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I've been really slow about publishing these books. The idea behind publishing them in the first place (self-publishing via Lulu.com) was to have some historical family references to pass along to the kids.

This book—a compilation of the first half of my 2012 blogs from *Despite All Obstacles*—was not published until the end of 2014. 2014 has been a rough year all around, and I almost lost my family. Fighting to keep us together now. Love you all so much.

With that, my unoriginal (yet heartfelt and timely) dedication and inspiration for this book:

For Petra, my First and One True Love

For Joshua, proudly called my firstborn son, a responsible leader

For Caleb, blessed with talent, intelligence, and the boldness to challenge

For Lily, with a heart like my own

For Hyla, my own sweet Flutterby

For Jolina, the littlest Sprights

And for Cara—we can't wait to meet you in a few weeks!

First and Best

January 14th, 2012

Last year, our church covered a multi-part series on tithing, finances, and financial blessing. None of the information was new to me, but certain parts were renewed *in* me, through the enthusiastic conviction of my wife Petra. Pastor Jack started out the series by handing out a copy of *The Blessed Life*, by Robert Morris, to every household represented in the church. Petra got started right away, and she instantly wrapped herself around the fact that God calls for not only calls for the return of ten percent of our sustenance, income, etc., but that He calls for the **FIRST** of it, as well as the **BEST**.

Why? Why does God want the first and best of everything we own? God certainly doesn't need our money, our belongings, or any material thing. What He wants is our loyalty and obedience. He wants to see our selflessness. He wants to know that He is #1 in our life. And this is the one area of our life--the one place in the Bible--where God challenges us to test Him. If we give God our first and best, God says to see if He won't open the floodgates of heaven and pour our blessing into our life. He promises to do that, and to protect the rest of our finances. Sounds like a win-win to me.

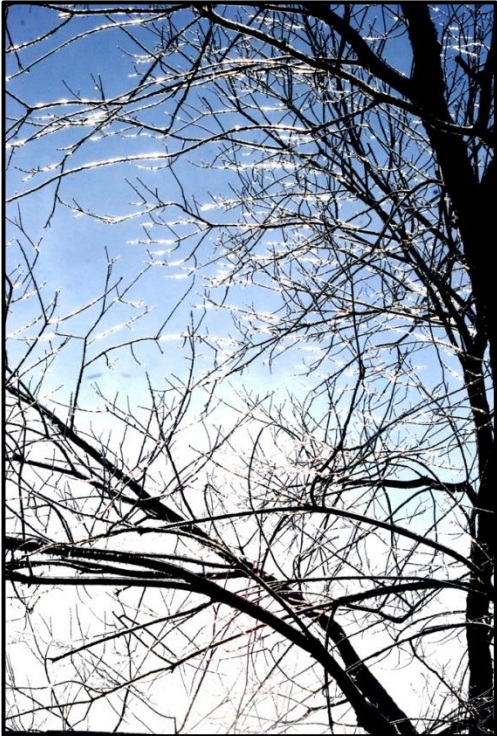
So here's my public writing tithing for 2012. Before I write stories about mermaids and peanut butter and whatever other meaningless topics come to mind, may I humbly express thanks to God for His many, many blessings. I will never be afraid to use anything He has given me--money, talent, time, or possession--in the ways that He directs.

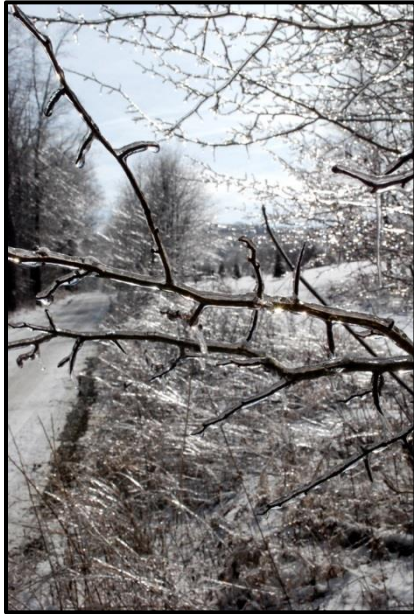
--MJ

Land of a Thousand Chimes

January 26th, 2012

Last weekend, there was an ice storm in central PA. On a cold, sunny, windy day just after the storm, it sounded like an endless orchestra of small wind chimes. The sparkling woods were beautifully blinding. My camera did no justice. My girls were with me for the experience.





Daddy Daughter Day

January 26th, 2012

I've been working a lot. I missed 'bring your dad to school' day at Lily's preschool, I've been working over my days off, and I've flown to Texas and back three times this month.

So I took back my family time. On Sunday, I took my girls to work with me. We loaded up early as momma and the boys were heading to church. We did laundry at a laundromat, which was surprisingly exciting for the girls... we had breakfast at Bruegger's Bagels & Bakery, back to the laundromat, to pick up a part at NOV, to the carwash, then to a rig in central PA, driving through an amazing 20-mile sparkling princess fairytale land left by the weekend's ice storm, then to Dairy Queen for lunch and ice cream, then to the shop where the girls "helped daddy fix a big machine." We had a blast!!!









Superdad in 10 Minutes or Less

February 3rd, 2012

As busy parents, we often pass up the simple opportunities to win big in the eyes of our kids. I've found that the most prevalent of these--for myself as a dad anyway--is the challenge of fixing a broken toy. I was blessed with this unique opportunity tonight, when I wasn't just dad... I was (dun-du-du-daaaah!!!)

Daddy, Mender of Fairy Princess Wands.



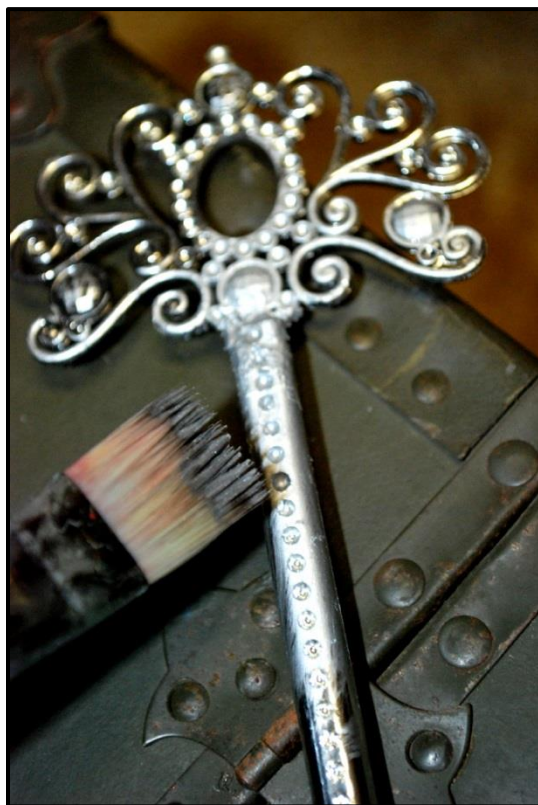
Sure, I could have put her off and pretended to be sad. "Aww, that's too bad, Sweetie. We'll have to get you another one." That's the easy solution as a parent. But my gosh, what a waste of potential... the potential to be AMAZING in the eyes of your child!

So my youngest followed me to the BatCave, where I've recently repaired a baby buggy wheel, an armless Strawberry Shortcake doll; and where I made a horrible attempt at repairing a Nintendo DS (Thankfully, there are Superdads on Ebay who are nerdier than me, who are confident in their abilities and are more than willing to buy a bag of Nintendo DS pieces for \$20).





I repaired her magical silver scepter as she wandered around, playing with guns and scuba fins and shark teeth and pretending to polish a chunk of Berlin Wall with an unplugged Dremel tool. *If she only knew*, I thought as I watched her dancing around with small artifacts and the manifestations of cherished memories... memories from my childhood, memories from adventurous times with my beautiful wife, memories shared with friends in dark nether regions of the earth...





She helped me re-apply silver color to the wand with a paint pen, and her eyes lit up when she backed up and looked at it. "We fixed it!!! Thank You Daddy!!!"

Does it every time. Such a small investment for such a big reward.



Labels: great dad tips home and family how to be an amazing dad how to fix plastic toys

The Patterson-UTI Model of Business Communication

February 11th, 2012

I work for the Appalachian Division of Patterson-UTI Drilling Company, LLC. Every morning, I am able to experience business communication at its finest, when every leader in the division dials into the morning conference call. I have been with this company for a year and a half, and we've done this every day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year (since long before I came on board).

If you were to sit in on one of these meetings, you would think we were a 'soft skills' company--perhaps a marketing group or some think-tank organization. We converse for upwards of an hour and a half, on the topics of personnel, leadership, safety, training, equipment maintenance, and general work operations and practices.

We are, in fact, a professional, publicly-traded company that drills for oil and gas. We're actually the largest land-based drilling contractor in North America. In the Appalachian region, which covers the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania and West Virginia; and which covers the deeper Utica Shale in Pennsylvania and Ohio, we operate with some of the finest and most technologically advanced drilling rigs in the world. Each of these rigs is valued between \$25M and \$30M. We have thirty-four rigs, and the manager of each rig is actively engaged in

our conference call each morning.

Communication is the bridge that connects ideas and ensures understanding... and every person in our company has a voice. At Patterson-UTI, we value people, we value their ideas, and we value each individual's contribution to the regional team and the company as a whole.

If your company doesn't do this already, try holding a morning meeting or conference call every day. Do not constrain it to the clock. Cover plans of the day, human resources concerns, and operational goals. These are corporate footsteps to tread in. This is a business communication model worth following. Invest time in communicating plans, goals, and ideas at the beginning of every day, and it will pay off big dividends as your company advances into the future in one accord.

Posted 11th February 2012 by mj

Labels: business communication model leadership development patterson-uti patterson-uti drilling

Leadership Development at its Finest

February 11th, 2012

Read this book: *The Way of the Shepherd*, by Dr. Kevin Leman and William Pentak. It's a small book... short, easy read... but it packs a timeless punch.

Posted 11th February 2012 by mj

Labels: leadership development pentak reviews reviews for the way of the shepherd the way of the shepherd

The Airport Litmus Test

February 11th, 2012

International airports give us a great pulse check on the heartbeat of the world today. Having sat in five different airports waiting on twelve different planes in the last month, here are my findings:

1. Chivalry Check, 2012. We're doing pretty good! Surprisingly, I saw men give up their seats in overcrowded terminals, people assist the elderly and handicapped,

and a couple men helping random women lift their heavy carry-ons into overhead compartments in aircraft. I was impressed.

2. State of the U.S. Military. Ouch. Kids right out of boot camp, where their 'Chi' should be the strongest, wearing cute little mini camo backpacks, chewing bubble gum and staring blindly into their iPods while jamming with their earbuds in, walking into people, oblivious to their surroundings. Young Marines too. Kind of hurts to see that. What happened to our John Wayne warrior cowboys?

3. Hustle and Bustle. That's right, airports are the #1 place to see fat people running their butts off. Thanks to Scrooge-like penny pinching and overbooking by airlines, there is an atmosphere of stress like never before at airports. Everybody runs. One person takes the pole position, and the rest of the runners follow single file.

4. Best Airline? Fly Continental. Delta has felt primadonna ever since they overtook TWA back in the day; U.S. Airways is predictably lame (Sorry, we'll have to check your carry-ons--EVERY TIME...); Southwest is supposedly a great company to work for, to fly with, etc., but they don't fly everywhere; and American is not much better than U.S. Airways. In general, Continental = Comfort & convenience.

5. Technology Overload. Yes, we're zombies. Just like a recent commercial points out, we are slaves to the wall outlets at airports--which are few and far between, but much more plentiful than five years ago. This is where we charge our iPods and iPads and Kindles and laptops and smart phones and Nintendo DS's and advanced media / audiovisual devices. Step back and look at the people sitting at the airport... they're either tweeting or eating, and eating has become an inconvenient necessity because it cuts into our Facebook and texting time.

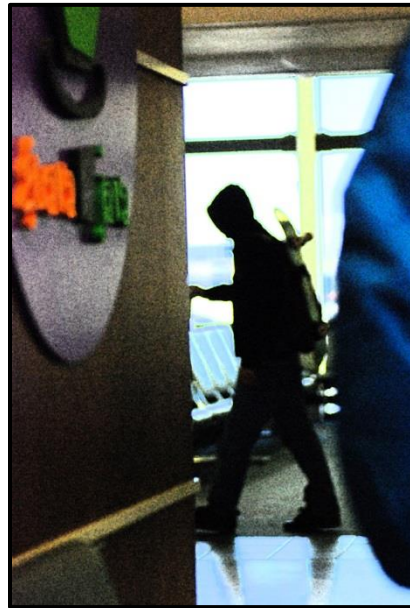
6. Diversity. I think we're doing pretty good here, but I also believe that airports offer an inaccurate view of reality in this arena. Airports are naturally diverse; this is where everyone puts on a 'tolerant' facade.

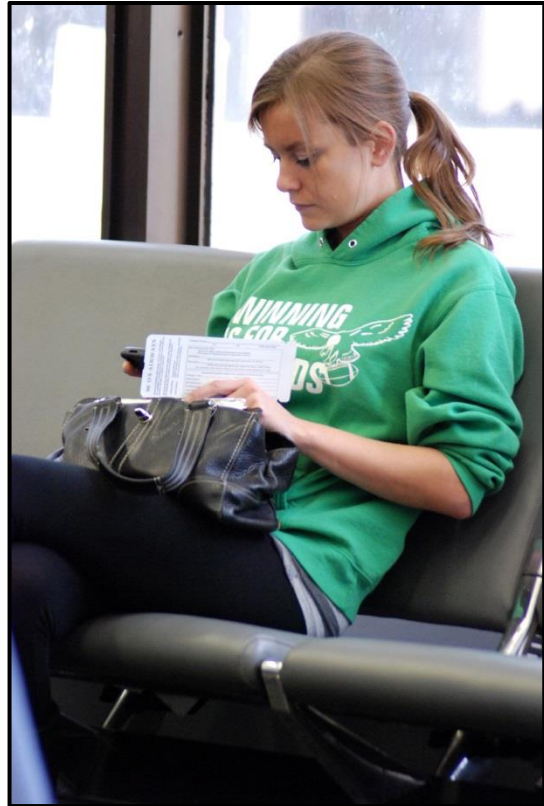
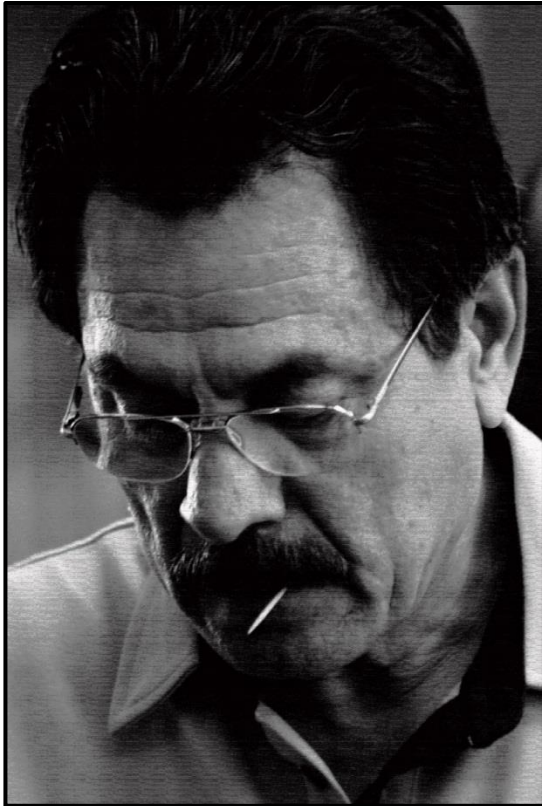
7. Customer Service... Sucks!!! Big airport businesses (airlines, hotels, rental car

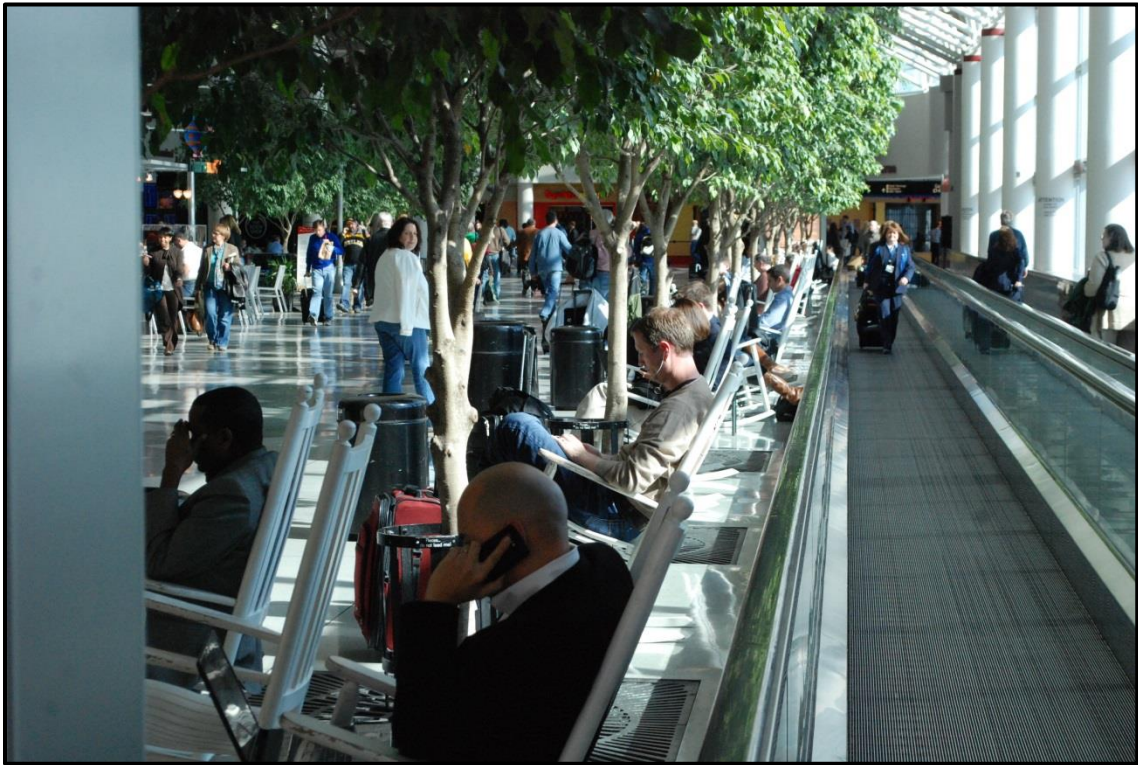
agencies, e.g.) have become very selfish and greedy. Customer service is heavily waning.

8. General Friendliness: Not bad, actually. Sharing isn't bad, space accommodation isn't bad, taking turns while 'de-planing,' willingness to talk, pleases and thank you's, all pretty good. Then again, maybe that's just Texas.

Lastly, a few photos of random airport people:







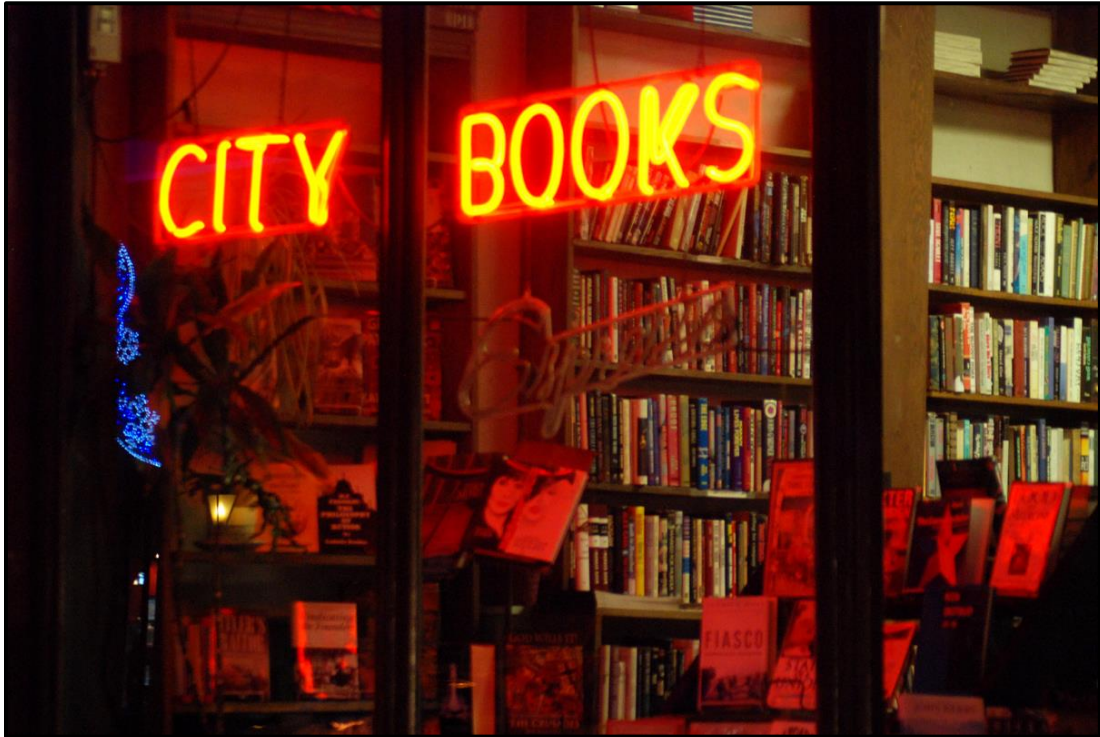


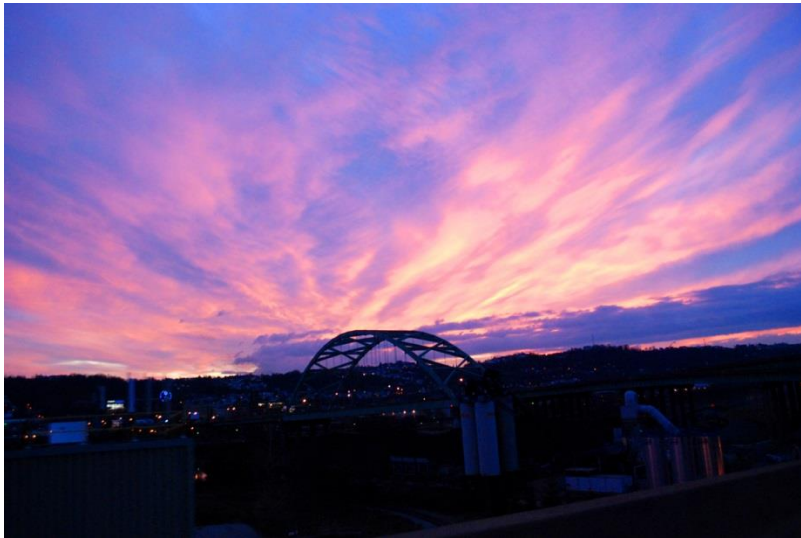
Posted 11th February 2012 by mj

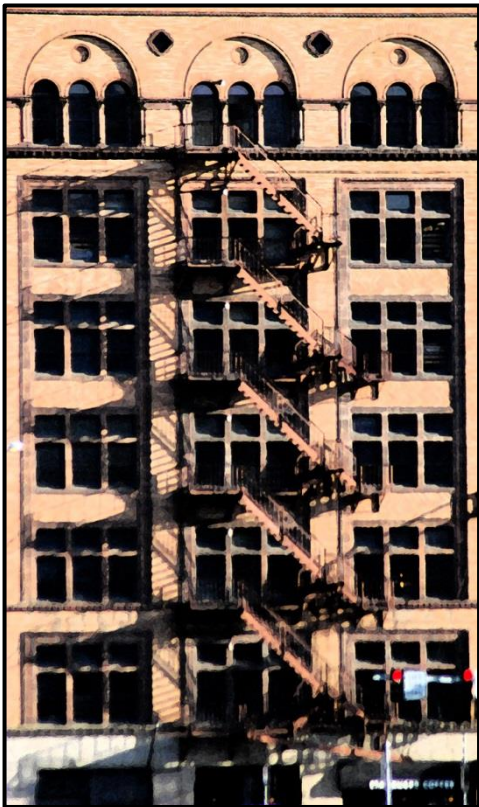
Labels: airport people pulse check america stories about people watching people at airports

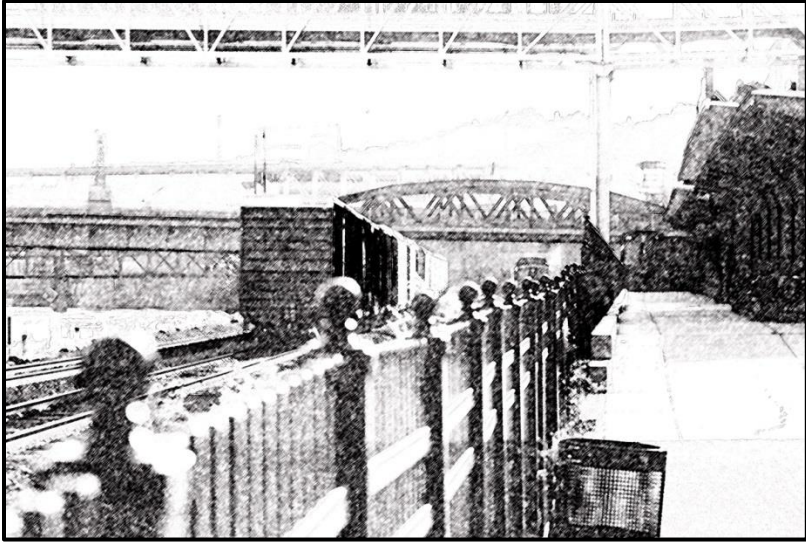
January in Photos

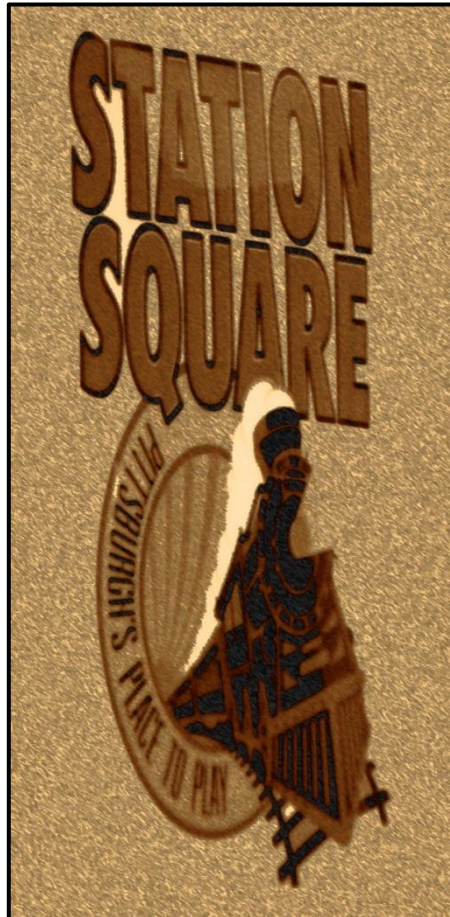
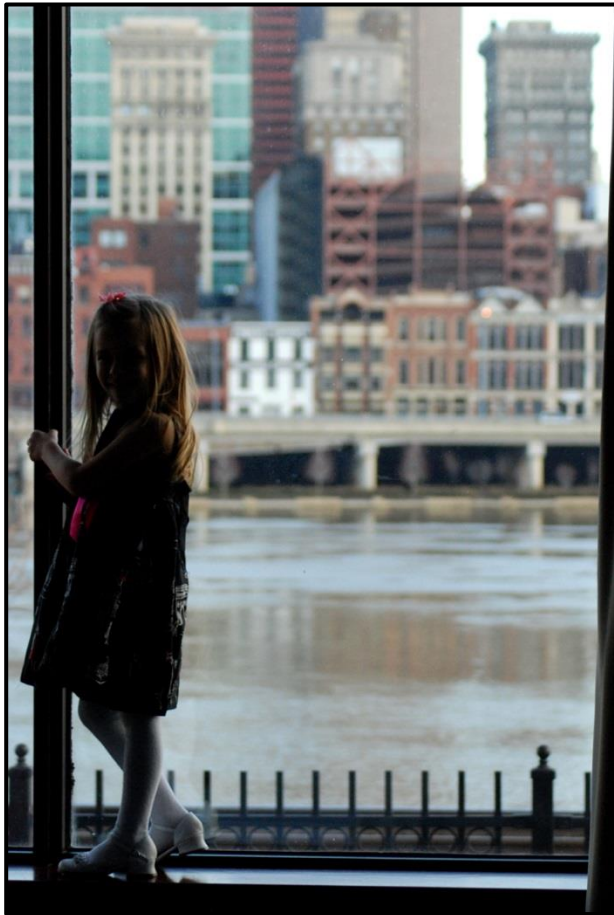
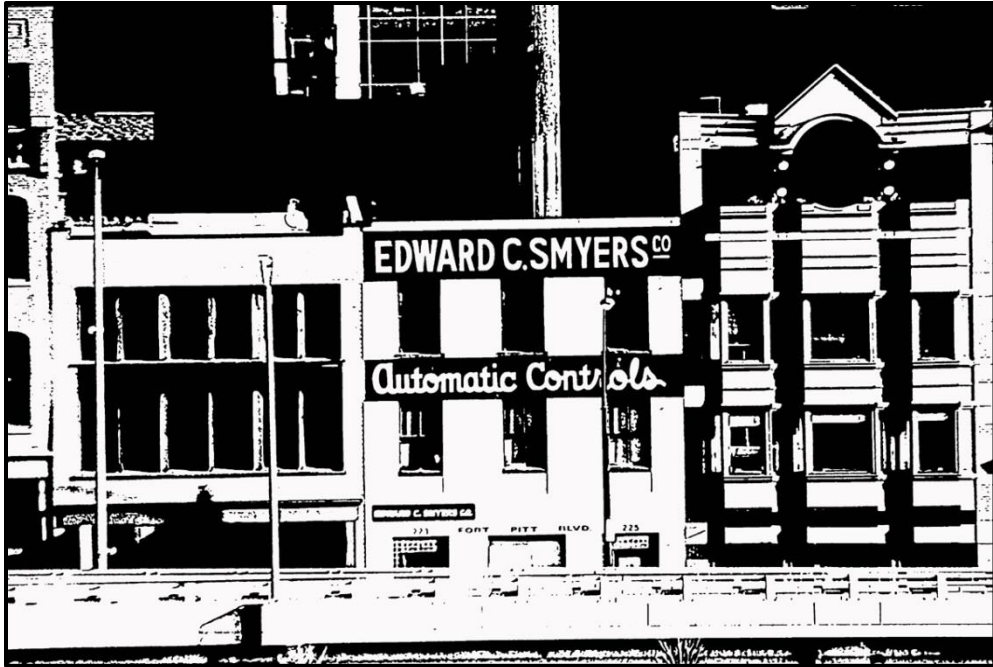
February 11th, 2012



















Posted 11th February 2012 by mj

Labels: amateur pittsburgh photos pennsylvania photos of pittsburgh random pittsburgh photographer

Phipps Conservatory Photos

February 11th, 2012

Phipps Conservatory, located in Pittsburgh, is one of the nation's oldest and largest greenhouses. Friends Jason and Ashley came to ring in the New Year with us, and this was one of the places we visited with all our kids. It's a pretty cool place! Find out more about Phipps Conservatory by [visiting their website](#).



There are many blown glass sculptures throughout the conservatory. This one hangs in the rotunda at the entrance.



The kids followed chronologically-placed pictures of *The Nutcracker* ballet around the rotunda



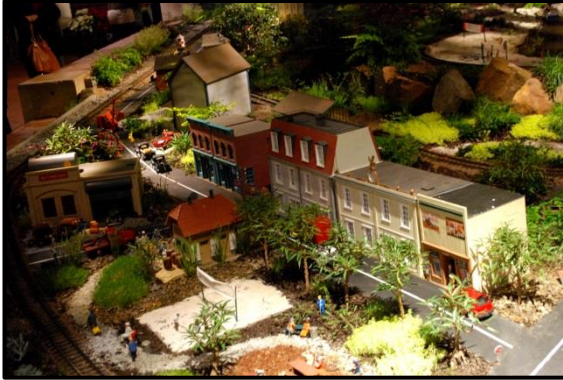






They set up the conservatory differently as the seasons change. This time, it was Christmas-themed. Above is a holiday railroad set. This visit happened during their big orchid exhibit, hence all the orchid photos. Beautiful.





COFFEE TREE

Coffea arabica

Although coffee trees are native to Africa, coffee is now grown in Arabia, Eastern Asia, the West Indies, and South and Central America, with Brazil currently the largest supplier.

Coffee is an evergreen tree that grows best in areas high above sea level where temperatures are warm and there is plenty of rainfall.

Coffee trees produce small, white, fragrant flowers that eventually form numerous green berries that turn deep red when ripe. The berries ripen at varying times and are hand picked to ensure a high quality product.

Jason was the first to spot the Coffee Tree... Score!!!







Petra, Ashley, and a huge Mimosa Tree



Rip Van Jason



Good luck, Mandy & Andrew... whoever you are

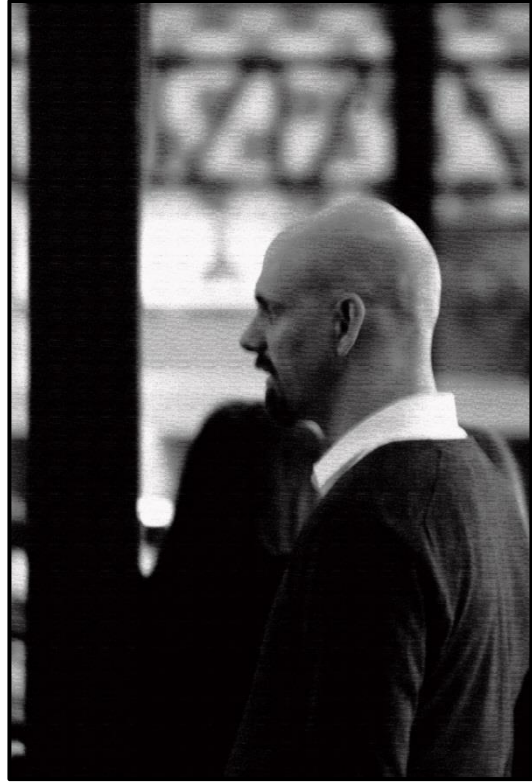
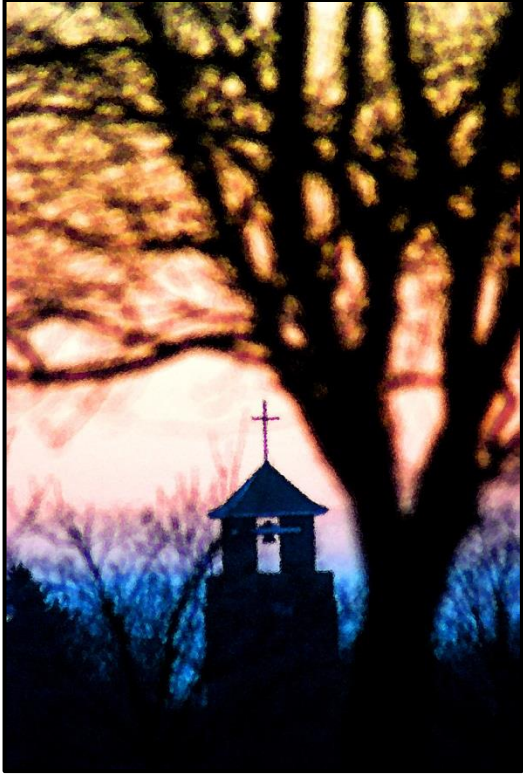
Posted 11th February 2012 by mj

Labels: pennsylvania Phipps Conservatory Phipps photos phipps pictures Things to do in Pittsburgh

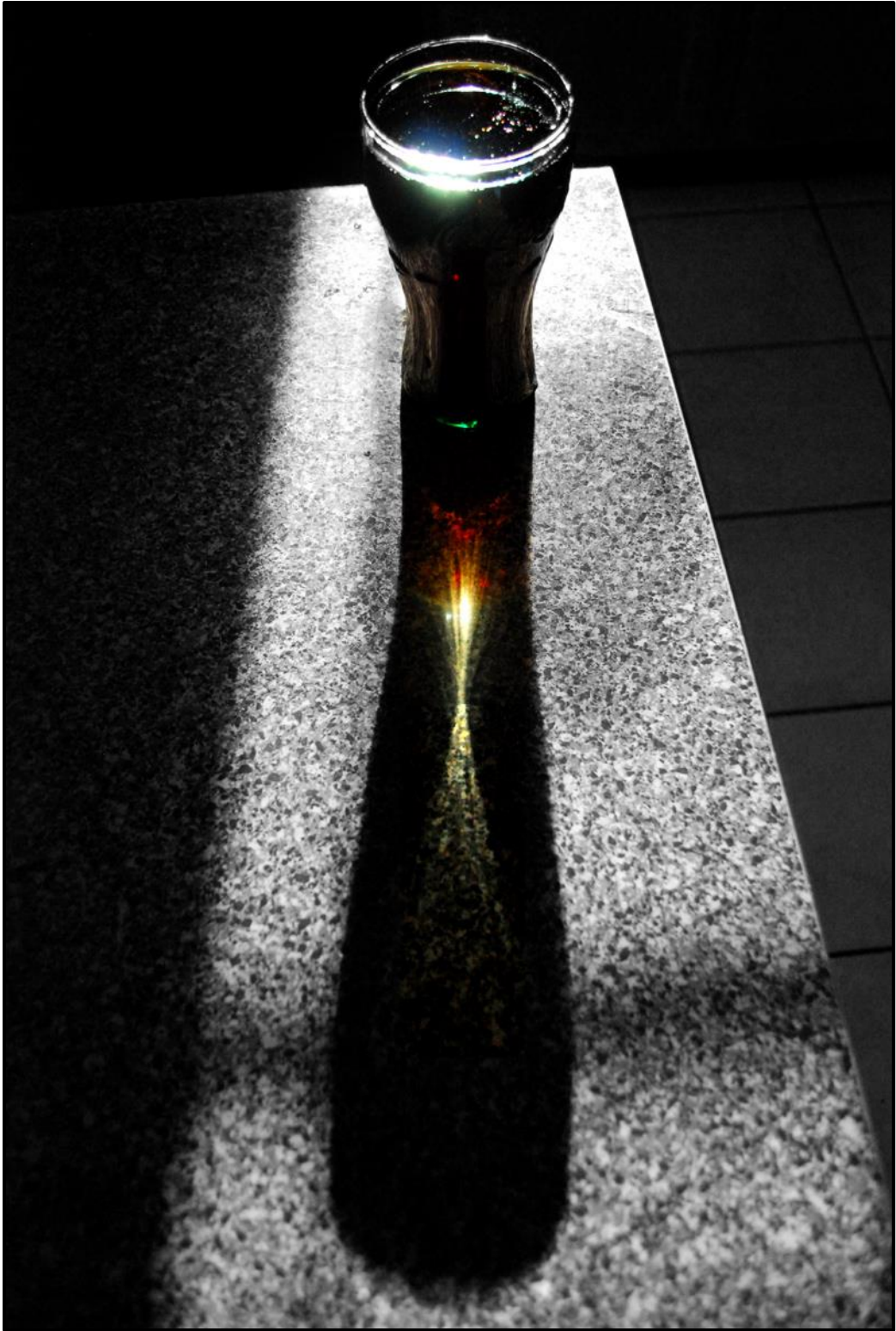
Church, Home, Friends, & Family Photos

February 12th, 2012













Posted 12th February 2012 by mj

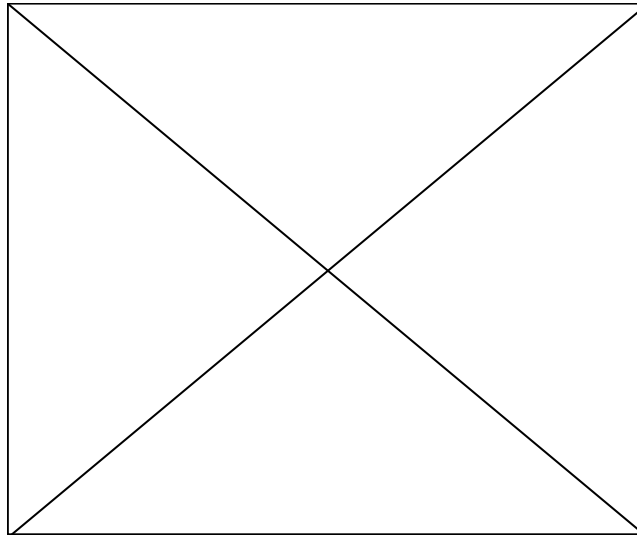
Labels: church friends home and family lifestone church

Coolest YouTube Video Ever

February 12th, 2012

Coolest YouTube Video Ever

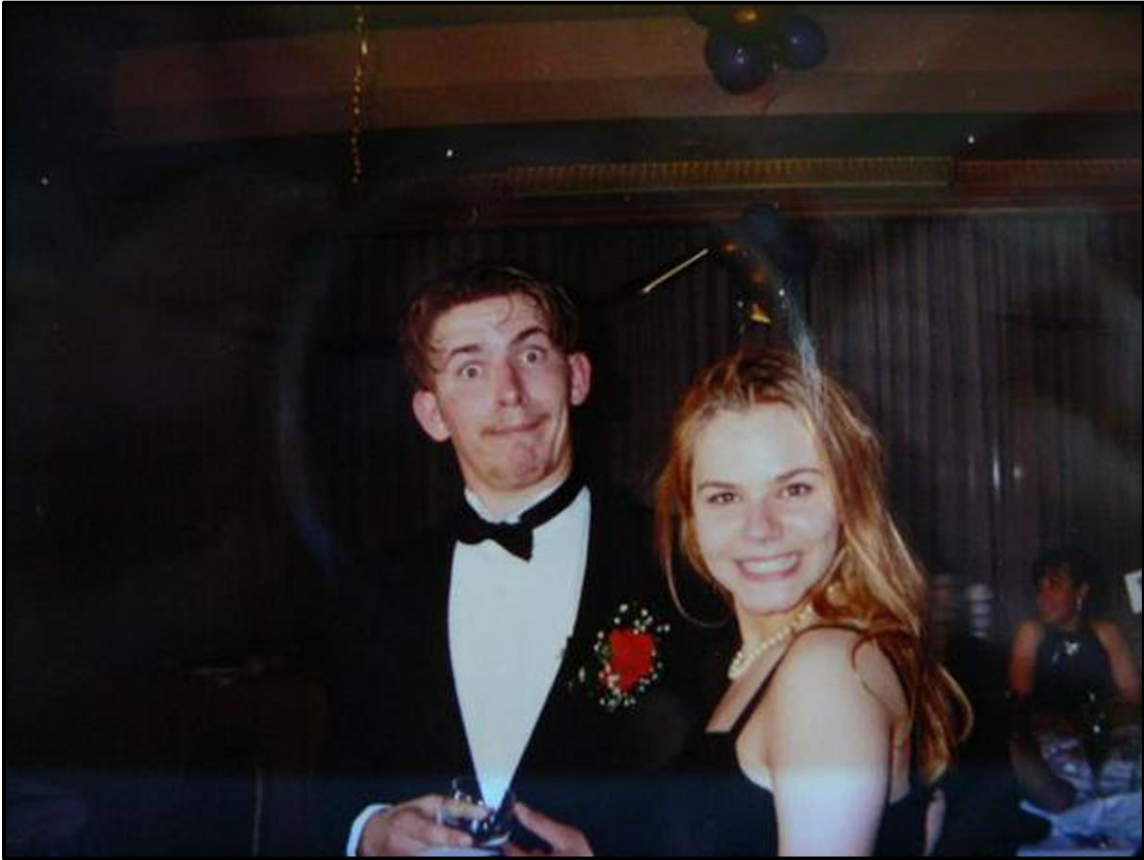
I recently saw this video at a regional leadership meeting for my company. It's my new favorite... 'Jeb Corliss: *Grinding the Crack.*' Freakin' awesome video.



Two Photos, Sixteen Years Ago in Germany

February 13th, 2012





Posted 13th February 2012 by mj

Labels: germany Matt Petra Matty and Petra Matty Petra Matty Petra Speights Patch High School 1996 Petra Kasaroczky

Mom & Dad's Albino Squirrel

February 23rd, 2012

Mom & dad have this great outdoorsy place, out on Lake Meade in Suffolk, Virginia. Bald eagles with nests, tame gray foxes, spiny anole lizards, ginormous alligator gar, herds of deer with bucks that spar in their front yard, and the occasional turkey. Regular black bear sightings just a few miles down the road. Copperheads and mink and martens and beavers. A couple humongous owls that talk back and forth between their tall Beech trees every night. Kingfishers and geese and a couple pairs of swans that fly in each year.

One of our very favorite animals at mom & dad's place, however, is an albino squirrel. Target or not, he's been alive and kickin' for years. Here are a couple pictures:



Posted 23rd February 2012 by mj

Labels: albino squirrel animals in suffolk virginia suffolk va squirrel white squirrel photo

Some Time to Write

March 6th, 2012

Been busy lately. Crazy busy. Back-to-back 40+ hour days busy. The last few months have offered little time to do what I love--write. So I'm currently in a hotel room in Dickinson, North Dakota, with a little time on my hands. Time to dump some of the stories that have been on my mind...

Posted 6th March 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life

Frustrated! ...So Much for Spare Time to Write.

March 10th, 2013

I have stories upon stories upon endless stories, rolling and tumbling and accumulating in my head. So many that I scribble down the topics, and I've lost more than I've retained. Am I crazy? Absolutely. But let me tell you how frustrating my writing endeavors are:

First, I took a break from blogging in January so that I could finish this book that's been hanging on the edge of completion for two years. It's the first book I want to publish 'the right way.' I also took a break from taking photos, which for myself can be addicting and extremely time-consuming.

Three months ago, I thought of about fifteen stories I wanted to write. I prioritized them, and I've known since then that when I started blogging again, the first story I'd write is a post entitled "The Worst Things About Christians." Then comes "10 Things I Hate About Me," "MJ's Oilfield Chronicles Part II," and a whole slew of other stories. So I worked through January and February without a spare moment to write. Didn't even get to work on my last book, which simply needs finished illustrations.

Business trips offer hope. Regular work weeks are regularly between 100 and 120 hours long for me, so the occasional business trip to Texas--or in the most recent case, North Dakota--present a potential opportunity for me to write.

No time to write at the airports. My computer battery stinks, so I can't write on the plane. No time to write at the hotel in the evenings, because every evening, a different vendor wants to take us out to eat, or somebody wants to catch up, or we burn the oil at our meeting that day and I'm smoked. So the writing opportunity fizzled over the course of the trip. No time at the airports. When I get home, I'm scorned by my family for opening the computer. Then I'm back to work for 10 days. I open the computer on my next weekend off. It starts a family fight. I try doing it late at night, so it doesn't interfere with family time. Petra gets upset because (a) I'm not in bed with her, (b) I'm in bed with the computer and it's too bright, or (c), I'm going to be tired the next day.

So I'm a writer who's destined to not write. How do authors and freelancers and editors do this?!! It's been a problem for me for a long time, and with ever-increasing work responsibilities, the opportunity to write is becoming nonexistent.

Okay, I feel better now. Just had to get that out.

Posted 10th March 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life on writing writers frustrations

The Problem with Christians

March 10th, 2012

Howdy Christians! Have a seat and get ready to squirm a little. We've got some serious mirror-gazing to do, so put on your rhino skin, and brace for impact--this medicine's gonna taste nasty.

I've been a Christian my whole life. Initially baptized Catholic, my mother broke away from a large Catholic family in the early 80's to become a fanatical charismatic (protestant) Christian. Next thing you know, I was not allowed to play with toys, watch movies, or listen to secular music. At five years old, I was picketing around abortion clinics toting an oversized photo of a mutilated baby, taunting police.

That's the wrong way. It took another 20-some years for my parents to get it right,

in my eyes anyway. We've always leaned towards full gospel, spirit-filled, holy-rolling churches... the 're-fried Jesus wheezers,' if you will... everything minus the poisonous snakes. But between going to church with friends, extended family, and my own parents and sister, I've seen the inside of Catholic, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Church of God, Assemblies of God, Church of Christ, Church of God in Christ, Church of Christ Instrumental, Southern Baptist, Baptist, Penecostal, Messianic Jewish and "Non-Denominational" churches. I'm not impressed. Looking back, it all makes me sick to my stomach.

I've experienced all the dirt. The church splits over money, the church splits over sex, the power-hungry 'servants' of God, the salt-lick gossip, the Pastor's wife (aka 'First Lady') entitlement mentality, the Reverend's kids smoking pot, the hierarchy of the choir members--who was here first and all that, the heeby-jeeby speaking in tongues, the TV pastor language-ah, the overdone prayers, the legalism, the lukewarm churches, ultimately--the stench of fakeness and corruption... you name it. Again, makes me wanna puke.

You see, the problem with Christians is that, like so many demographic groups, they fail to learn from the past, and so they repeat the mistakes that other Christian churches have made since the death of Christ. I see the same problems renewed day by day.

Now, there's been a push among Christian churches in the last fifteen or twenty years, to do what's right and to shuck the cloak of 'religion,' which in modern days is the title given to the human-added attributes of the *Christian Church* (or body of believers worldwide). Pop churches are losing their definitive denomination titles (Methodist-Presbyterian-Episcopal, e.g.) for more flock-friendly labels, such as 'non-denominational,' 'inter-denominational,' 'Community Church,' 'Family Church,' 'Christian Church' and just plain 'Church.' While there is no such thing as a truly non-denominational church, those are the ones that my family (parents, sister's family, and my own family) generally associate with. They are still imperfect.

That being said, I have some bulletized items that I'd like to share with the atmosphere. Maybe it will save your church. Maybe it will keep non-believers from turning farther from Christ. Maybe it will change some Christians. Without further adieu:

1. Repeated Prayers. Prayers are very important in our spiritual walk with the Lord. First and foremost, prayers need to flow straight from the heart. In *my* heart of hearts, I believe that there is no place in the church for "Repeat After Me" prayers. Teach would-be Christians how to pray, and what to pray for, but do not have them repeat empty words. "Heavenly Father" (Heavenly Father), "I love you and I want you to come into my heart." (I love you and I want you to come into my heart)... Prayer is meant to be a very personal communication between a person and God. Can you not see just how impersonal such a corporate "Repeat After Me" prayer is?? I'm not hating; not picking on anybody in particular. Truth is, almost every church I've ever been to does this.

2. Lord's Name in Vain? It doesn't just mean dropping GD's like a sailor. You take the Lord's Name in vain every time you use It for no reason. The early Hebrews would not even utter His name aloud. It is for this reason that Yaweh is written YHWH, and Bob Marley called Him "Jah," and why--before He was Elohim, Adonai, Jehova or any other name we recognize, He was simply "I Am," the God with No Name.

One of the most subtle and widely-accepted instances of taking the Lord's Name in vain--or using It without specific purpose--occurs every Sunday, from the mouths of Christians. And it happens in prayer. Example:

*"Dear **Heavenly Father**, I pray **Father God** that You world just surround us **God** with Your holy presence **Father God**. That **God**, You would free us from the burdens of stress, and physical pain, and financial burden **God**. **Lord Jesus** please cover us **God** with your mercy **Lord**..."*

Does this sound ridiculous? I have heard prayers just like this come from the mouth of almost every Christian friend and family member I know. Remember this: God is not a filler word; don't reduce the value of His Name to that of ah's and um's.

Remember, when it comes to prayer, Jesus gave us a template. Look up the Lord's Prayer on your Google tab above. Jesus opens up with a deference to God, His

Father. He honors His Name, calling it Holy. He speaks to God's planned future, and His most perfect and holy will. Then He asks God for sustenance / provision, forgiveness of sins, and the wherewithal / patience to forgive others. He asks God to keep us from temptation and protect / deliver us from evil. Then Jesus gives homage again to His Father, pronouncing His kingdom, His power, and His glory forever. Jesus only addresses God once in the prayer, as "Our Father." The most important parts of this prayer, I believe, are the ones that honor God. In providing this example, Jesus models the kind of attitude we should have in addressing our Father in heaven.

3. "It's All Good." I first heard this one at a men's meeting a couple weeks ago. Every couple minutes, someone in the crowd would tell the speaker "it's good." Over the next two church services, the quip exploded. "It's good." [Pastor talks]. "It's good." [Pastor talks]. "It's good." This 'flavor of the week' buzz phrase is the exact same thing as "preach it," or "Amen," or "Come on," or like at baseball game, saying "Eeeey batter batter eey batta SWING batta batta hey batta." Tradition, or custom, or whatever... if you overdo it, it's annoying and distracting. And to a first-time church visitor, it's wierd.

4. Everybody's "Called:" The Ministry of Title-Dealing. I remember when Petra and I went to this 'great' church, and one of the deacons was a cussing racist at a private barbecue. If you hold a leadership position at church, you'd better clean your closet. Bad movies, bad music, sinful lifestyles and bad decisions are not the marks of church leaders! That's why I couldn't be a church leader. I struggle with too many things that I haven't fully overcome yet... my mouth, my attitude, and many of my decisions, for example. Pastors, DO NOT allow your wives to be the head of everything in the church because they're your wives. We've been to those churches as well. And by the way, if you're called to pastor a flock, that doesn't automatically make your wife a pastor too. As a Pastor, you should be very, very, Very careful of the titles you bestow (Deacon, Elder, Worship Director, etc.) and the people you endorse for pastoral leadership. You will be held accountable by God for the souls of those charged under a pastor who received his title through a good ol' boy drug deal.

5. Praise, Worship, and the Holy Spirit. If your sound checks and mid-week

practices and your sound system setup and the placement of your fancy instruments take up more of your time than the worship you send to God, you're freakin' wrong. If you fought on your way to church, or your week was intentionally sinful, and your choices haven't reflected Christ-like values, but your hands shoot up like some tooled puppet when the Jesus music starts playing, then you're a church groupie and you're freakin' wrong.

I remember going to this church as a kid, where everybody to my left and right was ritually 'slain in the Spirit.' For those of you who don't know what this means, let me school you.

Some 'old car salesman' preacher convinces the entire church to come to 'the Altar' every Sunday and get right before God. Then he starts yelling a lot and IN THE NAME OF JESUS-UH!!! BE HEALED!!! BE HEALED!!! BE HEALED!!! JEHOVA RAPHA!!! JEHOVA NISSI!!! JEHOVA JIREH!!! SHANDA!!! SHANDA!!! As Tyler Perry's character Madea would say, "HalleLouJer! Sha-ba-du-bu-du-bu." With every shout and fake-smelling word that would come out of this guy's mouth, a smack of myrrh-scented olive oil would meet the forehead of every man, woman, boy, and girl in the audience. These people would then hit the ground forwards, backwards, and sideways and do the heebie-jeebies in Jesus' name.

I would routinely be the last man standing. Hands up, head down, eyes closed, ready and waiting for the power of Almighty God to slam my soul to the floor. The longer I'd stand, the louder the pastors would yell. The harder they'd push on my forehead. "Don't fight the Spirit of God, son!" But nothing. I've been to hundreds of those services in this lifetime. Don't know what disappoints me more, fake pastors or a congregation of invertebrate lemmings. I know God can move like that--He can slam you or me or thousands to the ground in an instant and make us do the heebie jeebies. But I'm a hard sell for believing that 'real' experience could take place in your flashy fake church.

6. Exclusivity. There's strength in numbers. We publish the names of our Christian businesses in Christian yellow pages directories so that we can build up other Christians and we can work and do business with Christians. That's great,

but is it right? As Christians, we are not to be on DEFENSE, hanging on each other as a crutch. Despite what you may have heard on TV, the Kingdom of God does NOT require funding by the people of God (tithe is important--but not a topic I'm covering right now--what I'm saying is that God doesn't need Christians' money to fulfill His will on earth). God can supernaturally multiply and stretch the provisions of any earthen storehouse. As Christians, according to Jesus' Great Commission, we are to go into all the world to make disciples of all men. Real Christian life is not defined by K-LOVE Radio (which I love) and the *Courageous* movie (great movie, by the way) and the next life-changing book series by Dr. Who Cares, the famous theologian (I've read lots of good ones). Real Christian life, then, is not defined by the fruit that Christians eat, rather the fruit that they produce. Sorry to pop your comfortable little Christian bubble.

7. Israel, the Mecca and Medina of Christians. Why is the status of so many modern Christians based so heavily upon the number of visits and mission trips they've made to Israel? I've sailed the Sea of Galilee and seen the first synagogue and been baptized in the Jordan and explored the Temple Mount and Gethsemane and Bethlehem and all the other (yawn) "checks in the box." Who cares? If Christ's kingdom is not based on anything worldly, why do we place so much value on these places from a Christian perspective.

Now, there is a very special connection that God has with Israel. And that relationship didn't change when Christ died on the cross at the hands of the Jews--an act that was part of God's ultimate plan for humankind. God has big plans for this world and Israel is the center of these plans according to the Bible.

The problem I have, has nothing to do with Israel. It has to do with Christians who use Israel as a status symbol in the Christian rank-and-file. I watched my mom and her friends go through this phase in the 80's with the Messianic Jewish movement... who can blow a shofar the loudest / longest? Who keeps the traditional Sabbath customs? Who celebrates all the Jewish feasts? Granted, I may love the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, but when it comes to Jewish traditions and customs, I don't see their specific, relevant value to Christians living in the 'end times' or otherwise!! Why do I need to care about the types of stones on the Jewish Priests' breastplate? Honest truth is that this knowledge should be reserved

for study and growth, not as some accolade for Churchy Sue to gloat about. Do not mistake me for insensitive and uneducated on the depth and breadth of Israel's value to Christianity. That is not the case.

I love Israel, I love that God loves Israel, and I love that we are Israel's allies. I know all about the Lord's future for Israel and our place therein. But until Jesus reigns in Israel, Christians across the globe, I could care less about your 'holier-than-thou' attitude regarding Holy Land experiences and their correlation to the invisible but all-too-real Christian rank structure.

8. Behind the Power Curve. I have been very fortunate to work in several cutting-edge industries and environments over the course of my working history, and I have been a trainer in some capacity during each experience. These days, many of us have enough experience to recognize the difference between good training and bad training, and the fact of the matter is this: lectures and "death by PowerPoint" are not the most effective ways for an audience to learn. When I am teaching or facilitating on any subject, the total experience is mixed-up, always different, 150% interactive, involving as many senses as possible, and fun--largely a result of having experienced this as a student and having recieved a lot of 'trainer training.'

Bottom line is this: If you are standing in front of somebody, trying to deliver valuable information as a pastor, coach, teacher, trainer or whatever, one fact remains timeless: you have got to know your audience. Here's a hint: Today's audience is fast, fluid, and distracted. Thanks to technology, we all have short attention spans, and the "lecture method" of instruction does not have the 'sizzle' (my nizzle) effect that it had at the turn of last century. If getting the Good News out to unbelievers in the forthcoming years is to be a real priority, it's time for churches to get with the program and change our tactics--to foster a more interactive form of message delivery (guided discussions, quick exercises, Q&A, etc.).

9. The Classic Complaint: Hypocrisy. Need I say more? I am just as guilty. Horribly guilty. I do things I don't want to do. I say things I don't want to say. I talk about people. I have habits that I don't want to let go of. At times, I

look nothing like a Christian. But God knows my heart. And I am continually striving to do better. To do more. I've gotten better as I've grown older and I hope that trend continues. But there are many Christians who do horrible things to themselves and others without batting an eye. Without a nickel's worth of hesitation or guilt. That's a heart problem... and a very dangerous form of hypocrisy for Christians.

10. Spiritual Apathy. One last bullet--Everything about our faith points to spiritual stuff. There are good and bad things happening that we can't see, every minute of the day, that directly affect the good and bad that we *do* see every minute of the day. The problem is that we choose not to care, not to recognize, not to do anything to affect the spiritual well-being of ourselves, our families, and our homes.

First off, as a primer, read Ephesians 6 and Romans 8. The nutshell? The weapons of our warfare are not carnal / physical! Put on your spiritual armor. Speak it over your kids. Keep your house clean, free from crap that gives the devil a foothold in your family, in your marriage, etc. Sorry, that means--for starters--it's time to lose the porn collection, horror movies and crappy video games. It turns out mom actually knew what she was doing, keeping that stuff out of the house. Then, read the Bible--out loud. Read to your family at night... even if you don't understand it. It will build your faith and strengthen your spirit. And it will really piss the devil off, and make your house an unpopular place for him or his minions. It really comes down to what's important: your family's spiritual health, or your stuff.

Folks, I hope this unseats you a little bit. I hope it disrupted your comfort zone. These are some things I can't stand about Christians today, and I guarantee you that many unbelievers are / will be just as critical.

Remember, this is not the 50's. You can't sell me indestructible pots & pans or environmentally-friendly asbestos shingles from your briefcase anymore. We have search engines. And Snopes.com. This is Generation REAL. History is no longer

written by the rich and famous. It's written by anybody with a computer. It's written by everybody. On Yahoo. On Wikipedia. And on this--the dawn of the age of reality--people are less gullible and more in-tune to what's fake. So Christians--stop being fake.

If you are interested in becoming a Christian... in seeing what God is all about, it's easy. You can do it right now, in your underwear, in your living room. All you need to do is **talk to God**. Do it out loud... **Confess that you're a sinner**. We all are. None of us deserve God's glory or the chance to go to heaven--but because of His mercy we have that opportunity when we choose to follow Him. Then you need to **believe in your heart and confess out loud that Jesus died on the cross to save you from sin and death, and that He is God's only Son**. That was easy. Now you need to pick up a Bible and start reading it. Don't worry about what to read, just read it out loud--and the same Spirit that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead will come alive in you, and make you spiritually stronger day by day. At first, I would suggest regularly reading a little from David's *Psalms*--in the middle of the Bible--and from the beginning through the middle of the New Testament. The very last step you should take as a new Christian is to get with a good church... and having read this post, you have a couple things that you can look for to steer you in the right direction and make yourself a good example to other Christians!

Posted 10th March 2012 by mj

Labels: christian hate christians the problem with christians

Bart Millard's Reality Prayer

March 10th, 2012

When I met Petra she had this CD from a no-name band that she hung out with during some church youth events. It took a while to warm up to the cheesiness of the CD title and art, but when I finally listened to the disk, I fell in love with one of the songs, because I could sense the real-ness of its author and its message.

The band is MercyMe. The Album is *Pleased to Meet You*, (c) 1995. The track

is *Reality Prayer*, by band leader Bart Millard. If you are ever able to find the song, listen to it.

There's a veil across the land--not a white veil--one as black as the sin by which it was created. And it covers every corner of the world...Can it be lifted... Lord, I sure hope so. Men trying to be of God are on their knees; they are asking for the Father's hand... With doubt in their voice, because they've yet to see their own type of delivery. And they talk to their Father with so many formalities; they were taught that way, I guess--it seems. I just wish the child left in us would find its way out--Crying please... Please, oh Daddy please. If faith so small can move mountains, can we not believe enough to be set free?

You know He tore the veil once, and He can tear it again... and He can bring us in from the rain of sin... and He can do everything that we have ever hoped for, and He can do things that we never could comprehend! He is our God, He is Almighty, He's the Holy One. He is our Hope, He's our Salvation, the one thing to cling to! Jesus... You are our God, You are Almighty, You're the Holy One.

Posted 10th March 2012 by mj

Labels: Bart Millard christian band i can only imagine mercy me mercy me reality prayer MercyMe musica

Dakota Badlands with Natcher

March 11, 2012

Spent last week driving around North Dakota. Made a few rig visits with buddy Natcher, who was visiting from Oklahoma. These are the pics taken over the course of travel between rig visits, most of which were captured out the passenger-side window.





A lot of stamped and wrought steel signage across the State



Thought that was cool. "Sioux."





You're right, Natch. This was a good picture waiting to happen.





Love this one. Natcher in his element.



Geese in Flight, one of many large steel art structures along North Dakota's *Enchanted Highway*. This picture was taken while driving from Bismarck Airport to Dickinson.



Huge cow off the South side of I-94 Westbound. *Babe*, Paul Bunyan's big blue ox, comes to mind...



Now, we didn't see the huge shadowed crack in the rock until we saw this picture closer (at the hotel on the computer). We both had to admit that if we had seen it before, this photo would have been different. Natcher would have been sitting naked in 'The Thinker' position... butcrack to butcrack with the rock.



There are cactii in this big frozen desert. Natcher saved me from eating a handful of them while bouldering.

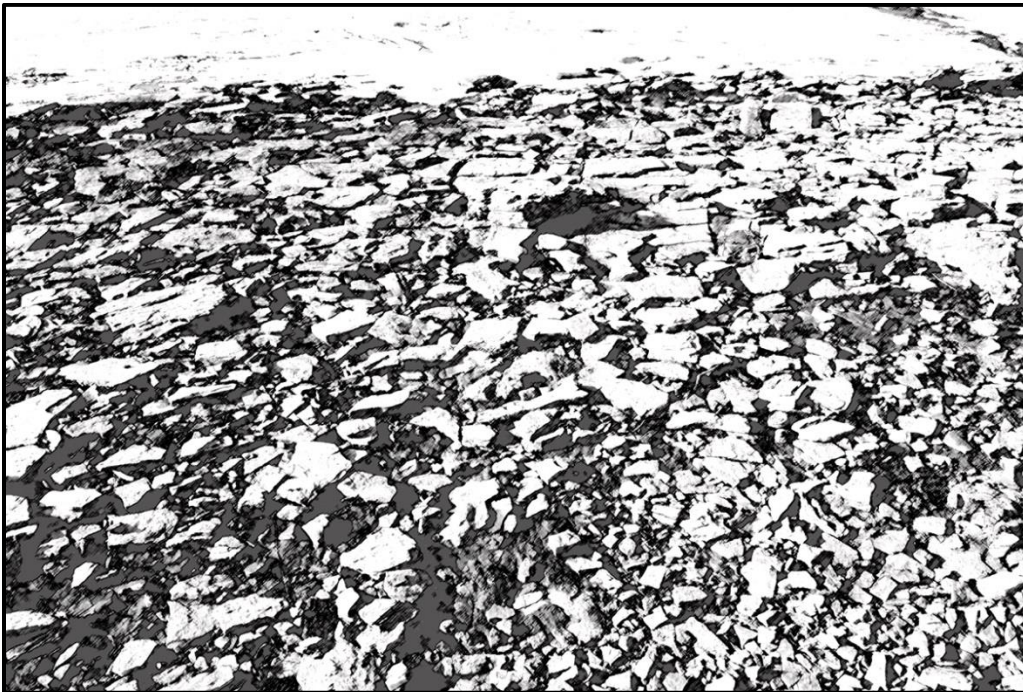


Me & The Mighty Missouri



Photo courtesy J. Natcher





Cretaceous Period? Lots of low-level shale containing petrified wood. In the glass display at the airport, the layer of rock that contained the most petrified wood in the *Hell's Creek* region also produced a really nice Triceratops skull.



Southwest side of the Lake Sakakawea basin on the Missouri River





Rig adjacent to Patterson-UTI 301





'One Tree' of North Dakota



Looks like a Chevy commercial. Matt S. and Scott L. trailing down winding road toward Patterson Rig 338, an Omron rig. Road looks like San Fran's Lombard Street, Eastern Tenn's Chilhowe Mountain, or the Massada Snake Trail in Israel.



Left to right: Natcher, myself, Scott Lane, Matt Schaefer



North Dakota... or Kenya / Tanzania? Looks like the East African Mountains.

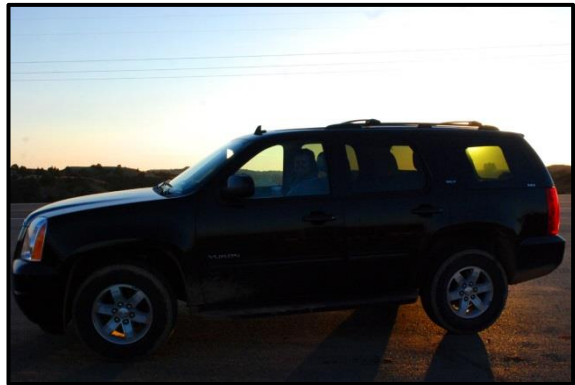


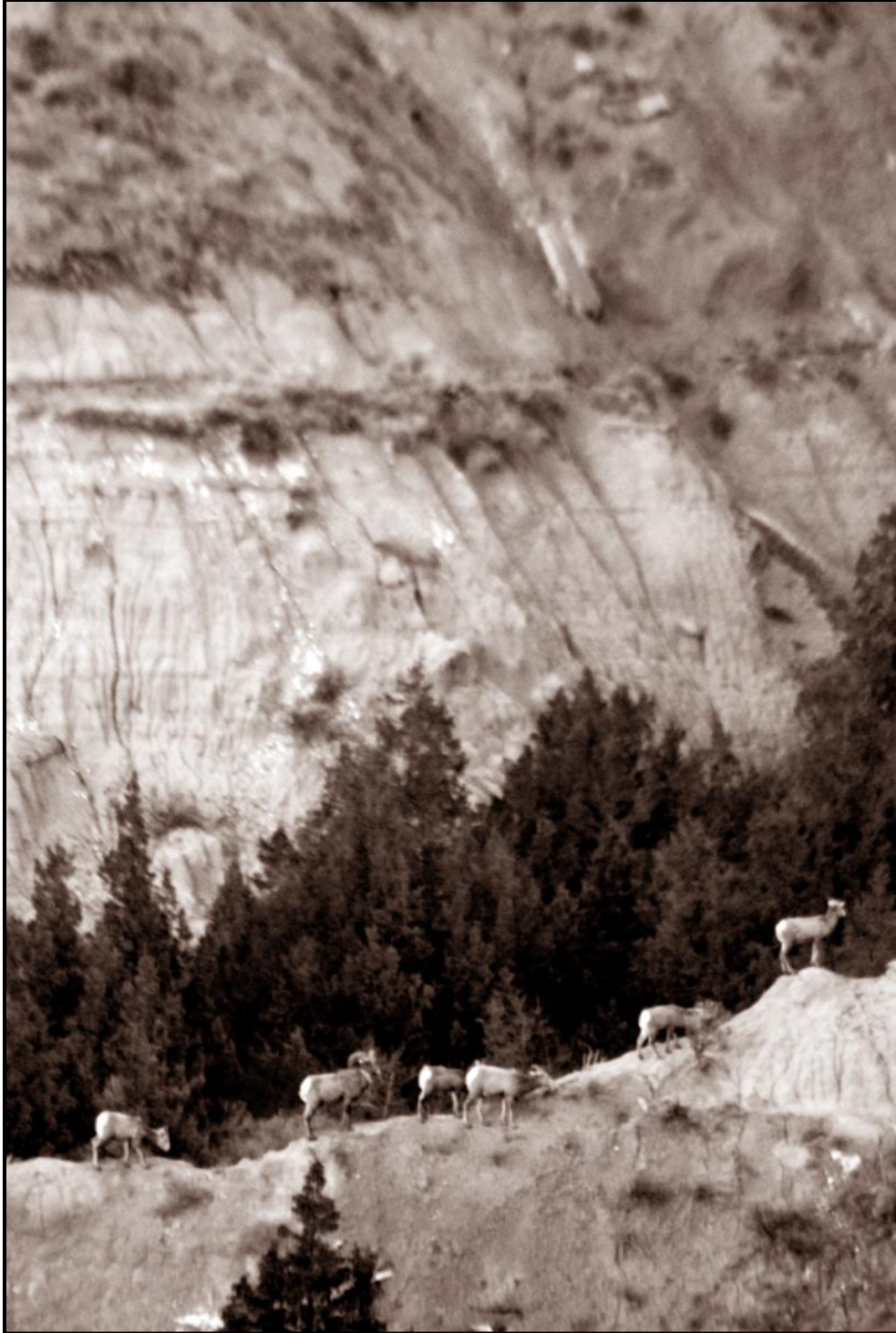


Lots of leaners in this State. Leaning barns, towers, houses, outbuildings. Guessing that comes with the windy, snowy territory.



Photo courtesy J. Natcher





What a treat! Our great time was endcapped by the bighorn sheep sighting.



Patterson Rig 180



Bighorn capture with Pet's Nikon D80 & 180mm telephoto



Dakota Moon











Another day for the books.

Posted 11th March 2012 by mj

Labels: adventures domestic dakota badlands dakota badlands photos john natcher natcher north dakota pictures

Saving Lives... One Earthworm at a Time

March 13th, 2012

It keeps me in touch with reality, with life, with nature, with my miniscule place in this enormous universe.

Started off when I was a kid--like a lot of kids (boys anyway) do, I suppose. We used to catch nightcrawlers for fishing... me, mom, dad... we'd husk the ripe black walnuts that were laid out on grandpa's cold garage floor, by stepping on them with our tennis shoes and rolling the half-dried husks off underfoot. Then dad would soak the tannic waste in these steel buckets of water, old minnow pails maybe, and mom would wake me up late at night and we'd go out with big 6V flashlights after mom & dad had drenched the yard with the walnut water. Those big, fat nightcrawlers would be half out of the ground, waiting to be carefully plucked. You've gotta be sneaky, though, or the worms will feel your footsteps and they'd suck themselves back downhole.

I loved fishing. Before you know it, I was turning over every brick and block in our apartment complex looking for worms. Mom will tell you the story that once, just after she received her daily dose of flowers from myself (a handful of dandelion heads), she went over to the fridge and opened it up, then jumped back... I knew that between fishing trips, we'd keep worms in the fridge. But I didn't use a container; I just laid the worms out across the racks.

Eventually, I would feel sorry for the worms that I'd see squirming and drowning in puddles on the street. Fishing was not an every night event, so I'd save these worms from certain death by throwing them into the grass (then the robins would gobble them up behind my back).

I never stopped doing that. Granted, I cannot save every drowning worm on the driveway, nor every moth from drowning in the community pool. I do believe, though, that this small gesture (or others like it) can keep folks humble, and show God some appreciation for His provisions and also show a general respect for life... saving a worm here, a beetle there, and whatever squirming critter He sends across our path.

Posted 13th March 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life saving worms from drowning saving worms from puddles

My Most Sincere Thanks to the Elderly Woman...

March 13th, 2012

...who was riding her bike, along with her husband, along the Bethel segment of the Montour Trail on Sunday. It was a gorgeous day and every Tom, Sally, or Fido in the area was out for a walk / run / ride.

We were walking, pushing our youngest in one of those runners' stroller things. Our other three were riding bikes. Our youngest wanted to walk. So we unlatched her and told her to stay to the right side of the path, which she's usually good at doing. But this time, she zipped left. Elderly woman crashed her bike and skidded five feet--her shoulder just resting against my daughter's shins.

Mrs. Lady, I know you broke your elbow, probably dislocated your shoulder, and messed up your wrist. After loading you into your husband's truck, we lost track--and didn't know which hospital you went to. My wife called the hospitals in the area to no avail.

If by chance you should stumble upon this post, or if someone else does who knows about this incident, please have this brave woman or her husband contact us, so we can at least send flowers and help however we may be of assistance. And again sincerely--Thank You for sacrificing your body for my daughter. Without your instant nosing over into the dirt, at that speed, I have no doubt she would've been severely injured or killed.

--MJ

Posted 13th March 2012 by mj

Labels: montour trail montour trail accident montour trail bike accident montour woman accident

A Day in the Life, March 2012

March 13th, 2012

I learned all of this in the last two hours:

Momma -- Scored 3:1 savings over Giant Eagle at Aldi. 49 cent avacados??!!! In Pennsylvania???! You rock, Gorgeous.

MJ -- If I have to eat one more bite of anything off one of these forks, I'm going to turn our silverware into a shiny lump of Redneck lawn sculpture. The bi-metal has lost its silvery coating at the very tips, which simulates the unique experience of eating mashed potatoes off the top of a 9V battery.

Lily -- Is really, really concerned that when she grows up like a mommy, she'll get lost when she's driving. "Can you tell me how to get to Grandma's house? I mean like how many times do I turn left and how many times do I turn right." We talked about licensing, cars, maps, GPS... she's still worried. Don't worry, Sweets. You're four.

Ayla -- Wants Rappunzel's hair. And knees.

Caleb -- Loves reading. So he and I had a much needed / long overdue father-son moment and I took him down to the Batcave. Behind the pile of guns is a bookshelf. *Hondo? Sacketts? Last of the Breed?* No... *Fortune Favors the Brave? Cave Bear? Killer Angels?* Nope, too young. Shakespeare, Sun Tzu, Max Brand, Luke Short, Danielle... Hmmmmmmm. *Aha!* I pull the dusty cover open on one of the books, handing it to him slowly. Inscribed: *Norman Speights, 1913*. It's a fictional Boy Scout adventure story. "This belonged to Opa. Your great grandpa... remember him? He was about your age when this was his." "Wow, thanks dad!" "This one's just a loaner, Son. I want it back in the same condition when you're done." "Yes, Sir. Thanks!"

Joshua -- Too old, too cool to kiss dad on the cheek when I pray the kids down for bed. He's gonna be really easy to mess with as a teenager.

That's it. For now, anyway.

Posted 13th March 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life best family blog family blog top rated family blog

A Day in the Life, April 2012

April 7th, 2012

Ayla is two years old. She can't pronounce the word "more." She says "moy" instead. It's adorable! She's our snuggler. Loves to curl up with Daddy--(there now). Laughs when she makes a 'butt' out of the crease between her chest and her arm near her armpit. Eats everything. Loves the wierdest food, too. Right now it's radishes. Hates bugs but loves worms--thinks they're cute. Helped me weed the yard last week. When Ayla grows up, I think she'll be a tattoo artist. Not a day goes by that she doesn't ink up her legs & arms, my legs & arms, yeah... pretty much anybody's legs and arms get marked by Ayla around here.

Lily, 4, is becoming a very talented artist. She draws and paints whenever she gets the chance! Very much like her daddy used to do. She is very 'mothering,' always looking out for the well-being of her family members. This attitude really just started to blossom in the last few months... she seems to put everybody first these days. We love it! Lily is also very concerned about animals, plants, and even inanimate objects. Last week, she came up to me and said of the rose bush, "Daddy I gave that brown bush with the yucky leaves and the stickers a big drink of water. I said, 'Aww, it's okay bushy. I hope you feel better!'"

Caleb, 9, is another artist. Extremely creative. He's been shooting a lot of hoops on the driveway lately. We played a few rounds together last week when I had some time, and I sat outside and watched him from the deck today while Ayla was blowing bubbles. Caleb has several sweet dance moves (he's always loved to dance) and can do numerous impersonations. Caleb is also the Ramen Noodle King. Much to Momma's disappointment, Caleb would choose Top Ramen over any 5-Diamond restaurant's menu. Caleb is still and always will be a Lego

maniac, and has loved everything Star Wars since he was about 4.

Josh just turned 11, and we got him a total home gym (plate/cable style)). He's at that age now, and he's got some good strong meat on his bones. He's having a hard time putting the gym together. Kidding, I'm doing that. I just haven't started yet. Josh is really starting to show forth an independent attitude these days. He and Caleb take turns mowing the lawn now, which supplements each of their weekly \$5 allowance by an additional \$5... ...all of which consequently gets spent on video games, but that's another story. They only play on Friday nights and Saturdays. Oh yeah, and Josh got glasses. They look good. He's presently making orange smoothies in the kitchen with his buddy... naturally, they're using butcher knives to cut the oranges. They're waiting for me to get off the computer to take everybody bowling.

Momma has had morning sickness badly for well over a month. Basically, this go 'round, it's the smell of deli meat, Old Spice deodorant, Old Spice men's body wash, COFFEE(!!!), and oh, pretty much everything that can be smelled--that can or will make Petra want to hurl in her mouth. Or in my mouth if we're kissing. Petra's been scoping out some gyms / fitness centers in the area to join. She's got it narrowed down to two right now. Momma loves her new(er) vehicle. It drives nice, the kids have lots of room, and it has all the bells & whistles. And let me tell you, Momma is absolutely smokin,' as always.

I have been settling into my new position as a Regional Maintenance Manager. Loving the job. Started investing in company stock just before the turn of the year, and I've continued to make that investment regularly. Went running three days ago. 6 miles, cold turkey. Mile and a half last night. 8 miles+ today. I'm sick of not dropping weight, and I'd like to be below 210 lbs for the Pittsburgh Marathon next month. I'm dancing above and below 220 right now.

Will continue with family updates throughout the year.

Posted 7th April 2012 by mj

Labels: 2012 pittsburgh marathon training a day in the life Matty patterson-uti pennsylvania family

So Long, Olive Garden

April 8th, 2012

We're going through a break up right now. It's tough... Olive Garden has been our #1 go-to dining out spot for fifteen years. Our family calls the place O-G (Oh Gee).

Last night we went out to eat. Lily begged for us to try OG one more time. I felt horribly guilty of cheating on our favorite restaurant, but we drove straight to Applebee's. I'm sick of the way we get treated, as a large family, at OG.

Now, we're big eaters. We don't go out too much, but when we do, our typical family meal costs between \$75 and \$150. And as a rule of thumb, we don't go out--as a family or as a couple--unless we can afford to tip well (and pay our babysitter well, if applicable). So our tips generally run between \$20 and \$40. And as customers, we're not picky! Our kids are exceptionally well-behaved, we dress properly when going out to eat--kids too, we pretty much eat anything, and we don't usually complain if our order gets messed up; it's easy to mess up an order of 6, soon to be 7.

Over the years, I have noticed a change in the way that we are treated at restaurants as a large family. It is particularly noticeable because with my job, I eat out a lot. In fact, I've always eaten out a lot, with my jobs in the past as well. Also, I've worked at three restaurants--two moonlighting while in the Marines and one right before I joined. I've learned what to reasonably expect at different types of restaurants--and I've learned what is unacceptable. So I'm a hard liner in the following instances... I use the "15-minute" rule:

If my family has to wait more than 15 minutes for someone to take my name for seating (Bob Evans), we're out. If, once we're seated, my family has to wait more than 15 minutes to get menus, we're out. If my family has to wait more than 15 minutes for our drink order to be taken, we're out. And if our server just completely blows us off for a half hour or more, somebody box this up, cause we're out. I'm sorry, but my family deserves the same kind of service as two people having a business lunch at an upscale establishment. In the restaurant

industry, it's SERVICE that drives reputation, from Waffle House to The Melting Pot.

Olive Garden has, over the last couple years, made its way to the top of my 'hit list' for eating out, not necessarily for the reasons mentioned above, rather for their blatant segregation of customers with children (see my older post on Olive Garden's social triage). I do not like being treated differently as a customer whether I'm with my colleagues or with my children. I assure you, my children are the better behaved.

So, to combat this treatment, whenever we arrive at OG, I politely explain to the host or hostess that we do not want to be seated in the children's section, and that we will wait patiently for a good table. At our once-regular locations in Suffolk and Chesapeake, VA, the OG staff was more than accommodating. In fact, they all knew our family and we got lots of smiles and compliments. But here at our local Olive Garden in Bethel Park, PA, we've experienced something different over the last year and a half. All of the families with children (or at least, with more than one or two children) are sent to the dungeon, a large room full of screaming kids, frustrated parents, Bubbas in hunting gear, sweaty basketball teams, and greasy mechanics. Basically, if you are loud, obnoxious, have no scruples, or have children, you are placed in the Room of Shame.

Two weeks ago, my family went to OG. I explained very, very clearly that we would wait for a good seat, but not in that big room to the left. I explained it to BOTH the host and the hostess together. We were told that the wait for such a table would be in excess of an hour. "No problems," I said, "we'll wait." We sat in the bar and drank Shirley Temples. Accidentally ordered a Tom Collins for Caleb. Thought those were alcohol-free as well, whoops. Oh well, more for Poppa. It took about an hour on the money, when Lily got excited because the little deal was buzzing. Our hostess began to escort us into "The Room."

"Ma'am, I'm sorry, but I asked to be seated anywhere other than this room. My wife and I have eaten on several occasions in different parts of this restaurant, and I would like my family to sit in one of those sections--somewhere quiet, as I explained when we got here." The teenish-looking hostess played her role very

well. "Sir, I'm very sorry, but it will be at least another hour before one of those tables becomes available. We have a booth in this room that is secluded in the far corner; it should meet your needs just fine." Not wanting to make a scene, I acquiesced, but not with a cheery disposition.

We followed our hostess into the room. My eyes were first drawn to the amount of filth and stains on the floor. Then we squeezed past a large family (Ma, Pa, aunts, uncles, kids, etc.) to sit in the back corner. I COULDN'T HEAR anything in the room except for the adults in this large family, arguing loudly over the sound of a kid screaming. Screw this place. We're out. Grabbed one of the GM's cards on the way out. Lost it by that evening. Went to adjacent TGI Friday's, seated instantly, had a well-served, well-prepared meal in a great atmosphere where I could hear my daughter when she'd ask me something. We're done with Olive Garden.

Posted 8th April 2012 by mj

Labels: olive garden bethel park olive garden with kids restaurants for kids restaurants that are bad about kids

View comments



1.

Melissa April 8, 2012 at 8:47 PM

I remember going to a restaurant in Budapest with my family... We were stuck in the basement next to the bathrooms! We had gone there because the restaurant was supposed to have a wonderful view of the city. Well, perhaps to those were were NOT a party of 6, 4 of whom were kids. My mom said whenever we went anywhere and had made a reservation for 6, she could tell the staff was always disappointed that it was a large family and not 3 couples. Smaller tips, I guess!

2.



Williams' World April 9, 2012 at 1:21 PM

I don't know you, but came across your blog on another blog that I read every so often. We made the same decision about 3 months ago ourselves. We used to LOVE the OG... it's just me, husband, and 2 well-behaved kids. The last couple times we went, it took forever (less than 15 min) to get menus and drink orders taken... but we're used to pretty instant service. The last time in Jan. we went for my husband's birthday. Had to wait a few minutes to sit and order drinks. No biggie... We were in a regular room with a few other couples, no kids... But close enough to the front of the restaurant to be kinda near the hostess booth/desk. There were a group of servers hanging around... bored i guess? and they were REALLY loud! My husband said he wasn't sure he could listen to all that while we ate. It wasn't bothering me too much. Well then, curse words and several N-words were thrown into the mix (the group was Black). That was it... My husband grabbed us, a manager card, and we rolled out. He called as soon as we got home and was transferred to the regional manager finally... was assured "something" would be done, but i doubt it was. He wanted to send us all sorts of free coupons, gift cards, etc... But he told him to forget it, we're done!

Mac's Marines: Recruit Training

April 9th, 2012



Following is one of several well-scribed excerpts from a biographic interview of John McInerney, formerly an Infantry Staff Sergeant of Marines. I'm honored by John's allowance for the use of this, a synopsis of Marine Corps recruit training.

SSgt. John McInerney, Arrutbah, Iraq 2004

"Entire books have been written that cannot describe the overall essence of Marine recruit training. The general purpose is to brutally remove you from your

comfort zone, disrupt our usual thought process and to get you to perform military tasks efficiently under duress. To rapidly adapt you to military lifestyle and teach you core fundamental skills required in your future duties and in your next phase of training. It is a crash course where every movement, action and thought serves a purpose.

In the very beginning you are screamed at before you can get off the bus, and rushed off into a haphazard formation and read (i.e. screamed at) the Uniform Code of Military Justice which basically says they have you by the balls and anything but compliance will result in suffering. You are then stripped of all things that can identify you as an individual. Everything you do is directed very specifically and any deviation is dealt with harshly, anything that isn't what you were directed to do is not tolerated (sneezing, sitting, using the bathroom). It is an exercise in brutal efficiency at the technical level and an exercise in sociological brilliance on the "human" level. You are kept up for two days for in-processing which is to ensure that most are operating without a lot of conscious thought, and to wear you down for the beginning of training.

Once you begin training, you cover classroom topics from weapons firing to applications of hand to hand combat; this is done under the same conditions, constant duress, stress and exhaustion levels for three months. It is just enough to not break most people (who enlisted, but that is another long convoluted answer), but to keep you at the threshold and to expand that threshold. The end result is a fitness level not achieved by most people, ability to operate with minimal food and rest, ability to think rapidly and clearly in adverse conditions, knowledge of the "society" and basic task skills. You are not brainwashed, but trained to operate under conditions where most people shut down. Fear is replaced with confidence, confusion is replaced with thoughtful adaptation, uncertainty with determination, paralysis is replaced with action and individual pride is replaced with unit pride. Your "circle of comfort" has grown to include conditions that would stop the rest of society. While this is an initial training it also prepares you for follow-on training and a society designed as sustainment training.

Fundamental technical skills are critical in combat and the conditioned responses are critical skills for every Marine deployed, but the way of thinking, adaptability and determination under the worst possible circumstances as a way of life are the most critical. Several times I would see actions or tasks that were directly what was taught in boot camp, but the societal conditioned thought process was evident every day. While people adapt under duress to the societies in which they are immersed, basic training drastically reduces that need and perpetuates the combat

culture. That being said there is nothing that completely prepare you for war, but recruit training is a good for step to condition you to operating in those environments."

Posted 9th April 2012 by mj

Labels: J-mac john mcinerney mac Marine boot camp marine recruit training marines mcinerney usmc ssgt mac ssgt mcinerney USMC

Cool Bird Story – Bird Asks for Help

April 21st, 2012

So yesterday evening I'm sitting in my truck, about to leave work and head home. I stopped just before driving out the gate to make a quick phone call. The weather outside was beautiful, so I had my window down and my elbow hanging out.

As I start talking on the phone, this bird walks up to my door, just a couple feet away. It's one of those brown and white birds with black markings that you see walking around in gravel yards and parking lots... I think it's a killdeer or lapwing or something like that. It walks up to the door, looks at me, and starts squawking. Squawk's the wrong word. But anyway, the bird's obviously talking to me. I continue talking on the phone while looking at the bird.

The bird walks away, about five or six feet... and looks down in a drainage grate near the edge of our company's driveway. The bird starts calling out again, twisting its head to look down. Then this next part really got my attention. I still can't get over this.

The bird walks back to my truck window, stops, looks at me, squawks a few times, then slowly lays down and sort of rolls over to expose its underbelly--like a dog does when it wants to be scratched. "Hey man, let me call you back." I end the conversation, put the truck in 'Park,' and slowly open the door, trying not to spook the bird. Then I walk over to the grate and look down. I hear chirping inside, but can't see where it's coming from. There's no way the mama bird can get to her

baby through this grate; baby took about a two-foot fall and--in hindsight-- would've been washed away by the rain we had last night.

I lifted the grate, found the baby bird, then picked the fluffer up--constantly showing it to mamabird as I walked slowly off the road, over the culvert, and into the grass. I put baby down carefully, walked back to the truck, and mamabird ran to the grass and nosed her way to the sound of her chirping babe.

That mother bird came to me... a guy significantly higher on the food chain... to ask for help. That was one of my coolest nature experiences, and I'll never forget it. I thought about it all evening, and relayed the story to everyone I talked to. Definitely a *'Wow, God'* moment in my book.

Posted 21st April 2012 by mj

Labels: animals that ask for help bird stories cool bird story flora and fauna wow god wow god moments

A Day in the Life, 27 April 2012

April 27th, 2012

Last Sunday we went to Chuch (any Snoop fans?). Then on a whim, Petra took the kids to Virginia to visit grandma, grandpa, sis & bro-in-law Renee & Jared, the kids and the new baby. They're visiting from Alaska.

I flew to Houston Monday.

Petra, Kids, entire family drive, take ferry to historic Jamestown Tuesday.

Wednesday, Mac & I meet Darwin Davis, Mike Holcomb, Harvon Jordan, Marc Flores, and Joseph Lemoine for crawfish @ Sharky's. Probably 40-50 pounds worth. Washed down by a few hot wings.

Thursday, Petra & kids went to the Marine Corps Museum. Boys had a blast. I got a shirt. I flew back to Pittsburgh, went on a fancy foods shopping splurge

(wines, antipasti, cheeses, fresh salmon, cavier, filet mignon, and three boquets to mixmatch (Calla Lilies, Stargazer Lilies, matching arrangement of roses). Set up house to surprise Petra, who was still on the road for an hour or more. They all got home. Spent time with the kids... ..then put them to bed early-- ;)

Josh broke his arm.

Friday... oh wait, that's today. Worked all day. Saw that momma bird with baby when I drove in to work (see last story). Went to Lily's school concert 1/2 hour late... but made it. Dinner at the house, we all sat around and prayed... When finished, Ayla says (pointing to the Asparagus spears on Lily's plate), "Lily, you gotta eat all your sticks!"

Caleb got all excited when his food was in front of him, quickly pointing out something inside his pile of asparagus and sweet pea pods... "Oh sweet! I love these beans with the little green balls inside them!" I smiled. "Buddy, those are called 'peas'."

Later, Lily tells Petra, "Sorry I couldn't help you clean up, Momma. It's just my hands are all okrapicky. Lily had been eating okra pickles, so her logical response was that her hands were "okrapicky."

In a week, I get to run the Pittsburgh Marathon. At 225 lbs., this will be the fattest marathon I've ever run. Or the fattest I've ever run a marathon. Whatever. Hey, I've run five times so far this year. 2 miles, 2 miles, 6 miles, 8 miles, 13 miles. And about four times last year... ..so I'm good.

More next month.

--MJ

Posted 27th April 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life home and family

Doing What You Love

April 29th, 2012

Last week, I received my first ever serious offer for a writing job. It paid much less than my current job--which has nothing to do with writing--and it made me wonder where this offer was two years ago. On the long drive that followed the receipt of that email, I pondered the idea of 'doing what you love,' versus 'loving what you do.'



For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a writer. To get paid to do what I love... writing. I've considered the consequences; the idea that writing may lose its fizzle when it becomes a 'requirement,' but the same can be said for any passion-turned-career and I'm okay with that. Now, in the real world--that is to say, where most people do not get to do exactly what they want--I have adapted to pretty much every type of job imaginable, and always with a good attitude. By and large, I have always excelled.

Then I realized something: I turn wrenches for a living. Sure, it's more complex

than that, but as a profession, I chose maintenance. Or maintenance chose me. After nearly two years with my current company--an oil & gas drilling contractor--I can't think of any place I'd rather be right now, job-wise. And frankly, I could care less about turning a wrench... but I love my job as a whole. Does that make any sense? I guess what I'm saying is this: the key to doing what you love, *is* loving what you do. I love being able to single-handedly support my family, regardless of what shape that takes. So elementally, the answer to job satisfaction (and happiness in general) is love itself.

If you were to ask me what I wanted to be when I grow up, I still couldn't tell you... it's a big life. Maybe I'll turn wrenches. Perhaps I'll be a dentist, photographer, chef, teacher, corporate business consultant or underwater basketweaver. A QC inspector at the Q-Tip factory. Whatever job--or combination thereof--meets the financial needs of my family is not off the table of consideration in this lifetime. But I do know this: whatever I do for a living, I know I'd be happy doing it. :)





3











Posted 29th April 2012 by mj

Labels: doing what you love loving what you do work working at patterson-uti

Doing What You Love, Part II

April 29th, 2012

Now for me, there are five other essential elements that come to mind, that allow me to do what I love--at work and in life. I will not make the absolute claim that these things work for everybody, but I believe they will:

First, I thank God every day for His many blessings. For my family, for our life, for my job, for our health, and for His favor. I ask for help, because I'm human and I mess up every day. I thank God for things I haven't received, and for the blessed futures of our children.

The second critical element is to love something else more than work--thus seeing any job as simply a means to an end. If you have a family, there's your prime motivation for working. But other examples are friends, pets, food, hobbies, travel, and leisure. Learn to love these more than work, and you may find yourself working harder--to financially increase your ability to enjoy these things more often.

The third element that allows me to always do what I love, is to love everybody. Granted, some you have to love at arm's length... but approach people with a 'glass half full' mentality. Forgive, and believe in second chances... you would not be where you are today without them.

The fourth is to desire success. If you love success, you will stop at nothing to achieve it--just remember to be honorable in your pursuit, or it will be all for nought.

The fifth is honor. Honor others by recognizing their efforts, continuously investing into their lives, dealing fairly with them, and helping them to succeed. Honor yourself by holding a high moral standard, and striving tirelessly for a good name.

If you can hone these character-based traits of thankfulness, prioritization, love, ambition, and honor, I believe you will love whatever it is you do for work every

day. Then you will be able to look back one day, and say that for a job... you do what you love.

Posted 29th April 2012 by mj

Labels: doing what you love loving what you do patterson-uti drilling jobs work

Eccentric Runner's Guide to the 2012 Pittsburgh Marathon

May 5th, 2012

"Don't forget the bananas and Vaseline." "I won't," replied my wife as she left the house for singing practice with the church praise team. This kinky request is a perfectly normal one in our house about once a year. I run races, and the 2012 Pittsburgh Marathon is tomorrow.

I'm sitting at our dinner table, surrounded with flyers, coupons, gift cards, food samples, race brochures, and athletic promotional items. The shirt style / design looks decent. Buried somewhere inside this bag is my numbered bib. Ah, there it is. The scanner is built into the bib. We have come a long way--race-runners, that is. At this pre-race Health & Fitness Expo, which is downtown at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center all day today, I've noticed a lot of anti-chafing products--some of which spray on, rub on, and some that are applied in deodorant stick form. These KY-type synthetic lubricants with athletic logos on each package have been gaining popularity in this community for about five years, but at this race, I saw twelve different brands. That's the problem with a good idea... market saturation. I saw that one company produced some bulky-looking foam nipple protectors... a product replacement for Band-Aids, which are naturally low-profile and work perfectly fine. Other goodies at this race include a sample of Win Sports Detergent, a \$500 promotional gift card for Red Star WorldWear sunglasses & watches, and a dealie-dad strap for retaining your ipod Touch / iphone while you're running.

Wow, there are a lot of Rock & Roll races these days. I wish they wouldn't encroach upon cities who already have their own popular marathons. Lisbon and Madrid come to mind.

Right now, I'm holding three "pace tattoos," or *PaceTats*. 4:00, 4:30, and 5:00. I don't know which of the three to put on my arm tomorrow. My dilemma: I'm fat. I really need to register for these races as a Clydesdale... not that I'd be breaking any records or anything. Sub-four hours used to be my goal for every marathon. 3:17 is my personal record. Big Sur in 2010 was the heaviest I'd run, at 218 lbs. With no time to train, I pulled that marathon off in 4:36. Not hateful for a chubba. With only a few practice runs in this year, I have been holding that same weight. The exception are my weeklong trips to Houston, wherein the corporate gorging that takes place each evening--usually at one of the Pappa's restaurants--pushes my weight up about 10 lbs. on the scale / week. Good food is my *Achilles Heel*. Wouldn't you know it, I was subjected to this blissful culinary torture for five nights two weeks ago... then I flew home to Pittsburgh and flew right back to Houston for four days and nights of gluttony this week. Flew back last night with just enough time to waddle into the expo to pick up my *burp* race packet.

Weighed in this morning at 225. Hmmmph. Threw away the 4:00 pace tattoo. I'll choose between the other two tomorrow. Honestly, I've never followed a pace chart before. Maybe it'll screw me up.

Today, racers are stretching. They're going for 'light' runs... five or six miles at an easy pace. Tonight they'll follow the ritualistic trend of carbo-loading, eating a big pasta dinner and washing it down with a light beer or two and plenty of water to boot. They're setting up meeting places for family and friends along the route... strategic re-supply checkpoints. They're wearing relatively new shoes... not new, but recently broken in (since their last big race). Runners are getting all their stuff together... their bibs and their statement-making shirts and their ipod playlists and *where the heck are my safety pins?* and all that. It's a process I know well, and I love it and make fun of it all at the same time. Usual race partner Matt L. and myself would poke at the heavily-sponsored racers with tight clothes and all the latest race-trend gadgets. "Bike fags," we'd call them--having absolutely nothing to do with their sexual orientation and everything to do with their donned gay apparel and holier-than-thou snobby attitudes. Tomorrow, the racers will pack down bananas and oranges, energy bars and gels, etc., before herding into their start corrals.

Today, I am not stretching. I need to. For myself, there is no such thing as a light run right now. Two miles might as well be ten, and ten miles would impede my race completion tomorrow. Not planning on eating pasta today and I probably won't drink beer because I'm beered out this week. I'm thinking Chimichuri steak at home, or take-out Chinese. Don't need any re-supply, just the regularly-spaced water stations with whatever brand of awful-tasting electrolyte drink is trying to project its name to runner's fame this week. I will need food around mile seventeen, but I'll scrounge something off some helpful girl scout or off the ground. My couch goes out the window in a big race. As far as pre-staged meeting places go, my wife and kids usually catch me somewhere around the halfway point--wherever that is for this race--and they'll see me when the race is over. It might be best to give them directions to the *hospitals* in close proximity of the course! I'm proud to say that my running shoes are about four years old... they've been through hundreds of miles in the cage pedals of a road bike, and have pounded sand and surf and road and trail (just not recently). I know I should buy new ones but hey, I'm a loyal guy and the shoes have some sentiment. Tomorrow, I'll wake up, make some bacon, and wash it back with a few cups of strong coffee. On the way to the Start Line, I'll pick up a can of Copenhagen and I'll place a huge woppachoppa in my lip, just for tradition's sake. I'll tape two Vitamin M's to my stomach (military over-the-counter 800mg Ibuprofen) in case of muscle failure in the final miles, slap Vaseline between my legs, and bandage my nips. I'll sport an ipod Shuffle and a small Nikon digital camera for the race.

If you were ever wondering how to just go run a marathon with no training or preparation... well, that's how its done, folks. I'll post pictures.

--MJ

Posted 5th May 2012 by mj

Labels: 2012 pittsburgh marathon fat marathon runner fitness marathon blog pittsburgh marathon run pgh

2012 Pittsburgh Marathon Photos

May 6th, 2012

Well, I didn't do as well as I thought I would. The unexpected heat, coupled with no wind and no shade, had me sweating within the first few miles. There were some pretty good hills too. Buckled the arch in my right foot around mile 17. Forgot a critical pre-game move as well... didn't trim back my toenails as far as I could, and that will cost me at least one toenail within the next week or two. This was my slowest marathon to date... by more than an hour. 5:36. It was a good race though, with ample water breaks, lots of music, and a lot of motivational support. I really enjoyed it, despite the heat, my feet, and my slow pace. Here's the first round of pictures:



Didn't realize that my three nearest neighbors were running as well, or I would have made similar travel arrangements on the trolley. Instead, I drove out at 5AM and parked at our church, *LifeStone Church* on the far end of Sarah Street in Southside. I figured I could hitch a ride in. No joy. I walked three miles to the

start line.



I saw volunteers setting up on my walk to the Start Line



saw this band setting up as well





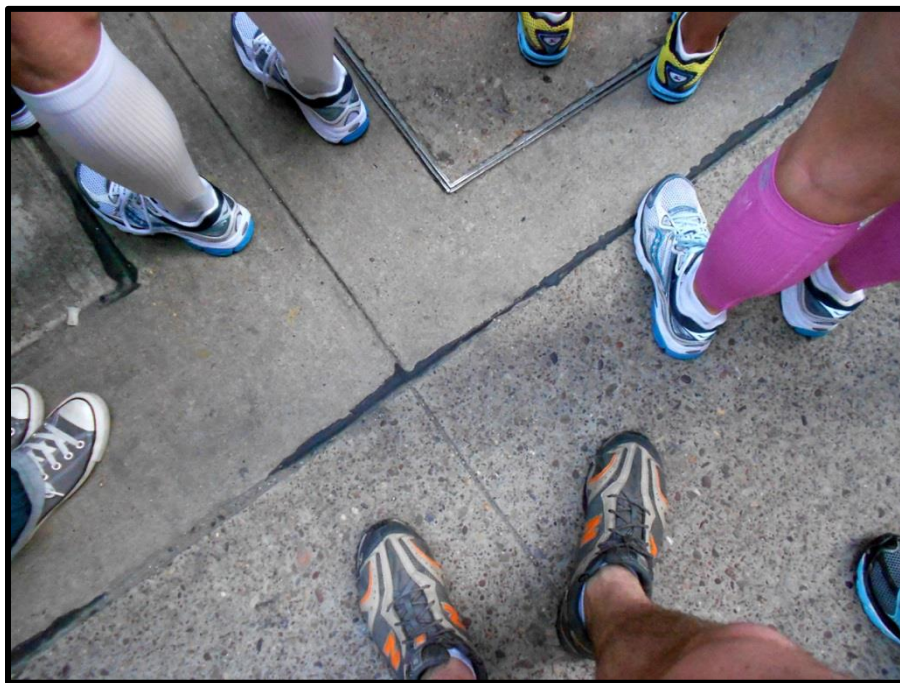
Yup, you guessed it. That's Mike. He's a Virginia State Trooper. Went to school here in Pittsburgh. Former Marine. We chatted it up until the starting gun.



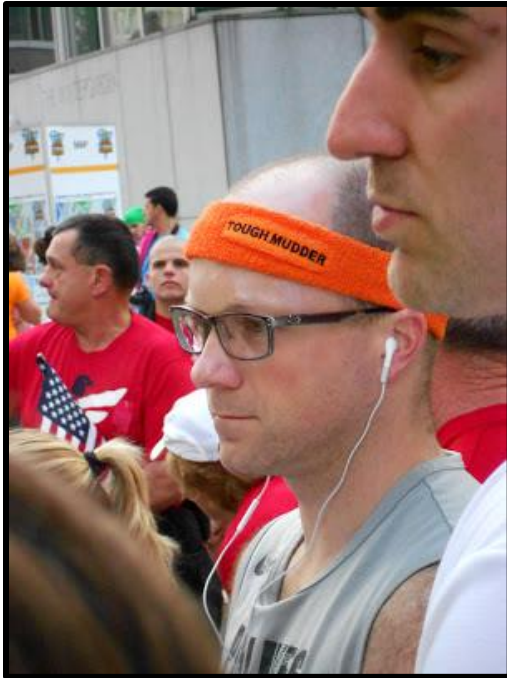
Random couple at our "D" Corral start area



View of the competitors from the very back of the line... they wrap around the corner way up ahead. 25,000-ish racers in all



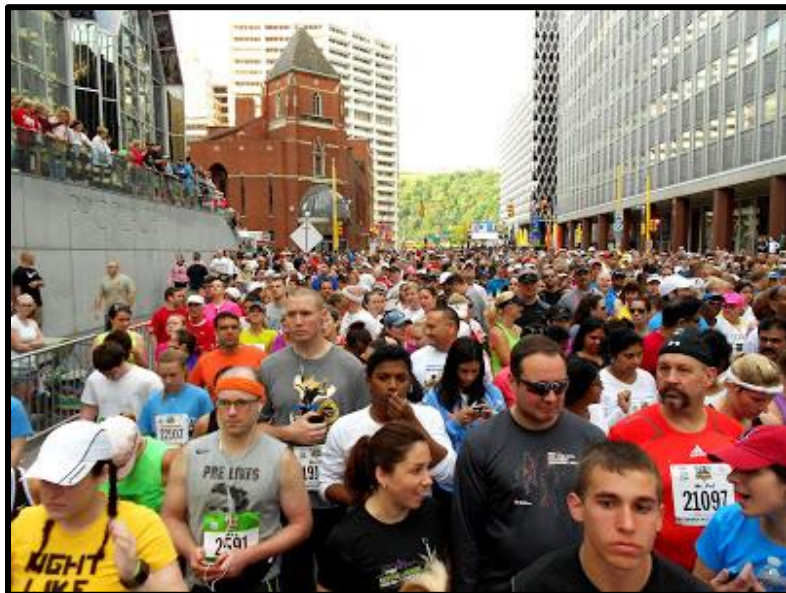
Waiting on the gun



The gun! And then the stop & go shuffle for 20 minutes.



Get some, girl. Thought this was cool. Hope she did well.



Still moving slowly toward the Start



Ah yes, the clothes that runners strip at the Start Line. A common sight at any marathon, especially at Marine Corps in late October



Spectators taking pictures from the steps of Winter Garden / PPG



Liberty Avenue, outskirts of the Strip District



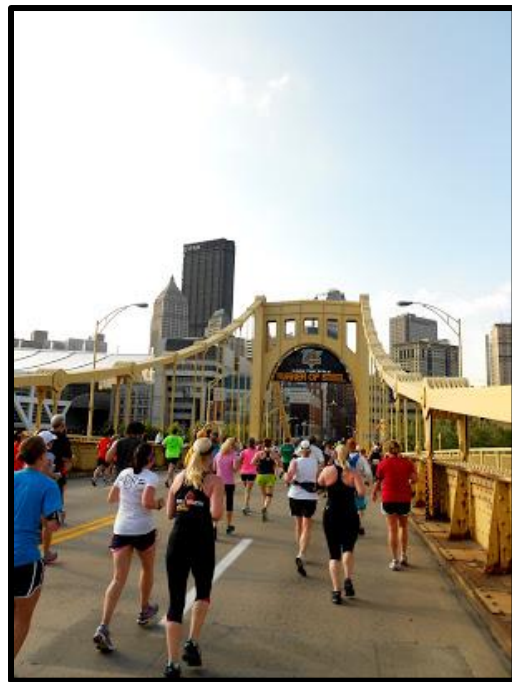
Great volunteering effort for this race. Thanks to all of you!





High paws to the toy poodle





Graf art with a message... bucket lists on the side of the building



Great cheerleading effort in this race as well. Thanks girls!



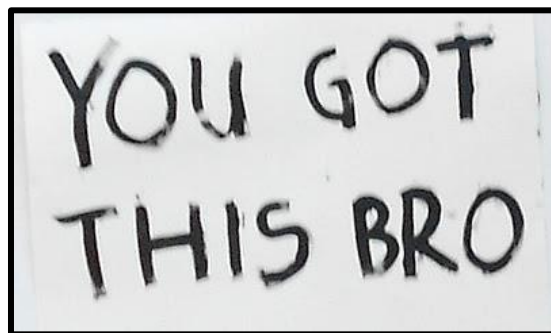
Thought this was a cool picture



This was a motivated cheer group. Just look at the runners!



...Here they are



Thanks to whoever made this sign





"Yinz" is a Pittsburgh thing... the equivalent of "Y'all" in the South, "You" in some areas of New York, and "You guys" or "You all" everywhere else. It means *you uns...* and is pronounced *Yinz*.





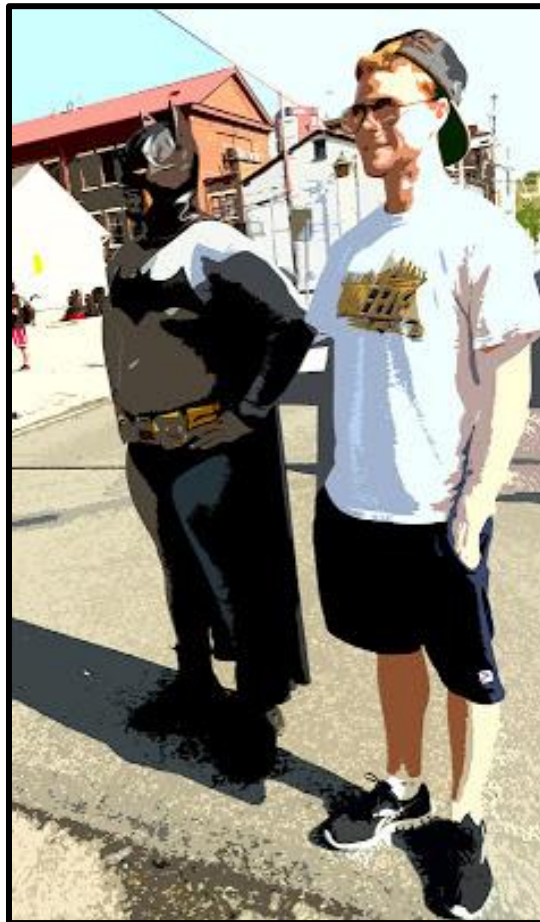
The first group of Half Marathoners that we saw walking through Southside



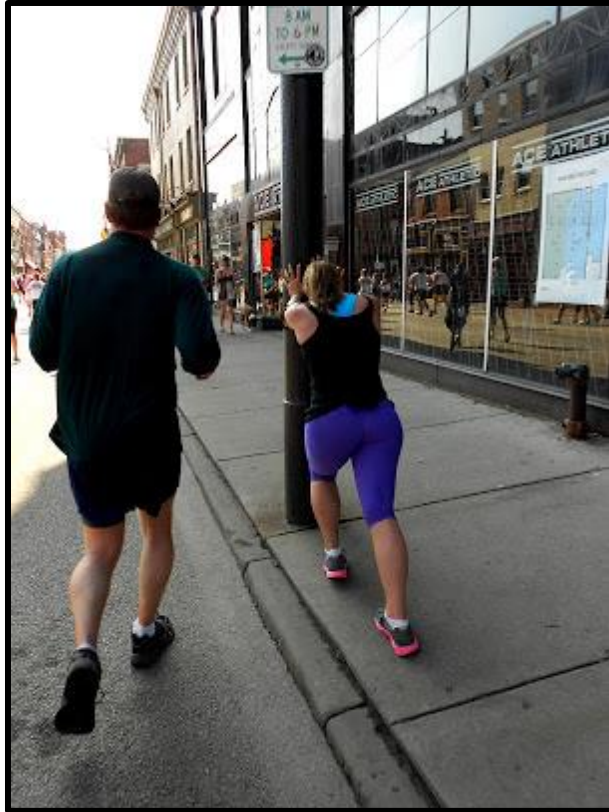
Here's that group I saw setting up early in the morning



And here's another motivator. Thanks!



What marathon would be complete without Batman?



The light pole calf stretch... one of about ten common stretches seen on the side of any marathon course, bested only in popularity by the curb stretch

Posted 6th May 2012 by mj

Labels: 2012 pittsburgh marathon photos fitness pittsburgh marathon blog pittsburgh marathon blogger pittsburgh marathon pictures

More 2012 Pittsburgh Marathon Photos

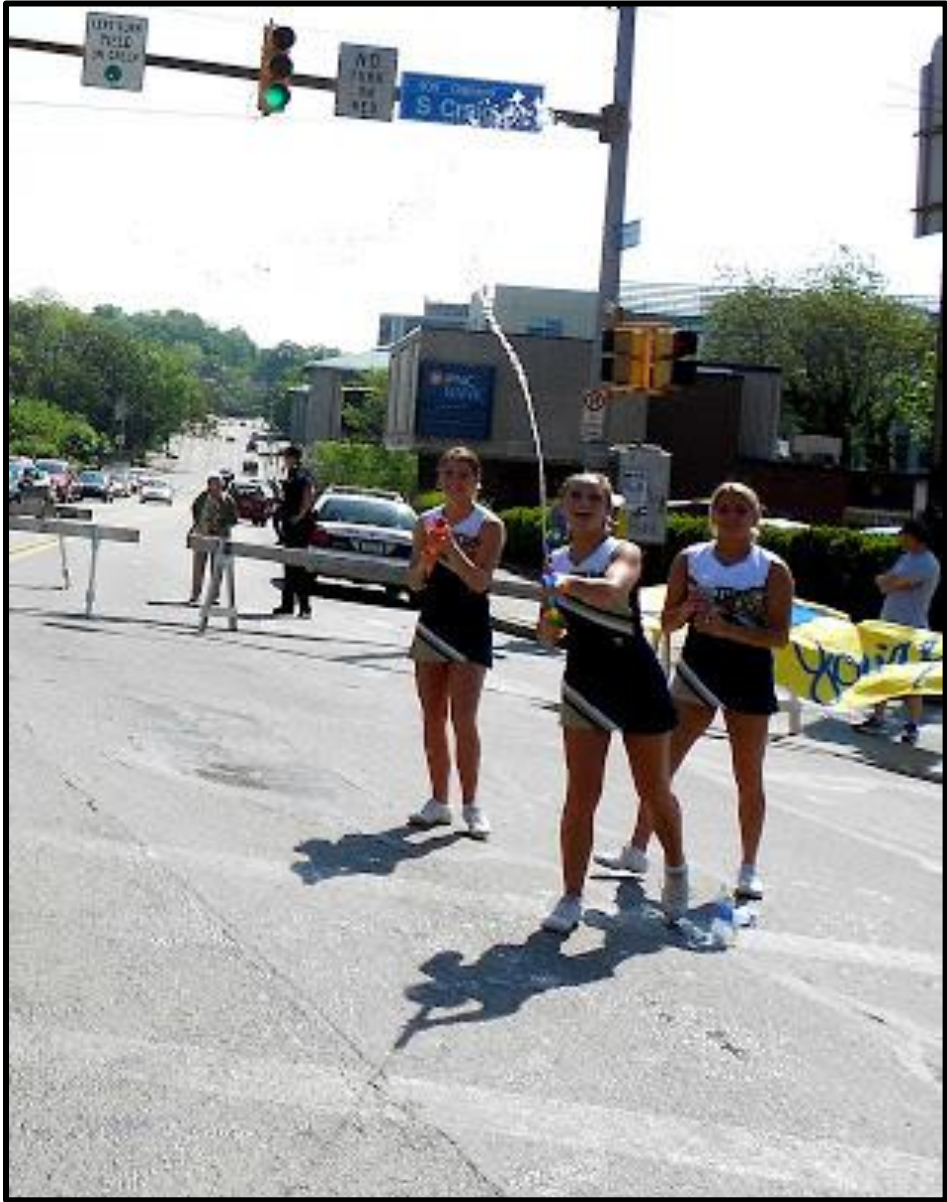
May 6th 2012

Here's the second installment of random course photos from today:



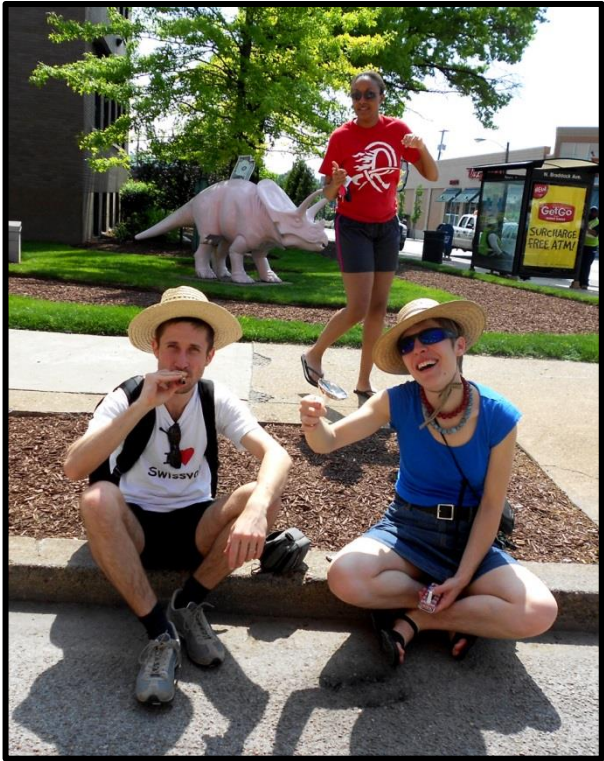








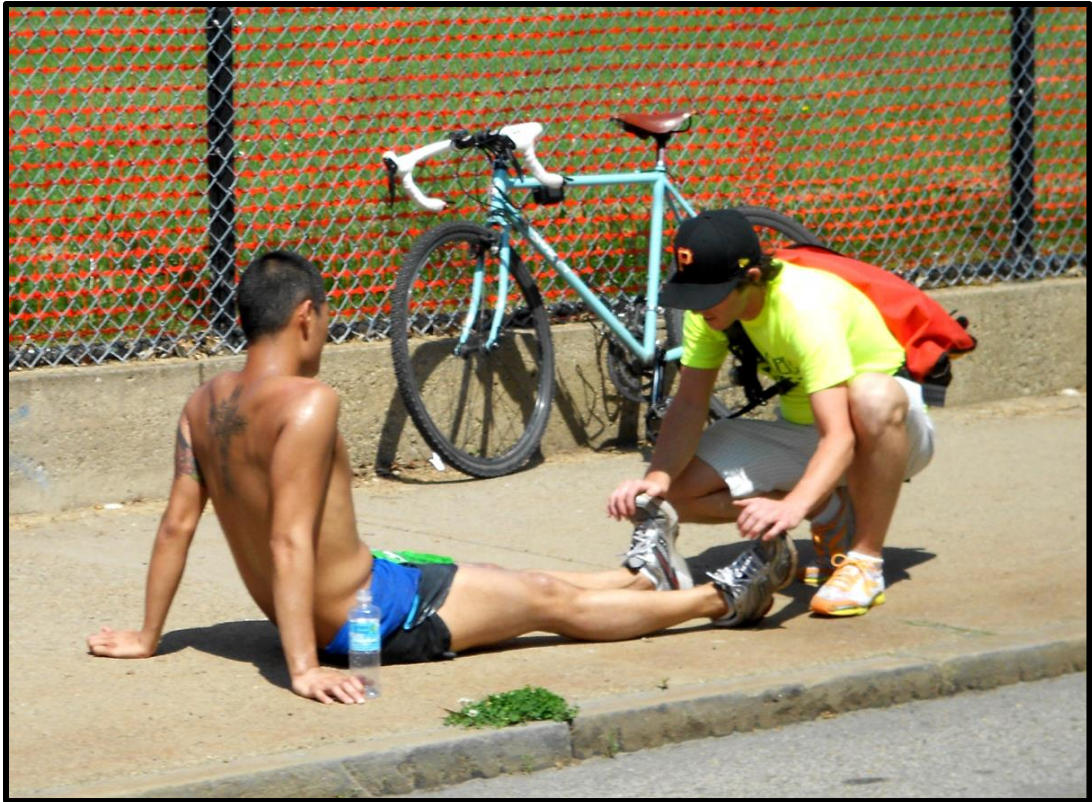
Fight the good
fight; Finish
the Course;
Keep the
Faith!
2 Timothy 4:7



















Posted 6th May 2012 by mj

Labels: 2012 pittsburgh marathon photos fitness pittsburgh marathon pictures pittsburgh runner photos

Writing, Driving, & Loving

May 19th, 2012

I've gotten away from writing. Here I am tonight, like so many times before, furiously and blindly scribbling in the notebook on my lap while I drive... because nothing motivates me to write more than six hours to myself and my obnoxiously loud mind. What I think about most on the road... is my family. The following few posts are my tribute to, encouragement of, and thanks & prayer for each of them at this point in their respective lives.

Posted 19th May 2012 by mj

Labels: despite the obstacles family family love home and family MJ writing and driving

Ayla Charis

May 19th, 2012

Ayla is the first of our four to not have a biblically-inspired name. Her name, in fact, was one of momma's final three choices: Layla, Leia, and Ayla. After pondering it for a second, I put in my two bits. "Layla, really? Think of the teenage years, when every wannabe suitor with half a talent is strumming out Clapton and singing outside her window in the piss-pouring rain at 2 A.M.... No thanks, let's spare her and ourselves the misery." "Leia, well, that's better. Our daughter will be the conquest of every Star Wars / Trekkie nerd that lives in his mom's basement for miles around..." "How's the name Ayla? She's the strong heroine in Jean M. Auel's Clan of the Cave Bear, which I understand was a horrible movie, but I find to be a great book series, with a lot of history in our family." The name stuck. Middle name Charis (Grace, in Greek) was what I wanted to name my daughter long before I ever met Petra or even contemplated a long-term relationship.

Ayla, you are such an amazing snuggler. When I come home after a painfully-long set of days apart from you all (my beautiful family), you especially--along with your mother and sister--make me feel that I was incredibly missed. In the last year, you and I have developed this amazing bond that I cherish above any earthly possession. When you curl up in my arms, you are content to be nowhere else for as long as I'm there--literally, for hours and hours--as you know too well that I'm here today, gone tomorrow. Nothing makes me feel more like a strong and protective and loving father, as the unflinching and unabashed trust you have for me and in me. I cannot believe that you will be three years old in less than a week!

Thank you for some phenomenal twos... they were far from 'terrible.' You can use the restroom by yourself, feed yourself, and par for the course in our family, pretty much do everything an adult can do, physical limitations notwithstanding. I treasure these days... this "now" moment of your life. I love you so very, very much. Thank you for your wonderfully sweet spirit. Thank you for the gift of you! I thank God for the joy you bring to my life, and for all that you're made of, all that you are, and all that you ever will be.

Posted 19th May 2012 by mj

Labels: ayla ayla charis ayla charis speights clan of the cave bear home and family

Lily Ava

May 19th, 2012

Lily was our first daughter, and after two boys, she was a welcome relief to balancing the family back out. Petra loved the name Lily, and I couldn't agree more. Subtly keeping in line with the biblical names of our boys, Lily can be found referenced in the Bible as Lily of the Valley, a flower of the Northern Hemisphere found in Europe, Asia, and the Appalachian Mountains of North America. The name Lily is fun... We call her Lilybear, Lilybug, Lil;' when it's time to get out of the pool or the bathtub, it's "get out of the water, Lily! (water lily)" Her middle name, Ava, is derived from the Jewish *Chava* (pronounced Hhavva), meaning 'little bird.' In the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, there is a song dedicated to a daughter with this name. Lily is every bit 'our little bird.'

Lily, you are so vibrant and full of LIFE! You are always the first one to greet me at the door with a whole-body smile, giddy laughter, and a "DAADDDYYYYY!!!!!" ...followed by a full-speed hug! Your name, your description, your total being... should never be put to paper without an exclamation point to follow! You have in recent years become such a helpful and caring individual, and you are so full of love! I only wish I could harness it, capture that beautiful spirit--if only for a moment... bottle it up for rejuvenation in the rainy days of my life. But you are as wonderfully wild and uncharted as the stallions you love to draw... as 'all the pretty ponies' which we sing to you and your sister each night. The only time that I can hold you for any length of time, without fidget or fit, is when you sleep. And you never sleep with blankets... so uniquely you. Like your daddy, you are tuned into the needs of others, and are especially empathetic

to others' pain. I adore that in you. Coupled with your love of art, you are inexplicably and undeniably a girl after your father's own heart. You are also very strong. Like your mother, you are fearless in the face of giants; unwavering in the face of persuasive compromise. Stay big at heart and small in spirit, sweet Lily!! Don't fly so quickly, I pray. Thank God for You!!!

Posted 19th May 2012 by mj

Labels: Chava father's love home and family Lily Ava Lily Speights speights family

A Day in the Life: "When I Grow Up"

May 20th, 2012

"What do you guys want to do when you grow up?" Here are my kids' responses:

Josh: "I want to be a Marine. Definitely."

Caleb: "I want to either be a chef, a cook, or work at Barnes & Noble because they have Starbuck's there."

Lily: "When I grow up, I'm gonna be a doctor!"

Ayla: "When I grow up, I'm gettin' bigger!"

Side note: Lily wouldn't let me put chocolate syrup--or her beloved strawberry powder--in her milk this morning, because before momma left early for church singing practice, she told Lily that she could only have regular milk today. That's 4-year-old integrity in action, and I love it.

Posted 20th May 2012 by mj

Labels: a day in the life family speights family

The Steinsdoerfers' Wedding

May 27th, 2012



These photos should have been posted a week ago. Unfortunately, I have been working 20-21 hours per day since last Sunday. Without further adieu, Adam & Lori's wedding:



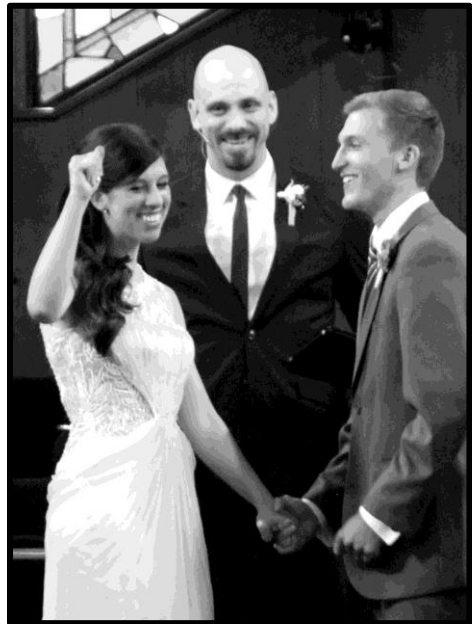
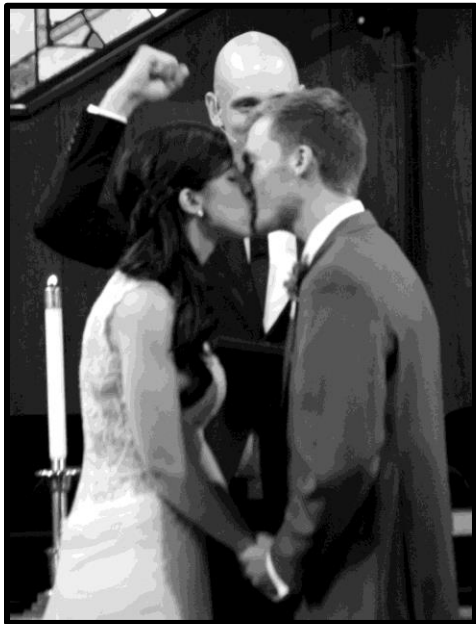
Petra tells me that this one looks like PJack (Pastor Jack) is a ghost. Heh, heh. She's right.

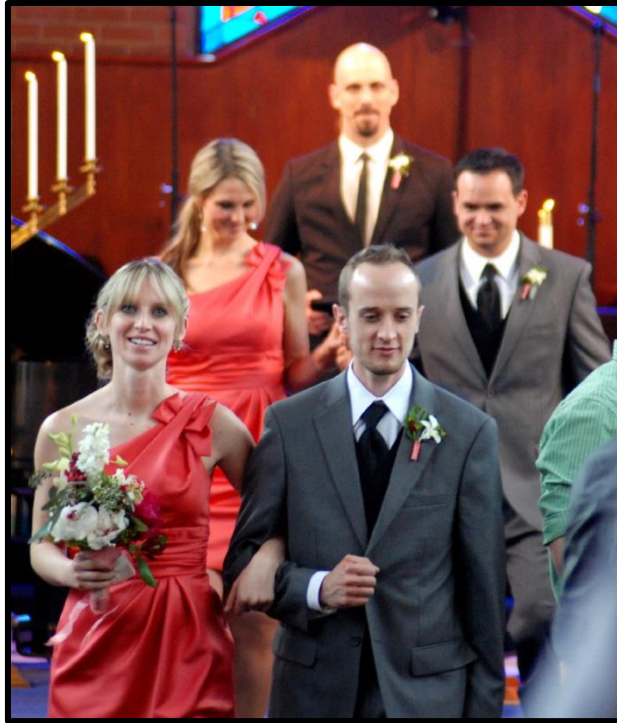


Lost the rings???



More Bars in More Places





Maid of Honor (Bride's sister) and Best Man





Brandon Oliver's gitstick -- He wrote and performed the Bride and Groom's theme song, entitled *Lori & Adam's Song*



Well-wishing friends, family, and a mob boss





Fernando & Ron



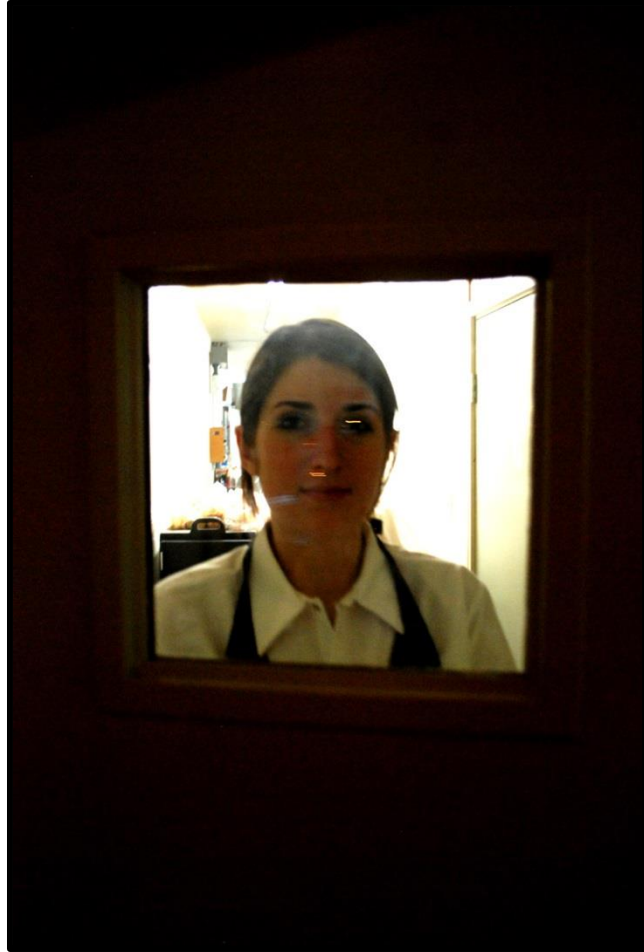
Got some good pictures of the photographer taking pictures, to send to her later... then lost her business card





Maid of Honor foreground; Rebecca helps affix Tiffany's button





Caught this caterer as she was coming through the kitchen door



Food was great

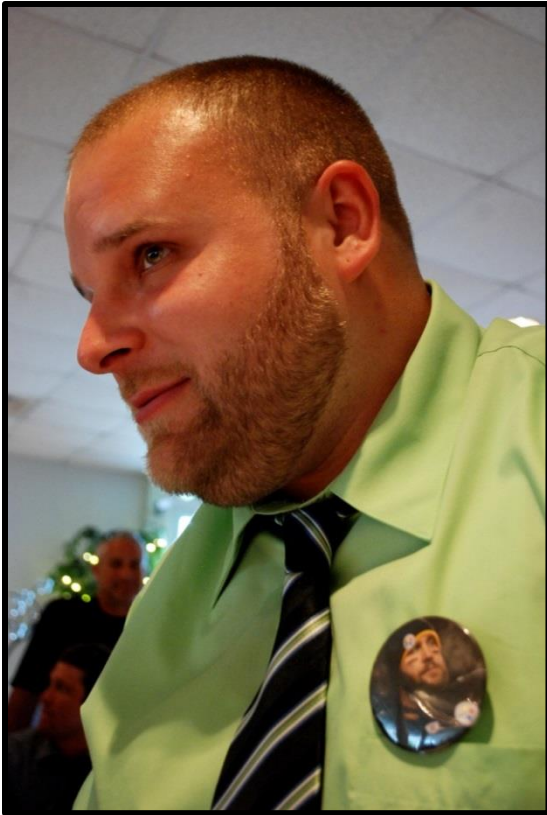


Classic Lanza Brothers



Brandon, the songwriter / musician



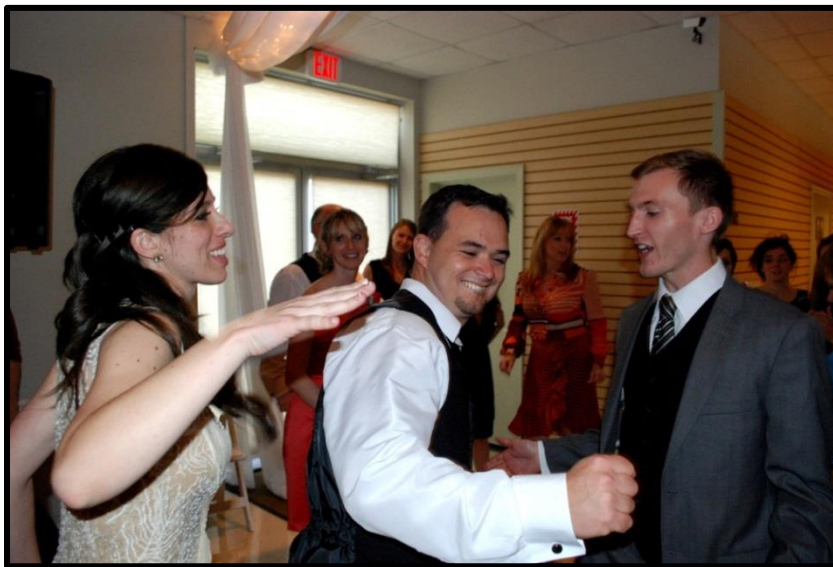




Jess Wagner, creator of bodacious cupcakes







Fernando cuts in





Adam & Lori had buttons made for all of us... some were funny, some were touching, all were uniquely paired to each respective guest



Father of the Bride



Booty Bumpin'



Dancin' Daniel... He's a Dancing Machine



Kelly & Katie



Disagreeing Couple







Ron & Rebecca



David Shim spins the Best Man



My own beautiful bride

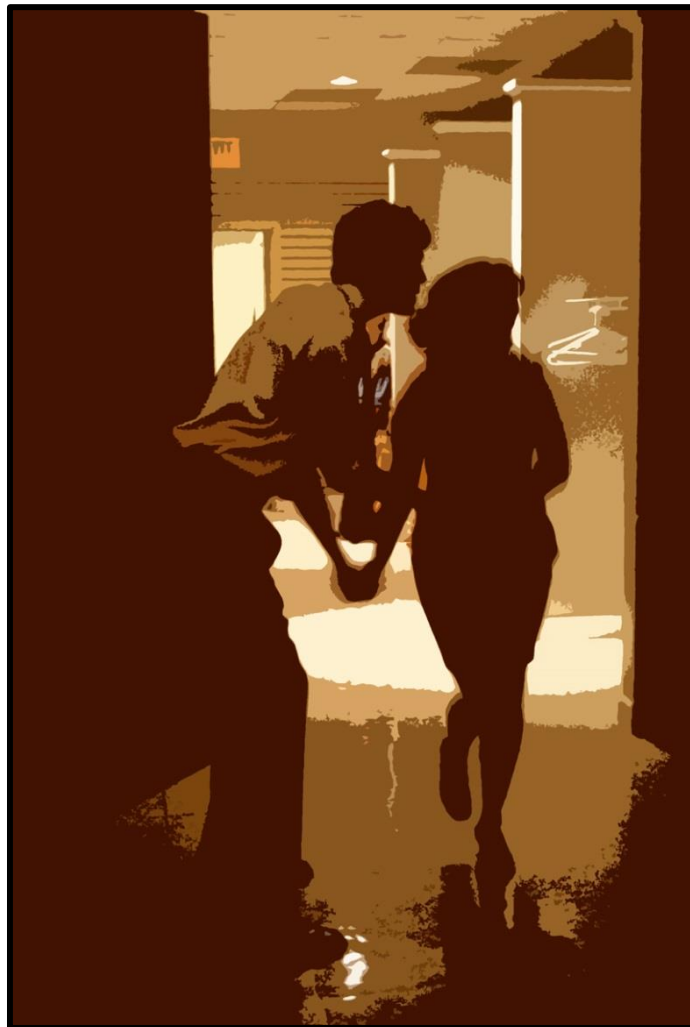




I love this crew



Mother of the Bride in blue





DJ Mikey D

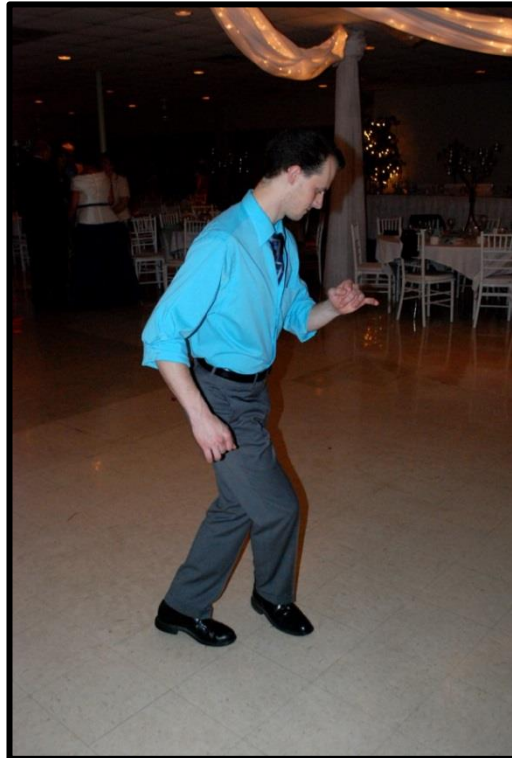




Pet & Tiff get down



Max & BM



... still dancing!



Cool spot. Great wedding.





Off to Paris!!!

Posted 27th May 2012 by mj

Labels: Adam Steinsdoerfer Lori Chiapelli Lori Steinsdoerfer love Steinsdoerfer Steinsdoerfer wedding photos wedding photos

The Punxsutawney Beavers

June 1st, 2012

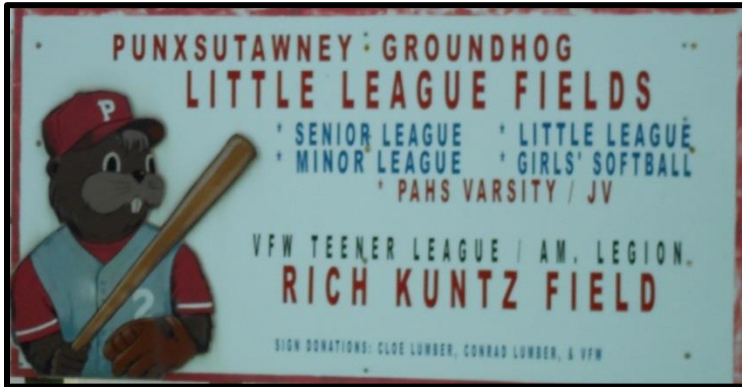


My company does a lot of work with a fabrication & repair facility called Femco in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. It's a sleepy town between Amish country and elk country that boasts a fine culinary arts school and some great athletes. Good people there. The first time I drove through the town, I saw beavers everywhere. Statues of beavers in people's yards. Beaver statues outside of prominent city buildings. Beaver signs. Beaver banners. Beavers, beavers, everywhere. *Or maybe they're muskrats*, I thought. This city

must have a large rodent infestation.

I was fourteen years old when I saw the movie *Groundhog Day* with Bill Murray, at the dollar cinema in Fairborn, Ohio. Had I watched that movie anytime since then, I might've made the connection that Punxsutawney, PA is home of Groundhog Day... and of the legendary groundhog who makes it famous, Punxsy Phil (sometimes spelled Punxy Phil).

I took photos of some of the groundhog stuff that instantly pops out at you when you drive through the town... by no means an extensive collection, I'm certain:













Posted 1st June 2012 by mj

Labels: groundhog city pa pennsylvania punxsutawney punxsy phil punxy phil where does the groundhog

2012 Eastern Shore 'Ocean to Bay' MS-150 Ride Photos, Part I

June 6th, 2012

Well, once again, Matt & I had a great ride this weekend, for the Ocean to Bay 150-mile bike ride--one of a hundred across the nation--that raises money to help stamp out Multiple Sclerosis. Saw some familiar faces, took a lot of candid photos. Here's the first wave:



Bikers get ready at the start point of *Ocean to Bay 2012*, City of Cape Charles, on the Eastern Shore of Virginia



Moving toward the starting line



Team "Sprocket Protectors"



First wave of relief volunteers fans out



No race would be complete without a guy in a lei and a grass skirt. Hey, where's the coconut bikini top? *DUDE...*



My regular race partner, Matt. We're not bikers. Or runners, either. Actually, we're kind of uncharacterized. But we've run a lot of races together... Run Swim Runs, duathlons, tri's, adventure races, e.g. For this event, we're the "Snot Rockets."



Two members of team "Ring of Fire"



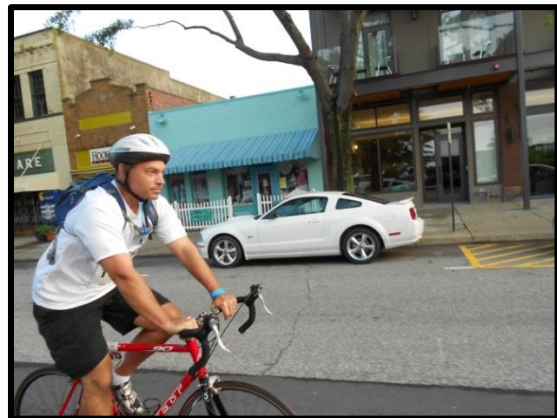
The OneLife Fitness Crew



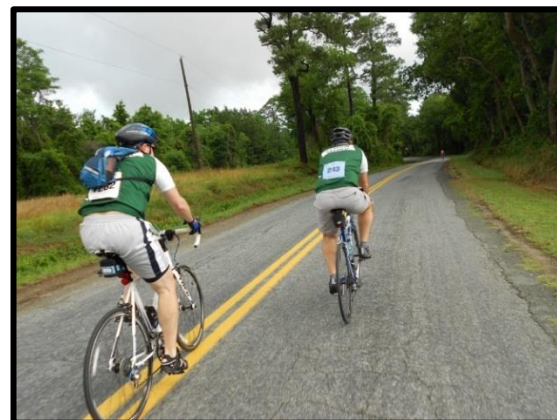
Team Portsmouth



Blazing Saddles at the Start



...And we're off!!!

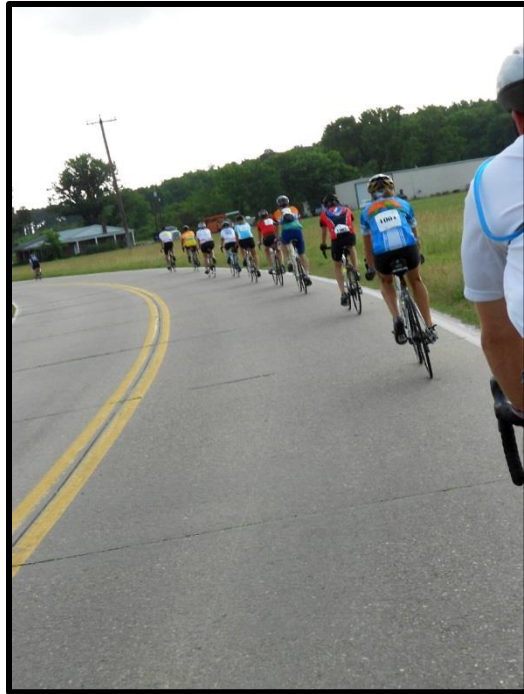
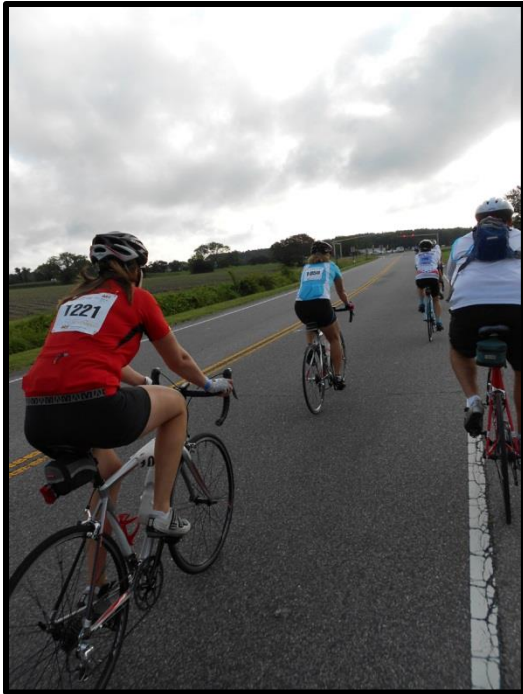




Cape Charles Lighthouse



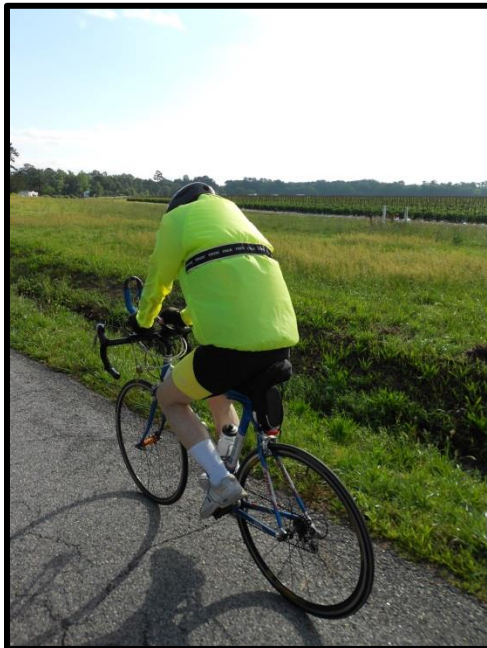
One of two buildings within the first mile that look like they belong on the set of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood



Early flat... that stinks!



A mountain bike will make you work the entire 150 miles. Hats off to those who ride 'em!



Grand Old Man of the *Ocean to Bay* ride, jacket puffed full of air



80% of your success in any endurance challenge can be attributed to this kind of attitude





Phew, first pit stop. Probably could've skipped the first one... but why?





Fat Frogs mechanic... he stayed busy the whole ride and took care of everybody. Thanks brother!



Two *Killer Bees* engaged in conversation



Team "Cycling Legs Against MS," aka "CLAMS"



We ran into these guys a lot... forget their team name right off hand

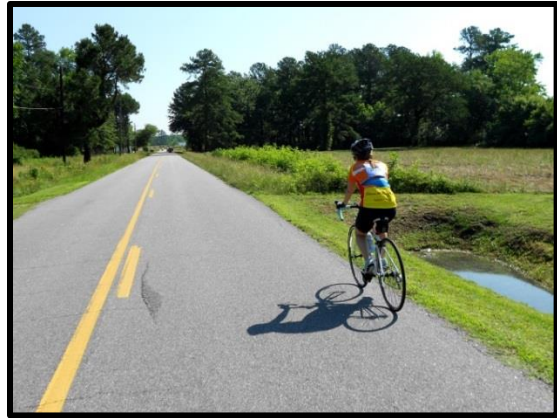


Matt refills his Camelbak @ the second stop



We love your enthusiastic support. Really, a great volunteering effort at this event, every time.





This old house is a waypoint I always look for



Desolation, wind at the salt flats coming into Wachapreague, the halfway point of the ride and the big lunch stop



Capt. Zed's Bait & Tackle near the halfway point... last year, stopped there for overpriced, dried out chew. This year, purchased three quad-packs of \$6.00 AAA batteries (for Ipod speaker)... by the way, do not buy "Enercell" batteries from Radio Shack. Rayovac lasted three times longer. The one time in this life I don't buy Energizer or Duracell, and I end up kicking myself all the way to the finish line.





Oh yeah, bring on the chow.





Peanut butter and "you name it" sandwiches, comin' right up!



Always in style



And who's this high speed motivator with the Corps' club patch? **Aarah!** *That's Oo-rah in one of the many Marine dialects.*



Love this stuff



This father-daughter team rides tandem. Got a picture of them together last year as well... they always seem to be enjoying themselves!



Team *Velo Bella*... we run into them throughout the ride this year



Team Portsmouth poses for a picture



Thousandaire gets her stretch on

Fat Frogs mech to the rescue again



That wraps up lunch... time to get back on the Seat of Discomfort

[...More photos to come within the following week. For photos of the 2011 ride, click on one of the following:](#) DAY 1 ...MORE DAY 1 ...DAY 2

Posted 6th June 2012 by mj

Labels: 2012 2012 ocean to bay photos eastern shore fitness MS-150 ocean to bay photos pictures vax virginia