Los Angeles was okay-ish, Captain America rocked for the most part, momma & I were somewhat disappointed by Footloose, Pirates of the Caribbean was pretty good, and I haven't really seen any 'man' movies. By the way, if you have Comcast Xfinity cable, and you see a free kids' movie on the On Demand menu, entitled 'Pocahontas,' don't open it. It's not the Disney version. It is the gayest children's movie you've ever seen, and we only watched about two minutes of it. Josh saw all the poorly-illustrated little Indian (Native American) boys and girls with feathers in their hair, and the first thing he said was, "What's up with the naked Japanese kids?" We could hardly stop laughing before the girls pleaded with us to let them watch it. Let's face it, sometimes you've just gotta break your kids' hearts, for the dignity of the whole family.

We did not celebrate Halloween... usually we go to a big church for a 'harvest fest' or 'hallelujah night' or something similar, but Dad had to work at the last minute, and that's a tough burden on momma... trying to manage four kids in a crazy crowd at night. So they went bowling instead. Had a blast; they're still talking about it weeks later. I guess that means that we don't bowl enough as a family. I used to bowl so much as a kid, it was like, "Awww, mom, do we have to go bowling again?" Ironically, as sure as I'm writing this letter, my entire family is playing 100-pin bowling on Wii Sports Resort. Looks like fun.

Josh just played his last football game of the season this weekend. Sports are great for your kids, but they can wear you out when the season drags on!! This was my first year not coaching or managing a sport since the boys started playing T-Ball back at Deep Creek (Chesapeake, VA). He had a good season... but as a new kid to the area, and as one of the youngest players, and in a non-Pop Warner football program where the techniques and rules differ, and having sustained a knee injury mid-season... he sure had to eat a lot of crap from a couple members of his team. He's looking forward to playing soccer this spring, and to returning to football next year as a 6th grader... and in better shape.

Caleb is a straight-A student. We're really proud of his academic abilities, and the

fact that he's seriously some kind of 'boy wonder' or whiz-bang super genius. He makes being smart look really freakin' easy. Caleb is still a lego maniac, a phenomenal artist, and an all-around good kid. I think I owe him some competitive video game time, or some lego time, or some time doing something else that interests him. He actually had a great time at the shooting range when we went as a family a couple weeks ago—and he is probably the most natural shooter in our family—which is why I was surprised he didn't want to tag along on Friday with myself and Josh. Caleb is a tough nut to crack... doesn't like ice cream or a lot of snacks that most kids would like; prefers a celery stick over a Snickers...

This weekend, momma busted out the 750-piece Thomas Kinkade puzzle on the dining room table. I read to her while she attacked the puzzle... Danielle Steel's awesome historical fiction *Legacy*, which is like a cross between *Auel's Clan of the Cave Bear* and *L'Amour's Last of the Breed*, with a modern Steel twist that includes New England and the Brittany coast of France. Great inspirational love story... Like most of Steel's works, it's relatively slow to start, has a great buildup, and then finishes with a bang.

When the book was finished, I put the action to one of my long-held invention ideas that may become my first patent... the ThermoSSock... to give me 2 more hours of hot coffee when under the elements. I grabbed the spool of Nomex fire-retardant thread, a needle, some old denim, a pair of polypro long johns, a six-point deer antler, a sharpie, a drill, and my trusty Stanley Thermos. Then I went to town on the project and created my masterpiece. Coming soon to an outfitter near you? Not likely. But we'll see.

The Hungarian came out of Petra this weekend! In case any of you would like to know, don't ever say anything about Hungarian salami or Hungarian paprika that could be construed as an insult! That's Peaceful Hungarian Relations: 101 for ya. I knew better... I was just testing the waters (heh, heh). That's like telling bad Irish jokes at a bar in Dublin, or trying to boycott olive oil in Italy or Greece.

Last night was at-home date night. Michael Buble & Rat Pack music, wine, light eats, and a lot of great conversation. Get your mind out of the gutter! No, we had a blast. No babysitter, no having to drive anywhere, no expensive meal... just an early bedtime for the kids, some well-placed candles, a reason to shave, get a haircut, and dress up, and a day's worth of buildup. It was a first for us, and we loved it!

My eating season started early this year. Usually it runs from Thanksgiving Day through Superbowl Sunday. It started early this year—today, actually. Thanksgiving pot luck at church today, followed shortly thereafter by Josh's football banquet... also loaded with great food. 235 lbs. already, even right after the summer (about 20 lbs overweight!). I'm in trouble.

Well anyway, that's the long and short of our life on this random November weekend, 2011. I'm off to gnaw on a turkey leg.
--MJ

Coffee or Cable?

November 21st, 2011

Aah, relief. After two years of keeping up with the Jones' coffee makers, my wife finally put away the *Keurig* and busted out the retro black \$15 *Sunbeam* 12-cup coffee pot from Wal-Mart. I have long complained about how our society has willingly and unnecessarily accepted a stiff inflation on coffee prices in the last decade or so. Like free air at the gas station and Taco Bell's archaic 3-olive enchirito, good cheap coffee has gone the way of the white buffalo... or has it?

Right now, we're spoiled. Fernando from church hooked us up with a package of *Cafe Campeao* when he returned from Brazil. Usually though, outside of the *Lion* coffee Petra may order for my birthday or the occasional Jacobs *Nacht & Tag* that dad brings back from Germany, we coffee cheap. You see, we made a great discovery for coffee drinkers everywhere: for good, cheap Joe, shop the ethnic Isle. At Giant Eagle grocery stores in Southwest Pennsylvania, there is a Mexican food section, with regular bricks of coffee priced at \$3.89. Or you can buy the cheap-o generic American coffee, in equivalent brick size, for about \$7. That's right, twice the price. And the flavor's good both ways.

You see, I have a theory on this one. The average American of European descent is a straight-up sucka, plain and simple. We take our medicine and we do what we're told. Ethnic Americans, whether of African or Latin or Oriental descent... well, they don't just put up with any Joe's crap. Hells no. Abuela is not gonna spend no \$7 on some crap coffee made in the United States, and she's not afraid to let everyone know that. Well, thank God for her, because she saves us hundreds of dollars a year on our steamy addiction.

Now here's what I don't understand about coffee inflation... we're having some tough times in this country, am I right? A lot of joblessness, a lot of corner cutting, a lot of thrift. And broke or not, we're still gonna drink our coffee, right? Well, here are the facts. One standard, freeze-dry packaged brick of coffee will generally make a full pot of coffee about 16 times. That's 16 times 12 cups... 192 cups of coffee. At \$3.89, that's \$0.02 per cup. Two cents a cup of Joe.

What's the first thing you cut out of your life, traditionally speaking, when you're upside-down in debt? Your cable bill, right? It's purely there for entertainment. For enjoyment. It's not essential for life. Well, consider this. If you are a die-hard coffee drinker, living in 'the now,' the average cup of foo-foo coffee costs you about four bucks (\$4) at Starbucks. I'm gonna take a stab in the dark, and guess that if you know how to correctly order a *tall, nonfat, marble mocha machhiato*, you probably order it four times a week or better. So there's four foo-foo coffees per week, at four bucks apiece, for a month... that's \$64.00. That's a cable bill... at Starbucks.

So folks, when the new *Flavia* hits the shelves--with their overpriced but oh-so-

dreamy Milky Way accessory packets, or when *Keurig* rebounds with a cooler machine and a *K-cup* that doesn't sour your coffee through overbrewing, or when you finally get sick of ordering *Tassimo* or *Gevalia* add-ons in pursuit of the perfect brew, take a step backward... to a simpler day in the not-so-distant past when you could still fill up a thermos at your house (not at the gas station where--yup--you're overpaying for coffee again), and where a full pot of brew creates that aroma that wafts through the house and cuts through sleepy eyes. It still is *the best part of waking up*, and you'll never get that slow-brewed smell from a machine that craps out an individual cup of coffee in 4.1 seconds.

And let's not forget, when you reach a financial low point that causes you to scale back on unnecessary spending... the next time you sip that piping hot cup of java that's covered in carmel and frothy cream and the magical touch of a human barista or automated dream machine, do the math.



Melissa November 21, 2011 at 10:32 PM

This made me smile. My mom and sisters got me a Keurig coffee maker for my birthday and I hate spending so much on coffee! I feel so wasteful, too, that for every cup of coffee I brew a plastic non-recyclable cup goes in the trash. I need to pull my old trusty maker out of the cupboard!

Lineman Video

November 21st, 2011

Here's a pretty cool electrical Lineman video...
[“Electric Power Lineman” on *YouTube*]

Thankful without Thanksgiving

November 25th, 2011

I had it all planned out. Wednesday night, I got back home from work around 9PM. Petra had bought me a ham and I went to town prepping it out and cooking it well past 2AM. Petra's folks and brother arrived from Ohio at about 10PM, and I needed to finish the ham because Anyu (my mother-in-law) needed the baking pan for the turkey.

My intent was to sleep in 'til about eight, type up a 'thankful' message on the blog, and then commence with those wonderful holiday traditions... the Macy's Day Parade, the day-long nibblins, the sweets, the Christmas movies, the football games, and of course, the FEAST!

Well, that all went to crap with a 7:30AM phone call, followed within fifteen minutes by a drive to work, which turned into a twenty-hour workday. I skimmed out on my opportunity to chow down... Rig 480 offered a field-catered, simple Thanksgiving meal--which I gratefully accepted, but with great reserve as to the quantity on my plate, partly in respect to their crew's needs and partly because I believed I needed to save room for the meal at my house, which I ended up missing entirely. After finishing up at 480, I had to drive a few hours to Rig 163 in Ohio, frustrated at the thought that this is my third Thanksgiving in a row without family (and probably my 10th overall since I've been married). I stopped along the way for the Thanksgiving meal of the American road warrior... a spicy-bite footlong hot dog and a bucket-sized sweet tea.

Despite all obstacles, I am so thankful for where I am--and where my family is--today. Two years ago, I worked for three weeks, through Thanksgiving, with my crew of eight men on several new homes being constructed in the Norfolk / Virginia Beach area of Virginia. I was the contractor, and we were sub-contracted by a major area builder to do the finish and punch-out work on eleven houses. I expended money out-of-pocket and I pushed the allotted credit limits from my suppliers, asking my men to work long and hard hours alongside me through the holidays. The builder defaulted, declared bankruptcy, and I lost \$43,000. It was a hard blow, and it got harder as my creditors squeezed and my men were paid agonizingly slowly out-of-pocket for work performed over the course of that project. It hurt... badly... and the effects were felt for the entire year of 2010.

Today, before I roll back to work again in what appears to be a long working weekend, I am thankful for the work. I mean, truly thankful for the work. I have an excellent job with excellent pay, and I work under independent conditions for the best manager I've ever had the pleasure of working directly under (Ron Swegheimer... I'll write all about him someday). I have a good partner at work to lean against, and my family is well-fed, all the time, and happy. To my brothers John in Oklahoma and Texas, thanks for the opportunity to join this team... 13 months in and

going strong. God, I'm thankful to You for the provision, and for Your big-picture plan for my life and for the lives of my wonderful wife and kids.

Today I'm heading to Rig 329, to work on their hydraulic catwalk. Along the way, I'm looking to share God's blessings with someone random. God is good.

Last Colors of the Montour Trail, October 2011

November 30th, 2011











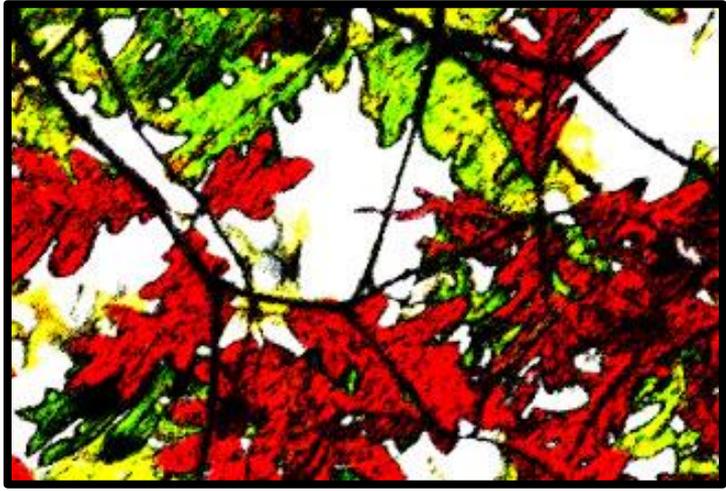












Daddy Daughter Time

November 30th, 2011







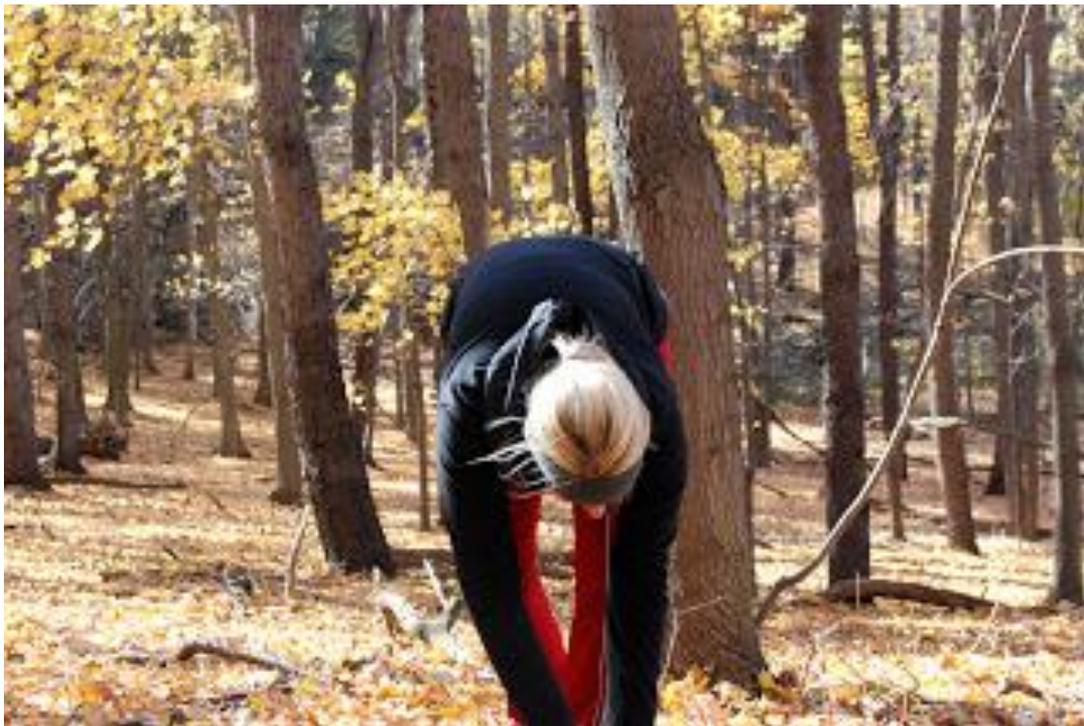
Last Walk of Autumn, and a Surprise Visit from Grandpa

November 30th, 2011















Paint, Puzzles, & Supa Snooka Barbie

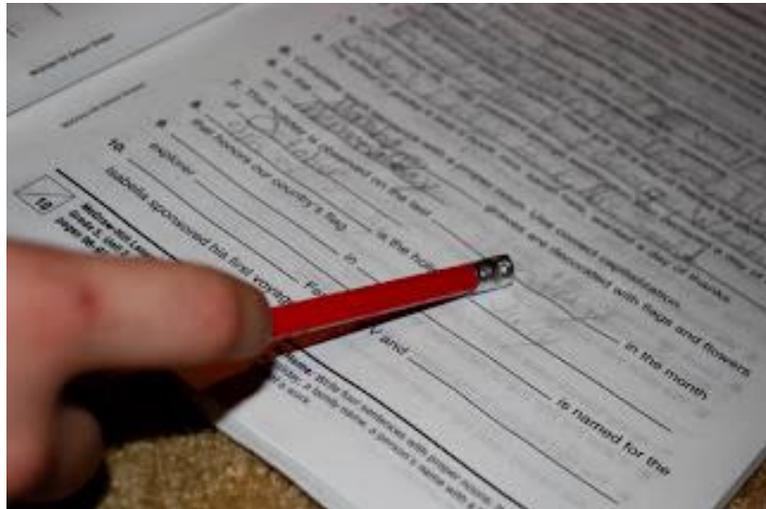
November 30th, 2011

As in most American homes, our family typically conglomerates in the living room each evening. TV's usually on, even if it's only on a music channel. The girls like to dance, play Barbies, dress up like Disney princesses, and color. The boys like to play video games if it's the weekend; otherwise they're either doing homework, chores, playing outside with 'the guys' (basketball or football), or with 'the girls' (neighbor sisters a couple houses down... trampoline, hide & seek, etc).

On occasion, we halt all normal operations to turn back the clock, revisiting family nights of not-so-long-ago. During this time, the dining room at our house becomes the center of activity. On this particular night last week-ish (photos below), the dining room table is used for eating, homework, painting, Solitaire, and a big puzzle. I sneaked out of the house for 20 minutes, to scout a potential hunting area. I showed the girls some Barbie wrestling moves in the living room... with the only two Barbies in the house that have clothes. Almost zonked out on the *Couch of Sleepiness*. Later, Petra and I enjoyed some coffee in the dining room (once the kids went down).

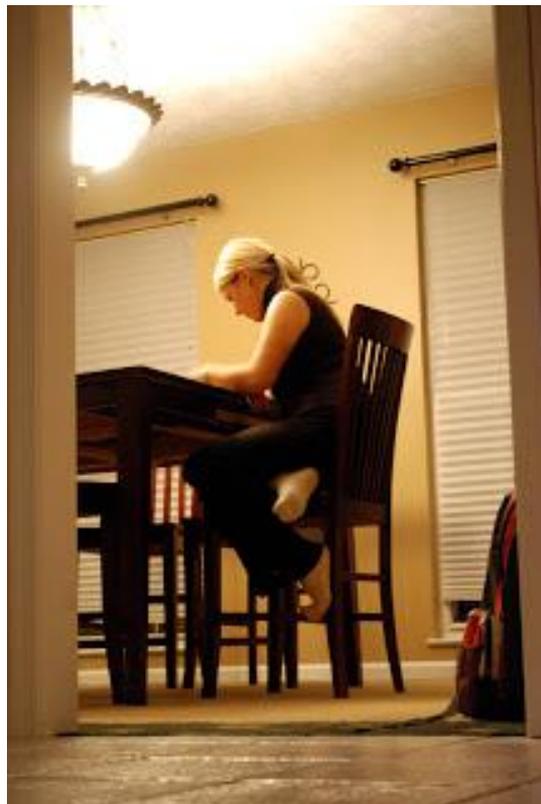
Aah, this is the life.













Piggies!!!

November 30th, 2011

Momma painted the girls' toes today. Nothing new, just need to capture these little opportunities to create a memory!



Mi Hijo

October 30th, 2011

Here are a few pictures of my oldest son, Josh, out shooting with his old man. We started with his new Ruger .22 pellet gun... fired it until he was keyholing rounds at 100 yards... nice gun, and silent!! Finished off with the new crossbow. Both were gifts from grandpa. I then tweaked Gaff, for a straight shot through the Leupold scope. We left the range materially prepared for the gun season opener.





Proper Recognition of October 29th

October 30th, 2011

October 29th, on any other year, is lacklustre. There's no pertinent holiday attached to it, there's no 'red letter' anniversary or occasion that immediately comes to mind. But in 2011, this was the date that much of the Eastern U.S. experienced its first snow dump of the year. And it was the good kind! Great packing snow. This unexpected weather phenomena happened right smack dab on my day off, right in the middle of a busy couple months--and a very busy couple weeks. And because our family--every last one of us--absolutely loves snow, it was as if God planned the fun weather just for us.

Because we were too busy having fun that day, I never got to post the pics (here they are):









Four Photos of a Bee-youtiful Sunset

November 30th, 2011

As viewed from our back porch...



Introducing... the ThermoSock

November 30th, 2011

The idea has been in my head for years--a custom-fit sock that provides an extra insulative layer to your thermos. No, they don't all have to be hand-stitched, antlered, and barbaric-looking. Think sporty. Think Mammut, Gore-Tex, fleece-lined. "Personal statement." Even in the most extreme temperatures, imagine 2- to 4-more hours of... hot coffee. Hot chocolate. Chicken-noodle soup. Tomato soup. Iced tea. Whatever. When every hour in the blistering cold is excruciatingly long and painful... and in style. *Your* style.

In *my* mind's eye, these would be made to fit the three or four standard Stanley thermos sizes, available in every color, design, etc. Zippers, velcro, buttons, whatever... and also including an attached (matching) cap that you slide over the top of the cup/lid, for full encapsulation. Mine will also have a webbing loop with a carabiner attached to the back. Can't you envision these on the shelves at Wal Mart or REI? Working on the patent!



Two Bucks... A Successful Season Opener

November 30th, 2011

I haven't been hunting in several years. Since the boys are getting older, I figured it was about time to blow the dust off the guns, buy a few licenses, and get my sons out where all boys need to be at some point in their lives... the wild. Well, as wild as



we can find around here, anyway.

So I took leave this week. Monday was the deer season opener, so I kept the boys home from school to hunt. Woke them at 4AM; they popped to attention, sleeping lightly on the hair springs of anticipation! We bundled and

headed out the door: Me, Gaff, and my strapping lads. Gaff, for those who may not know, is a .300 Win Mag, which replaced Ol' Trusty the 30.06. Gaff bears the nickname of his previous owner, Stephen Peter "Gaff" Gaffney, with whom I shared my most memorable hunting moments. He shares those moments with me still, in spirit.

For this hunt, Josh manhandled the crossbow and Caleb sought small game with his high-power (\$350) pellet gun. Unfortunately, it was miserably rainy and cold, and Caleb ended up weathering the last several hours in the truck. We hunted from sun-up to 11AM, drove home with two young bucks (I'm extremely selective... no doe, no button bucks, maybe a spikehorn, no leathery old monsters). Dressed them, carefully cut the steaks, cleaned the garage spotlessly, disposed of the carcasses, and washed up in time for the football man party that we were hosting (the guys from church). Of course, Petra put out a nice spread. Doggone I love that snausage dip!

The height of the day included dragging each of those two bucks by the horns, down and up the slick, muddy, no-kidding 50-foot 12-pitch walls of the creek gorge. Caleb thought I was going to die of a heart attack after struggling the second buck up the hill, 6" at a time, for over an hour.

It was a great way to start a vacation, a hunting season, and the holidays.

Sing Unto the Lord a Throwback

November 30th, 2011

In Psalm 33:3 in the Bible, David implores [us / everyone] to "sing unto the Lord a new song." In the preceding verse, and in other parts of *Psalms*, he encourages the use of different instruments, basically trying to make people understand that God delights not only in the praises of His people, but especially in fresh, hip, jazzy songs that are, well... new.

But that doesn't mean that God *ONLY* likes new songs. I'm sure God has a few favorite golden oldies. Instead of focusing on looking better and singing fresher, how's about we revive some of the classics? Hymns, early contemporary Christian music, old-school praise... God would probably appreciate it, and I wouldn't mind it too much either!

Tea For Three

November 30th, 2011



Caught a photographic glimpse--albeit blurry--of Ayla walking from the bathroom sink to the playroom. She just got a new tea set from a garage sale not too long ago, and Anyu & Apu (grandma & grandpa on mom's side) just got the girls a new Dora table & chairs set. I sneaked a peek at a tea time with Mickey & Minnie. Cute!



Two Blondilocks & the Four Bears

November 30th, 2011



Once upon a time, there was a bear. Not just any bear, a chic little Amy Coe collector bear. It was a very special bear for a very special baby. The baby was my daughter, Lily, and the bear was a gift from her beautiful momma. The teddy was aptly, simply, and innocently named "White Teddy."

White Teddy was raised alongside a great big pillow of a brown bear, named Barry.

Barry has a gruff 'Papa' voice, he's grouchy, and he always asks if he can eat the smaller stuffed animals in the room, especially kitties. When told "NO!" by Lily or Ayla, he then asks if he can just smell them. Then lick them. Then he always inevitably asks if he can eat them again. Usually he'll stop asking to eat the smaller stuffed animals when you give him a lollipop.

Well, the years passed, and Barry aged well. White Teddy, however, did not. At times, White Teddy looked so dirty, he was not white at all. He was brownish-tannish-gray. Then one day, something horrible happened. White Teddy's bum ripped open, and all his fluff came out. Lily was devastated. So was Barry. Momma took the opportunity 'hospitalize' the bear, so he could be properly cleaned before he was repaired. He was returned to Lily within a few days, good as new!

Over time, the dirt and sand and swimming pool chloride and sun and bumpy wagon rides took their toll on White Teddy. His cloth became very frail... first at the seams, then across the surface of his body material. Even his stitching became very fragile. He was losing fluff all the time. Momma had to limit Lily's playtime with White Teddy, in the best interest of the war-torn, aging bear. Barry was lonely. Lily was very, very sad.

Later that year, momma, Lily, White Teddy, Barry, and the rest of the family took a trip to see Lily's grandparents, Anyu and Apu. Lily's grandmother was, among other things, a sewing Ninja. With Lily's permission, momma gave White Teddy to Anyu, so that she could try to fix him.

Several months passed, and Anyu could not find a way to fix White Teddy. She was able to find material that looked and felt similar to Mr. Teddy's original material, but it

was not exact. That meant that she would have to completely rebuild the bear, in order for him to look right. White Teddy would need a whole new makeover. This would still be very, very hard for Anyu to do.

Then one magical day--not so long ago, in fact--something miraculous happened. Momma was searching on ebay, and she found the exact same Amy Coe baby bear, in 'like new' condition! It had a "Buy it Now" option, free shipping, and it was the only one. Regardless of what it cost, momma would pay the price, because it was Priceless!!!



Within 72 short hours, a small brown package arrived at Lily's house. The package had her name on it. When Lily opened it, her eyes lit up... "WHITE TEDDY!!!" She was so happy, she could just cry. She said his name so loud, it even woke Barry up from his daily hibernation, upstairs on Lily's bed. He was very happy too. White Teddy looked new and fresh and perfect. Then Lily's momma sat down with Lily, and explained that Anyu was not able to fix White Teddy. "So this is a new White Teddy," momma finished. "That's okay," exclaimed Lily, "I like this White Teddy better anyway!"

On Thanksgiving, this Thanksgiving, to be exact, Anyu and Apu came to visit Lily and her family. It was then that Anyu got to meet White Teddy II, and she carefully returned the original White Teddy to Momma. He now sits in a place of honor, guarding Papa's most precious collectibles in the 'Man Room' downstairs. Then Anyu unleashed another surprise... a specially handcrafted bear, akin to the original bears, lovingly designed and created from scratch by Anyu herself. "Since you have already a new Vite Teddy bear," said Anyu with her accent, "you can giving this one to your little sister."

Now Lily and her sister, Ayla, play together with Barry, and White Teddy II, and Chee Cha Bear. They sing the Teddy Bear song together, and on special occasions, they will still be able to play with White Teddy (the original)--when he is not busy guarding throwing darts, or playing chess with Pistol Guy, or guarding Papa's collectibles. And they're all living happily ever after.

Fire in the Sky / Gorgeous Sunset Tonight... For Real this Time

November 30th, 2011





Pittsburgh's Market Square at Christmastime

December 1st, 2011



Visited Market Square with my in-laws this past Friday. Tons of folks, including our boy Josh, had just left the Penguins game. Christmas spirit was in full effect. Afterwards, we drove around Pittsburgh; Pet's folks were floored to see a city bus welcoming them to the neighborhood... in their native (Hungarian) tongue! That, coupled with the fact that there are so many striking similarities between Pittsburgh (the City of Bridges) and Budapest (the City of the Seven Bridges... other similarities include the incline rail, the river boats, the layout)... these combined to create a perfect visiting atmosphere. Check out the Christmastime pics below:











Getting into Christmas

December 1st, 2011

It's not hard to do in our family. We freakin' LOVE Christmas. We're already in the groove. Holiday movies and music and food and egg nog at every opportune moment.









My 9-11 Tribute Photo Before & After, 2001 - 2011. Taken from Liberty Island.

December 3rd, 2011



Eight Days of Pure Perfection

December 5th, 2011

Saturday visit Pittsburgh sites with Petra's folks. Later that night, foreign beer sampler w/ guys @ Barley & Hops.

Sunday chill.

Monday deer season opener with boys... two big bucks, cleaned, cut, & disposed, garage spotless... then we hosted church guys' football night at our pad.

Tuesday chill.

Wednesday organize photos & write all day.

Thursday bright & squirrely drive 6 hours to NYC, walk the city with kids to see Christmas lights all night (Rockefeller, 5th Ave, Times Square, Late Show, Radio City Music Hall, Broadway, etc.).

Friday visit sites all around Big Apple: WTC area, Chinatown, Liberty, Chrysler, Empire State, Guggenheim, Central Park, Grand Central Station. Friday night, watch hockey game in Wilkes Barre from company suite for Northern Region Christmas party.

Saturday almost hit the most massive black bear we've ever seen, took pictures as he was running across a barren field. Babysitter. Dress-up night out at some fancy Italian place for Southern Region Christmas party.

Sunday visiting Swedish pastor spoke at church. Animated. Driving from church to Market Square in Pittsburgh, watched three guys run into a store with guns. Hit brakes. Then saw the movie's camera crew. Took pictures. Ate and watched Steeler's home game at Primanti Bros. Ice skated for six hours @ The Rink at PPG Place. Cooler and three times cheaper than Rockefeller Center's skating rink. Kids didn't want to leave. Came home to watch more football.

Great vacation.

New Yorkers etc. (Part I... Daytime Pics)

December 5th, 2011

Photos taken in Manhattan on Thursday and Friday... photos by both Petra and myself... she snapped all the good ones



Deceptive, money-snatching cartoon characters on every corner. *Seven Elmos in three city blocks??!* You've gotta be kidding me.





The Bus Driver





"Uncle Steve moved to [address], Utica NY..." "Sal's new cell phone number is 212-
..."





New construction workers near the WTC site





See this guy's falafel stand? Check out his sign in the photo below...





Painter in Chinatown



Skater in Chinatown



Bubbles Everywhere



Elegant Elderly at Liberty Park



Ladies walking at Liberty Park

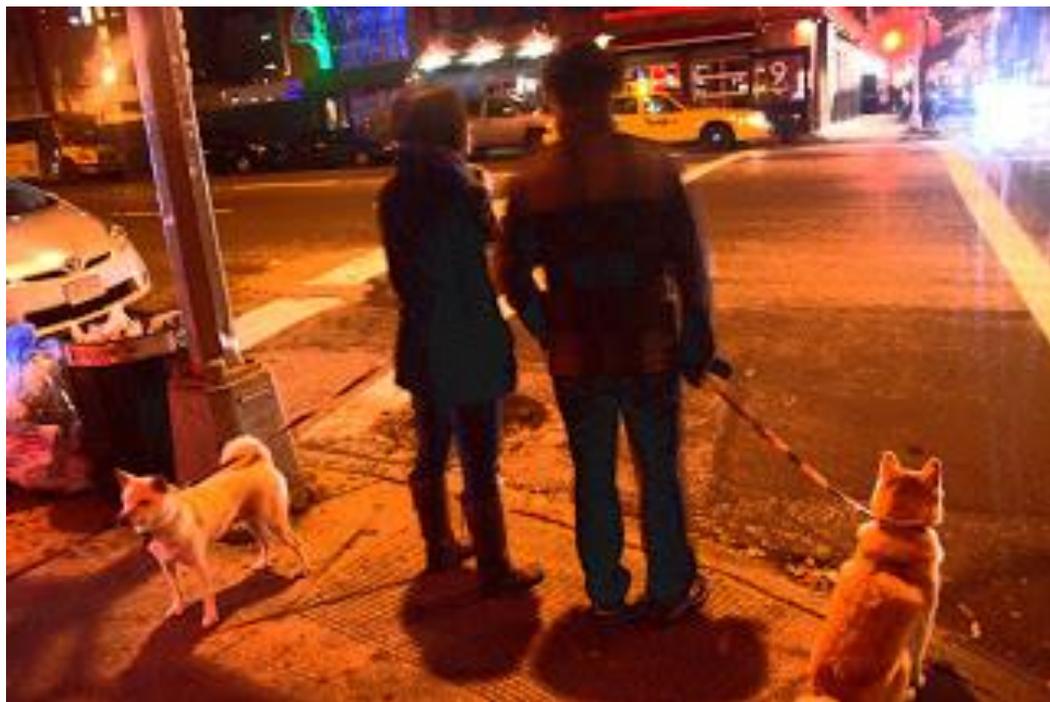


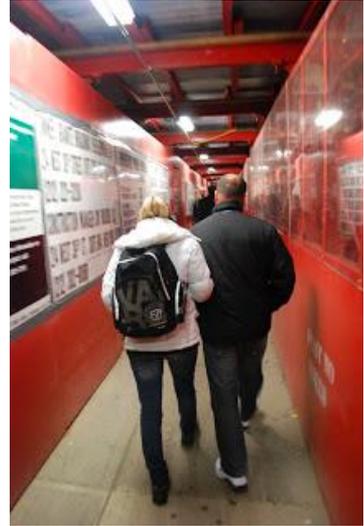


New Yorkers etc. (Part II... Nighttime Pics)

December 5th, 2011

Photos taken in Manhattan on Thursday and Friday... photos by both Petra and myself... she snapped all the good ones



















New York Randoms

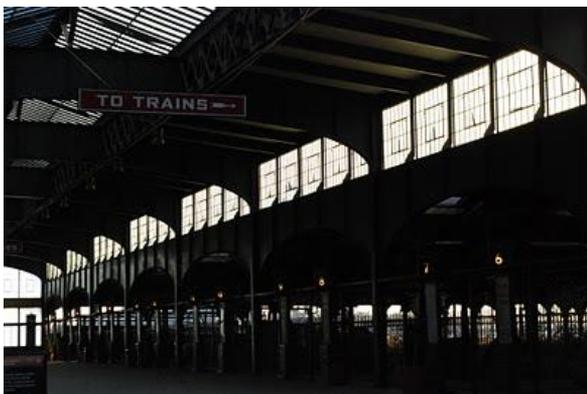
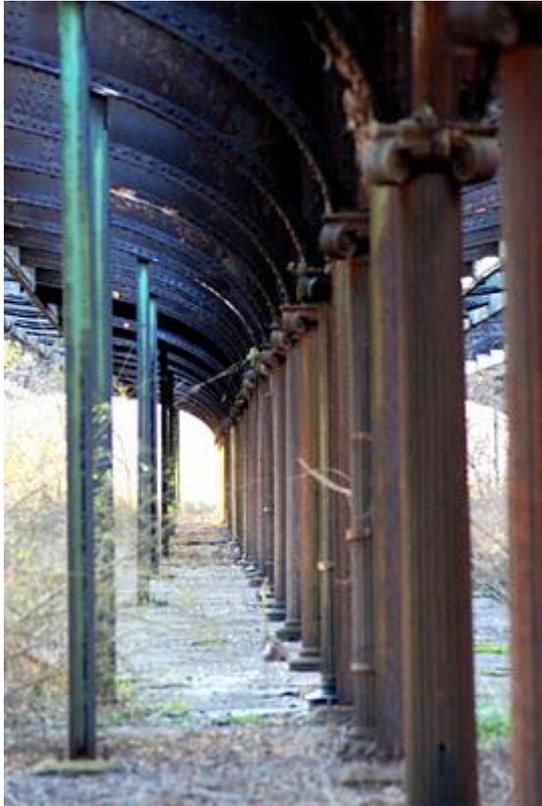
December 5th, 2011













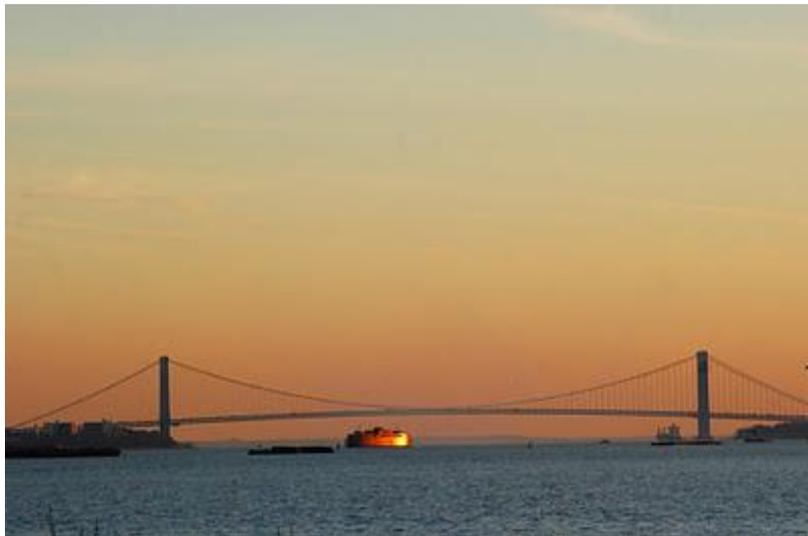
















Love @ Liberty Park

December 5th, 2011







It's a Pony!

December 6th, 2011



I'm so proud to be married to my wife. I'm going to let you in on a little story about us that goes back a long way. Like many good stories, the story itself is only part of the story. Make sense?

So about twelve years ago, Petra was driving back to me and our home in coastal Carolina, coming from Virginia. My sister was riding with her in the car. All of a sudden, a big black bear goes waddling across the road in front of them.



Now Petra's amazing genes used to betray her in those days. I'm not talking about her beauty, I'm talking about her accent--or lack thereof--it betrayed the fact that she was not a natural-born American. So basically, on rare occasions, she would get excited and her speech (phonics, vocabulary, definitions) would slip up... in perfect English.

So anyway, this big ol' bear runs across the road, and in her excitement, Petra says,

"Oh my gosh! It's... a PONY!!!" My sister told me all about it after it happened, laughing hysterically. Petra chuckled, but she was visibly upset. "I really thought it was a pony," she rebutted. For whatever reason, that only made it more funny. Bear. Pony.

So the story continues. Over the next several years, I tell the story so many times that it becomes polished to perfection, inciting a gut-busting roar from any audience. "Look at me, I'm a pony!" I'd loudly declare in the voice and body language of Austin Powers... or Richard Simmons... or Jack Black. Like a bear, I'd waddle fatly in slow motion across the room, winneying like a horse. I must've told that story a couple hundred times.

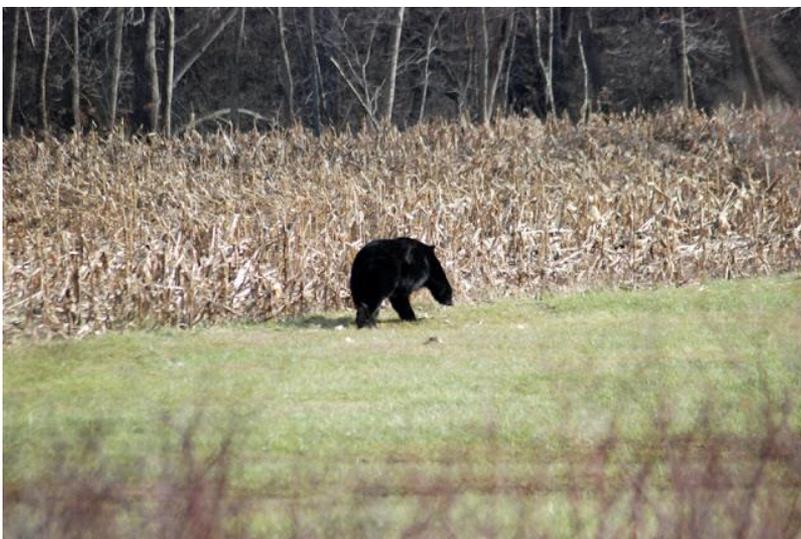
Petra hated it. HATED it.

For years, I told her to just lighten up, it's a great story. She was right, though, and I was a jerk for telling it. So eventually, thanks to Petra, I matured a bit, and the story found its way to the archives of the party side of my brain. I stopped telling it years ago, much to Pet's relief.

Here comes the part of the story where I fall in love with my wife all over again, like I do more and more each day... this time, for her self-depreciating humor.

On our way back from New York on Saturday, a freaking ginormous black bear runs across the road in front of us... we almost hit it! Mind you, the last time this happened to Petra was about twelve years ago. And like it happened just last week, Petra doesn't skip a beat.

"Oh my gosh, IT'S A PONY!!!"



By the way, if you ever whistle or call out to a bear to get it to pose for the camera, like a deer would usually do... it doesn't work. They just run.



Away Insomniac

December 16th, 2011

I have severe insomnia, but not at home. With my wife, I sleep like a baby. Away from her, I'm routinely up past 2, 3, 4 AM... staring at the ceiling... trying to sleep. Sometimes I simply skip sleeping. The first time I remember this being a problem was back in the Marines, when I was flying. I would lace up some running shoes and go pound out five or ten miles of ground, or I'd swim a mile or 2K--counting strokes.

This week, I'm in Houston. These days, I'm much less motivated. And I'm still awake. Watching horrible infomercials.

Christmas at Parris Island: Human Christmas Lights

An excerpt from *My Small and Mighty Corps*

December 17th, 2011

The best boot camp stories, I truly believe, happen over the holidays. Our platoon got very little sleep around the holidays. Just days before Christmas, we were stood up, in our underwear, next to the bulkheads (walls), and told to 'break out our moonbeams.' When every man had his angle-neck flashlight and was standing against the wall again, we were assigned a post – two men per window. Since every moonbeam has two additional colored lenses, we had to alternate red, white, and blue. For two hours each night, we were the 'Christmas lights' for our building. All the way around our deck (floor), the colors were alternated. The DI called cadence with the slow, steady, heavy step of his boots as he paced up and down the DI highway. Red, white, blue, red,... by Christmas Eve, we all had cramps in our thumbs from holding our flashlight buttons.



Anonymous December 21, 2011 at 5:10 PM

Hello. My son is a recruit on Parris Island. Are presents sent? He was already disciplined because of the flower sticker I put on his first letter

Mom



Anonymous December 21, 2011 at 5:16 PM

Are recruits allowed to receive Christmas presents? If so, any recommendations?

Mom



mj December 23, 2011 at 4:38 PM

Mi 'Mom,' recruits are usually allowed to receive Christmas presents, but they are limited to either (1) hygiene items (a really nice razor, some exciting toothpaste, Q-tips, cotton balls, aftershave, etc., or classic holiday foods (cookies, candy, e.g.) in sufficient quantity to share with the entire platoon. Hope this helps. P.S. Regarding the flower sticker, check out the story on this blog entitled "Our Life in Letters."

Christmas at Parris Island: Brown Paper Packages

An excerpt from *My Small and Mighty Corps*

December 17th, 2011

During the holidays, recruits receive tons of goodies from loved ones. Grandma Speights sent me one of her traditional handmade candy wreaths, and it was hung on the SDI's hatch. Though plenty of opportunity was there, not one of those colorfully wrapped caramels, or chocolates, or hard candies was pulled from that wreath for a month. Simply put, no one had the balls, and for this reason: just before receiving the wreath in the mail, recruit Feeney opened his eight pound box of cookies from mom and stuffed two oatmeal raisins in his mouth before the DI came to inspect the package. The DI smelled the cookies on his breath, and questioned the recruit. Diverting, Feeney said, "Would the Drill Instructor like a cookie, Sir!" (when you yell out a question in the Marines, it sounds more like a statement) The DI responded, "I don't want your damn cookies, because from the looks of you, your mother or your grandmother or whoever baked those cookies was probably a heroin-addict, and I have no doubt she injected those cookies full of crack, or marijuana, or some other substance that should not be in this room right now." Then the DI made the short, stocky, 140-pound Feeney eat the whole box by himself in less than ten minutes. When he couldn't eat another crumb (he was obviously in pain), he got his butt seriously trashed on the quarterdeck until he rained oatmeal rasin puke all over the squad bay. Now, who's hungry?

Recruit Martinez, who was my enlistment buddy, made sure to tell his parents not to send pogy bait, but instead to send razors, toothpaste, and aftershave, which were all authorized items. He stood on the quarterdeck while the DI inspected his newly arrived parcel. "Recruit Martinez?" "Sir, yes, Sir!" "What is this?" "Sir, it's Old Spice aftershave, Sir!" "Are you sure?" "Sir?" "Did you taste it?" "Sir, no Sir!" "Take off the cap." "Aye, Sir!" "Put the bottle in your mouth." "Aye, Sir!" "NOW DRINK IT! DRINK IT! DRINK IT ALL, RECRUIT!" Just as the DI was yelling, the back hatch slammed. It was the Series Gunnery Sgt. (he was, among other roles, the Human Resources Manager of this organization) and the DI didn't flinch. In the middle of his raving, he changed, like the flip of a switch. The whole incident went like this, 'NOW DRINK IT! DRINK IT! DRINK IT ALL, RECRUIT!' (door slams) "RECRUIT MARTINEZ, I TOLD YOU TO GET THAT BOTTLE OUT OF YOUR FRIGGIN' MOUTH! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING? WHAT IS IN THAT BOTTLE, RECRUIT?" "Sir, aftershave, Sir!" "DOES IT HAVE ALCOHOL IN IT?" "Sir, yes, Sir!" "AND ARE YOU ALLOWED TO HAVE ALCOHOL AT RECRUIT TRAINING? GET THE HECK OFF MY QUARTERDECK!!"

Christmas at Parris Island: The Big Surprise

Excerpt from *My Small and Mighty Corps*

December 17th, 2011

On Christmas Eve, our Senior Drill Instructor (the father figure, or 'good cop' of the DI team) instructed us to each take one of our socks out and hang it atop the head of our rack, "just in case Santa comes tonight." Well, we did as we were told, and I must say that I truly believed that there might be candy inside our socks when we woke up. The Senior DI had a foot locker chocked full of cavities just waiting to happen, which we saw from time to time if the SDI's door was open. Late that night, I heard a rattle and peeked out from between partially closed eyelids to see the firewatch placing something in each sock. Waiting until he passed, I slivered and slunk like the Grinch to my sock, then pulled out a small piece of paper. Getting my flashlight out and then crawling under my wool blanket (which obscured the light from the firewatch), I read the paper – "500 pushups." Curious, I sneakily snatched small notes from other socks, to see if someone had a lesser 'gift.' No luck. "Mountain climb until you die" and "1,000 flutter kicks" were the first two I pulled out – then, I got an idea. Devious? Yes. Feasible? Yes. Hilarious? I thought so.

I pulled a few sheets of paper out of my letter-writing gear, then got under my covers with the flashlight again and went to work, making my own set of 'presents.' "Double Chow." "Ice cream with dinner for one week." "No PT for a week." "Drill instructor for a day." On the back of each, I wrote, "see Senior DI to claim prize." I replaced the SDI's original pieces of paper in their respective socks, but stuffed them low into the

toe of each sock, and placed my paper near the top of each sock. In the morning, I woke up and remembered my actions, wondering just how smart the idea was. More than likely, the DI's would be furious, and we would all thrash until someone had the integrity to fess up. It was Christmas Day, however, and I was saved by the morning church service. By the time we marched to the chapel, sang some songs, and came back, the joke would be out and the thrashing would be over. I was wrong.

When the five of us returned to rejoin the rest of the platoon 'chilling out' (polishing boots, scuzzing the deck), a line was formed outside the SDI's duty hut. Recruit Vest was the first in line, and I moved my scuzzing operation to within hearing distance. He was talking to the recruit behind him. "I got the 'Big Surprise!' I wonder what it is? I hope it's not push-ups or something." I went over to my buddy, John Martinez, trying not to laugh and pulled him out of the line, "It's a joke!" I told him. "I made those things!" "*You dog!*" He said, laughing "*I knew it had to be you!*" Right just then, the air was disrupted by the short-fused, loud and raspy voice of our Senior Drill Instructor. "**What do you want?!**" Our Senior DI barked at Recruit Vest from behind his desk. Recruit Vest centered himself on the hatch. "Sir, this recruit is here to claim his 'Big Surprise,' Sir!" "*You want WHAT? Give me that [piece of paper, presumably]!*" The silence seemed to last forever. My heart almost stopped as I recognized the calm before the storm. He then continued. I think I could hear him smiling. "Oh, I see." The Senior Drill Instructor sounded almost amused. "You want the BIG SURPRISE?" Then he exploded. "YOU'LL GET YOUR BIG SURPRISE, VEST! HA, HA, HA, HA. YESSSS, YOU'LL GET YOUR BIG SURPRISE. I GOT A WHOLE BAG OF BIG SURPRISE FOR YOU, YOU MAGGOT! GET THE FRICK OUTTA MY HATCH!!!!"

At that, the rest of the line instantly dissipated. Within five minutes, the DI's had collected all of my little notes, laughing out loud at each of them. Then, we gave the DI's our Christmas presents – billions of little drops of sweat, for hours. I remained undiscovered. Then somehow, word filtered out that I had been the perpetrator (I guess someone saw me the night before). I still didn't know that anyone knew. Vest was paying for his 'Big Surprise' long after all of us had finished. He was really taking a beating. Then, in desperation, he yelled out "**SCREW YOU, SPEIGHTS!**" Oh wait, that's *my* name. How did he know it was me!?! He took some hell before he dropped my name, too. I took his place even as the giddy DI's swarmed me and toyed with me, the Christmas present mastermind, until I was flopping around on the floor like a dying fish in a pile of sweat. Looking back, it was worth it.

Home for the Holidays. Blessed and Thankful.

December 17th, 2011

Ah, home again. Flew in from Houston via Charlotte last night. Houston is not in any way Christmas-ish. White frost is painted onto trees, but folks are wearing tank tops. I think that everybody loves the idea of family and giving and goodwill, and those are associated with Christmas, and Christmas is associated with snow... but it's not happening in that part of Texas any time soon.

I did get a pretty cool sliver of Christmas spirit in Houston, though... my Amphion systems instructor, Michael Ehinger, was actually Santa Claus. No, really.

So I sat next to a former Cherry Point Marine named Melissa, who is wrapping up med school and traveling the States to find a good burn program to fit into. We yammered the Houston to Charleston leg away, which was nice. On the second flight, I saw a bunch of young Marines fresh from Parris Island, including a boot camp platoon Honor Graduate, proudly sporting his dress blues. I made a note to post a couple of Parris Island Christmastime blog stories. I got to Pittsburgh just after Midnight.

Today, it's been lightly but steadily snowing all day. Petra and the boys are volunteering in the community with our church (Lifestone) today. I've been home playing Wii Sports Resort with the girls. Right now we're watching Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (the classic claymation). As I look out our back door over the frosted rolling hills at all the lit-up houses, with Christmas music playing softly and our home filled with the smell of pine from the Christmas tree behind me, I count myself and my family blessed. I worked through Thanksgiving, and I'm slated to work Christmas, but it's a small price to pay for my family to be where we are today. We are in a good place--geographically, financially, and in every other way imaginable. Blessed and thankful.

Fa Ra Ra Ra Ra

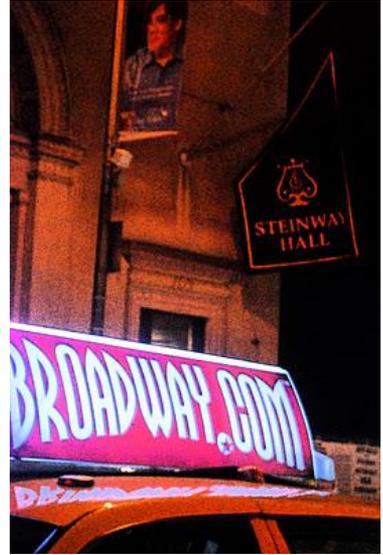
December 17th, 2011

YESSSSS! Momma wants us all to watch *A Christmas Story* tonight. And we're ordering Chinese.

Last of New York Holiday Photos (1 of 2)

December 17th, 2011





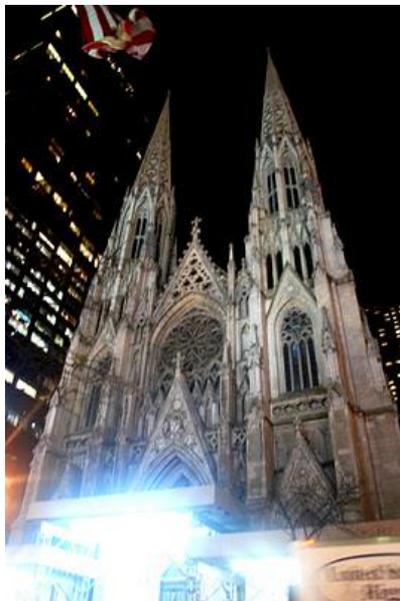


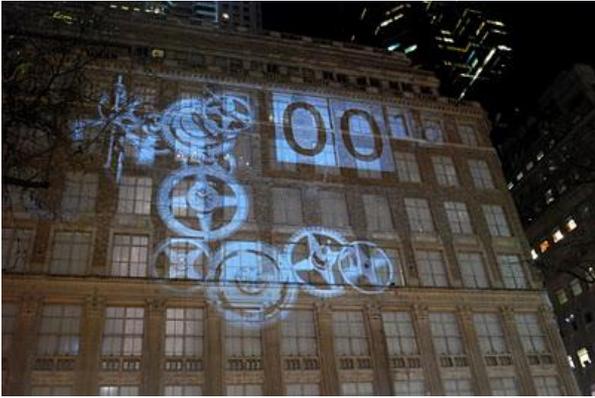


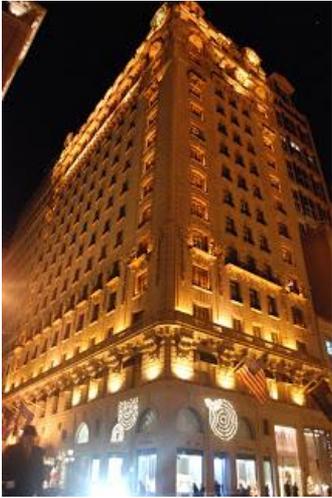


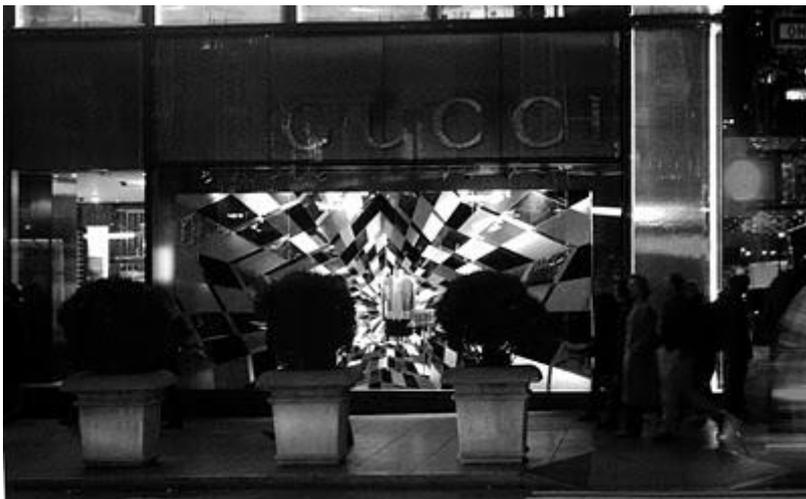
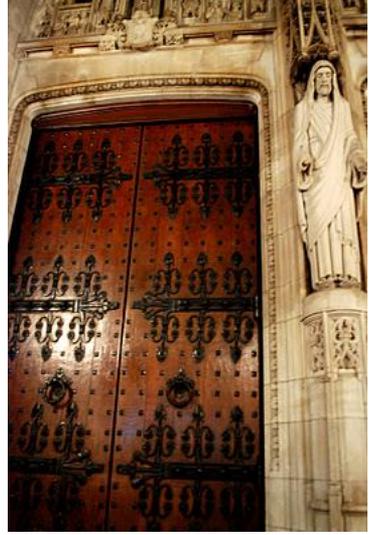






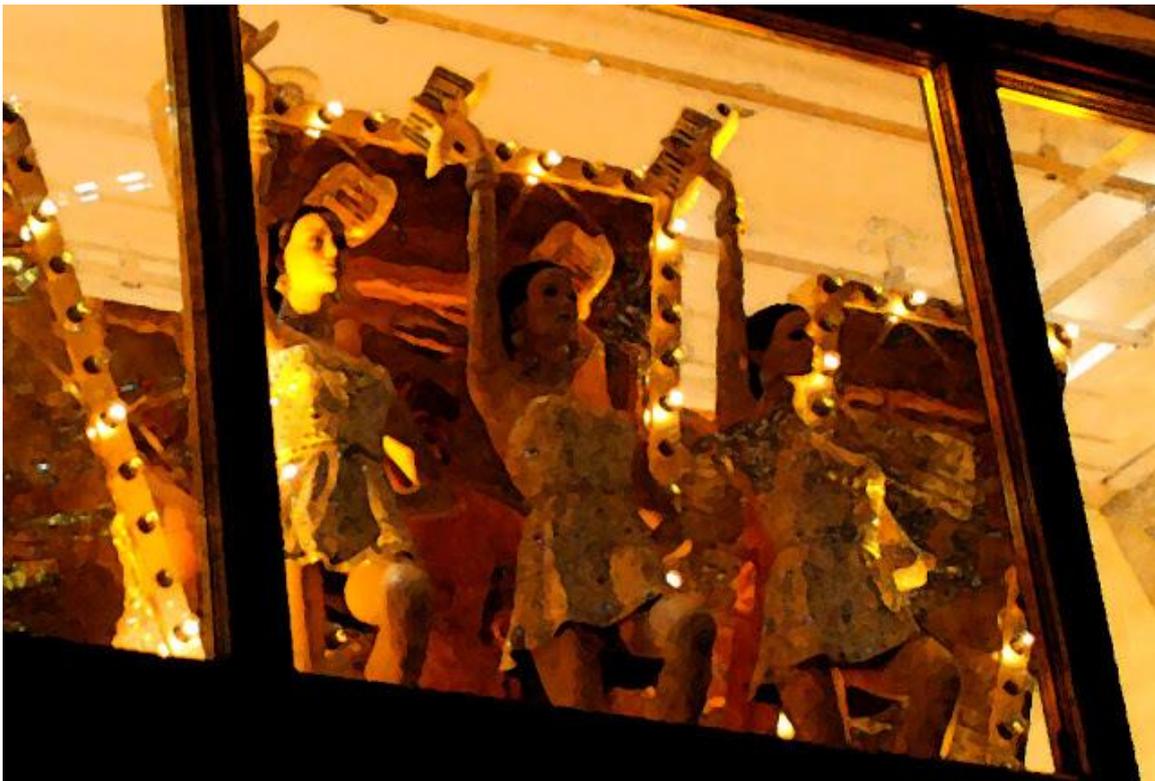




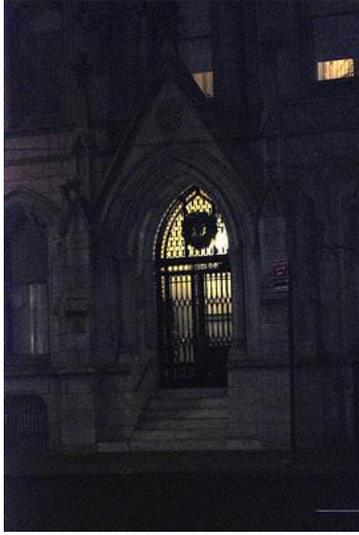


Last of New York Holiday Photos (2 of 2)

December 17th, 2012

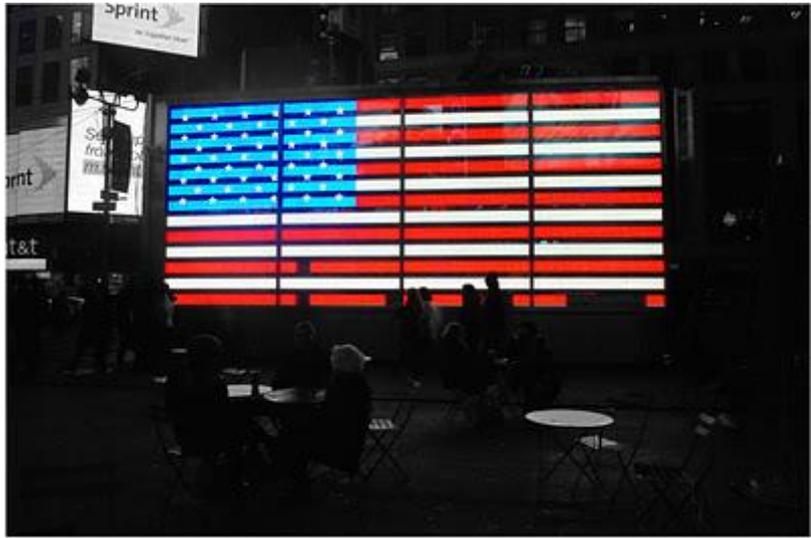




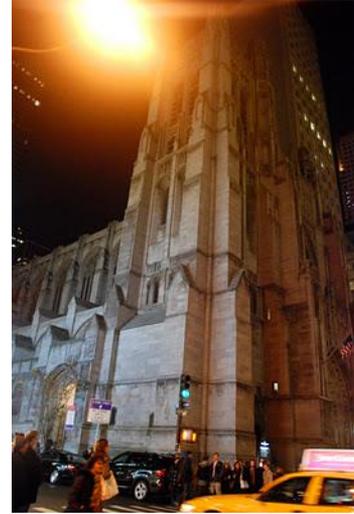
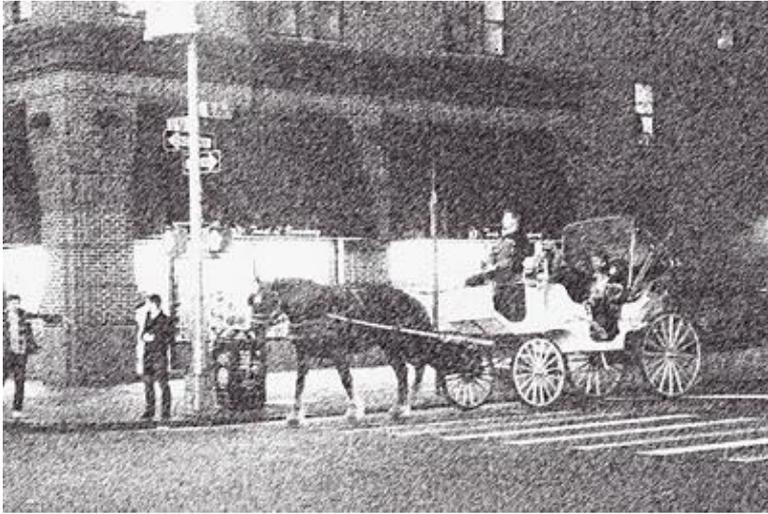


















One Family's Christmas Traditions

December 20th, 2011

I was about sixteen years old, staying the night at my friend Pat Francescon's house. His folks were out having dinner. We were looking at his family's Christmas tree, talking about every sixteen-year-old's favorite subject... "whatever." So as I'm talking, he walks over to the tree and roots around through the presents stacked high under its lowest boughs. He grabs a large, soft-looking present and plops down on the other end of the couch. Then he begins to carefully unwrap one end of it.

"What's up?" I ask him. "Oh, nothing," Pat explains, as if forgetting that I was in the room--bearing witness to the cardinal Christmas sin that he was committing. "I was just wondering if this was that Notre Dame jersey that I kept asking my mom for... Yup! It is." Satisfied, he rolled the shirt back up, slid it carefully into the cylinder-shaped wrapping paper shell, aligned the tape to its original place on the paper, and put it back under the tree.

"You do that with all your presents?" I asked him. He nodded. "Pretty much, yeah. Everybody does in my family." Yeah, yeah, likely excuse.

That night, I crashed out on the couch in the living room. It was pretty late when I cracked my eyes to a creak in the floor and a shadow passing between my eyelids and the bright Christmas tree in front of me. It was Pat's mom. I wasn't sure what she was doing at first... maybe adding a few presents to the pile while everyone's sleeping. Then she crouched down and pulled a present from the pile. She proceeded to quietly unwrap it. *No way*, I thought. *Like mother, like son*. Sure enough, she held up the new nightgown away from herself, then put it to herself against the nightgown she was wearing. She smiled to herself--(apparently somebody done right)--then re-wrapped the present, replaced it under the tree, and headed back to bed.

Michael Ehinger, NOV Santa

A True Story. Mostly.

December 20th, 2011



'Twas a week before Christmas at NOV College
Where oilfield professionals go to get knowledge
The students all gathered to smoke their last cigs
Then they went in to learn about Amphion rigs.

Myself, I was bummed--for in Houston, you see
Was not during Christmas where I'd like to be.
The trees were all dry, the snow was all fake,
And the wrong foods had red bows... *yum, rattlesnake.*

With Check valves, and diodes, and touch screens, and stators
Robotics, computers, and sweet simulators
This school is high-speed... but the best machine we know
Is the one that makes frothed *Milky Way Choccoccino*

With thirty-some flavors from *Park Place* to *Baltic*
Students swarm the machine, like deer to a salt lick.
But soon they find seats, and the classes get started
Introductions are made, and "*Okay, who farted?*"

Then to quizzical looks our instructor appeared:
Twinkling eyes, jolly smile, and a long snow-white beard.
With leathery hands and a voice that was gnarly
I could only imagine his sleigh as a Harley.

He laid out some rules: "No pouting, no crying,
you'd better be good, and you ought not be lying"
Then Andy whispered, "Dude, I just saw him at Mass
...I think he's a Saint!" Santa winked at the class.

Then he whipped out some magic, and he taught the dry stuff
In a way that no student could quite get enough
'Til Noon sharp each day, he'd wow and he'd thrill
Then he'd give us all vouchers for Alex's Grill.

All week, the subjects got harder and harder
And I think we got dumber before we got smarter
But if Santa had skeptics, with a *badda-boom-bam*,
He Snapped! ...And we all passed our final exam.

Now Darren, Emilio, come get your diploma!
I've got to run toys from Hong Kong to Roma.
When I blinked he was gone, but I saw blur of red
burning out to the fade of a loud shovelhead.

Michael Ehinger is an instructor at the National-Oilwell-Varco technical college. He is also Santa Claus. Visit his website by clicking [HERE](#).

Home for Christmas?

December 23rd, 2011



Maybe. It's awfully close to Christmas, but there's just enough rain and cold in the air to break another rig on Christmas Eve. We'll hope for the best and expect the worst. I've actually been out working all week, close to home but not home once between Monday and Friday! It's been busy and tiresome.

Monday, drive North to broken rig. Saw three herds of elk... one of them with 27 elk in all! Camera battery dead (go figure). Monday night, 1

hour of sleep. As always, grueling, greasy, heavy physical labor. Tuesday, 2 hours sleep. Wednesday, 4 hours of sleep at a hotel--and a hot shower and clean clothes!!! Drive to a rig 4 hours away. Almost at rig. Divert to rig 2.5 hours away in Ohio. Thursday, skip sleep. Spent most of day and night dangling in a harness, just over the windwalls where the non-stop rain and the biting cold air pierces two layers to make you feel as if you were wearing no clothes at all. Friday, 3:30 AM, crash in truck, wearing wet, greasy clothes. Ugh.

This year, I don't need a white Christmas. I just need a nap and a pinch of family time! And as far as presents go, I'll take a new back. They don't make backs like they used to!!!





Christmas Was Amazing

December 27th, 2011

Simple. Egg nog. Cookies. Vegging out. Perfect.

Ayla and the Ferocious Beast

December 27th, 2011

Yesterday evening, a blood-curdling scream ripped through the peace and quiet of our home. Instantly, everyone dropped what they were doing and ran frantically to the dining room, where Ayla was still screaming in panic.

Of course, as a parent, the usual horrors run through your head. The first thing you think, is 'pinch.' For kids, pinching and choking seem to be the most common injuries. Petra and I both expected to run around the corner and see Ayla's fingers stuck in a closed door, or pinched by a toy, or see her tongue pinched between a spring-loaded jaw clip for womens' hair or bags of chips. Smashed finger, pinched toe, something along those lines.

The next thing you think, is maybe she's stuck. Stuck with her shirt around her head, head stuck between the stairway rail ballusters, stuck underneath a dining room chair.

Then there's the whirlwind of everything else... electrical outlet shock, boiling water spill, throat stabbed after falling with an object in the mouth, broken glass, or whatever the mind can dream up.

All of these things ran through my head in about 1.5 seconds as I sprang from the couch to the dining room. Petra noted that this is the loudest, most agonizing scream she has ever heard from Ayla.

In the dining room, Ayla is pinned against the back of one of our tall dining room chairs, gripped with fear and looking to jump. For the last ten minutes, she had been watching a stowaway--a ladybug that we found crawling on the Christmas tree yesterday. Per Lily's suggestion, we gave the ladybug a small apple slice in a bowl, and she (Ms. Bug) contentedly sat on that piece of apple for half an hour. Then she got tired of sitting on the apple slice, and much to Ayla's horror, the bug opened her wings and flew right onto Ayla's hand.

We comforted Ayla... then we couldn't stop laughing. "I mean it, Matty," Petra said, "loudest scream ever!"

Thanking God in the Good Times

December 27th, 2011

Times are good for our family--in many ways, the best they've ever been. This type of situation presents an excellent opportunity to reflect on where we came from, where God brought us, and the people He used to get us here today. We will never forget the hard times nor God's many blessings. He has endowed upon us the means and responsibility to help others, as we ourselves have been helped; as for me and mine, we will be good stewards of his blessings. As in the past, when we had little, we will ever be thankful for each breath, each opportunity, and each disappointment that we fail to understand. God is good, all the time. Thank You, Almighty Father.



Steve Bellavia January 3, 2012 at 11:12 PM
Miss you guys!!