

“I don’t really want to read Dave’s book. I just wanted to have one so I could impress people and say, ‘I have Dave’s book.’”

-- *Tim Wenzl, author, historian*

Other books by David S. Myers:

“Spearville vs. the Aliens”

*With Jim Myers:*

“Mr. Brown; A Spirited Story of Friendship”

“Mr. Brown and the Golden Locket”

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# ... AND JESUS CHUCKLED

Humorous Stories  
of Faith, Inspiration, and  
General Silliness

By David S. Myers

Special thanks to my wife, Charlene Scott-Myers, for her guidance and editing skills, her love and laughter (Charlene is the author of “The Shroud of Turin: the Research Continues,” “Screechy,” and “The Journeycake Saga”); to my parents, Jim and Ruth Myers, for passing on to me their weird and wonderful sense of humor (Dad and I are co-authors of “Mr. Brown, A Spirited Story of Friendship” and “Mr. Brown and the Golden Locket”); to Bishop Ronald M. Gilmore, for allowing me a voice in the *Southwest Kansas Register*, and to Bishop John B. Brungardt, for allowing that voice to continue; to the people of southwest Kansas, who have never tried even once to have me run me out of town (that I know of); to my Lab, Sarah, for helping me realize what’s truly important in life; and, as always, to the Good Lord, who has humbly refused any royalties for this book, should there be any.

# Forward

For more than ten years now, I have watched David Myers at work. So I know how Harold Ross (founder of the *New Yorker* magazine) felt working in the same building with James Thurber.

In these years, David has *found his voice*. Now *voice* has something to do with the choice and arrangement of words, of course. But it has more to do with the hidden ground from which they spring: from the perception, the intuition, the imagination, the inspiration ... from this original “David-Ground”, and from no other. He has learned how to tap into that, and his *finding* has become a *creating*.

That’s what the Hebrew poet saw when God *found his voice* in Psalm 29. That’s what the biographer saw when Martin Luther King, Jr. *found his voice* in that Montgomery bus-boycott speech of December 1955. That’s what I saw as these pages emerged slowly from David’s keyboard: our own local *Walter Mitty* finding his voice, and all his readers finding a whimsical, teasing, friend.

Robert Olen Butler (a Floridian who won a Pulitzer Prize for his fiction a few years ago) once put it this way: ... *as you develop an ear for writing, you’ll hear your work **thrum** when it’s right and **twang** when it’s wrong.*

The *thrum*, that’s mostly what I find here. Listen carefully to David’s voice, and you will too.

+ **Most Rev. Ronald M. Gilmore**  
**Bishop Emeritus of Dodge City, Kansas**

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## *A note from the Author*

These columns, almost all of which were published in the *Southwest Kansas Catholic Register* newspaper, are a tribute to the two bishops of the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City under which I served: the Most Rev. Ronald M. Gilmore, and the Most Rev. John B. Brungardt. They are among the most devout and holy men I've ever known, not to mention deeply intellectual, and yet they allowed a slightly off-center humorist with questionable grammar skills to take control of their diocesan newspaper.

Early on, I struggled with the idea of putting a humor column into a Catholic newspaper (as did a few readers). I was pleased to discover Father James Martin, SJ, a noted speaker who wrote of the importance of humor in religion. He said that while some people dismiss any notion of humor in the Church, the parables themselves include segments that were originally meant to be “laugh-out-loud” funny. (This shows you that while life is eternal, humor doesn't necessarily stand the test of time. I can't see anywhere in the parable of the Good Samaritan where I would burst into uncontrollable fits of laughter.)

The point is, we need to laugh! We need to search out the funny! We need to, all of us, always be ready to embrace our inner-goofball!

You want serious? Open your newspaper to page ... well, *any* page! Can't we squeeze in a bit of zaniness now and then? Just a tad? A pinch? *A tiny dose of good humor?*

The shortest scripture verse is, “Jesus wept.” It's unfortunate that there isn't a place in the Gospel where it reads, “And Jesus chuckled,” or “Jesus laughed out loud,” because you can bet he did. If Jesus is a conduit of joy, can you imagine a

Jesus who never laughed? Or who never in his entire 33 years heard a joke he thought was laugh-out-loud funny?

Or, as a child, never laughed so hard that goat's milk came out his nose? Sure, Jesus is the Son of God, but he was, at the same time, a human child. And at some point there's a very strong possibility that Jesus got to laughing so hard while drinking milk that suddenly ... *splort!* It's a rite of passage after all!

The ability to laugh makes us better Christians, better people. When used well and without intent to harm, humor suggests humility. And it heals, of course. That, hopefully, is what these columns are all about, to shed a little light onto what can at times be an awfully dark path.

Muslim comedian, Ahmed Ahmed noted, "The power of laughter can medicate a tragic situation." Ahmed is part of a comic duo; the other half happens to be Rabbi Bob Alper, who said, "Comedy is a very holy endeavor, in that it enables people to cope with sadness and with tension and with crisis."

We must laugh -- at ourselves, at all the lunacy in this wonderful world God gave us. To *not* laugh, to *not* look for the inner goofball, is to deny such a joyous part of Christ's teachings.

Enjoy.

-- David S. Myers, May 14, 2014

“God bless the Hair Club for Men!  
Three cheers for anyone who claims to have had  
tea with Bigfoot! Kudos to every weird one of us!  
And hooray for God, who created humanity when  
He knew from the start that we would be  
anything but usual.”

-- *David S. Myers*

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# Lute player teams with drummer boy for first Christmas concert

**A** long time ago in the forests of southwestern Bethlehem, there lived a lonely shepherd boy named Foster, who enjoyed nothing more than playing his lute for his flock.

One day a sheep dog came to his cottage door asking Foster if he had any job openings.

Being tender of heart but weak of mind, Foster offered the sheep dog a job, and even agreed to provide full medical benefits. Before long, Foster's flock began to thin and the sheep dog began to thicken. By the time Foster realized he had hired a wolf that was cleverly disguised as a dog, the wolf had made his escape and was off selling "prime" Sahara real estate to one of the lost tribes of Israel.

Deeply saddened by the loss of his sheep, Foster took to herding gnats, which went moderately well until sheering season when he had tremendous difficulty working the tiny sheering scissors. He then switched to squirrels, but after sheering nearly 450 he only had enough fur to weave a nose-warmer that covered one nostril.

Still missing his sheep and tired of being hit in the head with pine-cones by angry, naked squirrels, Foster decided to give up herding, so he grabbed his lute and took to the road. A few days later he was playing outside an inn on 57th Street in downtown Bethlehem when a little boy with a drum came walking by, lured by the sound of the music. Upon reaching Foster, the boy reflexively grabbed his sticks and began tap-

ping his drum to the beat of Foster's lute.

"Come they told me," the boy sang as he pa rum pum pum pummed his drum. "A new born King to see..." *pa rum pum pum pum*. "Our finest gifts we bring," *pa rum pum pum pum*. "...To lay before the King," *pa rum pum pum pum — rum pum pum pum — rum pum pum pum*.

The song ended to uproarious applause by dozens of bystanders, a few donkeys, an ox and a lamb.

"Wow, you really know how to rum pum pum!" Foster said eagerly. "What's your name?"

"I am called the Little Drummer Boy," he said with his head held high. "I have been charged by my ancestors, all the angels in heaven, and — shall I say? Yes! — God Himself to play my drum before our newborn savior, the King of Kings, Jesus the Lord. You can call me Max."

Foster had canceled his subscription to the *Southwest Bethlehem Register* some time ago and therefore hadn't heard about the impending birth of Jesus, so Max told him of the prophecy, including that a star would lead them to the child savior. He also told Foster he should really think about renewing his subscription to the *SBR*.

Foster was stunned by the news. *Why now?* he wondered. Things weren't so bad. He had happily been worshipping several gods, including his favorite, Fernwood, the god of chocolate-covered almonds. He rarely faced hardships, such as when Oscar, the god of burlap garments, became angered and caused severe chafing, or when Lucille, the goddess of partly cloudy days, would oversleep and inadvertently cause overcast skies and a 70 percent chance of precipitation just when a good picnic was getting started.

That night, as darkness slowly draped Bethlehem, thousands of stars appeared above. Max had spent so many hours scanning the night sky looking for the guiding star. Suddenly

a particularly bright one shown down on them in an intense beam, and the two musicians were blinded by its radiance. Shielding his eyes, Foster cried unto the heavens: “Oh, dear heavenly Lord on high, I can’t see a thing! Can you turn it down a notch?”

But Max, warmed by the light and disposed to a deeper understanding of the star’s divine message, disappeared around a corner. Behind the inn he found a small stable.

“Foster,” he whispered when he returned. “God *has* led us.”

The two walked slowly toward the stable where they saw a beautiful woman, a rather haggard but very pleased looking man, and a tiny baby, all huddled together in the soft flickering light of a lantern. The mother motioned for the two to come forward, but Max didn’t move.

“I have no gift to bring that’s fit to give our King,” he whispered, his voice shaking as he grasped Foster’s arm. “Sure, I’ve got my drum, but I only know one song for crying out loud!”

“What happened to ‘charged by God’?” Foster asked. “C’mon! We’ve nothing to offer but the talent the child’s father bestowed upon us. What better way to honor the birth of God’s son?”

And then Foster said unto Max those immortal words now etched in history, “A one, a two, a one, two, three...” and with the ox and lamb keeping time, Joseph and Mary tapped their feet and gently swayed to the music, ever so thankful that the two young wanderers thought to share their precious gift, no matter how small.

And the Baby Jesus smiled.

*Editor’s note: With thanks to H. Simeone, who penned “The Little Drummer Boy.”*

## A squirrel story

In an article in a recent issue of the *Southwest Kansas Register*, Tim, a co-worker of mine, detailed in his column how a squirrel managed to crawl into his office, turn on his computer and rename his hard drive.

The little creature actually scampered across his keyboard, not only kicking his Mac into start mode, but, in doing so, altered the name of his hard drive. For several hours Tim had to ponder the fact that an entire a month-and-a-half worth of work he'd completed on his book about the history of the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City had been destroyed by a squirrel.

It would take a team of experts most of the morning to undo its handiwork. In the end they managed to retrieve Tim's research.

What Tim didn't tell you is that the squirrel returned the next day and completed the first chapter of his book. Oh, Tim complained about the liberties the little rodent took with his research, but I happen to know Tim didn't change a word.

I have to admit that I found the squirrel's essay on the diocese's relationship to the farming community in the 1950s quite intriguing. What was it he wrote? Oh, yes: "People often spoke of the Church as a refuge, a place where, on each Sunday, family and community entered into a oneness as inexplicable and golden as the Trinity. But for the farmer, the Church was the river of wheat and corn they would navigate each day, the sun radiating God's infinite power, His heavenly bounty providing spiritual nourishment. It was on God's shoulders that they placed their hope for the future. Indeed, the Church and the land were one and the same."

Wow. I don't know about you, but I find that to be darn

good writing -- which was exactly my first impression upon reading it. My second impression was this: Why should Tim be the only one to benefit from the furry little scribe? It obviously lived near our offices and might be more than happy to contribute to the *Register*.

I decided to track the squirrel down and ask him if he would like to start by providing a guest editorial. I went outside, pursed my lips, and began producing chirping sounds. I wasn't sure I sounded anything like a squirrel until an aged man with a cane walked by and said, "Quit making fun of the squirrels. They can't help the way they talk!" I knew I was on the right track.

Suddenly I sensed movement in the branches above my head. I looked up and saw a little fuzzy face looking down at me. I told Tim to get out of the tree and I kept looking.

Moments later I finally spotted the squirrel as it was making its way up the trunk of a large elm. I could tell it was the squirrel in question because the look on its face said it had been contemplating social justice issues. *What a squirrel*, I thought.

I smiled and pointed to the window of Tim's office. Nothing. I started typing at a phantom keyboard, hoping he'd get the message. He just stared at me. I ran in the chancery, grabbed a copy of the *Register* and held it in the air. He scanned the front page and just yawned, which I found a bit insulting.

Then I had an idea. I went back inside, ran up the four flights of stairs to my attic office, and one piece at a time, brought down my entire computer -- 19-inch monitor, hard drive, printer, surge protector and even the little plastic box that plugs into the computer but has no actual function.

With the help of an extension cord, I set the computer up on the lawn outside the office. Then, on top of the keyboard, I set a single honey-coated peanut. *Mmmmm*.

I moved several feet away and stood perfectly still. The squirrel looked at the computer. Then it looked at me. Then it looked at the computer again. I didn't breathe. I didn't blink. Seconds later I breathed and blinked. But it didn't seem to bother the squirrel.

Suddenly he began to move. Yes! He was coming down the tree! Slowly, cautiously, he made his way toward the computer. He sniffed the keyboard. He sniffed the peanut. He grabbed the peanut, threw it over his shoulder and wiped his paw on the grass. And then he began to type.

After only a few seconds he finished and darted back up the tree. I saved and printed the document before I even saw what it said.

I pulled the paper from the printer and read:

*"Verbum sapienti sat est: dum vita est spes est. Quomodo cogis comas tuas sic videri?"\**

Incoherent rambling. Okay, so maybe I was wrong. How could I have thought a squirrel could actually write? I threw the paper away and marched the computer back up to my attic office. From outside my window came the soft cooing of pigeons.

*\*Latin for: "A word to the wise is sufficient: while there's life, there's hope. How do you get your hair to do that?"*

# God's simple truths

A few days ago I decided to take an evening walk through my home town of Spearville, Kansas. I donned my favorite pair of torn shorts, my least stained tee-shirt, and with my beard looking like a fern because I lost my beard trimmer, I headed out the door.

“Ahhh, there’s nothing like a good walk,” I said aloud as I stepped outside. The air presses against your face, the heart beats faster, and neighbors sitting on their front porch offer a hearty wave and a friendly hello.

I had walked nearly a block when suddenly I heard a loud, ominous buzzing in my ear. I swung at the offending mosquito, my fingertips grazing my ear.

In Colorado (my home state), once you swing at a mosquito, it’s gone, flying wildly off, trembling in fear as it seeks refuge under a warm light bulb or in the folds of some drapes -- not unlike myself.

But in Kansas? It only took a fraction of a second before the same mosquito came back for a second run. I knew it was the same mosquito because I recognized its buzz. It had an Oklahoma accent.

As it hovered near my ear another landed on my arm, another on my leg, and pretty soon the buzz was spread far and wide and dozens of the little creatures came from as far away as behind the Mercantile to attend an impromptu mosquito family reunion courtesy of myself and my O-positive.

I fought the valiant fight, my arms flailing this way and that, my legs kicking violently as I tried to shake off the tiny beasts.

Over the sound of the buzzing I heard a small child ask-

ing his dad why a man was dancing down the middle of the street.

Suddenly three children ran up to me and -- as kids are prone to do -- began dancing behind me in a similar fashion, in part to mock the crazy adult, and in part because it just looked like so darn much fun.

Soon a group of several small children playing with a dog saw the parade and joined in behind the others, all swinging their arms and legs as if taking part in some bizarre dance contest.

Within minutes, dozens of small children had joined in, one loudly singing the "Barney" song ("I love you, you love me...), and before long, nearly the entire child population of the town, nearly 300 in all, were parading behind me, the long line of dancing kids twisting and turning as it snaked around several blocks.

Town leaders peered out their windows and nervously checked their calendars, convinced they had missed the anniversary of the founding of the city, or some other big event for which someone had organized a parade without telling them. Several plans were quickly set into place, including who would repair the gazebo, who would prepare a speech and who would organize a brass band, nobody having any idea exactly why they were doing what they were doing, but sure that somebody must know or certainly they wouldn't be doing it.

Meanwhile, I turned around and finally noticed what had been going on behind my back. My mouth fell open; the line of dancing children extended off into the distance, finally disappearing around a block nearly half a mile away.

Up ahead I spotted St. John the Baptist Church. The kids were far too preoccupied to see their fern-bearded leader dive into the church, out of site. They continued down the road,

dancing and singing into the sunset.

I felt a wash of cool air against my face as I stepped through the doors of the church. I walked into the worship area and knelt down. I looked up at the crucifix and then around at the brilliant stained glass windows. I sat in silent reflection, alone in the church, and thanked God for the cool air and for a multitude of other things.

I again found myself drawn to the windows, the sound of the “Barney” song slowly fading, and it occurred to me that the images looked as if they could step right out of their frames. If they could, perhaps they’d head across the street to Straw Bales Saloon and Grill for a quick iced tea and an enchilada before returning to their frame-work. Then I began to wonder what I might ask Jesus should he suddenly emerge from the window.

I thought for a moment, my head lowered in prayer, when a question popped into my head. Of course! “Why did you give mosquitoes wings? It’s bad enough they have a hypodermic needle for a nose, but they can fly, too?”

And then I envisioned Jesus smiling and saying, “How else was I going to get you into my house on a warm, Thursday evening, thanking my Father for all your many blessings?”

I took a deep breath and realized it’s not wise to debate the Lord. Just accept his simple truths and know that in some inexplicable way, it all makes sense. As I walked home, the sound of a brass band in rehearsal could be heard echoing throughout the town.

# On being called to the journey

And it came to pass that God said unto Russell, “I call upon you to paint my portrait. The canvas, it will be one cubit by two cubits. The portrait shall be vibrant of color — pastel colors shall you not use lest you want a big pox upon your nose and from hence forth be known as ‘Pox Noggin.’ Through its brilliance, this portrait shall open the hearts of my children to my love, and their eyes to the light that shines from within.”

And Russell, prostrating himself on the floor of his garage (but careful to avoid the oil stain) responded unto the Lord, “I am humbled in your sight, oh, Lord, and I will do as I am bid ... um ... bidden ... bide.”

For two weeks, Russell endeavored to create a portrait of the Lord (the first week spent figuring out how big a cubit was). For the following seven days, he splashed vibrant paints upon the canvas — greens and blues and reds ... and that was about it, for Duckwalls was low on acrylics.

And when two weeks had passed, the Lord looked upon the portrait Russell had created, and after an awkward moment said, “Do I really look like that? Why does one eye look bigger than the other? And is my forehead really that big?”

Russell once again prostrated himself before the Lord (this time in his kitchen, but again avoiding an oil stain), and responded unto God, “Dear heavenly Father, if it was a portrait you wanted, why ask a plumber? Why not ask — oh, I don’t know — an artist? A clogged drain I can fix, but —”

We are all like Russell, my friends, each, at times, called to do things for which we don’t feel we have the strength, faith,

or the general qualifications. What I say to you is this: we are all far more qualified than we think we are.

Consider some of those who came before: On May 14, 1882, settler Constant Frickey homesteaded with his wife, Peachy Keen Frickey, on a patch of land on the plains of eastern Nebraska. As noted in Peachy's journal, Constant had to travel hundreds of miles to get each and every piece of timber to build their home. Every trip took nearly two weeks. Imagine the fortitude they must have had! The strength of will! And it took even longer to get the wallpaper.

We have far more strength, far more drive than we think we have. In those certain, wonderful instances, we find that our ability can offer wonderful surprises.

Most of you have never heard of Nathan Farnsworth. On Sept. 18, 1931, Farnsworth was mixing various chemicals in hopes of creating a cure for the common cold when he inadvertently invented honey mustard barbecue sauce.

Unfazed, three years later, he was experimenting with the effects of large doses of various pharmaceuticals on physical feats when he accidentally invented the Chicken Dance.

The Lord has a plan for us, his imperfect people. We may think he wants us to invent a cure for the common cold, but what he may really want for us is to create a pleasant tasting barbecue sauce. We are an army of flawed servants who forge ahead to do God's will despite our failings.

To find the best example of this, we need only look at ourselves. In 1988, a young underachiever who, as a young child years earlier, had to sit in the "special class" with the other terrible spellers, found himself a reporter for his college newspaper. My spelling is still so atrocious that I've caused at least five computer spell-check programs to spontaneously combust. And to this day I don't know an adverb from a hammer, and yet, here I am, getting paid to write a column about what

a poor speller/grammarian I am. Cool, huh?

You see, if the Lord is asking, then you have the ability. You have the time, the strength, and the faith. You need only allow him to lead the way. You may never become Pavarotti, but that doesn't mean God doesn't want you to sing in the church choir. You may not reach Everest, but who knows — maybe God's real plan is for you to affect that one person along the journey. Being called by God is to wonder how your journey can change others. Although we may think the Lord's call is only about us, it is, most importantly, about how we affect other people.

By now you're undoubtedly wondering what happened to Russell. Yes, God was disappointed with his portrait, so Russell waited until Duckwalls had more paint and tried again. And again. And again. And again. In fact, it wasn't until 37 years later that the Lord finally looked upon Russell's portrait and said unto him, "Now we're getting somewhere."

As you may have guessed, it wasn't his painting that ultimately moved people so deeply. It was instead Russell's tremendous efforts -- and his efforts alone -- to paint a portrait of God that "opened the hearts of my children to my love, and their eyes to the light that shines from within."

## *‘Infantes Journalle’*

Some of you are probably aware of *Infantes Journalle*, a diary uncovered in France in the early 1940s that details the daily events of an unborn child. The oddity, as you may know, is that the journal was reportedly dictated by the unborn child herself.

This phenomena, called “Talking Unborn Baby Syndrome,” or TUBS, has been scientifically documented on at least four occasions. In each instance, the unborn child had an uncanny ability to hear and learn from its mother’s speech patterns, thus acquiring a working vocabulary while still in the womb.

In 1889, Deanna Richter of Hassburgen, Germany was scared out of a deep sleep when a tiny voice emanating from her belly demanded, “*Genug halten dat schnorchen, einredy!*” (“Enough with the snoring, already!”) The voice was eventually determined to be that of her unborn daughter, but only after a team of German veterinarians removed suspicion from the family’s Terrier.

In 1917, scientists were amazed when Edgar Johnstone of Newhaven, Conn. carried on a 15-minute conversation with his unborn son, who it turns out had a fascinating theory on how the rise and fall of ancient Rome related to the geopolitical events of the day. Noted Russian biologist Dr. Leonid Gravsky called it the most profound theory ever presented by an unborn child.

As late as 1973, Portia Warwick of Theshire, England fainted when, just seconds after giving birth to her son, her newborn requested a “copy of the *London Daily* and a spot of tea.”

So far, *Infantes Journalle* is the only known instance where

a newborn dictated her daily experiences leading up to her birth, thus creating a first person written record of life in the womb. It has proven an invaluable record for scientists across the globe.

Following are just a few snippets pulled from the 75-page diary, currently on display at the *Palais de la Découverte* in Paris (through June 1):

- “There is hope in the womb. Hope -- that most fragile of threads which binds us to life yet lived; hope born anew, hope not yet scourged by the incessant roar of our own mortality. *Hope divine.*

“And it is *wet* in here. Very, very wet.”

- “Tonight Mama sang to me the third movement of Mozart’s Serenade No. 7 in D major. Her voice is as sweet as a spring rain. I could have done without her drum solo, though.”

- “It is Day 211. Today I discovered that I have a twin brother! I spent a glorious afternoon sharing my deepest hopes and dreams.”

- “Day 212. I am vexed. My twin brother turned out to be a gas bubble. Alas, I now know better than to seek conversation after Mama eats a combination platter.

“This womb is growing small. Should I prepare to relocate? A dryer climate would be nice. Maybe I could sublet.”

- “241 days have passed. What is *existence*? Who am I in God’s eyes? How do I relate to the world around me? Does the universe extend beyond Mama? Is there ‘life after womb?’ Will my life as I know it end with a birth -- a ‘delivery’ if you will -- into another world? And if so, will it include Chinese take-out? Too many questions. I must rest now.”

- “Nine months spent. I don’t mean to question God’s grand design, nor do I pretend to understand his mysteries, but it’s getting really crowded in here and -- What the ...? What’s going on? Hey! HEY!!”

• *“Wonderful news! True, I have left the warmth and security of the womb, but I have also met my mama and papa. Mama called me her most precious child, and Papa called me a gift from God. I chance to think that I will enjoy this life, and am truly thankful to God, and to Mom and Dad. Thank you for choosing to give me life!”*

### **The Theology of Hee Haw**

I wanted to take this opportunity to announce that I have been asked to host the final series of classes of the season that are taught through the ITV (Interactive Television) network. As editor of your Catholic newspaper and thus an expert on all things, I was wondering when they would finally get around to asking me. By the way, I hope you enjoyed last week’s classes, which were taught by a tomato worm.

My classes are scheduled to include:

1) “My Life Among the Lettuce.” This class details the year I spent in the Himalayas living among a patch of wild lettuce. I remember it like it was yesterday - I named the big head of lettuce “Grumpy.” He was obviously the alpha-head. I spent many long hours bunched up in a ball, each day moving just a little closer to him in order to earn his trust. Then, on one memorable day, I was able to approach Grumpy without fear or trepidation. And by earning Grumpy’s trust, I had earned the trust of the others in the herd. They had accepted me as one of their own. I had, indeed, become a member of the patch.

Cost is \$5. Salad will be served.

-- Dave Myers

# Moms and Dads Through History

## *Dads*

One of the great lessons I learned from my Dad is not to take life too seriously.

For Dad, this comes in handy at the store when he accidentally wanders off with someone's half-filled grocery cart, leaving his cart with a puzzled patron who can't quite remember loading up on all that flavored oatmeal.

For me, it's beneficial when I misspell a word in a headline, such as "Couples celebrate 50 years of marriage," which sits on the newsstands like a dunce cap for two weeks.

This lesson didn't come easy, and only after a childhood of equally important lessons, such as: *When your mother asks if you broke the lamp, don't tell her Dad did it. Moms will generally believe their spouse over their 8-year-old son.*

It can't be easy being a father. Adam, for instance, was at a disadvantage from the start. It's not every kid who can say to his father, "If it wasn't for you, we'd be living in the Garden of Eden where no one would even know what badger-skin chafing is."

Adam, of course, was very aware of the seriousness of his "original sin." Just before a dinner party, Eve became the first wife in history to utter, "You're not wearing that, are you?" to which Adam replied, "Why does it matter? It's not as if anyone's coming."

Being the father of Cain and Abel had to have taken its toll. Cain was 16 when Adam told them the story of how God had created Eve from Adam's rib.

Being in the midst of puberty, Cain began hoarding all the

ribs whenever they had chicken for supper. Abel thought Cain was crazy (*A woman made from chicken ribs, of all things!*) right up until the day he was invited to Cain's wedding. This led to Abel's eventual murder by Cain after Abel accused his sister-in-law of henpecking. Cain thought it was a fowl thing to say. Cain and his wife eventually gave birth to Enoch, which in Hebrew means "Son of Chicken Woman."

A handful of generations later, we find another great dad, Noah. In Genesis 6, we read that Noah took his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth out of junior college so they could help build the 400-foot-long ark, which they thought was really neat until they were told that electric tools hadn't yet been invented.

The event is noted in Genesis 6:14, which reads, "Being silly of name, Ham was made to do the sanding." This was done with sand papyrus. The chapter also notes that Noah was 42 when he started the ark and 600 when it was finished, which wasn't lost on God, who, prior to its completion, said in Genesis 7:25, "Make it snappy!"

As we know, the success of the Noahs' labors led to the survival of humankind. Humankind showed its approval by inventing slavery, war, and reality television.

One of those slaves was Joseph, who was so loved by his father Jacob that for Arbor Day he was given a really cool leather coat that made him look like the Fonz. Joseph's many brothers become so enraged with jealousy (all they received were gift certificates for a free gyro sandwich and a small drink) that they had him killed.

Or so they thought.

Joseph's father was devastated until he learned that Joseph was not only alive, but had been sold as a slave, imprisoned, and had slowly worked his way up the ladder to CDI (Chief Dream Interpreter) for the pharaoh.

Jacob was elated, especially when considering that the same thing happened to another son, Eggbert, just last week. (Unfortunately, Eggbert quickly fell from grace after telling the pharaoh he needed a breath mint. This son is rarely discussed, and only in top theological/hygiene circles.)

Then we come to another father, who, while never building an ark to save humankind, or whose two sons never went on to form the tribes of Israel, did raise four generally good kids, which, when you think about it, is a lot tougher than building an ol' ark.

Dad taught us not to take life too seriously; that there's always reason to be thankful. Through his example he taught us to always remember that life is a rental. How well we take care of it determines if we get our safety deposit back.

*Thanks, Dad.*

## *Moms*

When I think of moms, I tend to think of the great mothers from the Bible. Actually I think of the mom from "Leave it to Beaver." And of course I think of my mom (whom I had better include, if I know what's good for me!).

The first mother noted in the Bible is Eve, whose original name, Estelle Kravitz, was legally changed by God in year seven. He didn't want the grandparents of all humankind to go down in history as Adam and Estelle Kravitz. Adam's original name was Fenton Smyth, Jr., which God changed some years sooner.

Now, Fenton and Estelle's ... er ... Adam and Eve's tale is the original riches to rags story, the two being thrown out of paradise because Eve dared taste the apple. What's worse is that she didn't even like it. Said it was too "squishy." Said she would have preferred one of those juicy orange fruits with the thick peels, which Adam later quite proudly named,

“Dr. Adam’s Medicinal Orbs.”

Considering she was the mother of all humankind, Eve started out with quite a complex. When Cain would act up, Eve would shout, “I expel thee from the kitchen! Get thee to thy bedroom where thee will toil and sweat until thy toys are put away and thy socks are in the hamper!”

As we know, years later Cain killed Abel after Abel became enraged because his brother wouldn’t tell him where Cain met his wife. Cain moved to Nod leaving Adam and Eve to live out the remainder of their days at Mt. Ararat retirement community, which was, a few pages of the Bible later, squashed by a giant ark.

“Did you hear a thump?” said by Mrs. Noah, is the only known Biblical reference to the exact moment the ark landed.

We clearly see in earlier chapters that Noah’s wife had a tremendous sense of humor. Why else would she let Noah build a giant yacht in the back yard just so he could get out of mowing the lawn, much less let him name their boys, “Shem,” “Ham,” and “Japheth?” Actually, Mrs. Noah preferred Shem, Larry and Mo, but Noah thought “Ham” sounded more dignified.

As noted in Genesis 8, with all the cooking and cleaning required of Mrs. Noah on the ark, she still found time to train one chimpanzee to mix margaritas and the other to barbecue red salmon. “You can’t live on Dr. Adam’s Medicinal Orbs forever,” she would often say to Ham’s youngest son, Bacon.

As the years go on, we find another strong but unnamed mom, that of Moses’s wife. Being the mother of Moses’s children was not easy, what with Moses always off parting seas and taking business trips up mountains to get commandments and things. He hardly ever made it to PTA meet-

ings and had no clue what his youngest son's home room teacher's name was (it was Sister Bernice).

She felt she finally made a breakthrough when Moses skipped an important meeting with God on Mt. Sinai to attend his son's soccer game. But it came to pass that God became angered at being stood up and said unto Himself, "Moses can just forget about this third tablet," in which God told where to get a really good cup of coffee.

Some 2,000 years have passed now since the greatest mom of all walked the earth — Mary, the mother of God.

I think the best thing about being Jesus's mom would have come when the neighbor moms would boast about their children: "My son made the honor roll again," or, "My little Jehosephat made the swim team," or, in my mom's case, "Davy got the raisin out of his nose all by himself."

There would stand Mary proudly saying, "Well, my Son's just the Savior, that's all. Oh, and he doesn't *need* to learn to swim."

But it couldn't have always been easy for Mary. Can you imagine the pressure? How do you tell the son of God to take out the trash or to get his math homework done? And is long division really important when you're the Lord?

Finally we come to the last mom, a mom who, with her husband and four kids, traveled from town to town on a different kind of ark — a '58 Mercury Comet — making a home in whatever town her husband happened to be transferred to.

They reached the promised land (Colorado) in 1969, and there they stayed. They raised two boys, one sharp and aggressive, the other timid and crooked of teeth, and two girls, one a teacher and neo-flower child, the other a quilt enthusiast with a love for the saxophone.

Despite the many entrapments of youth, she made sure they

drank their Dr. Adam's Medicinal Orb Juice every day; she fed, clothed and guided them through the years, and raised them to have a love for God, family, and burritos.

*Thanks, Mom.*

### **The Jesus Filter**

... There are other ways that our ears can deceive us, but only if we let them. Like when someone tells us that we're worthless or ugly or stupid or fat or a whole bunch of other ridiculous things that people have thought up to diminish others.

And it doesn't help when we hear with our ears and see with our eyes the "beautiful" people on television – perfect builds, perfect teeth -- always wealthy, hedging their bets on their appearance and what they have, not who they are, not what they can live without, all the while subliminally urging us to be like them by virtue of their fortune and fame.

So, how do we exercise our eyes and ears -- and "exorcize" the trash? It's simple, really. I call it the Jesus Filter. You can't buy it in stores, although it would be cool if you could. Hook up a Jesus Filter – one for the eyes, one for the ears. Let everything you see, everything you hear, be filtered by Jesus's unconditional love. You will never be ugly. Never stupid. Never, ever worthless. The love of Jesus trumps all! The Jesus Filter. It's free and available now! Don't wait! Order yours today!

*-- Dave Myers*

# Making music

I walked into the little restaurant on 43rd Street in Lower Manhattan and sat down. Across from me sat Suzi La Femme, a Creole woman with such sizzling good looks she could boil a lobster in her bare hands. A few yards away stood an old upright piano, its master mysteriously absent.

“Pierre, where’s Dom?” I asked the owner as he walked nervously by.

“I don’ no where Dominic eez! Eet eez not lek ‘im to be let. I don’ no wat we’ll do eef ee dos not arrive! Ee eez why people come eer to dine! Witout eem, der weel be pandemonium!”

“Not to worry, Pierre,” I said calmly.

I gave Suzi a knowing glance and sauntered over to the piano. I sat down and let my fingers take over. The songs flew from my hands like a flock of doves beating melodies with every flap of their wings as they soared to destinations unknown. People turned in mid-sentence from their dinner conversations; wait staff stood frozen half-way through taking orders; and Pierre wiped a tear from his eye.

I started with Gershwin, moved onto some Bach and concluded with Debussy’s “Claire De Lune.” The entire restaurant erupted in a standing ovation and I closed my eyes to take it in.

When I opened them I was still sitting in front of the piano, but I was at home in Spearville, and instead of having just played “Claire De Lune,” I was trying to remember that “Every Good Boy Does Fine.”

“Every Good Boy Does Fine ... EGBDF,” I repeated to myself as I stared at the music. I pressed Middle C with my

thumb, then F. No, wait. That was E. There's F. Darn it! That's G! Did they forget to put F on my piano?

I don't remember a time as an adult when I didn't want to learn the piano. As a child, on the other hand, I'm sure I wouldn't have spent more than five minutes sitting on the piano bench before I'd be off watching re-runs of "McHale's Navy" or building a fort with a blanket over a picnic table

In my early 20s, I resolved that I was too old to learn to play the piano. After all, children start learning piano at 3 or 4. Heck, Mozart wasn't even out of the womb when he wrote his first virtuoso, "Uterus in B Flat".

At 30, I surmised that if only I'd have started a few years ago – say, in my early 20s — by now I'd be pretty good. And at 35, I decided that if I had begun to learn at 30 instead of wishing I'd have started a few years sooner, I'd be playing pretty darn well by now.

And when I hit 40, I didn't really think about learning the piano any more, content instead to spend my days watching reruns of "McHale's Navy" and building things in my yard.

Then, a few months ago, I heard that an old upright piano was being given away. It looked to be about 60 or 70 years old. It was off-key, some of the ivory was cracked and broken, several keys stayed down when you pressed them, and the wood finish was chipped in several places. In other words, it was *beautiful*.

The first major dilemma I faced was transporting it the 18 miles home. I tried lifting it, but my arms nearly detached at the shoulders, which would have defeated the purpose. I tried filling it with helium and floating it home; I tried flooding Dodge City and rowing it home; and I even tried convincing it to sprout legs and walk home on its own accord, which would have worked had it not been utterly impossible.

Finally, I turned to some friends at the *Spearville News*,

who, along with a couple other guys, not only provided the muscle, but brought a custom-built dolly to hoist the piano onto, and even brought the horse-trailer in which to transport it to Spearville.

Now, that's kindness you don't find everywhere.

When I sat down to learn to play for the first time, I was surprised to find that I didn't immediately want to get up and go watch TV, or build something, or play fetch with the dog. In fact, before I knew it, hours had passed and I was slowly but surely plunking out little ditties, trying always to remember that "Every Good Boy Does Fine."

I suddenly found myself wondering what the difference was; I could have begun to learn years ago. So, why now?

Over the years, that ol' piano had offered an abundance of both beautiful music, and just plain old noise. It was cracked and chipped, some notes including a weird twang or clicking sound. Although far from perfect, with the help of a higher power, it had the potential to be the instrument of something wonderful. ...

Birds of a feather.

## ‘Good Time Eddie’

Prior to our monthly department head meetings here at the Catholic chancery in Dodge City, we always spend a few minutes discussing Sunday’s Gospel. This month it was the story of Jesus healing the blind beggar.

“He spat on the ground and made clay with saliva, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, ‘Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.’ So he went and washed, and came back able to see.”

One of the questions we are asked is how the Gospel is reflected in our lives. I got to thinking about how the story would have played out had the beggar been someone, well, a bit more like me. The beggar is not named, so we’ll just call him Ed.

We join the story in progress where Jesus is telling Ed the beggar, “Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam.”

*Let’s listen in:*

So he went and tried to find the Pool of Siloam, but found it not within his neighborhood, and soon grew vexed.

“Does anyone know where the Pool of Siloam is?” Ed asked a group of shepherders on lunch break. “Does anyone even know Siloam? And if so, does he have a pool? Look, this is really important. You try walking around with clay on your eyes for a while. It itches like crazy.”

But answers came naught to Ed, who continued to wander hither and yon, occasionally uttering unto himself that if Jesus could raise the dead and turn water into wine, then surely he could have steered him in the right direction.

The hours turned into days, the days into weeks, the weeks back into days, and then the days skipped the weeks and

turned directly into months. And still the clay stuck firmly to Ed's eyes as he continued his important search for the Pool of Siloam, praying often for guidance.

And it came to pass while walking along 47th Street in mid-town Jerusalem he caught wind of an opening for a salesman. Being empty of pocket and hungry of stomach, Ed applied for, and was offered the position of sales trainee in the sandal department.

With the Pool of Siloam still swimming in the back of his mind, Ed would often inquire of his customers about the whereabouts of said pool, to which most would reply, "Dude, you got clay on your eyes."

As his pocketbook grew, his interest in finding the Pool of Siloam diminished. Soon he was able to rent an apartment, complete with a loft and a fireplace. He bought all the modern comforts: a sleeping mat, a sitting mat, and an extra mat, just in case. And lo, he even purchased a year's membership to the Roman baths, wherein he did scrub. But still the clay adhered like Amazing Superglue to his eyes.

As the weeks passed, Ed became bored with his life and its riches, and began frequenting Bathsheba's Bar & Grille, where he acquired the nickname, "Good Time Eddie."

And thus, the sun did not rise nor set on the corner grille without Ed therein to bear witness. The alcohol flowed like wine and he partook of complimentary pretzels until there were none to be had until the next shipment came in on Tuesdays. Women, noting Ed's generosity with a *prutah*, lavished him with attention, fighting over who would get to flick the salt from his beard and comb his eyebrows.

The more Ed possessed, the more he wanted – more wine, more women, more mats; but alas, he wanted to do less and less to earn them. He grew lazy and indignant. Nothing was good enough for him; nobody treated him with the reverence

or respect befitting a man of his wealth and stature. He no longer showed up for work and cared little when he received his pink slip. He lost his apartment, and his eyebrows became unkempt. His mind and heart became void of goodness, and he was beset with despair.

And it came to pass that when Ed was feeling at his very, very lowest, he knelt down in the muddy street, raised his arms and shouted unto the heavens, “Lord, God of Heaven and Earth, Father of humanity, this is all your fault! You couldn’t stand to see me happy! Am I not deserving of the good things in life? What have I done to earn your wra – “

Suddenly there came a commotion from down the street. People were crying and shouting. As they grew closer, the acrid smell of blood left Ed’s skin tingling. The cries grew louder and louder until Ed was nearly enveloped by them. He reached out to shield himself and felt the dry, rough surface of wood brush against his hand.

The sudden realization stole all strength from his legs, and he fell to the ground. He began to weep, tears pooling in the dirt. As he did, the clay from his eyes broke away, and light slowly filtered in.

When he looked up, his first sight was of a man silhouetted in the bright daylight, a crown of thorns upon his head, and a cross upon his back.

# Vote for Phil

*Editor's note: The following was written during the 2000 election fiasco in Florida.*

I'm kind of embarrassed to admit this, but when voting in the 2000 presidential election in Spearville, I became confused by the ballot and wound up voting for a guy named Phil who works at Walmart.

In Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri, several people thought they were voting when they were actually filling out coupons for free boxes of Clorox.

In Marshall, Texas, a family of five is suing the state election board for allegedly giving poor directions to the voting booth. When the family arrived to place their ballots, they were immediately surrounded by Dinka warriors who were awed by the family's pickup truck and its "magic" twin beam suspension.

Meanwhile, both Gore and Bush have demanded several regions complete recounts due to the race being too close to call. For example, voting officials were gearing up for a long night in Nebraska, where Bush beat Gore by a narrow 310,217 votes. Not to be outdone, Bush has demanded a recount in California where Gore barely edged him out by 7,199,744 votes.

In Florida, officials were made to recount the ballots for a second time. After the first count, a stunned local ballot official could be heard saying, "You just said to count the ballots. You didn't say anything about who voted for who."

Thanks to the election fiasco, the United Nations has issued a statement reducing America's status from First to Second World Country. This leaves Great Britain in the top super

power seat, with China and Russia running a close second. While the United States could regain its status after the 2004 election, until that time it can no longer police Third World countries, moderate international quarrels, or play rock n' roll music after 10 p.m.

On a local note, several interesting amendments hit the ballots.

In Dodge City, Amendment 365 was solidly voted down. This would have made it illegal for anyone to attend a county commissioner meeting dressed as a mallard. Voters obviously shied away from the amendment after last year's passing of the "Elmer Fudd Amendment," which made it mandatory for government officials to dress like the beloved cartoon character.

In Garden City, voters approved a bill requiring the removal of the numbers 7, 16 and 242, as well as the letter "D" from all public signs, including address placards. When the *Register* tried to contact Ray Ursbeck, author of the bill, they were told that Ursbeck was heavily medicated and unable to come to the phone.

In Dodge City, government officials were beaming after voters passed a tax increase for improvements to the local airport. Most voters missed the typo on the explanation-in-brief of the bill, which increased the amount from \$8 million to \$8 zillion. A team of attorneys representing the city has confirmed the \$8 zillion as valid. The city has now changed its plans and will begin constructing "Dodge City International Airport and Casino" in April 2001. Meanwhile, local residents will see an increase of approximately 700 percent in their city taxes.

In other areas: It's now illegal for anyone in Ulysses to name their hamster Benny, Lenny or anything that rhymes with Cheryl. In Satanta, those under age 18 who are out after midnight had better get home, fast; nocturnal tree frogs are

now allowed to carry automatic weapons.

In Kinsley, voters approved an historic amendment outlawing a facial expression. Says amendment author Aligor Kent, “I just got tired of my wife giving me ‘that look.’ You know the one. So, now it’s illegal. She gives me ‘that look,’ and I have the option of seeking legal counsel.”

Because the *Southwest Kansas Register* goes to press approximately six days before its publication date, this election could be decided by now.

But I doubt it. It’s more likely that come 2001, we still won’t have a president or an administration, and someone else will have to temporarily step in. If that person’s unavailable, they’ll go down the line until eventually coming to a guy named “Phil” who works at Wal-Mart.

And if he’s busy working the night-shift, maybe it’ll be one of our local farmers, ranchers, accountants, nurses, or laborers.

Come to think of it, that might not be a bad idea. Not a bad idea at all.

# Edna for President

Pope John Paul II has said that if you want peace, you must work for justice. I'd say it's about time our world leaders take this advice to heart. In the last 100 years, only a handful of leaders have truly lived out this principle: Pope John Paul II, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Desmond Tutu, Cesar Chavez, the Dhali Lama, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to name a few.

As the last presidential election loomed, a team of seven experts made up of religious, political, and financial leaders set out across the United States to find a potential presidential candidate not only supremely qualified to serve as commander and chief, but whose ideas would most benefit all humankind.

After tireless research, their quest took them to the community of Lake Town, Penn., where they tracked down 63-year-old Carl Eubanks. According to town folk – as well as the numerous letters he wrote to the editor of the town paper, *The Weekly Porcupine* (“Gets Right to the Point!”) – Eubanks had ideas so innovative that they earned him the nickname, Carl “Innovative Ideas” Eubanks. It was later shortened to “I.I.”, which made more than one stander-by wonder if he was a sea captain. Carl didn't mind because he was very fond of the ocean.

When the group finally tracked him down, group member Dr. Rolfe Switzer (the noted philosopher) nervously asked him if he would like to do his country a great service.

“Already am,” Eubanks replied, and went on with his harvesting.

With faces drawn, the team continued their search until

eventually landing in the quaint village of Prairie Pat, Ill. There they met up with Edna Greenburg, 72, widowed wife of Phil Greenburg (former head of the volunteer fire brigade and owner of Greenburger's Luncheonette). She is the author of three books: "Edna's Path to Peace," "This World According to Edna," and "Holiday Meals on a Budget."

After reading the books one night in a hotel room at the edge of town (the one near the ball field), the group decided that the books offered advice and guidance that, with Edna's leadership, could put the world back on track. It also presented a terrific recipe for three-bean salad, which they agreed couldn't hurt.

The next day the seven found themselves sitting in Edna's living room being served iced tea and Hungarian sugar cookies. With trepidation, Suzanne Martin-Martin, PhD., (she's the political novelist whose work for peace was nearly overlooked when she decided to keep her last name even though it was the same as her husband's, just to make a point) asked Edna if she would consider running for leader of the free world.

Edna replied that if not for the fact that it would interfere with the feeding of her cats, of which she had approximately 27, she would be delighted to run for president. When Martin-Martin suggested that leading the country was far more important than caring for a bunch of animals, Edna asked them politely to leave.

Their nerves raw, their patience nearly at an end, the group found themselves two weeks later at a diner in Meade, Kansas when a young man came in and sat down. When he began to speak, the seven were mesmerized.

"This world could be one in which supermarkets and super-department stores slowly disappear due to the growth of small, family-run businesses," the young man told anyone who would listen. "Grand-opening notices for new businesses

in southwest Kansas would no longer include the date of their going-out-of-business sale.

“It could be a world where absolute power does not corrupt absolutely. If it has to do something, let’s just say it causes a little bursitis and maybe a touch of gas.”

The group was sold. The young man agreed to run for president and the seven spread the word far and wide that a man had been found who had ideas for achieving peace and prosperity for all people. No more war! No more hunger! Sure, there’d still be acne, but nobody would care!

Sadly, come the primary election, only seven people voted for him. It would have been eight, but Dr. Switzer was preoccupied with his sick goldfish and forgot to vote.

After much discussion, the group decided that the experiment had already been tried 2,000 years ago, except that the man in question was the son of God. And if after 2,000 years of war the world still hadn’t accepted the teachings of Christ, why would they listen to some guy from Kansas?

## This one's for the couch potatoes

**R**ichard Blutowski of Team USA slowly approached the two suspended rings. The fact that the Olympic arena was filled to capacity – 17,000 fans cheering their nation's best – didn't help his nerves any. He was sweating profusely. Of course, the football-sized beer-basted sausage with German mustard he had just consumed hadn't helped. Neither had the pint of Guinness.

Two team members lifted the 235-pound Blutowski up to the rings. He dangled nervously for a few moments, his 48-inch gut hanging over his gym shorts. He tried to focus and, just as he had been taught, envisioned himself winning the gold.

He imagined the cheers of the crowd; he could feel the sting of the high-fives from his team-mates. He envisioned standing proudly at the center podium as the American flag was raised, a tear on his cheek, a Caesar Romero hat on his head. He wondered if he'd get to keep it.

This, indeed, was his moment.

With the noble poise of the Olympians of old, Richard Blutowski raised his legs upward, his knees slightly bent, his hairy toes flailing as he struggled to lift his legs past his waistline. With muscles rippling under a thick layer of fat, Blutowski urged them on. "Just a little bit further," he said through gritted teeth. "Just ... a ... little ...—"

Suddenly, dramatically, his legs dropped. The audience released an awe-inspired gasp before erupting into applause.

So far, so good, he thought. Refocusing his energy, Richard Blutowski, 40, TV repairman and model airplane enthusiast,

did the unthinkable. Releasing one of the rings, he allowed his full body weight to be suspended by only one hand.

The entire arena was at its feet. Such a routine had only been attempted once before, at the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, resulting in Romanian gymnast Igor Kromenov's body dislodging from its arm at the shoulder like a human Mr. Potato Head. The arm was later stolen and then recovered from a nesting doll-maker, who said he needed an extra hand around the shop.

Blutowski didn't wait for his teammates to help him down. Completely exhausted by the 37 seconds of effort, he dropped like a bag of wet laundry. He ran to his coach, Mildred Kendal (who, when not training Olympians, ran the local chapter of the Red Hat Ladies) and gave her a well-deserved hug. Kendal wiped herself off, and the two smiled for a herd of international photographers.

Blutowski graduated Cum Laude from the AAA School of Television Repair in 1985. Married to Maude, the couple has three children. It hasn't always been easy for the Blutowskis. In 1996 Maude gave birth to a boy, who, though they named "Phil," would only answer to "Raymond," leading the couple to financial ruin. The Olympics would offer Blutowski the hope his family so strongly needed.

Next for Blutowski was the pommel horse, where he would follow a strong performance by Irish bartender, Morgan McKinley, 44, who managed not only to climb atop the pommel horse, but to turn completely around on it in under three minutes.

The horse was not Blutowski's strong suit, due to the fact that pommel horse practice was held at the exact same time as reruns of the A-Team, which he had taken a blood oath never to miss. But Dame Fortune would smile on the American once again, thanks to a hopelessly lost bumble-bee that happened

to suddenly find itself in a large hive of humans after slipping through the arena doors without a ticket.

Richard Blutowski feared little in life; he was afraid only of his wife, her cat, “Scrapey,” boiled squash, and bees. So after struggling to board the pommel horse, when he saw a large, puzzled looking bumble bee around the vicinity of his nose, Blutowski lit into what appeared to be the lead solo from the Nutcracker Ballet, all without ever leaving the pommel horse.

McKinley’s mouth fell open. Kendal’s mouth fell open. The bee’s mouth fell open. It was another awe-inspiring performance by Blutowski, who, for his efforts was granted the Olympically impossible score of “11.”

As the springboard, parallel bars and floor competition were canceled due to general lack of ability, this was the final competition for the gymnasts. Blutowski continued to proudly bask in the glow of victory as he took the steps to the center podium. As the American flag was raised, the national anthem rang out, and the 40-year-old TV repairman, with a tear in his eye, sang loud and with emotion, “This land is your land, this land is my ....”

***Editor’s note:*** *A guy can dream, can’t he?*

# Death by any other name

The other night I had a dream. It seemed a werewolf was terrorizing southwest Kansas. On a night lit by a full moon, a young hero empowered by an Arnold Schwarzenegger video he had rented the previous night, decided like any hero worth his salt, to take matters into his own hands.

After work, he tossed his Wal-Mart clerk's vest aside, put on his leather jacket he bought at Good Will (the one with all the cool zippers), and headed for the park at the end of town.

Edmond (he preferred "Mondo," meaning "extreme" – it seemed to offset his 105-pound frame), sat down on a wooden bench and waited.

From amid the darkened trees came the sound of footsteps crushing fallen leaves and twigs into mulch. Mondo shuddered and fought off a tremendous desire to flee.

It came out of the brambles like an eating machine, its massive jaws snapping wildly in anticipation of the midnight snack sitting on the bench. Its rear legs supported a barrel-like body strewn with muscles.

The Wal-Mart clerk, who, only six hours earlier had argued with a 93-year-old woman who was sure he had overcharged her for Ajax, felt his courage slip away.

The beast was nearly upon him when his hands tightened on a box sitting on his lap. He lifted it, held it between himself and the monster, and turned a small button.

"This is Brit Hume with the news," the laptop computer uttered as it blinked to life.

The beast froze, staring wide-eyed into the screen.

"Today a bomb went off in a Baghdad hotel killing 19 people," the anchor said as a video showed people running from

the smoking building. “Nobody has claimed responsibility for the attack. Meanwhile, in Israel, seven gunmen raided a local college campus, killing 23. The killings are thought to be in retaliation for Israeli bulldozers destroying 50 homes in a Palestinian refugee camp.” More images, this time of families huddling together by their ruined homes, reeled across the screen. “Two American soldiers and several Iraqi children were killed when an RPG blasted . . .”

For nearly two hours the beast stood mesmerized as terrible news played itself out.

Suddenly the werewolf’s lip began to quiver. The creature started sobbing uncontrollably, his massive claws limp at his sides. The Wal-Mart clerk smiled inwardly, slowly set the computer down and approached the beast, placing an arm gently over its shoulder.

“There, there,” he said. “There, there.”

He walked him over to the bench, and the two sat together in the moonlight, the monster wailing like a newborn baby, its tears streaming down the the clerk’s shoulder. After a few moments, the beast stopped sobbing and stared quietly into the horizon.

“What I don’t understand,” the creature finally said, holding back tears, “is how humanity has let itself deteriorate to the point of self-destruction. We werewolves, we have voracious appetites. It’s nothing personal. But you . . .”

“Look,” the clerk said, “it’s okay to kill, as long as you’re doing so for a higher purpose. It’s okay to kill as long as you are killing people to stop people from killing. It’s okay to kill someone who’s thinking about killing you in the future. And it’s okay to kill someone to punish them for having killed. God gave us our intelligence, and we used that intelligence to invent the electric chair. And so it goes that if we have the best weaponry to fight and win a war, that’s just a further sign

of God's love for us.

“See, being human means coming to terms with your inhumanity. Thousands of Indians died in the Indian wars, but look what we have to show for it, super highways ... Pay-Per-View television ... Kentucky Fried Chicken. If we had been meek, we never would have won the land that is now the United States of America.”

The beast looked puzzled.

“Let me put it this way,” Mondo said, “God helps those who help themselves, and if helping ourselves means that we have to, from time to time, take a few lives, then so be it.”

“I think I understand,” the werewolf said. Rising from the wooden bench, he glanced up at the stars, swallowed the man whole, and ambled off into the moonlight.

# What I learned from the shrew

In the opening pages of Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew," we find a young man named Petruchio searching for a wife. He soon learns of a woman so temperamental that she is known across the land as "Katharine the Shrew."

For all Petruchio cares, she could be called "Katharine the Really, Really Awful and Sometimes a Little on the Smelly Side," because she's also *very* rich, and not bad on the eyes.

So, Petruchio visits Katherine's father, Baptista. Petruchio informs Baptista that he wishes to woo his daughter, who, Petruchio adds, is probably just misunderstood and, in all likelihood, a "really nice gal underneath all that violent rage."

Baptista asks if they are talking about the same "Katharine." Suddenly Katharine's music teacher comes stumbling into the room screaming that Katherine had broken her lute over his head after he criticized her performance.

The determined Petruchio makes a mental note not to leave any sharp musical instruments around, and presses Baptista for his blessing, which Baptista quickly gives, knowing that this may be his only chance to one day die of natural causes.

To make a long story short, the tricky Petruchio vows to "tame the shrew," and does so by being pretty darn snotty to Katherine.

For example, after his servants cook up a perfectly good meal, Petruchio flings the meat away, pretending it was poorly prepared, thus depriving the famished Katharine of a meal. And his servants don't fare much better. He calls them things like, "heedless joltheads," and "malt-horse drudge," which, when you think about it, isn't very nice at all (but only after you think about it).

By the time he's finished with her, Katharine is so "tamed",

that she's ready to admit that the full moon alighting the night sky is actually the noonday sun beating down on her face, simply because her husband dictates it as so.

But wait; there's more! One day while on a journey, the couple spots an old man on the side of the road, and Petruchio decides to further test his wife by maintaining that the old man is actually a young maiden.

"Good morrow, gentle mistress," he says to the old man, and then asks Katharine if she has ever beheld a fairer gentlewoman. "Sweet Kate, embrace her for her beauty's sake."

The story doesn't say what the old man thought, but I imagine he decided right then and there that he would finally break down and buy that ear horn his wife was always lecturing him about.

Katharine, who probably was wishing she was back home slugging her music instructor just like in the good old days, felt entirely vanquished, and said to the old man (who didn't even resemble a young budding virgin), "Young budding virgin, you are fair, and fresh, and sweet: whither are you going, and where is your dwelling? Happy are the parents of so fair a child."

"Why, how now, Kate?" replies Petruchio, who is really being a heedless jolthead at this moment. "I hope you are not mad. This is a man, old and wrinkled, faded and withered, and not a maiden, as you say he is."

"Pardon me, old gentleman," Katharine says, feeling as if her brain has just been put through a Play Dough Fun Factory. "The sun has so dazzled my eyes, that everything I look on seemeth green. Now I perceive you are a reverend father: I hope you will pardon me for my sad mistake."

Meanwhile, the old man's thinking, "Forget the ear horn, I need to get a hair cut, maybe grow some whiskers."

The first time I read this story (okay, the only time I read this

story) was in high school. In the tiny world that is my mind, every Shakespeare story is a bit like an art museum unto itself. Some passages are beautiful, and some I just don't get. ("Unto a mad-brain rudesby full of spleen," Katharine says at one point. I like the line a lot. In fact, I plan to use it at our next department head meeting. But can anyone tell me what it means?)

Nearly 400 years after writing "The Taming of the Shrew," there is one aspect of the story that hits a universal raw nerve, one that, sadly, time has not managed to heal. It's the idea that anyone can be so trodden upon that they willingly accept that which is not true — that the dark of night is actually a sun-filled day, that an old man is actually a young maiden, that abortion is not killing, that slashing federal aid programs will give our sick, disabled, and elderly a secure future, that you can promote peace by waging war. ...

It's almost noon, and it's getting pretty dark outside.

## My idol, Casper Johns

Several years ago, I had the privilege of interviewing a man whose career I have tried to emulate, a man who for 45 years digested Catholic news and events, and passed them onto the written page in a way that was entertaining, educational, and spiritually moving.

Although he led a fascinating career, I would be remiss to overlook his unusual early life. Born in 1930s Idaho, the infant Casper Johns “looked just like Colonel Sanders,” he said, “little white beard and everything. I was dressed like him too, right out of the womb. The doctors said it was because Mother had been frightened by a rogue chicken early in her pregnancy.”

Fortunately, the affliction proved only temporary, and by the time he began attending St. Cecilia Catholic School, he only needed slight therapy to rid himself of a speech impediment that caused him to sound like a southern plantation owner.

Still, those early sufferings left their mark on the lad; he was shy and often delved into his own little world where he called himself “Comet, the Albatross Boy.”

His introversion led to much ridicule by his classmates. In his second year of school, when a student dared him to belch the spelling of a word during a spelling bee, he timidly agreed. Afterwards, his teacher, an excitable young priest named Father Shaun O’Leary, immediately conducted an exorcism on the young Johns. Father O’Leary was not faulted for his mistake, for as noted in the text, “What the Devil?” by Dr. Henry LaPlante, C.Ss.R., D.D.S., S.T.P., Satan does indeed sound just like someone belching the alphabet.

Six months later, some bad meatloaf left Johns the subject

of a second exorcism.

When he entered high school, Johns began to write. Being poor in math, Johns, for example, would answer problems such as  $9 \times 7 = \underline{\quad}$ , with, "Life, a cherry pie, and an afternoon on a grassy knoll," which the teacher would somehow find added up to 63.

Soon after graduating high school, he was accepted into Edna's School of Basket Weaving, and in three months was fully prepared to begin his career as a newspaper reporter.

Those early days as a reporter for a Catholic newspaper wouldn't be easy on the young Johns, whose shyness made it difficult to conduct interviews, much less to attend large Church functions where he had to stand in front of people and take pictures. He would only conduct interviews from a distance of at least 50 feet from his subject, and always while wearing a potato sack over his head.

He had worse luck with photography. He would only take photographs as long as there was a wall separating him from the actual event and/or subject. When his editor finally demanded that Johns quit turning in pictures of walls, Johns paid his mother to dress up like Bigfoot, who, hunched over and arms swinging, would amble quickly through the room, allowing Johns to get his picture without being noticed. (These incidences unfortunately led to a young Dr. Raymond Pitt initiating a life-long study based on the idea that not only did Bigfoot exist, but that he was Catholic.)

Taking notes also presented difficulties for Johns, whose slow fingers were only able to write down every third or fourth word that the subject/speaker said. Then there were times when, desperately trying to write down a quote, his hand would seem to rebel. The speaker may say, "The Book of John tells how Jesus ...," but Johns' nervous hand would write, "Betty's School of High Quality Dancing," which led to

general confusion and at least one recorded instance of gnashing of teeth by his bishop.

In 1967 his mother was arrested on five counts of IML (Impersonating a Missing Link), and Johns was forced to make a decision. He called on a power greater than himself, and on an historic day in 1973 – after six years of intense therapy — managed to march half-way up an aisle to get a photo of their cathedral architect receiving an award from PAS (Plywood Appreciation Society).

Over the years, Johns would overcome many of his weaknesses, including his fear of three-bean salad. He would earn the Pulitzer Prize for Spelling, and would publish several books, including “Church and Politics,” “A Study of the Pontificate,” and “Big-Hearted Bigfoot; The Story of My Mother.” He retired in 1995 as editor of the *National Catholic Beacon*.

Before he died in 2002, I asked him if he would offer some words of guidance. He thought for a moment and said something about never giving up on yourself, despite your weaknesses, because God certainly never would. It was something like that, anyway. I wasn’t quick enough to write down but a few words. Somehow I don’t think he would mind.

## Looking for God's tender mercies

A few days ago, just hours after I had spotted a full-sized rabbit grazing in my back yard, I was out mowing when I saw a blur of a tiny creature darting away from the mower. I thought at first that it must be Wayne, a kindly toad that vacations in my backyard, but upon further inspection I noticed it was furry and had little ears.

I reached down and gently picked up a baby rabbit, which was uninjured.

His eyes were half closed and he lay quietly in my hand as I marched into the house, sat at the computer and *Skyped* my family. On the computer screen, my dad, mom and sister – all tired and a bit stressed for various reasons -- came into view: “Awww!” they all said, looking at the little guy as I held him up to the webcam, smiles stretching across their tired faces. At that point, I imagine the bunny must have been thinking, “Wow. That’s really cool,” because Skype *is* really cool, and that’s what everybody thinks.

My sister, who has rescued many a critter in her time, suggested I put the little bunny back, and that the mama would eventually come looking for him. So, after a few more “oohs” and “awwws” I marched him back out to the yard, and once the bunny was an inch from the dirt, it took off like a rocket, leaving a dust trail in its wake like a car racing across the desert.

I couldn't help but admire him. Despite the horrible anxiety he must have felt, he was able to take off running into his wild little world.

If only I could handle anxiety so well, I thought.

• • •

### *Stress.*

It all started about 46 years ago when I began to have difficulty handling stressful situations, an occurrence which happened to coincide with my birth. The moment I left the safety of the womb, I knew I was in for a bumpy ride. The doctor told my mom that it was the first time he had ever seen a newborn come out wringing his hands.

I was a nervous child, as my stomach later would attest. Each morning before gym class my digestive system would communicate to me in painful terms just how much it disapproved of dodge ball.

I became a favorite of the local bullies, who were drawn to my skinny arms, large nose, and unconstrained fear, which they could smell from five classrooms away.

The ninth grade – the last year of junior high school – was a good year. I ran the mile relay on the school track team, fell in love for the first time and even had my first kiss. Yes, things were going well, my friends. But it wasn't to last. The next year I entered high school; my girlfriend and I broke up; I was no longer a track star; and had zits been able to be harvested like wheat, I would have made some lucky farmer rich beyond his wildest dreams.

When eventually I entered college, I had no idea what I wanted to do for a career. Being painfully non-aggressive, a very slow note-taker, and a poor speller, I was naturally drawn to journalism.

Some 20 years later, the way I mismanage stress has long-since begun to catch up with me. I rarely express anger, frustration or fear; no, I bottle up my stress, which is one way to ensure that you and your doctor will eventually be on a first name basis:

“Well, Dave,” a doctor recently told me while examining my x-ray, “it seems that your intestine has somehow managed

to tie itself into a square knot. I've never seen anything quite like it. And your stomach...."

"What *about* my stomach?"

"Well, it's very rare, but you seem to have 'stomach-exititus.' That's when the stomach, after years of worry has eroded the lining, tries to detach itself from the body and find another host, one who's much more, shall we say, sane."

"Anything else?" I asked, afraid of what his answer might be.

"Weeeeellll, it's your heart, Dave. You see, for most people, their heart has a soft rumba beat: ba bum, ba bum, ba bum. Anxiety has made yours ... well, it's made yours more akin to jazz: skiddly do wa, wam bam ... biddly bo daddy doo. It would be quite entertaining where it not so deadly."

I knew that anxiety could greatly affect my physical well-being, but to this extent?

When the anxiety has gotten bad, I've tried all sorts of tricks to calm my nerves, from meditation to watching an old movie. One solution I found is to talk it out with a friend or loved one. The other thing that works for me is simply to keep my eyes open for God's tender mercies, his little miracles that will pop up even in the very, very (one more, and italicized for emphasis) *very* worst of times. Be patient, be ever watchful, and when they come along, embrace them and thank God for them.

Recognizing God's little miracles is deeply therapeutic, even if it's just a few smiles brought on by a brave little rabbit.

# How Santa tamed the West

**I**t read “Happy Acres” on the sign, but somehow I didn’t think the name suited those inside. As I stepped in, the aroma of stale Ben Gay struck me in the face.

He sat in a hard, straight chair. His name was Josh Freeze and he had just turned 112. I was told he had a story to tell. I hardly had a chance to introduce myself when he started speaking:

“It wasn’t any town I lived in in 1896, but the kind where good people stayed indoors. It was the kind of town where, if you didn’t own a six-shooter you were asking for a short life.

“Oh, now and then an upstanding family would move into town, but sure enough they’d be gone as soon as the first lead went flying. The governor tried sending in peace-keepers, but if they weren’t shot right out, they were run out of town with their tail between their legs.

“Of course, that was before the governor called on ‘Big Red.’ I’ll never forget that day. He came riding into town on a bright red coach pulled by eight brutish reindeer. The one in the front had a red nose. You could tell he was just wishing someone would crack a joke. A meaner looking bunch of reindeer, I’ve never seen.

“Well, me and several others turned quick as we could and went back into the saloon where I had half a bottle of gin waiting. The big man followed us in. Silence trailed behind.

“‘I’ve been sent here to clean up this town, and that’s what I aim’s to do,’ he said. His voice was like the sound of coal cars sailing through a mine-shaft. A man at the bar known as Rude Rex Rider turned, tossing his coat tail over a readied pistol. I backed up until I felt wall.

“‘If you want me,’ Big Red said as he threw a wrapped box in the face of Rude Rex, ‘just ask for ... Santa Claus,’ and he was gone.

“The hush remained as Rex slowly peeled open the delicately wrapped box. With hands shaking, he lifted the lid and pulled out a brand new, 100 percent cowhide cowboy hat with a matching goat tooth hatband.

“Suddenly, Rex’s look of fear turned into one of joy. Tears welled in his eyes as he steadied the hat perfectly onto his head. Next thing you know, ol’ Rude Rex is pattin’ everybody on the back, asking if he could buy ‘em a whiskey and all.

“We knew from then on that the Claus was one serious hombre. Pretty soon word got out about how Santa Claus had tamed ol’ Rex and men came from miles around to take on Big Red.

“One by one they fell as Claus got ‘em with imported tobacco, fake alligator skin boots, and even a new pony. They’d come thirsting for blood, and go eager for friends to share their good fortune with.

“Soon the town was back to its old self. People no longer feared the streets. In fact, Santa Claus was about ready to move on when he got wind of some news. Yeah, it seemed that an outlaw gang had set their sights on taking out the man in red and was heading for town.

“According to rumor, there were 20 or so in the gang, and they liked nothing more than spilling innocent blood. They had taken out towns, Indian villages; they were even linked to crimes as far away as the Congo. And now they were coming for Big Red ... and the town.

“Well, we had to think fast. He only had so many gifts left and time was getting short. Then Rex Rider (who was now known as Righteous Rex) had a thought.

“‘We could get the townspeople to create gifts that we could use to fell the evil gang of dastardly outlaws and do-wrongers!’ Rex was under the impression that he had a way with words.

“So the townspeople set to work. They made belts, hats, toys, fruit baskets and many other wonderful things. They were ready for even the worst onslaught.

“They set up out-posts, and when the gang finally came riding, they were ready. The townspeople took their positions and before the first outlaw could fire, four-year-old Mary Jenkins nailed him with a neatly wrapped stuffed bear. Another outlaw fell as he opened up a brand new set of reading glasses. And as they fell, they came over to our side and fought against their own gang!

“In 10 minutes, all had converted to the side of the law, and not a single shot was fired. When it was over, we all turned to Big Red and knew it was time for him to move on.

“‘Where you gonna go from here, Mr. Claus?’ little Mary Jenkins asked.

“‘I hear they’re having trouble way up north,’ he said, and with a finger aside his nose, he and his gang of reindeer were gone.”

# God is the traction to get you through life's icy spots

I'm the guy. You know the one -- the one who won't go more than 25 mph on the highway during a light winter snow. Call me a coward if you will, but like most poor saps struggling through life like an exhausted bird flying lost over the ocean, I've got a story to tell. It's not a pretty story; it's not a happy one; and it's not even very interesting. But I'm going to tell it anyway.

The air was as cold as leftover oatmeal when I left my home in Palmer Lake, Colorado that morning. Palmer Lake was a town of 234 — 267 if you count the Elliott twins — nestled at the base of the Rocky Mountains. It was a hamlet, a burg, a village, a settlement, a rural community, a small town ... you get the picture.

My landlord's name was George. He had a comb-over that looked like it could deflect bullets. He used to come over unannounced and talk endlessly about his wide range of uncanny abilities. Fortunately, I had developed the talent of responding appropriately while paying absolutely no attention. He'd be talking about the kudos he had received for his design of a computer chip, and I'd be on a pontoon boat cruising down the Limpopo River of eastern Bostwana. The only time I got into trouble was when he asked how many reporters I had working for me and I shouted, "Down, you fool! It's the Bagomba tribe!"

But as George has nothing to do with this column except to flesh it out, you'll not be reading about him again.

Anyway, I got into my car — a soft top Suzuki Samurai that behaved like it had been pieced together by an actual Samurai

more than a century ago — except that it didn't exactly follow the ancient principles of Bushido. And if you're an ancient history buff who has studied the principals of Bushido, you'll get a kick out of that!

Despite the frigid cold, the sun shown bright through a cloudless sky. I drove as I did every morning down the small road leading away from my house and Palmer Lake; a hamlet, a burg, a village ....

My car sounded like an old man shouting at a noisy dog. As I traveled the long road leading to I-25, I spotted a car pulled over up ahead. I would have wondered if I should stop and help, but I was too busy reeling in guilty pleasure that it wasn't me on the side of the road.

Just then I noticed that my car seemed to be acting independently of its driver. I was steering straight, but a sheet of black ice was sending me sliding to the left! My back end started to fishtail! Then my car's back end started to fish tail! On my right was a 12-foot deep ravine.

Suddenly the car seemed to right itself, but then turned just as quickly toward the ravine. I hit it head on, the car nearly vertical as I peered downward, my eyes like two full moons. My life flashed before my eyes (even the embarrassing stuff).

I hit the bottom of the curved ravine and bounced up a small hill before smashing through a barbed wire fence and into a snow-covered cow pasture.

The car finally came to a rest and I got out, shaking. The folks from the other car shouted out, asking me if I was all right. I was so happy to be okay that I began dancing right there in the snow, laughing like I was insane! I had lost a tire and rim, but I knew I had been lucky. I little more turn and I would have been rolling down the ravine sideways.

So, that's my story. I went into the ravine and bounced back out again. Yeah, I went through a barbed wire fence, I had to

change a tire, and I knelt in a semi-frozen cow pie. But when you hit bottom, you have to go through some pain and effort – and yes, a little cow doo — to get back on the road.

Now I go a little slower, with a little more thought and a little more faith. After all, had I slowed down to help those people up ahead, I may never have gone into the ravine in the first place.

### **The big and small of it**

...God (I explain in my most professorial demeanor) is really, really big! Big enough to create the known universe and all that is beyond, and to balance it on his finger like a basketball.

And yet ... as unfathomably large as God is, he can reach down and gently, and with greatest loving care, breathe new life into a totally unique creation that he loves, as Bishop Brungardt says, *more than we can ask or imagine* – and from, in part, a cell that is the very smallest in the human body. Not only that, but the Bible tells us clearly in the book of Leviticus that God doesn't even wear glasses.

-- Dave Myers

## A brief glance behind the scenes

As this new year begins, it has dawned on me that you, the reader, know nothing of what goes on here at the office of the *Southwest Kansas Register*, and that I, the editor, owe you a look into the inner workings of this newspaper. After all, you are paying for it and have a right to know. At least you should be paying for it. If you are not paying for it, please report immediately to the nearest confessional for penance/payment instructions.

I will start with the day after the issue goes to press. I arrive to work at approximately 8:30 a.m. Heavy traffic on Highway 50 sometimes delays my arrival until 8:33.

I collect my mail, pour myself a cup of coffee, splash the coffee on my tie as I go up the stairs, turn around, go back downstairs, refill my cup, start back up the stairs determined to be more careful, make it to my attic office, become over confident and spill the entire cup down my right leg and into my shoe.

With two weeks to go before my next deadline, I use this day to go through the piles and piles of mail that have accumulated the previous two weeks — you know, fan letters, proposals of marriage, that kind of thing. The important stuff, including magazines like *Liguorian*, *Banjo World* and *Madd*, go in one pile, while less important things, such as bills, go in a round file I keep under my desk. I'm a real stickler for filing.

The next day is Thursday. After emptying my shoe, I make a list of all the stories I'll be working on for the next issue. And that's about it for Thursday. I start my Friday by checking the

Catholic News Service for wire stories to put in the “World/Nation” page. That takes about 10 minutes, after which I’m ready for a well-deserved break. By the time break is over, it’s close enough to quitting time that I go home, ready for some R and R.

One Friday a month the department heads take part in a department head meeting. When it’s my turn to speak, I ask if anyone has any suggestions for the paper that doesn’t include parakeet cages, potty-training puppies, or mailing carp to Mafia kingpins. After 10 minutes of deafening silence, we go on with the meeting.

By Monday, I begin to try to come up with a column idea. By noon, I’m in the advanced stages of trying to come up with a column idea.

By 3 p.m., I stumble on a possibility. After a break, I decide to sleep on it. After I’m done sleeping on it, I go home.

On Tuesday, I start to write my column, decide my idea just isn’t working, try to come with another idea, sleep on it and go home. On Wednesday, I finally manage to write a column that seems to make sense at the time, but will ultimately leave readers puzzled.

When Thursday rolls around, I begin to think about the news stories I have to write. By noon, I decide to wait until Friday to think about the news stories I have to write. I spend the rest of Thursday considering how I would rearrange my office if I were to rearrange my office, which I’ll never do because I’m not a rearranging office kind of guy. Well, maybe just a few throw pillows in the corner, and maybe a fern or two ... .

By the end of the day I realize that I’ve wasted the entire week-and-a-half and have only one day left to write my stories.

On Friday morning I decide to wait until noon to worry about writing my articles. At precisely 12 p.m., panic sets in,

causing severe stomach cramping and dizziness. For the next two hours I'm indisposed. At 2 p.m. I telephone my contact for that week's story. I'm told my contact just left for a two-week vacation. I call our syndicated columnist and ask if he could extend his column by about 7,000 words to fill the extra space. He says something about filing a complaint with the FCC if I ever call him again, and hangs up.

On Monday I go to the Spearville printing plant where Kerry A. re-formats all my layout onto their computer system for final printing. Seeing as this is usually only one page, it doesn't take long. I go back to my office where I remember I haven't yet done the obituaries, youth page, entertainment section, or lead story.

What happens next is just a blur, as all my adrenaline is focussed on putting together a 16-page newspaper in two hours.

Come Tuesday, the issue hits the presses and somehow a completed paper is printed, with words, pictures and everything. In the newspaper business we call this a "miracle."

All kidding aside, the preceding column is my bizarre way of saying thanks to all those people behind the scenes, without whose help this paper would never go to press. Especially thanks to God, who, although quite busy, takes a few minutes every two weeks to make sure a hapless editor manages to get out a little bit of Good News.

# Happy Mother's Day

And it came to pass that in the Year of Our Lord 1963, a child was born unto the house of Myers in the city of Casper in the state of Wyoming. And a proclamation was sent out among friends and relatives announcing, "Lo, it is a boy. He shall be called David, 'One Who Drools.' He weighs eight pounds and looks like Uncle Phil before his operation."

And Ruth, wife of Jim, did look upon her newborn son and say unto her husband, "Can you run to Dairy Queen for me?" whereupon Jim did as he was bidden and purchased for her a Peanut Buster Parfait.

In those days it was easier for a wife to stay home with the children, and it was at home wherein Ruth did sew polyester pantsuits, watch "As the World Turns," and make "Shake-A-Puddin'" for her family, now counting six among them.

In the Year of our Lord 1968, it came to pass that David entered kindergarten and began his life of learning, leaving Ruth to dance down the street singing, "Free at last, free at last!"

While the Lord blessed the family with financial stability and quality television, all was not well in the Myers household. David began to show signs of instability, eventually drawing the wrath of his teacher by uttering loudly and with feeling a limerick he learned upon the playground.

A few days later, Ruth found her youngest supping on a Three Musketeers bar just moments prior to dinner.

"Is there a pox upon the house of Myers?" Ruth shouted unto the heavens. "Lord, I beseech thee, adjust my children's attitude, for in their whining, their eating of snacks right before meals, and their wanting of things that they shall have not, they are a blight upon my sanity. In your name I do pray."

And the Lord smiled upon Ruth and blessed her family in the years to follow. Together, they would make many a joyous trip to Sterling to spend quality time on the farm on which Ruth was reared, and to Denver to see the tall building to which Jim took the bus to work each day.

Together they worshipped each Sunday and celebrated memorable holidays, such as when Santa delivered unto David the Willie Talk ventriloquist doll, and to his big brother a Hot Wheels garage, plus extra track.

And they recognized the sanctity of Christ's birth. A small Nativity was set up under the tree in which the Christ figure eventually became lost and had to be replaced with another twice its size that in reality would have squashed its cradle to cinders and caused Joseph and Mary much consternation.

Indeed, the house of Myers felt truly blessed.

Then, on a day marked by the sky opening up and raining down upon the flock storms so strong of force, so vicious, and so wet that they had to cancel a Little League game, the eldest child became a teenager.

And lo, she began talking on the phone for hours, ignoring her mother's command to "Make thy bed!" and "Help cleanse the dishes!" And the Bible story pictures that once adorned her walls were replaced with pictures of Davey Jones and Ricky Nelson.

And then another child became a teen, and another, and another, until all four children were teenagers at one time. It was an era known unto the Myers family as "The Dark Ages."

For the Myers children, it was a time marked with insecurity. Their moods became like the weather, partly cloudy with a chance of damaging hail. A plague of pimples came upon them, often cropping up just before a date. The teenagers became like mythical beasts of yore: you know they are there because someone once claimed to have seen one. But most the

time they were out with friends.

“Is there a pox on the house of Myers?” Ruth found herself shouting unto the heavens for the second time in her life. “Lord, I beseech thee, help this poor mother of teenagers. My children, they mean well, but I am in doubt as to the soundness of their minds. They listen not when I command them to pick up their dirty socks, even though dirty socks weigh naught. By proclamation they have been ordered not to watch TV after 8 p.m., yet as surely as I am standing here, Hoss and Little Joe will alight the family room after ‘light’s out.’ Help me, dear Father, for I am vexed and wish not to eat a gallon of ice cream, just out of anxiety. In your name I do pray.”

Once again, God smiled upon Ruth. While the years to follow would not be easy, eventually the four children would all leave their teen years behind them. When the youngest finally left home in 1982, his last sight was of his mother dancing down the street singing, “Free at last, free at last!”

And on one particularly glorious day, two years after Ruth’s daughter gave birth to their first grandchild, she overheard her daughter shouting unto the heavens, “Is there a pox upon the house...”

And Ruth did grin, fold out the footrest on her chair, and turn on “Oprah.”

## An interview with Santa Claus

The tiny bar where we were to meet reminded me of a dark alley. I walked in apprehensively and was hit by the stench of stale beer and cigarette smoke. The floor was littered with peanut shells. In the back stood a pool table, unused and blanketed in dim lighting. Two customers who didn't know each other and didn't care sat draped over the edge of the bar like wet rags trying to keep from drying up. There was no music — no TV giving the play-by-play; just the sad silence of lost hope.

I sat my reporter's notebook on a small, round table and peered around the room. A single, torn poster advertised a '65 Mustang Fastback, its once sleek silver-blue color long since bleached to a dull gray.

I was trying to make out the name of the state on its license plate when the light in the room was suddenly blotted out. In the doorway was the silhouette of a man the size of a water buffalo. He stood frozen for a moment, and then pushed through the doorway, mashing peanut shells to dust with each step of his big, black boots.

He tugged a chair away from my table giving himself a wide berth, and sat down. I studied him for a moment and then said in a shaken whisper, "Santa?"

"You can call me Nick," he smiled and said in a voice resonating with age. Except for the billowy, white beard and elfish, round face, you'd have never known that this was the man who had defied the laws of physics for generations. But there he was, clad in a red, flannel shirt, wearing blue jeans and candy-cane-stripe suspenders. On his head was a baseball cap that read, "Go North PoleCats — '98 Champs."

“Elves,” he said when he saw me looking at his hat. “The PoleCats are our snow-shoe soccer team. In ’98 they defeated the Yup’ik Yaks of Northern Canada for the regional championship. Boy, those little guys can play!”

“Elves?!” I asked, turning to the bar. I needn’t have feared any reaction from the two customers; both were drowning in bottles of gin.

“Yes — from the workshop. Of course they had a little Christmas magic on their side. The Yup’iks are a people native to northern Canada. I’ll never forget the looks on their faces when our team came flying in by reindeer. Rudolph nearly crashed into a tree he was laughing so hard. From that point on the Yaks were a little intimidated.”

If there had been any doubt in my mind that this was the real Santa, it had all washed away in the last few seconds. It wasn’t what he said exactly, it was ... well, it was how he said it. There was such a pleasant confidence about him; a gentle spirit strengthened by wisdom.

“Can you tell me a little about ‘Santa’s Workshop?’” I asked eagerly.

“Ahhh, the workshop,” he said, his voice almost a whisper. “There’s a great misconception about the workshop. Sure, we make toys, but we do a lot more than that.”

He took off his hat, ran his thick fingers through his hair, and repositioned the cap back on his head.

“When people are cold, we bring warmth. When they’re hungry, we feed them. When they’re lonely, we offer friendship.” He paused for a moment and then continued. “These aren’t tangible gifts I’m referring to. You can’t wrap them up in pretty paper and a bow. They’re ... they’re ... .”

“I think I understand,” I said. “You’re talking about the spirit of Christmas — spiritual warmth for the downtrodden; nourishment for those hungry for peace — peace of mind,

peace in the world.”

Nick smiled.

“But what do you mean by ‘friendship’?”

“To answer that I’ll have to start from the beginning. When I was a child I had a very dear friend,” he explained. “We grew up together, played together. But when we grew older and I was off chasing girls, he was challenging the aristocracy. As he grew to adulthood, his teachings began to draw a large following. Pretty soon, the government took notice and labeled him a radical.

“Meanwhile, he taught me something that I never forgot, that it was better to give than to receive. So, with a little help from some friends, I began providing to the poor and weak, just as he taught. Before long, the government became so afraid of my friend’s powers that they had him put to death.

“Before he died, he said to me, ‘From now and for all eternity, your gifts will remind people of my birth ... St. Nick.’”

I was stunned. I could barely breath.

“You mean ...”

“Yes. Jesus was my best friend in life just as he is in death, and it’s his companionship that people long for.”

It took me a few moments to recover, during which Nick downed a few peanuts. Finally I asked him why he chose such a gloomy location for the interview.

Nick looked around the room and smiled sadly. “Let’s just say I have faith in the human spirit, even when it’s at its worst, even when it’s weighed down by life’s struggles.”

With that, he stood up and marched over to the bar. He spread his arms out like wings and placed one massive hand on each of the men’s shoulders. I couldn’t hear what he said, but after a moment I heard a hearty laugh, his big frame bouncing like a bowl full of jelly.

He raised a hand to wave goodbye, and disappeared through

the door.

The two men sat stoically for a few seconds staring at their drinks. One stood up, and then the other. They smiled, walked over to the door, and out into the light of day.

### **That's my kind of God!**

While at a recent concert at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church at Windthorst, Kansas, I peered up at Jesus as depicted in the magnificent stained glass windows -- the one where he appears to the apostles after his death on the cross. It was so magnificent, so glorious and awe inspiring. You forget that at that moment he's asking the apostles, "You got anything to eat? Leftover pizza maybe?" To which one apostle responds, "Got some leftover fish sticks."

"Awesome. I'm starved." And Jesus takes a seat and chows down with his old pals. I recognize clearly the resurrected God. But I tend to forget the person Christ was. The guy who made jokes. The guy who enjoyed kicking around a ball with a bunch of kids (I don't have to wonder if this happened. It was Jesus. It happened.). The guy who walked a quarter mile out of his way to pet "Mr. Cohen's dog, Benny." And the guy who, after rising from the dead, greets his buddies by asking them if they have anything to eat.

That's my kind of God!

-- Dave Myers

## We could all use a little doggy wisdom

**W**ith the recent election finally come to a close, I have decided to devote myself to more intellectual pursuits. Of course, hitting myself in the head with a desk lamp would be more intellectually rewarding than the recent presidential race.

I recently participated in a psychological exercise involving the manipulation of buttons on a small control module as various images flashed across a large screen. Okay, so I was watching TV. But while doing so, I happened upon an interesting documentary about animal behavior. Although worried the subject was again in regard to the recent election, I decided to chance it.

The documentary suggested that just as we humans are striving to learn more about our four-legged-friend, the dog, dogs are doing quite the same in regards to us. In fact, it went on to describe the dog as a furry little scientist that spends its life studying human behavior.

It makes perfect sense – and it explains why my dog carries a little note pad around.

Do you ever catch your dog staring at you — just staring ... and staring ... still staring — for no apparent reason? What’s going through his mind? Is he waiting for a snack? Or is he thinking something along the lines of the following: “9:03 p.m. Subject ‘Dave’ hasn’t moved in two hours. ‘SpongeBob SquarePants’ marathon on TV. Is there a relationship? More information needed.”

And why do you think dogs sleep so much during the day? Are they really that bored? Is it simply that they have nothing

better to do? Or, could it be they're tired after having stayed up the night before analyzing data?

Two nights ago I decided to test my theory. At precisely 11:30 p.m., I sneaked quietly out of my room and into the hallway. I could see the flickering light of a candle and hear the scratching of pencil on paper. This went on for nearly an hour, the sound broken only when my dog took a break to snack on a cracker with a slice of Wensleydale cheese, a favorite of this particular breed, and to sip a particularly good cabernet.

At precisely 12:25 a.m., the candle was extinguished. Moments later I heard her familiar snoring and I crept toward her bed. There I discovered a file on which was written: "Myers, David; A Case Study in Human Behavior."

I ever-so-gently pulled it out from under paw, sweat forming on my brow. I only once became unnerved, when, lost in a pleasant dream, she uttered, "I'm runna ret *me* some Ribbles and Rits."

The file in hand, I crept back to my room, closed the door and turned on the light. For the sake of space, I will include only a few submissions:

**"Oct. 1; 10:45 p.m.:** Subject 'Dave's' agitation was heightened today when he found the Cheese Doodle sack void of Doodles save one. Are all humans so easily undone? Must consult with 'Muffin' next door. Subject's lack of hole-digging, rubber toy chewing, and cat chasing may explain foul temper. If we could find a way to train humans in such rudimentary therapy, leftovers may be forthwith."

**"Oct. 14; 10:59 p.m.:** Subject's piano playing has left me depressed and void of want. Doggy biscuits carry no pleasure. Cats fear me not. Should such sounds – which continue to pound my skull long after the noise has ceased – resume tomorrow, I will consider donating myself to scientific experi-

ments.”

**“Oct. 23; 3 p.m.:** Subject has been at the computer for three hours, causing alarming physical change. Eyes are red. Back is hunched. Fingers extend like claws. After two hours, he began to resemble a large toad; after three, a buzzard. Fearing for my safety, I retreated to my bed. If the transformation continues to a sub-human level and I find myself in harm’s way, it should be noted that I have a sister in Wichita.”

**“Nov. 6; 11:01 p.m.:** Tonight I find myself in the proverbial ‘doghouse.’ Subject ‘Dave,’ who sends perhaps three electronic messages every day, became enraged after I sent a peemail on his new porch rug. Should ‘Sarge’, the Lab across the alley, come to call, he will read that I am doing well, not to mention high in iron supplements. Tomorrow I will amend the message to include today’s tribulation.”

As you can well imagine, I was stunned. I mean, is my piano playing really that bad? Besides, what does she do all day? Sleep, run around in the yard, play with an old boot like it’s her best friend in the world, bark at people walking by, love us unconditionally despite all our failings ....

Come to think of it, maybe the world *could* learn a lesson or two from our four-legged friends.

## Preposition proves costly

**D**uring the last two weeks in September, the largest concentration of energy in the entire universe could be found at the Olympic stadium in Sydney, Australia. I saw a report, in fact, that American swimmer and gold medalist Misty Hyman had enough energy in her lumbar to power all of Philadelphia for the next 17 years.

Such is the sheer, electric intensity of Olympic athletes. If not for my love of Fritos and bean dip, I could have been have been one of those athletes. As it was, my Olympic experience was relegated to —

*Wait a minute.* It just occurred to me that many of you are probably unaware that I competed in the 1988 Olympics in Seoul. That's understandable. You see, my journey to the Olympics really started in 1986 when then-Olympic event coordinator Ivan Pietrik stayed up a little too late one night watching an Andy Griffith Show marathon, overslept the next morning and hastily walked out the door without his coat.

In too big of a hurry to turn back, Pietrik stood shivering at the bus stop for nearly 30 minutes as the bus arrived late. By 2 p.m. that afternoon, he felt chilled, his head felt as if it was filled with cotton and he could barely hear a word said to him. It was then that his secretary, Olga, made the fateful suggestion that he put the Equine Riding event after the men's gymnastics.

Pietrik thought it a strange suggestion, but trusted Olga because she reminded him of a portly aunt he had loved while growing up. He simply smiled and wrote on the official Olympic form with the logo emblazoned on the upper, right hand corner that "Essay Writing" would follow men's gymnastics.

Not being the strongest competitive writer, I won a spot on the U.S. writing team thanks to a special program designed by then President George Bush, Sr. to give people from developing suburbs a chance to compete.

The competition went like this: Each competitor was seated at a wooden, elementary school style desk with pen and paper in hand, a large screen projecting their essay. We were each given five minutes to write at least 300 words on a topic presented to us at the start.

On my right sat Grigarian Belov, known as the “Russian Rice Crispy” (largely due to a nick-name translation error). On my left was Katrina Choy, an attractive Chinese woman who was later disqualified because she had had her smile surgically enhanced to be as distracting as possible to the male competitors.

In the stands sat Bob Costas and a young Katie Couric giving the play-by-play. Just before the starting whistle blew, a man in a white suit handed me an envelope. Inside was a notecard with the words, “**WHAT DID YOU DO OVER YOUR SUMMER VACATION?**” written in big, bold letters. I looked at the question, thought for a moment and began to write.

**Bob:** “And Myers is off to a good start. He almost stumbled over a cliché, but caught it just in time. Not using too many big words – probably saving those for the finish.”

**Katie:** “If you remember, Myers struggled in the ‘pre-lims,’ forgetting how to spell ‘micro-processor.’ He finally erased it and wrote ‘thingy.’ But he’s looking pretty goo —”

**Bob:** “Oooh, he just ended a sentence in a preposition! There goes a tenth of a point. He’s going to have to bounce back from that!”

**Katie:** “It appears he’s unaware of his mistake, Bob. And – Do you see what I see? On that last move — a dangling participle! Ouch.”

**Bob:** “I see it, Katie. This kind of writing does not win medals. You can see Myers’ coach motioning to him from the side. He’s saying, ‘Present tense, present tense!’ Myers is slowing down a bit, trying to get back into the zone. Easing back....”

**Katie:** “I think he’s risking monotony here; he’d better pick up the pace a little. Bob, if Myers didn’t do anything over the summer but plant a radish garden, his medal hopes are over.”

**Bob:** “You’re right, Katie.... And – yes. His writing has become boring. The judges are not going to like this. Not at all.”

**Katie:** “It’s all over for Myers, Bob. The Russian Rice Crispy is already celebrating.”

So, I bombed; but it was a great experience.

Every few years, the world’s best athletes get together for some friendly competition. The world sits back and watches as their best battle it out with other nations for the top prize. They watch as the competitors, win or lose, happy or distraught, share a hug, handshake or a kiss after the competition.

Win or lose, friendships are made; memories are created. Win or lose, the young competitors go back to their home countries having seen walls that separate our countries come down for just a few brief weeks.

# God bless the Hair Club for Men

The headline for my last column read, “Put something silly in the world.” I’ve since wondered: Could this be one of the reasons why God created us? To spice up an otherwise bland world? Hmmmm ...

Genesis 1:27 reads: “So God created man in His own image to have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth....”

Now, I’m not judging the writers of Genesis, I’m just wondering if perhaps they didn’t leave out a few things. Again, I’m not judging. If I had to produce the *SKR* using papyrus and a stick dipped in berry juice, I’d edit for space too. (As a side note, that’s why the Dead Sea Scrolls smell so good.)

I would imagine that, in reality, the story went a little more like this:

“And God looked upon the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the land, and said, ‘It’s good, but just a tad too serious. The crocodiles are particularly moody. I know! I’ll add a bit of silliness. I’ll create Man, who will have dominion over all the animals. This’ll be hilarious!’

“And lo, he saw that it was.”

As we all know, animals -- the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and, yes, the cattle, too -- basically do three things, among them, eating and making more animals. Not terribly interesting. Then humankind arrived. Soon we began dressing dogs up in tutus and teaching chimpanzees to sign, “Me want chocolate cookie. ... No, wait. Give me the Deluxe Graham. No, no, those go right to my hips. Oh, just give me a Sandie.”

Life on earth was simple then, before Man came along. A bit of fun and frolic here, caring for the young there, avoiding being eaten, and trying to eat those that were trying to avoid being eaten. It was a life in which not a single gazelle or emu or bottle nosed dolphin ever worried about male pattern baldness or not having a nice dress to wear to the Johnsons' dinner party.

Then came Man (insert thunderclap, please). Embarrassed by his appearance, Man invented the first beaver skin Bermuda shorts.

*And God did chuckle.*

Not content only to play and eat and have children, he invented a little box at which he could stare for hours on end while his wife yelled at him to get off his rear and help out around the house once in a while for crying out loud. And God did shake his head.

And then Man came up with Hair Club for Men.

*And God did burst out laughing,* and lo, he could not control his laughter for nearly five minutes, even though he was God.

Soon after God created Man, God decided to upgrade. He created Woman.

Displeased with beaver skins, Woman invented the polyester jumper, to which God said (Gen. 5:22) "Heh, heh. Polyester. Heh, heh." And she too began gazing into the little box, the adventures of "Luke and Laura" causing her to forget to set meat out for dinner, sending the family to Burger Lard, wherein they ate hamburgers and onion rings. And lo, God said unto all the cherubim in heaven (Gen. 7:13) "Are they gonna eat that? No way. Wait! They ARE eating it! Gross! Ha ha! I can't believe it! I wouldn't feed that to a crocodile!"

So, again I ask, did God create us, in part, to spice up an otherwise bland world?

Sure he did! But it was out of joy! He wasn't looking for reasons to laugh in the face of his creation. In the eyes of God, we are the ingredients of sheer beauty. He put us here to feel joy, to experience and appreciate the beauty he created.

He put us here to provide the fun and the funky, the beautiful and the bizarre, the striking and the strange! Whether you are fat or thin, hairy or bald, a health nut or sickly, super smart or a newspaper editor, you are a part of that bag of "sheer beauty" that God sprinkled onto the earth.

And in return, we are – ALL of us – provided with a big ol' bag of love with which to seed the world. Whatever your story, whatever your background, whatever your condition, you always hold within you that big bag of love God gave us. Spread it like it's fertilizer on a garden! After all, love is emotional fertilizer. It helps things to grow, especially those doing the spreading!

God bless the Hair Club for Men! Three cheers for anyone who claims to have had tea with Bigfoot! Kudos to every weird one of us!

And hooray for God, who created humanity when he knew from the start that we would be anything but usual.

## A Q and A with the SKR

It's time to open up the SKR mail bag and answer some of the thousands of questions that have been sent in over the last year.

**Q:** In an ad near the back of the paper, you boast about having the best Catholic paper in southwest Kansas. What other Catholic newspapers are in Southwest Kansas?

**A:** There's the *Southsouthwest Kansas Register*; the *Just Plain Kansas Register*; the *Take a Right at Liberal and Go Three Blocks Kansas Register*; and the *I Lost My Shoe On the Highway Near Great Bend Kansas Register*.

**Q:** Why are so many articles printed weeks after they happen?

**A:** Being a twice-monthly, it's difficult to be very timely. Also, we go to press five days before the paper hits the stands. Finally, I lack any organizational skills.

**Q:** Where do you come up with the ideas for your columns?

**A:** I guess it's just a little voice inside my head. I call him Tony, or Mr. Danza. I'll just be sitting there minding my own business, when suddenly Tony will pipe in with, "Why don't you write about a squirrel?" or, "Whittle. Now there's a funny word."

**Q:** How do you mesh your devotion to the Church with the complexity of the reporter, a modern day "hunter-gatherer"?

**A:** Huh?

**Q:** If your newspaper were an animal, what would it be?

**A:** Without question, a sea otter.

**Q:** How many people are on your staff?

**A:** Well, Tim is an ad guy/writer/photographer; Josh Chickeo is our foreign correspondent, currently on assignment

in Beijing; Megan Torth is our weather person; Alan Redspan is our financial reporter; and Ian Southmore (a former triangle player with “The Who”) is our entertainment writer.

**Q:** How do you get all those world/nation briefs?

**A:** Although each is only one paragraph long, we feel it important to actually go out and investigate and write each brief ourselves. Every week Tim or I may find ourselves in India, Russia, Mexico or Garden City, depending on where the action is. Last week, in fact, I was sharing a glass of wine and a bacon cheeseburger with the Prime Minister of Latvia when I walked my ex-girlfriend, the daughter of the former Russian premier! Boy, was I embarrassed! Thankfully, just then I received a call from Tim allowing me to duck around a corner. Tim was in a small village along the Ivory Coast finishing an in-depth 45-word brief when he stumbled over the spelling of “mosquito.” Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to help him.

**Q:** The *SKR* is not only a voice for the bishop and the Church in general, but for all the Catholics in Southwest Kansas. As the new “permanent” editor, do you feel you are qualified to carry this load?

**A:** Well, it’s not brain surgery; it’s not even outpatient surgery. But then, it really has nothing to do with the medical profession at all. I’m an editor, not a doctor! All you need to do this job is average reporting and writing skills, a general knowledge of the Church, and a little of that ol’ time religion. In some areas of the world, they actually bring in homeless street urchins to edit the Catholic paper. In Taiwan, they’re experimenting with amphibious tree frogs. After several months of tireless work, one actually managed to write a study on the papal encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, from two feet away using its tongue to type out the letters.

**Q:** Every now and then – hardly ever, really – I see a misspelling or other typo in the paper. I mean, it’s hardly even

worth mentioning. But I was just wondering, why haven't you been fired?

**A:** I'm glad you asked. In all seriousness, we have a great proof reader. Almost all typos occur in late changes — those made by me after the proof reader has read through the paper. My employment here is the result of a government program providing grants to Catholic newspapers that hire editors unable to spell words of more than three letters.

**Q:** Your columns always seem to have a moral at the end. Do you stumble upon them by accident, or do you give them a great deal of thought?

***Editor's note:** The editor regrets that he has run out of space and cannot answer the last question.*

# The journey of the Magi

**W**e've often been moved by the beautiful and wondrous story of the birth of Christ.

But within this story is relatively little of the journey of the magi. We know that they came from afar -- somewhere in the vicinity of the Orient, which I always assumed meant China, Japan or, as some scholars have theorized, "somewhere in the Jetmore area, around Fifth Street."

We know from scripture that the three men learned that a star would lead them to the place of Christ's birth. There are some schools of thought that indicate they may have read about this in their local newspaper. My own theory, based on both the subject material and the accuracy of the report, is that it was a Catholic newspaper. Together, Melchior, Casper and Balthasar, along with their camels -- which we read in "Matthew" were named Mike, Horace and Carol -- ventured in the general direction of Bethlehem. But before finding the child Jesus, they first found themselves in an audience with King Herod in Jerusalem.

Let's you and I go there now, to the interior of King Herod's palace:

Since learning of the three wise men's quest to find the boy who would be born "King of the Jews," Herod's stomach had rarely been still. An irritable guy, he had an irritable stomach. This was long before Mylanta, but they did have Tums, though.

King Herod had hatched a plan. He told his assistant, Phil Burns, to fetch the three kings, to which Phil replied, "Will do."

"Greetings!" King Herod said upon their arrival. "Welcome

to my palace! Phil, fetch some drinks. I think there's some Bosco in the cabinet by the sink."

"We three kings from Orient are," Balthasar said, the others nodding in agreement.

"Oh ... um ... Herod am I," Herod responded. "Welcome my palace to."

"Why are you talking that way?" Casper asked.

"You started it," Herod replied as Phil brought in a tray of Bosco drinks. "Never mind. Listen. I heard about your quest and was hoping that when you find the child, maybe you could let me know so I could come and ... and ... worship him. Yes-ssss, worship him. Not harm him or anything like that. Just worship. That's really the only thing on my agenda – juuuust to worship. ..."

"Well, I suppose --"

"Good. We'll supply you with some Tang, a few granola bars. You'll be all set."

The three wise men went on their way, smiling at their good fortune.

"That Herod was really nice," Casper said, munching on the granola bar, which in those days was made of tree bark and sand. "I was all nervous and everything at first, but then I felt, you know, okay."

"But did you notice his twitch?" Melchior asked as they made their way across the dunes. "Every time we mentioned the boy king he jumped around like a German step dancer. That struck me as odd."

"Yeah," Casper said. "And he kept breaking into maniacal laughter, even when nobody said anything funny ... or maniacal."

The three spoke for a long time about what they should do and finally came to a decision. They determined that they didn't believe that Herod meant to worship Jesus. In fact, they

decided that he meant the child harm. They decided to keep secret the place of Christ's birth.

As if to confirm their suspicions, that night they each had a dream in which God said, "Smart move!"

Meanwhile, back at Herod's castle: "They actually believed that I mean to worship the Christ child, and that I don't mean him any harm" he told Phil, laughing maniacally before clutching his belly. "Tums -- now!"

Several nights into their long journey, the three kings looked into the sky and saw that the star that they followed was particularly bright; In the distance, Balthasar spied a village reflecting the light from the star.

The three men trembled. Under the brilliant light, warmed by its glow, would be the Christ Child. They made their way toward the village until, suddenly, Melchior came to a halt.

"How could I have even imagined that we were worthy to gaze upon the Christ child?" he asked. "I mean, who are we to be called to this glorious journey? Three simple men bearing simple gifts."

"Melchior, you don't understand," said Casper. "The Savior was not put on this earth to accept our gifts; He *is* the gift!"

# Shepherds recount birth of Savior

I hope you've all been able to enjoy this Christmas season, and that you have a very blessed Christmas day. I was researching a column idea for this issue when I came across the following article. It is from the *Bethlehem Weekly Tribune*, written two years after Christ's birth. My understanding of Aramaic isn't what it used to be, but I think the translation is fairly accurate.

Witnesses recount tale of Christ's birth

**By John of Judea**

*Bethlehem Weekly Tribune*

It's been two years since the birth of Jesus Christ shook not only this small community from its pillars, but King Herod himself, who, at press time, had still refused to come out of his den. When reporters attempted to get a quote from the king, he shouted, "No comment!"

As readers are undoubtedly familiar with the story of the birth of the boy-king, they will also know that among those lucky few invited to the birth were brothers Dennis and Roland the shepherds, and married shepherds Meridith and Larry Johnson.

From the living room of the brothers' hovel in the desert southwest of Bethlehem, the four described what it was like the days leading up to the birth:

"There we were, four of us shepherds resting one night after a long day of shepherding, when suddenly a bright light appears before us," Dennis explained. "We hear this beautiful voice telling us that the Savior was to be born, the King of Kings. She said that we were 'all invited; informal dress; no

gifts necessary.’

“Well, it’s not every day an angel invites you anywhere, much less to the birth of God’s son, so we boxed up our sheep and had them shipped the rest of the way, and did what the angel bidden us. Bide us. ... Boud us. ... We did what she said.”

Just as the angel of the Lord had instructed, the shepherds spent the remainder of the night making their way across the desert, following what has since become known as the “Star of Bethlehem.” Only once did they run into trouble, when Meridith ate some bad olives and for the next hour accused her husband, Larry, of being a houseplant.

“It wasn’t just the olives,” Roland said, laughing. “It so happens that Larry looks an awful lot like a geranium. When we first met, I kept wanting to move him into the sun.”

The next morning, as they traversed one more of dozens of hills, the four found themselves filled with a joy they had never yet known when they suddenly spotted Bethlehem aglow in the amber sunrise.

“That was a long night of walking, let me tell you,” Dennis said. “But anticipation for the birth of the Savior kept our hearts and hopes leaping for joy. It was wonderful when we arrived in Bethlehem. It was still pretty early, so we decided to go to the inn and get some rest ... . And, well, um ...”

“Go on and tell him, Dennis,” Roland interrupted. “He’s going to find out anyway.”

“Well,” Dennis continued, “we took the last room at the inn. I mean, how were we to know?”

“I loved the little soaps,” Meridith whispered.

When contacted by the *Tribune*, Mabel the Innkeeper confirmed their story. “They were very nice,” she said. “Smelled a bit.”

When pressed, Mabel admitted she felt terrible about turn-

ing away the young couple who came to her door later that night, but expressed frustration that the same angel in charge of invitations hadn't thought to call ahead for reservations.

That evening, as the four shepherds were waking from their day of rest, Joseph and Mary were doing the best they could to settle into a nearby grotto. Joseph formed a bed out of hay for his weary wife as several curious farm animals watched their every move.

"The grotto was softly lit by the Star of Bethlehem," Dennis said, the other three shepherds nodding in agreement. "And there they sat, Mary, Jesus and Joseph — the Holy Family. It was beautiful beyond description."

"At first we were afraid to approach them," Roland admitted. "But as we stood our distance, kneeling to the Baby Jesus, Mary waved at us to come closer."

"Looking into the Child's eyes, that's when we realized," Dennis said. "We weren't there to welcome the newborn King, he was there to welcome us."

## Alive and well in Heaven

Easter arrived this year to the greetings of flowers and foliage long since blossomed thanks to Old Man Winter hitting the sack early. It's spring (was it ever really Winter?), and new life has been chancing a peak along garden paths everywhere.

My uncle, too, is chancing a peak along that garden path, only the world he is chancing to see is in Heaven. He died a few weeks ago and by now has been chatting it up with Grandma and Grandpa and eight of his brothers and sisters who preceded him. My mom is the last of the brood, and the orneriest – you would be too if you were raised by nine older siblings.

It's birth into a new life, re-birth into a family made new. Remember how Mom or Dad or Grandma or Grandpa struggled in those final years? Their memory slipping, their bodies failing? Well, in Heaven the party's just getting started. There's softball, volleyball, Lucille Ball, ball room dancing ... – and later a round of beer and nachos. Everyone's invited; leave your cares and crutches at the Pearly Gates.

There's no addiction in heaven, no fat to build up around the arteries, no drink that can make you more drunk with joy than you find with every breath you take in. In Heaven there's no tribulation, temptation, taxation, condemnation, deportation, discrimination, starvation, mutation, probation, stagnation, frustration or constipation. There's no ultra-violet radiation, Federal Bureau of Investigation or government administration. There's no ulceration, palpitation, or medical examination.

There's only salvation.

There's no earthly way to define God's infinite power, and the same goes when considering heaven. For example, ask the wrong person if dogs go to heaven, and he'll raise his nose high and utter, "Dogs do not have souls!" First, my dog may or may not have a soul as we define it, but there's something going on there that borders on love, and love, as God tells us, is a miracle. Secondly, you can read the Bible until you have every word memorized, but if you deny the absolute, unlimited power of God – even the power to allow dogs through the Pearly Gates – you are drastically limiting your perceptions.

Keeping in mind God's power, a power fueled by love, what do you imagine heaven will be like?

I remember as a child seeing a painting of choirs of angels numbering into infinity, standing on an endless cloud, their wings billowing amid beams of light. And I remember thinking that it looked ... well, *boring!* My parents impressed upon me the solemnity of the Mass, the gift of grace received through that special hour of prayer and devotion. And the minute I got home it was "All Star Wrestling" with the "Crusher," "Bobby the Brain Heenan" and "Nick Bockwinkle."

What I mean is that hymns are beautiful, and they speak to God in ways we can't express through spoken prayer, but I simply refuse to believe that we scrape and struggle through the hardships of life on earth only to go to choir practice.

My idea of heaven is simply this: it is the culmination of every dream we've ever had. It may not be the dream literally realized (although it might — don't forget, God is all powerful!) but the level of pure, unfiltered joy those dreams represent.

Heaven is the physical manifestation of God's love for us. It's our favorite fast food restaurant on every corner. Can you say, "Free Burrito Supreme?" Dare to dream, people!

It will be the drive-in on a warm Friday night, a cool breeze wafting through the car, Humphrey Bogart about to tell Ingrid

Bergman that “We’ll always have Paris,” when a voice blurts over the speaker, “Attention. The concession stand will close in five minutes.”

It’s walking along a beautiful meadow and seeing in the distance a past love. *Could it be?* We walk faster as our minds struggle to accept the impossible. And then we run. We run as if caught in each other’s gravitational pull. And finally; finally we meet! “Cricket!” I shout, her tail wagging as I give her a good scratch behind her ears.

Heaven will be all our loved ones together again – even Uncle Al, only without the cigar and football knee. Or was it a canasta elbow? It will be a Saturday afternoon cookout with family and friends, the pines reaching into the blue sky, a mule deer and my old Guinea Pig, Ruffles, sharing a Pepsi. And when it’s over? *Heaven means never having to say good-bye.*

What is Heaven? Heaven is what happens in that blink of an eye when our life here is finished, and you hear the voice of God saying, “Welcome home.”

That is the gift of Christ’s sacrifice. That is the gift of Easter.

# An interview with Satan

The sun had just set when the prince of darkness stepped into the tiny cafe where he chose for us to meet. Dressed in casual attire, no one would have imagined that this was indeed Satan.

At 5'9", he was shorter than the looming image seen in countless motion pictures. He even looked a bit frail. Lucifer came over to the table, took off his brown, felt hat, and sat down.

"I loved that era," he said, noticing me glancing at his circa 1962 Stetson. "The Vietnam War, Martin Luther King's assassination -- I could go on and on. Today, apart from a bombing here and there or a localized war, it's just random violence."

Up until then, I really had not fully accepted the fact that this was Satan. Now I had no doubt.

"Do you cause the misery and pain in people's lives?" I asked, my shaken nerves barely raising my voice above a whisper.

"I'll let you in on a trade secret," he replied. "I don't go anywhere unless I'm invited. You want drugs? Indiscriminate sex? How about beating your enemy into submission? Open the door and let me in.

"It's not pain I cause. I just give people what they want."

"What about natural disasters?"

"Mother Nature. Look," he said, "terrible things happen. I wish I could take credit for all of them but I can't. Life is a constant gamble. Why do bad things happen to good people who do nothing to instigate it? Why are babies born with terrible diseases? I don't mind enhancing the anger and bitterness these events cause, but the event itself wasn't something

to which I was invited.”

“So, apart from natural occurrences, people choose their own path, whether it be good or evil,” I said, my voice a bit stronger, “all the while with you feeding off their weaknesses.”

“Basically -- although with all my ‘feeding’ it is still their decision which direction their life will go.”

“We’ve talked about some of the subtle ways you enter people’s lives,” I said. “But what about the ways you permeate society as a whole?”

“You’re talking about racism, bigotry, greed -- the lifeblood of civilization.”

“Right,” I said without arguing.

“The first two are easy: Feed people a little fear and ignorance. Blame comes easy when you’re afraid to look in the mirror.”

I told him I didn’t quite understand.

“Racism is a disease of the intellect. It has as much to do with skin color as greed does with money. Racism is ignorance manifested through fear, while greed is ignorance manifested through want.

“Speaking of greed,” he added, “It’s more difficult to cultivate greed than racism or bigotry, but the results are far more rewarding.”

“How’s that?” I asked.

“It’s much easier to affect the rich than the poor. Believe it or not, the poor typically give more and want less. Imagine, though, that a corporation or a government opens their door to greed as they often do. We’re talking corruption. We’re talking war.”

After a brief pause, his mouth drew to a wide grin: “That’s the joy of it. The simplest ones to affect are the ones who will cause the most damage.”

“Do you think by speaking so bluntly your power will be

challenged?” I asked.

“None of this is new,” he said, “People have the answers right in front of them. You’d be astounded at how many people have walked straight into hell with both eyes wide open.”

### **Life and other of God’s inventions**

As soon as I arrived at my parents’ house in Colorado, I tried to load an old version of Microsoft Word onto their computer so I could work more easily from their house.

Mom and Dad’s computer is like a lifeline of sorts through which they and I communicate each night via video chat. So, when I tried to re-start the computer after loading the program only to have it display a series of error signs, I felt my stomach drop. I even heard it hit the floor. I heard it run through the front door and steal my truck. I didn’t press charges. I didn’t have the stomach for it.

I re-started the computer – the old standby.

*Oh, no. It didn’t work! But the old standby always works!* I tried it again. Same thing. *Dear, Lord, please look with pity upon your humble servant and give this computer life!*

Finally I called the number on the computer. They transferred me from India to Nova Scotia (I guess that’s what they do with the most technologically challenged of us). While I lost every program on their computer, I was, ultimately able to reload the video chat program.

As my dog and I headed home to Kansas, enjoying the cool breeze under a deep blue sky, I thought about how technology so often includes with it a good dose of stress.

I also realized that in another 300 miles or so, I’d be seeing and talking to my folks on my computer. I’m not a friend to technology. Yet, I couldn’t help but thank God for inventing the universe, in which a homesick guy in a little town in Kansas can peer across the miles of prairie, through the vast Denver skyscape, and into a little room in a little home in Colorado.

-- Dave Myers

## A stroll through the human condition

**M**y cable TV service recently added several new channels, bringing the total to 73. The other night I got to flipping through the channels so fast that I suddenly found myself hypnotized like a deer in a headlight. When my thumb finally gave out, I sat mesmerized, gazing at the Animal Planet channel as if in a cable TV induced stupor. When I came out of my trance several hours later, I had an uncontrollable urge to sedate my neighbor's cat and attach an electronic locating device to its ear.

• • •

Christmas is around the corner, and with it, the promise of a new year filled with hope and ... well, that's about it. In light of the celebration of Christ's birth and the new life it promises, I decided it would be nice to take a stroll through the human condition and see how we're fairing. And what better way to do this than from the comfort of my living room using that prism of human existence, the TV?

*(Please note: "Click" is a clever sound effect indicating the changing of the channel. Thank you.)*

*Click, click*

"Be veeeeeeewy qwiet. I'm hunting wabbit!"

*Click, click*

"Lookit that! She's a beaut'. That's the loveliest wombat I've eva laid eyes on! Now, watch as I sneak up along side and – Crickey, she got me by the aaam! You blo—"

*Click, click*

"Oooh, Hashimoto is putting hollandaise sauce on the squid tentacles. Can you believe it? I don't know how Iron Chef Kenogi is going to top that! He'd better do something imagi-

native with that tripe —”

*Click, click*

“Marjorie, the tribe has voted you off the island. You were unable to swim the snake-filled river of doom or dine on the giant Juijui beetle. Therefor, you are not a survivor. Give our best to your coworkers at the New York Fire Depar —”

*Click, click*

“Jean, welcome to the Pet Psychic. What your terrier, Foofy, is telling you Jean, is that she likes *kibbles*, but *bits* give her indigestion. Now she’s saying that if you could keep up on cleaning the dishes, she’d appreciate it. The ants have been getting so strong that she’s anticipating any day now being carried off like a sacrificial lamb. Now she’s saying that there’s no such thing as pet psychics and that I should seek ther —”

*Click, click*

“Brothers and Sisters, God told me just last night, He said, ‘Oral, I want people to send you their cash – dollars, yen, pounds, it don’t really matter.’ And I said, ‘God, I am humbled in your sight and will do your bidding.’ Make checks out to Oral – that’s O-R-A-L Ro —”

*Click, click*

“Watson is approaching the ball. I believe he has a nine iron. Stiiiiill approaching the ball. Okay, he’s reached the ball. He’s looking at the ball. This is exciting stuff, folks. Now he’s grasping the nine iron. Now he’s looking at the ball agai —”

*Click, click*

“And setting off this beautifully decorated new living room is this lovely oak trim antique armoire. And outside the new, huge, picture window is the gorgeous just-completed garden courtyard. Now you see what you can accomplish around your home with a little elbow grease and \$147,000. —”

*Click, click*

(Ahhh, a news channel. The one true reflection of life as

it is on our planet, unhindered by artificial drama and sham personalities.)

“The government relaxed pollution standards this week in hopes of boosting the antihistamine market. And in other news, after Congress’ failure to act on an unemployment initiative, hundreds of workers will stop receiving unemployment pay immediately after Christmas. When questioned, Congress laughed maniacally and fled into the bowels of the Capital to protect themselves from the rising sun. And in related news, President Bush said that to avoid war, Saddam Hussein must shave his mustache and change his name to Lucille —”

*Click, click*

“I’ll get you, you wascally wabbit!”

# The story of the fourth Wise Man

**Y**ou all know the story of the three wise men who traveled from afar to honor the baby Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What you may not know is that there was a fourth wise man. His name was Ernest, and this is his story.

Ernest was the king of a small region southwest of Egypt. It was so small in fact that his kingdom was made up of only six people, four being family members and the fifth a guest who hadn't yet left after attending a dinner party there several months earlier. "Well, it's getting late," family members would tell the man from time to time, hoping he would finally get the hint, but he would just go on talking about his Uncle Albert's model ship collection.

For that and other reasons, all was not well in Ernest's kingdom. There was much bickering among King Ernest's subjects, such as when Prince Billy demanded, "Where be my shoes!?" to which his sister, the fair Princess Lori would answer, "How should I know? I don't don them!"

And lo, even the beautiful Queen Doris was disgruntled. Every night she had to cleanse the dishes – even the royal pots and pans – while King Ernest lay on the couch, never so much as lifting a royal finger to aid his queen.

Then one day, while waiting to check out at the market, Queen Doris spied a headline in the *Southwest Egypt Register* that would change their kingdom – and their lives -- forever: "Savior coming; star to mark birthplace."

"As a king," Queen Doris said unto Ernest upon his arrival home that evening, "you must go and welcome this Christ child. He could grant us the peace we so desperately need!"

And even if he doesn't, the exercise will do you good."

Having heard the prophecies, Ernest set out with a smile on his face, confident that this child would bring with him a peace that would embrace his kingdom. Upon his way he stopped at a toy market, spied a shelf holding gold, frankincense and myrrh, wondered what on earth a child would want with those, and purchased a stuffed penguin.

And thus did King Ernest set out into the desert upon his trusty camel, Mike, in search of the Star of David. For miles they scanned the night sky searching for the star as they trod along in the dark, until finally the two drifted off to sleep. It was hours later when they awoke to a bright light.

"Can I help you?" a voice asked. He was bent and elderly, his outstretched arm holding an oil lamp.

"Er, yes. I hope so. I am King Ernest, and I am searching for a star to lead me to the Son of God, Jesus the Christ, Lord of Hosts, King of Kings. And I'm totally lost. Can you help?"

"I ... uh ... hate to be the one to tell you this," the old man replied, "but the Christ child and his family have already fled to Egypt to escape King Herod. Didn't you read the *Register*? It explicitly stressed, 'arrive early.'"

"My queen wouldn't let me go until I cleaned out the royal attic," King Ernest said, looking forlorn. The old man nodded sympathetically.

The light of day started its slow ascent from the east as King Ernest and Mike began their sad journey home.

"What will I tell my queen?" Ernest wondered aloud as the hours ticked by. "Now my kingdom will forever be gripped by turmoil, my queen never to cook lasagna again, just out of spite."

As Ernest and Mike were making their way over the never-ending dunes, a haggard looking man was gathering water from a small pond while his wife nursed her newborn son.

Surrounded by a grouping of small rocks jutting out of the desert floor, Joseph felt sure that his family could rest comfortably for a time before continuing their journey.

“God has blessed us with this oasis in the des—” Joseph stopped talking. A startled look had appeared on Mary’s face as she gazed between some rocks. From atop a nearby dune came a very surprised looking man on a camel.

“Uh ... er ... Excuse me!” Ernest shouted, his voice shaking. “Surely God has led me this day. I am King Ernest, and I come to greet the newborn King!”

*Whew*, Joseph thought.

Ernest slowly approached the child, so small and fragile. Could this be the Savior for whom we’ve all been waiting? Could this be the Son of God?

“From this tiny babe has come hope for the world,” Mary said, gazing proudly at her son.

Ernest gently lay the stuffed penguin in the child’s grasp, and the baby Jesus held it tight, a grin alighting his tiny face.

# Lost and found

I knew the highway would be just around the next corner. It didn't matter which highway. Any would be better than being lost among the county roads of the central plains. At least my road map wasn't lost. It was safely pinned to my bulletin board back at work.

The occasional washboard roads were making mincemeat of my truck. If you own a truck, you'll know that they don't drive along washboard roads as much as dance. It's when the truck leads that you know you're in trouble.

There I was, bouncing along, my muffler threatening defecation, and the sky edging toward darkness.

I aimed my car in the general direction of home and prayed the roads would cooperate. At one point I turned southwest, toward Spearville and home. I drove for nearly 20 minutes when the road suddenly jutted around to the right, in the direction of the North Pole, with no turnoff in sight.

Whoever had designed these roads did so under the assumption that the fastest way to get from point A to point B was to put your right foot in, put your left foot out, do the hokey pokey and turn yourself about.

The sky to the west was slowly turning into an orange, yellowish color, offsetting the deep blue sky to the east. I saw a rabbit look up at me as I drove by – not so much frightened, but curious to see a person on this road, a road so long void of life.

An owl flew by and called my name: “Moron! Moron!”

It wasn't until I saw one of the lost tribes of Israel that I knew I was really in trouble. Apparently, the tribe of “Bruce” had wandered the deserts of Kansas for hundreds of years after an ancestor took a wrong turn at a “mailbox near a wind-

mill” just north of Egypt.

Regardless of the many twists and turns, eventually I found myself moving in the right direction. Along the way, I encountered some interesting sights, such as old, dilapidated barns from who-knows-when, cows, a railway car in a field, a squashed skunk, cows, several miles of barbed wire fence, a bird, another bird, two little birds attacking a bigger bird, cows, a shoe, a hubcap, an abandoned U-Haul trailer, a horse, another horse, two little horses attacking a bigger horse, and a man whom I would come to know as “the guy.”

Except for the old gate at the front of the road leading to his ranch in the distance, the guy appeared to be standing in the middle of nowhere.

“Can you tell me how to get to Highway 50?” I asked the guy.

“Yap. Just take that road up there to the second road and go left. ... Wait. ... No. ... No, you would go right. Then go up about ... I never take 50, ya see ... take the second left and that will take you all the way to County Road 75. Or is it 57? I think it’s 75. If there’s a big house with a blue top, then you’re okay. That should get you to County Road 65, which turns into 39, which should run you right into the highway.”

“50?”

“No. That would take you to 83. I never take 50.”

So I pointed my car in the general direction of home and drove off.

After several more turns and a few more lonely roads, I finally found a familiar road I knew would lead to home and hearth. Several minutes later, I drove up to my garage and checked my watch. How late was I?

I was 20 minutes earlier than usual. Although laced with twists and turns, I had actually found a shortcut. Unfortunate-

ly, it was impossible to retrace my steps after being so hopelessly lost.

Now, as I drive those extra minutes along paved highways to get home each day -- people passing me by dangerously if I go under 70 mph, the scenery whizzing by in a blur -- I think about the old barns, the deep blue sky, the guy, the sometimes bumpy roads that force you to slow down and take notice, and how much I miss them.

### **A nice time**

I just returned from a very nice nine days at home in Colorado for Christmas. My parents, especially my mom, always express a little bit of guilt when the time is done and I head back to Kansas -- guilt that I didn't have a merrier time; that perhaps their physical conditions kept me from achieving true jolly-dome.

This, I tell them, is just downright silly.

It's true that my dad's knees and back give him a lot of pain, and yet, I'm convinced that he would bound up Mount Everest like a wildebeest if on the top of the mountain there was a screen door at which his Schnauzer, Maggie, was begging to come through for a bite of Dad's peanut butter sandwich.

As for Mom, that prescription-induced fatigue that seems to hit harder as we age doesn't deter from the fact that she has the upper body strength of a Cape Buffalo. Jelly jar lids are so intimidated when they see her coming that they unscrew themselves. When it comes to memory, I'm certain that Mom's is the result of some mind-enhancing government experiment. I prefer that over the alternative, that my recall, which is far, far inferior to hers, should be recalled.

Did I have a nice time at home?

No, Mom and Dad. I had a wonderful time. A great time. *The best.*

-- Dave Myers

## Never too late

**I**t was my first confession. So it's understandable that when the priest said, "Go in peace and sin no more," I didn't realize the confession was over. I continued to kneel in the little room, figuring he was just taking a few moments to contemplate my sins before returning to continue our discussion.

Meanwhile, Mom watched as a child finished her confession and came out the opposite side of the confessional, which indicated to her that I should have emerged quite some time ago.

Suddenly the door to my side swung open. "Are you all right?" Mom asked. I could see other kids looking at me from where they waited in the pews.

"Yeah!" I exclaimed, waving at her to close the door as if she had just interrupted the Second Vatican Council.

Of course, by then I knew something was amiss. The little sliding door opened again and Father repeated the same words he had said the first time.

What's a little kid to do in such an embarrassing situation? When asked how long it had been since my last confession, I couldn't respond, "Four-and-a-half minutes."

I did the only thing I could do. I changed my voice and made up a whole new list of sins. This time, when he said, "Go in peace and sin no more," I bounded out of there like a gazelle. Should I have gone to confession a third time to apologize for the sins I made up the second time? So much pressure for a six-year-old.

Now, Mom (being Mom) didn't chide me, but instead tried to console me on this, my highly embarrassing first confession. She and Dad probably saved the laughter for later.

Mom could afford to laugh. She had earned the right after a memorable first confession experience of her own. You see, Mom thought that her first confession was actually a dry run – a rehearsal before the real thing. Where she got this idea, I don't know, because her first confession was her actual first confession.

Thinking it was a practice run-through, Mom didn't take the time to contemplate real sins. She was creative. She had fun. She made up a list of the most heinous crimes ever perpetrated by a first grader in 1930s St. Peters, Colorado.

If her sins were to be believed, my mother was the worst criminal since John Dillinger. She made Al Capone look like the Little Match Girl. She had robbed banks, stolen cars – she had a counterfeit press under her bed – and, truth be told, she had “plugged” more than a few along the way.

Mom didn't say what occurred after her confession, or how many “Our Fathers” and “Hail Marys” she was asked to pray, but I'm pretty sure she's still counting.

That's what I love about my mom. There are very few embarrassing things I've done to which my mom can't say, “I can top that.” Fortunately, Mom has never lost her childlike sense of fun.

There's a Biblical passage that urges us to leave childlike things behind us. But that doesn't mean we have to always act our age. Christ lived on earth for 33 years. Just because John didn't write, “On Tuesday, Jesus took the afternoon off to play kick-ball with a group of children,” doesn't mean he never did it. I can clearly envision Jesus laughing hysterically as he runs around a field amid laughing children and one elusive kick-ball.

And I can see Mom – again and again – laughing along with her grandchildren as if she's not a grandmother at all, but one of the kids.

Mom was raised by a family of nine older brothers and sisters, two devout Catholic parents, several sometimes-grouchy hogs and a horse named “Ranger.” Their Eastern Colorado farm never did have electricity while Mom lived there. The family outhouse actually stands as a memorial near the high school in Flemming, Colorado. What it memorializes, I’m not sure. Perhaps the passing of time.

For me, the years seem to pass more quickly the older I become. But regardless of my age, I know by Mom’s example, that it’s never too late to be a kid.

# Rhonda Lee Combs for president

**Y**ou may remember prior to the last presidential election when a team of seven *Southwest Kansas Register* political analysts set out across the nation in search of the person most qualified to be president of the United States. Sadly, after an exhaustive search, their eventual candidate only received seven votes after one of the analysts forgot to cast his ballot because he was caring for a sick goldfish.

Despite their failure, because neither the current president nor the Democratic candidate bring to the forefront qualifications that make them entirely suited for the top job, the team has once again decided to set out in search of the perfect candidate.

After months of in-depth research, fact-finding, and information gathering, they found themselves in the quaint town of Pulman, Idaho, in which lives 62-year-old Myra Bunch, half-owner of “Braiding Bunch” hair salon and gift shop.

Bunch had created a line of decorative statuettes, each with a little saying such as, “Be nice to each other,” “Always look on the bright side of life,” and “Technological advances have increased the complexity, scope, and speed of potential risks to our national security.”

When set in a particular order, the statuettes formed a seven-volume thesis on positive inter-government relations, making her the perfect candidate for president, according to the analysts.

Unfortunately, when asked if she would consider running, she said she was too busy to devote herself to a full-time position, but would be happy to consider “doing it as a hobby.”

Frustrated but prepared for such setbacks, the hearty analysts continued their search, moving on to their second choice, Dr. C.R. “Truly” Cane of Chiggerbight, Oklahoma. Dr. Cane, as you may know, is the grandson of town founder Pettys Chiggerbight, and 13th in line from William Chiggerbite of Scotland. The Chiggerbite clan was said to have earned the name after defeating a “vast armada” of angry chiggers camped in their garden.

Dr. Cane, or “Doc Truly” to his friends, was known for three things: 1) his inability to tell anything but the truth 2) punctuality, and 3) his ability to balance a bowling ball on a corn flake.

After much research, including interviews with the doctor’s patients (including the late Donald Grey, the late Philicia Johnson and the mildly feverish Palmer Bell), the analysts learned that the truth Doc Truly espoused was the same kind Jesus referred to in the Gospel of Matthew as, “Truth with a capitol T.”

The analysts felt that if the president spoke the Truth, the world couldn’t help but drastically improve. And entertaining heads of state with the bowling ball trick couldn’t hurt.

But again their hopes were dashed when, on one fateful day, Doc Truly’s wife asked him what he thought of her new hairstyle and he wound up in intensive care.

The analysts once again hit the road, this time landing in mid-town Chicago at the apartment of Rhonda Lee Combs, a 27-year-old single mother of 12. Combs, they had discovered, was successfully supporting her children – all of whom had a 3.5 grade point average or above — on minimum wage earnings. Understandably suspicious at first, the analysts completed a background check on Combs, and learned that apart from occasionally selling tartar sauce at the fish-yard, her success

was entirely due to her ability to manage money.

This, combined with the fact that her children were excelling, left our experts brimming with hope. They surmised that Combs would make a better national economist than the entire current administration.

Intrigued by the offer, Combs ultimately turned it down after the request alone caused her youngest child's IQ to drop by 17 points.

With their top three choices a bust, the analysts decided to call it quits. They were outside of Omaha when they stopped at a highway gas station to purchase corn-dogs and Ovaltine. As they stood near a microwave oven discussing their failed journey, a burly trucker who overheard their conversation shared this advice:

“In all my travels, I've seen many a man or woman who would make a far better president than those in recent years. Problem is, them who push hardest for peace and contentment aint the ones who get voted in. A long time ago a man once preached to ‘turn the other cheek,’ and he said that ‘those who live by the sword, die by the sword.’

“You think for a second that if that man were alive today, he would stand a chance of being elected president?”

## Lent: A time for slowing down

I relaxed onto the couch, balanced my bowl of ice cream on my chest, turned on the TV and watched as one skier after another made their Olympic run down a steep, winding slope in a blur of motion -- talent beyond reason, endurance beyond understanding, skill beyond measure.

Meanwhile, I tried and failed to maneuver a spoonful of ice-cream to my mouth without spilling it down my chin. I've not always been such a couch potato. Watching the Olympics, I recalled the occasion 30 years ago when my brother, Tom, took me skiing for the first time. Tom, an accomplished skier, decided to skip the bunny slope and take me directly to the intermediate slope. This is true, by the way.

Having never been skiing, I wasn't aware that you *wind* down the mountainside to control your speed. Nor did I know that when going fast one generally bends at the knees to help maintain control. So, I went directly down the mountain standing straight up the entire way, as if I were waiting for a bus.

My first thought as I began to speed down the mountain was the simple acknowledgment that I was skiing. It was a good feeling, as if I were experiencing a sort of right of passage.

Then I began to accelerate at an uncomfortable rate, which grew more uncomfortable with every second that passed. That's when I had my second thought: "AAAAAAAAAAAAHhhh-hhh!!!"

I gasped against the frigid air as it struck my face like an angry Mike Tyson. The icy air bit at my ears, again like Mike Tyson.

I zoomed down the mountain faster and faster until the G-forces kicked in and my face took on that weird deflated look

that the astronauts get while training in those big centrifuges. It wasn't a pretty picture.

My goggles began to fog up and my world became a strange Twilight Zone-esque landscape filled with trees zipping by, looking like they were from really bad water color paintings.

Meanwhile, stunned skiers gazed admiringly at the guy who was standing on his skis with the intensity of someone ordering Chinese takeout while flying down the slope like the human canon ball.

It took only seconds to reach top speed – not long enough for me to entirely comprehend what was really happening. I looked around as if I was standing still and someone was pushing the earth really, really fast underneath me. The world began to look like that scene in Star Wars when they switch to light speed. For a moment I even considered closing my eyes, but then I decided that the owner of the little deli 300 yards below me wouldn't appreciate knowing that the reason I destroyed his front patio was because I attempted to use the Force.

I don't know just how fast I was going, but I'm pretty sure I proved Einstein's theory of relativity and went back in time a few minutes. (Or maybe that little bird crawling back into its shell was just scared.)

I peered far below and saw ski racks and buildings and people milling around. Not a safety net or someone's giant pillow collection among them.

I decided then and there what I had to do. I began leaning to the left, farther, farther and farther, until I fell completely over and went rolling through the snow, my skis dislodging and heading down the mountain without me.

I lay motionless for a moment, thanking God that I seemed to be unhurt. I propped myself up on my elbows looking like a half-melted Frosty the Snowman. I looked down the moun-

tain and then back up to where I had come from. There was my brother gliding to my side, a look of concern replaced by a huge grin.

The morning after watching the Olympics and recalling my ski trip, I was at the Ash Wednesday Mass when Father mentioned that Lent was a time when we endeavor to come ever closer to Christ. I couldn't help but call to mind that ski trip again, realizing that for me, Lent isn't so much about fasting, it's about slowing.

A Canadian priest once said that we are "so attentive to everything, that we're deeply attentive to nothing." It's time for me, this Lent, to slow down, to be still and allow God's voice to permeate through the blur and help me to clearly see the beauty of his creation that is all around me – beauty that surrounds us all, if only we slow down enough to see it.

## Burtram, my Anxiety Monster

I woke from my sleep, sure I had heard a loud “clunk”. I glanced at my clock; it read 2:30 a.m. I was in the middle of a reoccurring dream in which I’m a giant eyebrow; when someone asks me a question to which I didn’t know the answer I arch myself quizzically. I always wake up with a sore back.

I looked around my bedroom. Had I actually heard that *clunk*, or just dreamt it? Then, suddenly, I saw a shadow pass along the bottom of my closet door. To my horror, the door slowly pushed open and there stood a 7-foot tall, scaly monster, with horns and big ol’ claws and sharp teeth and really stinky breath.

“No, no, no,” I said, my heart sinking. “Not you again.”

“Hey, don’t blame me.”

And I couldn’t. Burtram, my own personal Anxiety Monster, often comes to visit me in the night, usually when I’m trying to go to sleep, but he sometimes wakes me up in the early, early hours when the world is dark and silent and there’s nothing to distract me from my thoughts.

“Hey,” Burtram whispers, “remember that article you wrote a few months ago? The one you messed up? Yeah, you really messed that up. Just ... just wanted to remind you. About messing it up. So ... don’t forget. You messed it up. The article I mean.”

“I know, I know! *Go away!*”

“Hey, what if that dark spot on your arm hadn’t been a smudge from that Snickers bar? What if it had been something serious? You know ... *serious!* It could happen to anybody, you know. Even you. In fact, my cousin in Beloit ....”

“I know, I KNOW! Please shut up!”

“By the way, you’re 46 and you’re still angry that they took Saturday morning cartoons off the air. Do you think that’s normal? You think you got a few issues? Huh?”

“Hey!” I say in my defense. “The Banana Splits wasn’t just a Saturday morning cartoon, it was a cultural phenomenon, man! Now, please, please go away.”

A few minutes go by, my eyelids begin to feel heavy, and I think that finally ... FINALLY I’m going to drift off to sleep.

“Psssst: Dave, you know what else? Huh? You wanna know what else?”

I plug my ears and shout “LA LA LA LA LA...” But it doesn’t help. Burtram’s voice sears through my plugged ears like a lightning bolt through a fog bank.

“The people you love the most? Yeah, you know who. Well, guess what? They’re not going to live forever. Nope. I’ll just let you dwell on that for a while. Well, my job here is done. Nighty night.” And pretty soon my head feels like it’s been put through a Lean, Mean Grilling Machine.

As I’ve mentioned too often in this column, I don’t handle anxiety very well, and unfortunately it doesn’t take much to rile me up. A wrong look, an upsetting e-mail, a misspelling in a headline (only in the *SKR* – in other papers it’s reaffirming somehow), even a wrong number (Was it really a wrong number? Maybe they were just seeing if I was in so they can come here ... and ... and ... yell at me for messing up that article! NO!!!!!!) can send me plummeting into an anxious funk.

The big question – the question I ask myself time and time again – is, how do I handle it? Self-medication? Naaaw. Anyone who has self-medicated knows that it’s a one-way ticket to Funky Town. Sure, it offers a quick high -- whether from alcohol or, my favorite, caffeine -- but what follows is a game of how-low-can-you-go.

How about meditation? The other night (and this is true) I listened to a meditation tape I had made months ago using my own voice to lull me into a deeeep state of relaxation: “You are walking along a babbling brook. Listen to it babble. Babble, babble, babble. Every care is slipping away. Slip, slip, slip. You are tooootally relaxed.”

But instead of becoming relaxed, all I could think was, “Do I really sound like that?”

While I sometimes find myself seeking easier, quicker answers, I’ve found that one of the best ways to attack my anxieties is simply by talking them out – with friends, loved ones, the cashier at the grocery store. Spout your anxieties like Mount St. Helens, regardless of how many people are behind you in line.

But more importantly, keep the Holy Spirit on your shoulder at all times -- the Spirit of God’s ever-present love urging you on through difficult, stressful, anxious times, a constant reminder that we’re all far from perfect -- that life is far from perfect -- but a reminder that in life, just as in death, there’s a Light at the end of the tunnel.

## Of go-carts and green pea soup

Last week I wrote about Burtram, my own personal anxiety monster that haunts me three or four nights a week. I've offered him plenty of time off, but ol' Burtram's a workaholic.

That column got me to thinking about when I was a child. During those days – back when childhood innocence shielded me against most stresses in life -- there were those occasional anxieties that did come along. When I encountered a bully, for example, I knew from the moment he eyed me coming around the corner or down the street that humiliation was waiting with him. I wish I could tell you even one story of my standing up to the bully -- just one story of my clenched fist raised in defiance, to let you know I'm not a complete pansy. *Sorry.*

And there were those anxieties that arose when I got into trouble at school, such as the time I playfully pushed a fellow third grader. Instead of laughing and pushing me back, she did a sort of backward somersault over a desk, landing on her rear. I saw her face slowly contort into that pre-cry crinkle, and that's when I knew I was in trouble. What's worse is why I pushed her. It was because I liked her. But do you think I was going to tell the teacher that? I didn't know what to use for an excuse. I think I blamed the Communists.

On those nights, I'd lay awake, willing the memory of the day's events to evaporate and disappear, much as I tried to do at the supper table with the Lima beans.

Then came the day that "The Exorcist" was advertised on TV. "The Exorcist" came to theaters in 1973 when I was 10 years old. Talk about anxiety! To this day I have not seen the movie, but the commercials alone were enough to scare the

begeesees out of me. Even today, I have no begeesees.

I'd lay awake, wrapped tightly up to my nose in my blanket, scared silly because I happened to see a commercial for "The Exorcist" that night.

Necessity isn't the only mother of invention; so is fear. To block thoughts of little girls who sounded like James Earl Jones from haunting my 10-year-old mind, I came up with the "go-cart." Kids, if you're reading this, which you're probably not, this was long, long before video games. Well, except for Pong: *"And the 12 apostles did step into the corner convenience market wherein they bought burritos and played Pong into the night."* (Dave 7:14-73)

We didn't have video games, but we did have go-carts – anything from a few two-by-fours with wheels, to the deluxe model that included a lawnmower engine. Each night, when that ol' "Exorcist" commercial came along to haunt me, I'd imagine every corner of my go-cart – every piece of wood, every screw, every wheel, every racing stripe, every throw pillow. This would be the Chitty Chitty Bang Bang of go-carts. Night after night I built that thing in my imagination, adding new parts, making it cooler and cooler.

God's great gift of imagination gave me escape from those ugly thoughts, allowing me instead to build something wonderful in my mind. No green pea soup for me, thank you. No floating above the bed while sounding like a cat coughing up a hairball. You go ahead and float all you want – float to the moon for all I care. I'll be working on my go-cart.

Today, the anxieties are worse – because they're real. We worry about sick loved ones – or ones who could be facing sickness. Anyone who's awaited test results knows this awful anxiety. We worry about our job, our health, about paying off debt, and about that new "ka-chunk" sound in the same car that you were convinced a few months ago wasn't a big

enough clunker to trade in.

And maybe you're angry and have difficulty voicing it, so it sits in your stomach like a couple of pit bulls fighting over a happy meal. Maybe someone at work or a family member hurt you, or you had a run-in with a stranger.

Today, put a couple of those together and I'm *wishing* all I had to think about was a little girl with a head that can do a complete 360. (I hope they used special effects for that.)

Last week I suggested a few answers; this week I say "pray." Pray, pray, pray. Talk to God. Just last night I really did say to God, "I'm not putting you to the test, Lord, just making a request. Okay, you're all powerful, so please help me find a bit of peace, God, so I can sleep." And you know what? He did.

*... My mountain cabin, deep in the forest, is built of pine and stone. There's a long porch outside on which sits a couple of rockers and a slumbering dog named "Sarah." Inside, a large, lit fireplace fills the room with warmth, bathing it in soft golden light. ...*

## A national ‘worry-o-rama’

I was driving to work the other day when I saw smoke billowing out from under my hood. A light flashed red on my instrument panel and I noticed that the heat gauge was on “well done.” I pulled over on the highway, opened the hood and found myself enveloped in a thick fog, not unlike you might find in London ... or in my head following a staff meeting.

My antifreeze -- mixed with “stop-leak” that very morning -- had erupted all over my engine.

Knowing what I do about engines, I decided after several minutes of careful consideration that what had occurred was not good. I did the first thing I always do in a crisis situation, I ate a mini-Three Musketeers bar. I would need sustenance if I would survive this dire predicament.

I glanced at my engine and peered out over the vast horizon that is Kansas. I had never really gazed out over the wheat fields of Kansas, I thought. Then a moment later I realized, *yes I had, lots of times.*

Several more minutes passed and I eventually realized that doing nothing was not a viable solution, and that doing something would be the wiser path to take. I closed the hood, got in the truck and turned the key.

Oddly enough, I knew just how my radiator felt. Only 12 hours earlier, I too was fighting a high temperature -- amid a hard fought battle with stomach flu, during which I did my own fair share of erup --. (Sorry. That’s gross.) In fact, I was still feeling extremely weak as I pulled over on the highway that morning. Unfortunately, it was deadline day. I would slip into the office quietly and quickly, put the paper to bed, then

go back home and put me to bed.

You see, friends, I am like the postman. Neither wind nor rain nor risk of urping will keep me from getting the *SKR* to press. And for that you are welcome.

After my pickup sat for a while on the highway the engine started. My truck was able to hold its fluid the rest of the way to work. Much like myself-- (Sorry again.)

Once back home around noon -- the paper all tucked in -- I refilled the radiator. It was very thirsty. I filled and filled and filled and it never seemed to get full. It didn't occur to me that it had a pretty massive leak. (I have a habit of not having things occur to me until at least three days after it would have done me any good.) By the next morning there was a river of antifreeze so deep in my garage that I had to use flippers and a snorkel to get to my truck. I'm getting a new radiator in two days. And a new temperature gauge and fuel filter. At 203,000 miles, I figure the ol' girl is due. Oh, and new flippers.

## **TWO DAYS LATER**

I like to think that everything we say and do and experience -- even automotive break-downs -- is a thought that goes through God's mind. My truck broke down and God knew it. And he knows that I'm worried, as you are, about the economy, about major unexpected expenditures, about maybe losing my job.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, that for which we worry never comes to pass. But that doesn't stop me from turning worry into an art form. (I was named "1997 Worry Champion of Arvada, Colo." for which I received the "Warty".) And especially in times like these, when that one percent blossoms into reality for countless people, our lives become a sort of national worry-o-rama.

When bad things do happen, whether it's something relatively minor like having your car break down, or more serious

such as losing your job, learning you have a terrible disease, or losing someone you love – the event can draw us closer to the mystery of God. What leaves us shaken often stirs our faith. It sheds us of our security blanket and leaves us again realizing that we have no more control over our lives than a newborn child, and that we really, truly are in God’s hands.

I handed my mechanic \$550. A lot of money, but, fortunately I had that much in savings. *I’m going to be fine*, I repeated to myself like a mantra as he handed me the receipt. And as I walked out of the shop, my mechanic really did say to me, “Dave, have you noticed that your transmission sounds a little ... off?”

A forest of worry starts with a little seed. Our greatest consolation is knowing that there is a master gardener at work deep in our hearts, always ready to do some landscaping. All we need do is place those worries, whether they be a seed or a forest stretching over the horizon, into his loving hands.

## A pearl of great price named 'Missy'

I stepped into the animal shelter and through to the dog enclosures where two workers greeted me, one cradling the head of a mop in a curiously tender way. There was no handle protruding from the mop, and I surmised that this woman must have a fixation with mops – an unnatural attachment better left for her psychotherapist to unwind. (I wasn't one to judge. I once dreamt that I fell in love with a cartoon mouse. Or *was* it a dream?)

The woman smiled at me expectantly, and it suddenly dawned on me that this wasn't a mop head at all. You see, I had notified the shelter a few weeks earlier that I was looking for a little poodle to get for my parents, whose beloved dog had died a few months before.

"Here she is," the worker said, smiling.

Upon closer inspection, I saw that instead of a mop, she was holding a pile of matted fur that had been swept off of a very dirty floor – one with all sorts of nameless substances on it -- the kind of substances used to fertilize gardens.

I stressed to her that I didn't want only the fur, that I wanted all the other parts, too.

Was this the dog that I was going to get for my folks? I mean, who knows what was under that pile of matted fur. There could be a sewer rat under there for all I knew. Or some kind of mutant. Or some kind of mutant sewer rat. Was I prepared to buy a mutant sewer rat for my parents? Would a mutant sewer rat cuddle with my parents on their chairs as their beloved dog had done? Could they learn to love a mutant sewer rat? Well,

they put up with me for 20 years. Sure, why not?

I analyzed the pile of fur for several minutes, strategizing where the head must be. I slowly reached over and lifted the fur. Nope. That was definitely not the head. Reaching for the other end, I lifted the matted fur and there were two big brown eyes peering out at me as if from a cave, a smile indicated by the sudden wagging of a pile of fur at its other end.

A little while later I was placing the little creature in a cage in the back seat of my car while making a mental note to have myself fumigated. The little beast reacted to the crate as if she were the Tasmanian Devil from the old Bugs Bunny cartoons. *My folks are gonna' love this*, I thought: "Here Mom and Dad; I brought you a psychotic mutant sewer rat!"

I got the little creature home, took her out on the porch and began to clip away at the matted fur. That's when something amazing happened. With the first clip, I found that underneath the thick, indescribable filthy matting was a layer of soft, pure white down. I clipped and clipped, wads of matted fur flying this way and that. When I was finished, the dog was one-third its previous size; it was pure white, and was one of the cutest toy poodles I'd ever seen.

I temporarily named her Gypsy due to her mysterious wandering past, and she and I took to chasing each other through the house. She would chase me, and then I would turn and chase her. I called the game, "Chase," after realizing "Monopoly" was taken.

A few weeks later I planned my trip home to deliver little Gypsy to my folks.

For some 15 years, their previous dog, Cricket, had sat beside my dad in his rocker. With the pain of Cricket's death still prevalent, I introduced a bubbly little toy poodle into their home. I set her down and the first thing she did was to hop up on my dad's chair and lay beside him as Cricket had done

countless times; it was as if she had known Dad all her life. She would do the same with my mom, regularly sitting beside her or curling up in a blanket at her feet.

For some five years, this little wandering Gypsy, which my folks renamed “Missy,” was an extension of their hearts, a precious and fragile gift with a mysterious past. Sometimes Missy would tell Mom of her previous adventures, and Mom would smile as she shared with us a bit of that ’ol Myers imagination.

Then, last week, after a brief illness, Missy’s adventurous life on Earth ended with one final journey.

The little dog that was so filthy you couldn’t tell one end from the other had within her a beauty not defined by her white downy fur, but by the sheer joy she was able to bring two special people. She had begged us to lift the matted fur and discover the pearl of great price that lay underneath.

Today, I can just see Missy sitting in a big fluffy rocker in heaven, sharing stories with a dog named Cricket about the joy of their previous home -- about tummy scratches, endless kibble and barking at the neighbor dogs – but especially about those two people who gave their love openly and unconditionally to the wandering little dog with the dirty face.

# The day I met God

**D**o you ever experience times when you feel that God isn't listening? Do you ever wonder if he even knows you exist? If you were at a party and God came walking in, would you feel like he knows you, or would you think you need to be introduced?

"Hey, Dave! C'mon over here. I want you to meet someone. This is God. God? Dave."

"Wow! God! I've heard so much about you. It's so nice to finally meet you."

"Come now, Dave! Don't you remember me? We met before, you know."

"HMMMMM. I'm sorry, God. Nope, I'm afraid I just can't remember. Wait; was it at the Stein's dinner party? I recall seeing someone who looked like ..."

"That was the caterer. We have similar chins. Actually Dave, you wouldn't remember the first time we met. It was the day you were born."

"Huh?"

"Yep. Casper, Wyoming. I remember you were quite a squirmer. It was like holding on to a bar of soap. It was all your mother could do to keep you from shooting across the room."

I always wondered why my dad joked about bringing a catcher's mitt to the hospital.

"Hey, remember a few weeks after we left Casper, when that car plowed into my bedroom at the old house? Guess it just wasn't my time."

"If you'd decided to leave a few weeks later, it would have been. Right now you'd be writing a column in heaven. That is,

if we had newspapers, which we don't."

"Do you remember that time I ran away from home?"

"Sure. You and the neighbor girl, Jodi. You were pretty rebellious for a 3-year-old. You made it all the way around the block before her dad pulled up."

"We'd planned to start a new life together down by the 5 & 10 store. *Heh, heh*. Hey, remember Charlie?"

"Your poodle. Sure. He had been abused by his previous owner, ran away, then your family found him and nursed him back to health. No teeth, a dirty little face. Had a flatulence problem I recall. A good dog."

"Is he ... uh ...?"

"Oh, sure. New set of teeth. Chews on a bone all day. Happy as can be."

I smiled at that. Me and God shared so many memories -- all of them in fact. I asked him if he remembered when I got lost in the K-Mart.

"Oh, yeah. You ran through the store screaming, 'MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY MOMMY!' When you found her, you latched onto her leg like a bear trap."

"Yeah," I said, "Only it wasn't her. Whoever it was had a very nervous disposition."

I recalled my two buddies I had growing up, both a bit rough around the edges ... like me, I guess. God remembered when the three of us stole penny candies (still, the guilt looms); he remembered our run-ins with the police, our stealing crab-apples from Farmer Jones. He remembered the struggles I had growing up, the bad choices I made in high school and college. He recalled them all, without anger, without judgment. I shouldn't have been surprised. He's always known the contents of my heart, after all.

There were questions I wanted to ask God, questions that had nothing to do with memories. What's the meaning of ex-

istence? Why do people have to suffer? Do you really answer all our prayers? Why does it seem that you're so distant at times?

But I never *really* met God at a party, never really had that conversation. Oh, sure; there had been thousands of occasions over the years that I chatted with God; sitting alone, hands folded, eyes closed, offering a quick *thank you, please won't you help so-and-so*, or, *please keep me from saying something at the department head meeting that could lead to extreme difficulties in paying the mortgage*.

So, it was within the silence of my heart that I turned to God and asked, "Do you really remember the day I was born?"

And in that silence -- if I am still, if I listen carefully -- I can hear his answer whispered loudly and clearly in the silence of my heart: "Like it was yesterday."

"You mean, with all you have to do, with all the millions of people you help, you had time to hold me in your arms?"

"Dave," I heard him say with so much gentleness, "I've never stopped."

## Lent: A time for sculpting

I slowly chipped away at the block of plaster, which was about the size of a gallon of milk. In fact, it was exactly the size of a gallon of milk. That's how the block was formed, in an empty gallon sized jug of milk.

Others in my sculpture class chose to use electric tools to sculpt their milk-jug shaped block into who-knows-what – drills and scroll saws and sanders. For some inexplicable reason I chose to use only a pocket knife, which meant it would take me far longer to accomplish far less than my classmates.

I recalled a quote from Michelangelo. When asked how he made the sculpture of “David,” the artist replied, “It’s easy. You just chip away the stone that doesn’t look like David.”

While clever, it wasn’t terribly helpful. In my case, nothing about that giant rock he used would have ever looked anything like David, and I would have wound up with a pile of rubble. If David, in reality, had looked like a pile of rubble, I would have been a huge success.

But this was art school circa 1988, downtown Denver. My teacher’s name was Martin, and he was so mean that he would have made Attila the Hun say, “Boy, that guy’s really mean!”

He would yell and curse (and boy, could he curse!) at you for no reason other than your very existence, which he deemed somehow as a personal insult to him. He had absolutely no qualms with humiliating you in front of the class, and often did so, especially when critiquing your work.

Making things worse was the fact that I was a terrible sculptor. As Martin made his way slowly around the room, peering at our creations-in-progress, I carved away at my block, mak-

ing only a smaller and smaller block of plaster. I knew I was in trouble.

“What the [tarnation] is this?” he screeched like a dog that just had his tail stomped on. In his hand, held high so that all could gaze upon its horribleness, was my sculpture. “I’ve wiped better looking [stuff] off the bottom of my shoe!” he barked.

When the day came that he actually sang the praises of one of my sculptures – going so far to say that he wished he had made it – I wondered (and really do wonder to this day) if it wasn’t a prolonged exercise in sarcasm. I think it was.

His meanness overshadowed any lesson that might have inadvertently escaped his tight grasp. I walked away from the class having learned only that I wanted to be his polar opposite.

In a sense, it was a strong lesson. I was never destined to be a great sculptor, but at that formative age, I had learned a personal lesson in behavior. I was determined never to treat others with the disrespect he had shown me.

I suppose that this is one way God chips away at us, providing lessons in unexpected ways that can, if we allow them, make us just a little bit more Christ-like – chipping away at any part of the stone that doesn’t look like Christ.

Truth be told, I shouldn’t sound quite so pious. I mean, I wanted to hit him in the nose. In fact, I *saw myself* hitting him in the nose. I saw him staggering back, then looking at me all wide-eyed and fearful and saying something like, “Gosh, Dave. I’m sorry I was so disrespectful to you. Your nose-hitting has shown me the error of my ways. For this, I thank you.”

But I didn’t. Hit him, I mean. If I had, you’d have probably read by now several columns highlighting what I learned

in jail.

The next semester he taught my art history class, which included a daily slide show of famous art works. By then Martin had earned himself a reputation. One day he came into class, pulled down the movie screen, and discovered that someone had drawn a nearly life-sized caricature of him dressed as Adolph Hitler, with a group of people shouting, “*Heil Martin!*”

I didn’t know at the time why it made me so uncomfortable. Perhaps it was because Martin was Jewish. Perhaps it was hearing the embarrassment in Martin’s voice as he tried to dismiss it amid the nervous laughter of the class.

As mean as he had been to me, I couldn’t laugh. Now that I reflect on it, I think that God had already started to chip away the part of me that said this sort of disrespect was okay, much less *funny*. Even when done to Martin.

This Lent, I’m going to open myself up to God the sculptor, praying each day that He’ll chip away the things that continue to make me less Christ-like. It’s not going to be easy, for there’s an irony attached: As cumbersome as those chunks of rock can be, as much of a burden as they can be, they tend to give us comfort. False comfort, but comfort just the same. Allow God the sculptor to do what He does best. Trust God the artist to chip away and to create yet another masterpiece.

## A brief glance into ... The World of Tomorrow!

One of the greatest thrills I had as a child was when my teacher would announce that we were going to watch a film -- from the dousing of the lights to the *flut-flut-flut-flut* of the projector as it rolled to life, to the screen igniting in hues of grey. It didn't matter if it was about "Pecos Bill" or about the life cycle of the amoeba, if it was a film, I was happy.

One of my favorites focused on the future -- the housewife dressed appropriately in high heels and pearls, slipping a turkey into a small oven, only to remove it fully cooked three seconds later.

*This is the world of 1985!* the narrator would announce.

*Neato!* a child of six would think.

And the flying cars! And the weekend trips to the moon! No one could have convinced me back then that by 2012 we wouldn't have weekend trips to the moon.

If those films had been prophetic -- truly prophetic -- can you imagine their content?

*Copyright 1952; School Films Inc.*

**Narrator:** Join with me as we venture 60 years into the world of tomorrow! The world of 2012!

A rotund man with a large, white mustache walks on screen wearing a one-piece suit and large gloves with swirls on the cuffs denoting atoms. He's dressed in knee-high boots and has a strange logo affixed to his shirt that looks a bit like a rocket.

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Hello, boys and girls! My name is Lt. Ben Moonbeam, and I'm going to be your guide into 2012! Are

you ready take a peak into the future? You are? Then let's go!

*Scene switches to a teen-age boy sitting in a chair talking on a telephone.*

**Timmy:** Gee, Mary. I was just wondering ... what I mean to say is ... I'd really like ...

**Voice of Timmy's mother:** Timmy? Did you take out the garbage?

**Timmy:** Would you like...? Aw, gee. Never mind, Mary. I have to go.

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Did you notice, children? Timmy had to hang up the telephone and wasn't able to gather up the nerve to ask Mary to the big dance. ...But what would happen if this were 2012?

*Lt. Moonbeam waves his magic wand at Timmy. Suddenly the telephone disappears, and in its place is a device about the size of a wallet. Timmy sees the strange object and looks up at Lt. Moonbeam.*

**Timmy:** Wow! What's this? And who are you?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Why, I'm Lt. Moonbeam! And that's a smart-phone! It can facilitate web browsing, and streaming media. Their advanced operating systems give you access to a host of applications: productivity tools, shopping, multimedia, games, travel, news, weather, social, finance, references, etc...!

**Timmy:** Wow! That's keen! Can I still call Mary?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Ha ha ha. No, Timmy. We don't talk in the future! But you can text her! In fact, you don't need to talk to any of your friends any more!

**Timmy:** Jeepers, that's great! I'm going to get busy texting right now!

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Don't forget the garbage! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Seriously.

*Lt. Moonbeam addresses the camera.*

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Okay, children! Are you ready for another great adventure! Let's go!

*A blanket sets over an outdoor picnic table and we can hear a child inside. He is pretending to be in some sort of fort, barking orders to an imaginary army.*

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Hey, Billy! What would you say if I told you that you didn't have to play outdoors anymore?

**Billy:** *Billy lifts a flap and pokes his head out.* Golly! That would be swell!

**Lt. Moonbeam:** And what would you think if, while not playing outdoors, you could have a whole army, right at your finger tips! What would you say to that, Billy?

*Before Billy can answer, Lt. Moonbeam waves his magic wand. Suddenly Billy is sitting on a sofa in front of a television holding a device.*

**Billy:** Wow! What's this thing?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** It's an eighth generation video game console that is able to produce glasses-free stereoscopic 3D graphics, Billy! And that game you're playing? Well, let's just say you don't have to waste time imagining things any more!

**Billy:** Golly, Lt. Moonbeam! It's so real! What ... What's that guy holding?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Why, that's a flame-thrower, Billy! Just one in your arsenal of weapons! I bet you never thought playing Army could be so much fun!

**Billy:** I'll say! Jeepers, Lt. Moonbeam, can I stay in 2012 forever?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. No.

As a young child, I would have been thrilled with this vision of the future! If I had been a parent or teacher back then,

would I have been prophetic enough to see the consequences? Remember, this was a time when cigarettes weren't widely considered dangerous, and when school children practiced "duck n' cover" drills because nuclear war wasn't yet off the grid of sanity.

Imagine if instead of peering into the future, Lt. Moonbeam took the students on a tour of the past:

*A young girl sits on the floor watching "I Love Lucy". From the kitchen, her father asks her if she's done her homework. Mary looks annoyed and continues watching TV. Then ...*

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Hello, Mary!

**Mary:** Who ... who are you?! And what happened to the TV?

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Mary, we're in 1892, long before television sets were invented! There are no radios! Why, your town doesn't even have any cars or telephones!

**Mary:** Gosh, Lt. Moonbeam! That sounds terrible! I couldn't live without television!

**Lt. Moonbeam:** Ha ha. That's really ignorant, Mary. Why, look at how happy people are - - chatting with one another, enjoying each other's company with no distractions like the TV and radio.

**Mary:** Wow, that's nifty! I like enjoying people. I guess I just forgot how. I wish *we* didn't have a television.

**Lt. Moonbeam:** You can keep your TV, Mary, just remember as you get older the great lesson you've learned about living in an age of electronic excess. About the importance of talking, listening, reaching out in love, learning, teaching, singing, playing and praying -- together -- face-to-face.

Enjoy and truly celebrate God's wondrous gift, Mary -- a gift of great price that costs nothing -- the gift of each other.

# The indisputably true life of Benjamin ‘Whisper’ Jones

## *The Petro Oil Variety Hour, Act I*

*A live television studio in New York, circa 1957; a curtained stage. A man appears dressed in a suit and tie and carrying a microphone. The entire house stays lit. This is Fred Masters, host of “The Petro-Oil Variety Show.” He’s filled with a nervous glee as he leans into the crowd to accept his applause. Fred Masters is a slight man with a polished comb-over. He’s visibly anxious, but still attempts to exude a sprightly cheer.*

FRED MASTERS: Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we have for you a special treat. Here to share the wisdom of the ages is Benjamin “Whisper” Jones. As you are aware, Jones earned his nickname, “Whisper” because he was hard of hearing and throughout his life assumed people were whispering. This led to his shouting loudly about such topics as the nation’s growing dependency on foreign hairstyles, and whether or not a dipper full of Castor Oil was as medically beneficial as a mustard plaster. Eventually he moved on to more serious topics, those for which he is known today. Having recently celebrated his 97th birthday, Jones comes to us directly from the Happy Acres Home for the Elderly in upstate New York where he is currently working on his biography. *(Looking off stage)* Mr. Jones ... Mr. Jones? Would you like to come out on stage?

*Onto the stage shuffles a very old man with a cane. He has long, white whiskers and a sparsely toothed grin. Tiny, round spectacles perch on a nose perfectly suited for dialing rotary phones. He’s dressed in jacket and tie.*

FRED MASTERS: Mr. Jones, thank you so much for being here with us. How are you feeling tonight?

“WHISPER” JONES: Waja say?

FRED MASTERS: I asked how you were feeling this evening.

“WHISPER” JONES: Fine.

FRED MASTERS: (*Shouting the words*) Can you tell me sir, when and where were you born?

“WHISPER” JONES: I was born in 1860 on a prune farm.

FRED MASTERS: Excuse me, did you say a “prune farm”?

“WHISPER” JONES: I said a PRUNE farm. That was in the state of Virginia. Back in those days ya see, there was a big prune trade. I can still remember ridin’ my daddy’s prune boat up n’ down the Rappahannok. Sometimes we’d go all the way out to Northhampton Island. There were still Indian tribes livin’ out there back in those days, ya see, and if we happen to catch ’em when they were constipated, we might unload our entire supply.

FRED MASTERS: Eventually you and your family moved west to Kansas, is that correct?

“WHISPER” JONES: Yup. Wasn’t ’till after the Civil War. My folks were doin’ jus’ fine until about ’64. One day a whole battalion of hungry Confederate soldiers on their way to the battle of Shenandoah raided our field. Them scoundrels ate ever’ last one of our crops, ya know. A few hours later one thing led to another and them soldiers, they become indisposed and never did make it to the battlefield. Thanks to them never arrivin’ at there appointed destination, the North won the battle. President Lincoln himself wrote my daddy a letter thanking him for “keeping the rebels otherwise occupied.” He told him it was one o’ the turnin’ points of the war.

FRED MASTERS: That’s terrific. And it was then that your

family moved west?

“WHISPER” JONES: Waja say?

FRED MASTERS: That’s when you moved to Kansas.

“WHISPER” JONES: That’s when we moved to Kansas, ya see. I was 14 years old. My daddy worked for a cattle rancher for a time, until one day – times were tough, ya’ know — one day he walked in on the owner serenading one of his heifers. Right there in the barn he was a singin’ “Beautiful Dreamer” to a Guernsey named “Tillie”.

FRED MASTERS: What did the cow do?

“WHISPER” JONES: (*Looking at Fred, puzzled*) It just stood there. Sos anyway, I guess the old man was afraid my daddy’d tell the rest o’ the men what had taken place, so he fired ‘im right there on the spot.

FRED MASTERS: Is that when you took part in the Oklahoma Land Rush?

“WHISPER” JONES: No, then I became an apprentice to a blacksmith. I was an only child, ya see. So whilst Mama baked pies and sold chicken eggs, I smithed for right on 20 years. Finally — I don’t know if it was the heat, the smoke or the dust – but it got to where ever’ time I looked at a horseshoe I’d break into “Beautiful Dreamer,” jus’ like my pappy’s ol’ ranch boss. I knew then I’d had enough, sos I headed south to Oklahoma. They’s gettin’ ready to give land away, ya see. This was back in ’89. I’ll never forget it, let me tell you. There must have been thousands of people lined up ready to race off into the wilderness and stake a claim. There were people on horseback, on mules, even some just using their own two feet. There were grandpas with their grandkids, cowboys, men and women. Well, at noon on May 18, 1889, I tell you it was like someone opened the flood-gates. Thousands of people took off across the land. (Pause) It was really somethin’, let me tell you.

FRED MASTERS: And were you able to find some land on which to build a home?

“WHISPER” JONES: Yaw sir, I did. Problem was, with so many people runnin’ this way an’ that, well, I managed to get good and lost, and wound up right back in Kansas. Not only that, but about two months later I was out checkin’ some traps I’d set, and there comes Pappy walking over a knoll just as plain as day.

FRED MASTERS: (In disbelief) Did you say it was your father?

“WHISPER” JONES: (*Shaking his head*) Just as plain as day. He says to me, “Benjamin? Wutch you doin’ here?” I said, “What do you mean what’m I’m doin’ here? What are YOU doin’ here?” He says, “I live here!” Turns out I had homesteaded on ma’ own land.

FRED MASTERS: It was about this time that you met your wife. How did you two meet?

“WHISPER” JONES: Well, that’s a story. See my wife, her name was Hattie. McGill was her maiden name. Hattie McGill. She worked at the general store. Well, I go in there one day to buy a map sos I could make ma’ way back to Oklahoma, ya see. I told her I wanted to get back in the land run. I told her I couldn’t a’ been the only one to run off to the wrong state, an she said, “Well, I didn’t hear o’ nobody else,” an I said, “Well, that’s all right, then,” and she said, “I suppose it is.” Then I looked at her right in the eyes and I said, “Ya know, I could think of worse things than you marryin’ me,” and she said she supposed so, and next thing ya’ know we was married.

FRED MASTERS: (*Enthusiastically*) A love story for the ages! At the age of 75 Hattie passed away, but not until giving you 47 years of blissful marriage!

“WHISPER” JONES: (*Looking at Fred, puzzled*) Ya’ never met Hattie, did ya’?

FRED MASTERS: I never had the pleasure.

“WHISPER” JONES: (*Looking at Fred*) You like bein’ hog tied an’ horse whipped?

FRED MASTERS: Well, no. I certainly don’t.

“WHISPER” JONES: Then you wouldn’t a’ liked Hattie.

FRED MASTERS: Come now, Mr. Jones. Surely there was something you liked about your wife? She did give you a son, did she not?

“WHISPER” JONES: That she did. (Pause) Had ’im at home. Twernt no doctor around. (*Pause*) I remember I ... I didn’t know what to do but boil water. That’s what they say, boil water. What you did with the water after ya’ boiled it, well, it didn’t occur to anyone to mention that part. Sos I figured it was to soak her feet. Well, thinkin’ it was to soak her feet, I put the boilin’ water into two pans and told her, “Put your feet in this water as it’ll make ya’ feel better.” Well, when she put her feet in that boilin’ water her eyes looked like they was gonna bug right outa her head. She looked like a bull ready to charge. Well, she lets out an angry howl and that baby, (*motioning with his arm like a rocket*) he shoots right out the window.

FRED MASTERS: (*Incredulous*) Was he okay?

“WHISPER” JONES: Yup. Thank the good Lord he landed right smack dab in a fresh cow pie. To this day, when I hear people complainin’ about the smell, or that they stepped in some manure, I look ’em right in the eyes and say, “Manure saved my boy. You should be proud to wear that on your shoe.”

FRED MASTERS: What’s your son doing now?

“WHISPER” JONES: He’s a congressman for the State of Louisiana.

(*Applause*)

That was my introduction to Benjamin “Whisper” Jones; a dusty video tape discovered on a rainy afternoon at the National Archives while researching a man who, though all but forgotten today, once held the ear of the nation.

Whisper’s life was far more varied than presented on the variety program. In his life he had served as a journalist, ostrich farmer, theologian, and for a brief period, as a trough on his uncle’s hog farm. He was founder of the “Olympics for the Morbidly Obese,” first held in Milan in 1916, but soon cancelled when a judge disappeared and was later recovered after having been lost in Russian competitor Igor Smirnoff’s torso.

In the late 1870s, he did time in jail where he met noted philosopher Stein Wallaby, from whom he gleaned many of the philosophies that gave rise to his own, unique ideals.

“Whisper” Jones began his rise to fame around the turn of the century when his outlook on life began to gain attention. From barber shop to town hall, Whisper shouted his opinions on wars, religion and, on one occasion, what a group of Kansas farmers would do to “der furer” if he were to be found walking through their wheat field during harvest season. His well appreciated musings soon earned Whisper another moniker, that of “Voice of the Irritated Working Man.”

Soon, he was one of the most sought after speakers in the country, second only to Will Rogers, and would have surpassed Rogers in popularity if not for his steadfast devotion at the time to the one remaining ostrich on his struggling ostrich ranch, Clara Bow.

Jones’s biography was never published and today only exists in a few chapters that were reprinted by hand. Various articles have been written about Jones over the years. By chance I discovered an article on “Whisper” Jones when I happened upon the Catholic-Zoology magazine, *The Church and Ewe*, in the waiting room of a veterinary clinic. It was in that article

that I discovered a reference to what would lead me to a look into his family history. The reference simply read: “Admiral Landford F. Jones takes first steps upon the new world, September, 1605, then goes home.”

## **Chapter 1: Admiral Landford Jones**

The story of Benjamin “Whisper” Jones begins with his great, great, great, great, great grandfather, Admiral Landford Jones, leader of the exploration vessel the “Blue Barnacle,” commissioned by King Barton III of Upper Essex on-the-River in northern Britain, a kingdom so small that it was known only to the king, his seven children, and a few of his neighbors.

The reason why the venture has all but been ignored by historians is readily apparent upon reading the surviving pages of the ship’s log:

“The New World,” Admiral Jones wrote, “was lush and green as far as the eye could see,” which wasn’t far, as evidenced by the thick magnifying glass housed at the New Barton Maritime Museum; Jones was nearsighted.

“The journey of the Barnacle hath been a long and arduous one, lasting 17 monthes. Not being the best planners, my crew of 65 ate the entire food supply in the first 15 minutes. Finally we were forced to eat our stockings. When we ran out of stockings, we ate our sideburns. Those without sideburns went hungry, as is the tradition in times of want.”

The first “thanksgiving” came not when William Bradford took his first steps upon the New World nearly 40 years later, but when Jones stepped off the ship for the first time, looked up into the deep, blue sky and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to the creator.

“Thank you, dear heavenly Lord on high,” he prayed that historic day. “Thank you very, very, very, very, very, very,

very much.”

“*Ehem.*”

Jones wrote that upon hearing a strange sound, he looked to see where the “*ehem*” came from. As far as he knew, he was the first human to occupy this small corner of the New World, and therefore he shouldn’t be hearing the “*ehem*” sound.

“*EHEM!*”

“There it is again!” Jones shouted, jumping back. Squinting into the distance, which for him was about three feet, there suddenly appeared before him a man, tall and dark-skinned, wearing only leather pants and a vest of white beads.

“Who ist thou that you should make the ‘*ehem*’ sound?” Jones asked.

The tall, dark man rolled his eyes. “Papers, please.”

“I know not of which thou speaketh,” Jones retorted. “We are pilgrims, having journeyed 17 monthes time from the Kingdom of Barton in searcheth of the New World.”

“Yes, well, this world isn’t new, now is it?” the Indian said. “We Indians live here, don’t we?”

“I didn’t know,” Jones said, looking down at his big buckles.

“Well, now you do. And since this is our land, and as such, not yours, I need to see your papers.”

Desperate, Jones fumbled around in his pocket and pulled out a wrinkled wad of paper, which he handed to the Indian.

“Uh, this is a recipe for sponge cakes,” the Indian said. “Look, I don’t have time for this. If you don’t have your papers, you’re just going to have to leave, that’s all there is to it.”

“There must be something we can do,” Jones said. “Perhaps we can trade. We’ve got several good sideburns on board. Mmmmm!”

“With Hollandaise sauce?”

“Alas. Nay.”

“Look, here’s what you can do. Have each member of your party fill out an A-7L form. If you don’t have pens, you can share this one. But I want it back. I know how you people are.

“After you fill out the form, you will sail back to ... whatever that kingdom is you said. When your papers are processed, you will be allowed to return. It usually takes about six years. Once you return, you will file an M-2.7a. Are you getting this? Because I’m not going to repeat it. Once the M-2.7a is processed, which usually takes about three years, you will be allowed to seek employment. Should you attempt to seek employment or otherwise live in our land without proper documentation, you will be subject to arrest. Am I making myself clear?”

“Yes,” Jones said, dreading having to give the bad news to the others.

“That’s ‘ya-hay,” the Indian said sternly.

“Huh?”

“We don’t say ‘yes,’ we say ‘ya-hay.’ If you’re going to live here, you’re going to have to learn the language.”

As the Bulbous Barnacle sailed back to Europe, Jones shared with the others the frightening story of his encounter with the inhabitants of the New World. The passengers were astounded.

“Did those Indians think they owned the New World?” they muttered. “Who do they think they are, anyway? All we want is a better life!”

Meanwhile, back in the New World, the tall Indian was shaking his head: “You let one boatload in, and you open the floodgates — all those white people with their white people ways.”

And though it was never officially recorded, at precisely

the same moment in time, Admiral Jones and the Indian — separated by miles of sea — each uttered, “I mean, really. How uncivilized.”

## **Chapter 2: Captain Broderick Jones**

The story of the Jones family falls off at that point, slipping into anonymity until the appearance Captain Broderick Jones, chief supplier of Mentholatum to the Algonquin Indians during the rhinitis epidemic of 1847. (It should also be noted that Captain Jones’s father is Daniel Jones, inventor of the buttonhole.)

In a letter written by Captain Jones to his wife, Ralph (short for Mary Beth), while on one of his months-long Mentholatum runs (now housed at the Wischome, Vermont Museum of Historic Interest) he wrote:

“It has been a rough go. Having dispensed several gallons of the stuff, I am vexed. I cannot walk without sliding around on my feet as if doing some sort of jig. The natives often gather to watch me as I make my way back to the boat, trying to stifle laughter through their congested noses. The sound haunts me still. Pray, dear wifey, that God will give me the strength to continue to mentholate.”

Further research revealed that while growing up, young Jones had the unfortunate job of “boot sniffe” while working at a local inn. He would perch near the door and sniff people’s shoes as they entered to be sure they weren’t tracking anything unsavory. Although an unpleasant job, he took pride in his work, and often was named “Employee of the Month.”

According to Sir Preston Elbert’s text on 19th Century boot sniffes, “Broderick’s popularity drew consternation among other inn employees, who eventually boinked him in the head and delivered him unconscious into the hands of Captain Edward Teasdell of the sailing vessel, the ‘Structurally Un-

sound’.”

Here is where the young Broderick learned master seamanship — how to tie knots, how to swab the deck (after first attending the weekend seminar, “So You Want To Swab”), and how to cook bean soufflé.

He grew to be an honest, hard working man of faith, as stated in Chapter 4 of Hans Melman’s, “Obscure Sailors and the Women Who Knew of Them,” which reads, “He grew to be an honest, hard working man of faith.”

But the “Structurally Unsound” was, unfortunately, aptly named, and Jones eventually found himself the lone survivor of a ship wreck, having swum to an island several miles off Long Island Sound that was inhabited by a tribe of Delaware Indians.

The Indians were startled by Logan’s bizarre dress, button holes, and pasty skin. He quickly earned their trust, though, by not demanding his pen be returned after one of them accidentally walked off with it. He taught them how to swab things and to tie knots, but as they had no rope or decks, they simply smiled politely and nodded.

In return, they introduced Logan to the medicating effects of Mentholatum ointment, invented the previous winter by Chief Chitook Agokoa, which, roughly translated means, “He Who Mixes Chemical Compounds.”

Suddenly Jones’s mission became clear. He felt that God had appointed him to share the benefits of Mentholatum ointment with those most in need. He shared it with the native peoples of the United States, offering good will and coooooo, medicated relief where ever he went. Nary a sniffly nose or congested chest went un-mentholated, thanks to the efforts of Captain Broderick Jones.

He soon would achieve legendary status serving thousands of stuffy Algonquin Indians during the rhinitis outbreak of

1853. Not long after the last Algonquin was mentholated, Logan retired and devoted the rest of his years to trying to get that greasy feeling off his hands.

### **Chapter 3: Edward Not-Lythrop Jones**

While her husband was on one of his missions mentholating the Natives, Ralph gave birth to a son, whom they named Edward Not-Lythrop in honor of his uncle Lythrop, who always hated his name and often said that he wished he'd been named "Edward, not Lythrop."

Edward was born in Virginia in 1840. When in grade school, Edward's mother, being a deeply devout woman, would shine his boots each morning with lard. While at recess, Edward — often sitting alone near a glade where thoughts of his absent father was never far from his mind — would be visited by various small animals lured by the scent of his shoes. At first this distressed Edward, but then his mother told him of St. Francis and how his mother had shined his sandals with lard, which she said led directly to Francis becoming a saint.

At age 6, a family malady kicked in and Edward grew a mustache that made him look like a tiny version of Charlie Chaplin. By age 8, he had grown a full beard. The constant jeers left him dejected until his mother told him the story of Samson.

Jones would never shave again.

By age 13 Edward developed a love for sports and joined the junior high lacrosse team. Unfortunately, his desire to play was surpassed only by his lack of any sense of direction. Thrown the ball, he'd often run the wrong way.

"Pappy once mistook a corner store for the goal and was tackled in the housewares aisle," Whisper wrote in his biography.

Once again dejected, Edward was uplifted when his Uncle

Lythrop told him the story of the Lost Tribes of Israel, and how they had wandered all the way to Pennsylvania before realizing that they were way, way off.

At 15, Edward received the surprise of his life; he was invited to travel with his father to help him serve the Algonquins during the rhinitis outbreak. Edward was beside himself. To suddenly be able to travel with his father, who had been all but absent in his life, was more than he had dared dream.

On a cold, spring day in 1855, Edward packed up his Edwardian Village People set, including the hard to find construction worker figure, said goodbye to his mother, and together, he and his father set forth in a canoe down the Shenandoah River.

While little is written of Edward's early experiences, the text, "Indian Migration Vol. 14, 'The Clearing of the Algonquin Sinuses,'" includes a brief but important note regarding Edward's contribution to the mission:

"Along the journey, the boy, Eduard, son of Captain Jones, learned great respect for the Native peoples and their ways, of which were many. [In Chapter 7, the Algonquins are referred to as the Chescatwim, or "People for Whom There is a Lot to Be Interested."]

While nothing more is written of Edward in the text, Whisper's grandniece, Laurie Jones-Tambor, in a 2007 interview, said that the story of Edward and his friendship with an Algonquin youth named Nap-a-wee, has been passed down by word of mouth for generations.

Jones-Tambor currently resides in Lesser Delmont, Del. where she heads the Lesser Delmont Historical Society, is the founder of the Lesser Delmont Chapter of the Red Hat Ladies, and works part-time repairing dish-washers.

"While out hunting, Edward met and befriended 'Nap-a-wee,' an Algonquin youth who shared Edward's poor sense of

direction,” she said. “As the story goes, the two became lost after taking a wrong turn at a giant oak while looking for fire wood. Eventually they became so lost that they wandered into a camp of Dinkas and realized they had somehow reached the Niger River in central Africa. It was strange, since neither remembered having boarded a boat. When those two got lost, they didn’t fool around.

“This version of the story has been challenged by some relatives as being more than a little exaggerated,” Jones-Tambor continued. “They believe that the pair was never more than four or five miles from home. If so, how does that explain why they were missing for a year-and-a-half, or how they managed to return with a tribal head dress of a Dinka chieftain, under which was the Dinka chieftain himself?”

Jones-Tambor’s version is supported by a submission in the journal of Admiral Jonathan Bick of the Queen’s Royal Navy who, in 1856, was dispatched to the Ivory Coast to gather exotic flowers. The queen was having a dinner party and wanted the centerpiece to be especially nice.

“Upon our arrival we met two boys who seemed quite pleased to look upon us,” Admiral Bick wrote. Although the submission doesn’t mention names, Bick does note that one boy was white, and the other was of a brownish hue and dressed in deerskin.

“They regaled us with a story of living deep within the woods of the colonies when they got lost searching for wood to build a fire, and would we please give them a ride back to Virginia, if we were going that way. Although we were at a hurried pace since the dinner party was to occur that very evening, we allowed the two youngsters aboard and dropped them off in Virginia on our way back to England.”

Upon arriving in London, Admiral Bick was horrified when it dawned on him that in all the hubbub, they had forgotten

to get the flowers. In a panic, Bick quickly plucked several flowers from the queen's own garden just as she was about to answer the large castle door.

According to his journal, the queen was not fooled, and Bick and his crew were sentenced to five years of tending to her royal back yard, which included cleaning up after her royal poodles, counting 7,532 among them.

By the time the two boys arrived back in Virginia, the rhinitis outbreak was over.

"This was a very difficult time for Edward," Jones-Tambor wrote. "Nap-a-wee was like a brother to him and he hated the thought of leaving his friend, even though he missed his mother terribly. Then his father suggested they bring Nap-a-wee home with them for the summer, which Nap-a-wee's parents agreed to, as long as Captain Jones was able to provide several references.

"Edward and Nap-a-wee were overjoyed. In November of 1857, the three pulled their canoe onto the bank of the Shenandoah and the boys ran the short distance to Edward's home, where Ralph was waiting in the same apron she was wearing the day they had departed, the glob of gravy that had fallen on it all those months ago having since solidified. In her hands was a steaming dough pie, she explaining that a national cherry shortage had recently reached their tiny home.

That's when Nepawee suggested they try prunes.

According to Jones-Tambor, "We do know that prunes were introduced to the white man by the young Indian Nap-a-wee, who had learned to farm prunes from his father, who had learned from his father before him, who had learned from his great aunt Pu-a-day, previously known as Cant-a-go."

*Editor's Note: And this is where the story became too silly to continue. We'll pretend they all did juuuuust fine.*

## ‘Do not adjust your television set’

**I**t was late February. I was sitting at my desk in my penthouse office at Catholic central. I’d spent the morning trying to decide whether I prefer super chunky peanut butter to regular when I received a phone call:

“Do you do public speaking engagements?”

I looked at the receiver as if it had just fallen out of a flying saucer: a foreign thing, emitting foreign noises, the sounds of which I knew not what they were.

*Public speaking engagements*, my mind finally translated. *Me. Do I do them? No. I don’t*, I determined, yet the very notion that I was even being asked left me paralyzed with panic, gripped by fear, altered by anxiety, and a little hungry. “We’re having a catechist appreciation banquet, and I was wondering if you’d like to come and speak.”

Of all the diabolical .... She had used the one thing that gets me every time: She had asked nicely.

“Sure,” I said as I stabbed myself in the forehead with a highlighter. It didn’t hurt, but I was highlighted the rest of the day. People kept looking at me like I was an interesting fact.

I had two weeks before the event, two weeks to prepare, two weeks to rehearse, two weeks to wonder if I was being controlled by an alien from outer space who’s into public speaking.

It took about a week to write five pages of copy. The first paragraph was a killer. I’d read the Bible verse: “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things ... except ...” and that’s when I would reach down and pull out

a few comic books, my Star Trek communicator with sound effects, my Lost in Space talking robot, and of course, my Davey and Goliath action figures.

“They were Lutheran, by the way,” I would tell them. They were. “Davey and Goliath” was produced by the Lutheran Church. You, me and the Amazing Kreskin are the only people who know that.

Then I would speak of the journey – that journey we all take from there to here, then to now, childhood to adulthood. It would be personal, far more personal than I intended.

“When I was young I thought I wanted to be an astronomer,” I’d tell them after describing how on so many warm, summer nights I’d go to the park at the end of my street and stare up at the stars.

“I soon realized that I didn’t want to be an astronomer,” I’d say, shaking my head. “No, I wanted to be Captain Kirk. I wanted to go where no one had gone before. I wanted to explore new worlds. I wanted to make out with green alien women.”

Pause for laughter. Keep pausing..... They’ll be laughing hard at that one.

And then I’d get into the meat of the journey. How my second grade teacher, Mr. O’Leary, kept me after class one day until I could spell the word “sure.” I spelled it every possible wrong way known to human kind, including “schourré” before he finally let me go home.

“It would have been easier for Mr. O’Leary to believe I would be the first person to travel to Mars than to believe I would become a newspaper editor.”

And I would describe how God’s guidance through this maze was revealed in many instances of my life, instances that don’t necessarily reflect God’s guiding hand except in retrospect, when it’s revealed in glorious technicolor.

And to close, I would express in one statement how God sometimes speaks to us in ways that are both inventive and unexpected:

“There is nothing wrong with your television set,” I’d say, reciting the introduction to the Outer Limits TV show. “Do not attempt to adjust the picture. ... You are about to participate in a great adventure. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to... The Outer Limits.” *Thank you.*

Bishop Brungardt came to the gathering, where he got to know his strange editor in one quick swipe. And he prayed with me beforehand, which was very cool. It put me at ease. *Where two or more are gathered ...*, I was reminded.

The good people of Kiowa, Sharon and Medicine Lodge chuckled a few times; no rolling in the aisles; no need for me to pause for laughter, but that was okay. Afterwards, many genuinely expressed their gratitude for my coming. That was enough. I was pleased.

And before I left, a man younger than me, but not by much, gave me a terrific compliment:

“I bet my ‘Buzz Lightyear’ could take your ‘Lost in Space’ robot any time,” he said with a grin.

Ahhhh. Birds of a feather.

## Riding in the bumper car of life

**D**o you ever feel like life is a bumper-car ride, and you got the car that doesn't work? It just sits there, motionless; its lifelessness made ever more obvious by the zing! of energy as everything around you jumps to life.

I never really liked the bumper cars. I always felt a twinge of guilt when I hit someone, and a twinge of anger when someone hit me. Where's the joy in that? So, I would just cruise around pretending I was on a Sunday drive, wishing I could drive right out the little gate, through the parking lot and into the sunset.

But typically, I got that one car that decides to just sit there. *I've waited all year to go to the amusement park! I'm sitting in the bumper car all energized and ready. The adrenaline's building! Then I hear it: those three loud buzzers counting down! Three, two, one! Here we go!*

And ... nothing. *Huh?* It doesn't matter your age, you're going to feel as helpless as a child, and there's absolutely nothing you can do about it. I can't hop out and run to the little gate as cars are zipping around. (Besides, isn't the floor electrified once the ride starts? If I step out, would I suddenly be sizzled into a French fry in tennis shoes? I often wondered about that.) All I can do is look around, hoping people will have mercy.

They won't. The broken car is just too much temptation. Nothing like a sitting target. I'm lucky to escape the ride with only minor whiplash. People standing along the side are pointing and laughing. Good thing this was before cell phone cameras.

Afterwards, the operator comes over and leads me to another car. Meanwhile, my friends have already left their cars and are

off getting funnel cake.

It's a lonely feeling, being on a bumper car ride with no friends to bump.

It's those days, those sitting-in-the-dead-bumper-car days while the world zips by around me, I tended to decide that Life was against me. Even God was against me. *Well, he may not be against me; he just doesn't like me all that much. I must annoy him somehow, get on his nerves.* Otherwise, why would I be treated like this? I'm a nice guy! It's like, God is a teacher and I'm that one kid who even *the teacher* can't pretend is ever going to amount to anything.

It's just so easy. When things go awry in our lives, it's so easy to assign blame. Have you ever had your spouse ask you where something is, even when there's absolutely no reason why you would have touched that something? "Honey? Where's my ratchet set? It was sitting right here on the table. Did you move it?"

"No; I've been working on your dinner for the last hour."

"But it was right here. Are you sure you didn't take it?"

"Why would I take your ratchet set?"

"I'm just saying that maybe you put it somewhere."

"I can tell you honestly, I've never used a ratchet set to make lasagna."

A minute, maybe two go by: "Are you absolutely sure you didn't touch my ratchet set?"

It's natural. If I run out of gas on the highway, I don't blame myself for not filling up when I had the chance, I blame God for creating in my life distractions that made me forget to fill up. Like that interesting story on the amoeba that was on NPR. It's not just coincidence that the story came on just as I was passing a gas station. God knows I'm easily distracted! He should have caused a sunspot to mess up the radio waves, thus keeping the amoeba story from being aired just as I was

supposed to get gas.

Now look at me! What have I done to annoy you, Lord? It's just too easy. It's easier to wallow in self-pity than to acknowledge that maybe, just maybe, everybody has a car that has broken down on the highway, and that if St. Francis were alive today, even his car would break down on the highway at least once. Francis prayed that God would make him an instrument of his peace. When you last broke down on the highway, did you feel like an instrument of God's peace? Boy, I didn't. I felt like an instrument of automotive destruction. Maybe God wasn't against me, but my truck sure was (You see, even inanimate objects are against me. My computer, my GPS navigator, general apparel. All out to get me.).

Why is it so difficult to acknowledge that I'm not the only one to have ever gotten the bumper car that doesn't work? Or that, by the way, our lives are a lot more awesome than we can imagine, thanks to the love of a certain Lord? See, one of the great gifts of life is knowing that we're never alone. Not only do we have the unconditional love of God, but we have the gift of each other. No matter what lousy things we experience in life, a multitude of people have experienced something similar.

We belong to a unique club, you and I, formed by God, an island of misfit toys loved beyond measure. As for club dues? Naaaah.

The dues were paid in full a long time ago -- 2,000 years ago in fact.

# The Petro-Oil Variety Show, Part II

**F**RED MASTERS: Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to bring to this evening, direct from Paris, the fabulous DeLaCroix Quartet, who take you tonight to a cemetery in Your Town, USA, where a pair of young lovers share an intimate rendezvous.

*The curtain opens and two teenagers in 50s dress sit on a bench at the edge of a cemetery. Seven or eight feet behind them is a line of several large tombstones. It is dusk, and the two young lovers, while steeped in romance, are new to the game and struggle for words of affection. The sun slowly sets as Doris finally speaks of something other than romantic affection.*

DORIS: Isn't it peaceful out here by the cemetery? (*Danny nods his head*) The girls thought I was crazy when I mentioned that we were coming out here, but I think it's romantic. I mean, imagine all the people buried out here. There are people here who had families -- children and grandchildren who lived and grew and accomplished great things. People who fought in wars -- wars that for most kids are nothing more than a few chapters in a history book. There are people who were famous in their own time or in their community, who have long since been forgotten. (*Pause*) There are people buried here who lived and loved before the beginning of the 20th Century, people who were able to open the pages of "Tom Sawyer" while looking forward to the time when Mark Twain would publish his next novel! There are people here who struggled, people who thrived, people who persevered.

DANNY: Yeah, *creepy*. (*Pause*) When I was a kid and we used to go see my grandma in Sterling, we'd always pass by the cemetery and my dad'd say, "Better be quiet! Don't want to wake the dead!" And I'd be like, "You can't really wake the dead, can you Dad?" 'Cept I'd say it really quiet because I didn't want to wake any dead people. And he'd be like, "What?!" An I'd say, "You can't really wake the dead, can you?" 'Cept it'd still be too quiet and Dad wouldn't be able to hear me. And he'd be like, "**WHAT?**" An then I'd start crying 'cause I figured he prob'ly woke up some dead people and I'd be afraid to look out the window 'cause I knew people would be climbing out of their graves to come eat my brains or something. (*He looks at her uncomfortably.*) Yeah, it was pretty funny.

*There's a pause as the two look at the setting sun.*

DORIS: It sure is pretty out here, what with the sun setting and all. I bet this is about the prettiest place on Earth.

DANNY: Yeah. (*Pause*) Except maybe for the Grand Canyon. Or Mount Rushmore. We went out there two years ago. Oh -- If you were thinking those presidents are buried out there, they're not. In fact, I don't think they're buried anywhere near there. (*Pause*) They should let you know that in the brochure. (*Awkward pause as he realized he's not sounding very romantic, or cool, and struggles for something, anything to say.*) I hear Niagara Falls is pretty this time of year. (*He cringes.*)

DORIS: Danny, it's supposed to be a full moon tonight. (*Shyly*) Do you know what that means?

DANNY: Do I?! (*Raising his hands in a claw-like fashion*) Werewolves!

DORIS: N...no, Danny. Not werewolves. (*Moving closer to Danny*) It means that this is the most romantic night of the month.

DANNY: It ... it does?

DORIS: You know when it was that I first noticed you?

DANNY: Huh uh.

DORIS: It was when you dropped your class project on the floor in Mr. Wooley's life science class.

DANNY: (*Reflectively*) That would a' been one heck of a volcano.

DORIS: Remember how your jars of baking soda and vinegar broke, and that big pile of foamy goo started expanding on the floor? And when you tried to clean it up, you slipped, and every single time you tried to get back up you would slip and fall down again?

DANNY: Yeah, I seem to remember somethin' about that.

DORIS: Everyone was laughing so hard, Danny. (*Pause*) But you didn't get angry. You just laughed right along with everyone else. I felt so much admiration for you, someone who could laugh in the face of all that humiliation and embarrassment.

DANNY: (*Feigning laughter*) Heh, heh. Yeah. Even the stitches were kinda funny, now that I think about it. (*Motions with his hand*) Shaped sort of like a big smile. You know when it was that I noticed you?

DORIS: Tell me.

DANNY: It was right after that, when I was going to the men's room to throw up because the pain was so intense. You were standing near the door smiling at me. You weren't laughing; just smiling. You were smiling at me. I couldn't get your smile out of my mind. Even when I was throwing up, I just kept thinkin' about your face.

DORIS: That's sweet.

*The sun has set now, and there is an eerie glow cast from the full moon.*

DANNY: You know, you must be about the best ... I mean

... you're just the ... uh ... what I mean to say is, I think that you ... oh (*exasperated*) ... I like you, but it's more than that. I ... uh ... Oh, I wish I could put it into words.

*Suddenly from behind a tombstone a ghostly skeletal head pops up.*

SKELETON 1: That's our cue, boys.

*Three more skeletal heads pop up from behind tombstones. The four climb over the headstones breaking into "Blue Moon." They stand behind the bench where Danny and Doris sit, but the young couple doesn't seem to notice them. They are lost in the moment, hypnotized by the night, and whatever haunted music is wafting about. The four finish "Blue Moon" and sing another, slightly more jazzy Doo Wop song. As the song concludes, three of them go back up to the tombstones and slip behind and "into their graves." Before Skeleton 4 can go back to his grave, he trips and falls in front of the young couple. Doris and Danny shriek and run off into the night. Skeleton 4 looks at them as they go, then looks at the audience. He stands up and notices that while in front of the bench on the "sidewalk," his skeletal feet make a clicking/tap dancing noise. He slowly breaks into a little dance number. As the song concludes, he dances back to the headstone, climbs over and back into his grave.*

CURTAIN

## Yet more great moms in history

**J**ourney with me now as I pull open the drapes of time and together we peer through the window of the ages at more “Great...ate...ate...ate Moms ...oms... oms ...oms Through ... oo ...oo ... oo History ... tory...tory...tory!”

We ...ee ...ee ...ee (sorry) start with Jochebed (pronounced “Doris”), mother of Moses, who, soon after Moses was born asked her husband, Amram, to get her an ice cream, but who instead of getting her ice cream gave to her the rather depressing news that the Pharaoh wanted to kill all newborn boys.

“I’d rather have ice cream,” she responded (Ex 2:20).

In a desperate move to save her son, she set him adrift in the River Nile in a reed basket. This way, she reasoned, he could avoid being killed while at the same time getting a nice tan. As little Moses sailed down the Nile, his sister, Miriam, watched from the side. To avoid suspicion, she was disguised as a crab.

Up ahead she spied the tender-hearted daughter of the Pharaoh, who, upon seeing Moses, picked him up, cradled him in her arms and said, “Ahhhhhhhh! It’s a widdle baby! Are you a widdle baby? Yeah! You’re a widdle baby! You sure are! Ooh da woo da woo!” (Ex 2:31)

Miriam returned home, gratefully removing the large shell and her pincher-shaped shoes. Jochebed praised God for her infant son’s good fortune. To make a long story short, Moses and his mother reunited some years later, and Moses went on to gain fame in the freeing-people-from-slavery business.

As we move up the Old Testament, we come to Samson – leader, hero of Israel, unrivaled in his skill with the jaw-bone of an ass. Despite his attributes, the writers of “Judges”

neglected to include the name of Samson's mom in the story. This woman, to whom an angel of the Lord saw fit to appear, was known only as the "wife of Manoah." Did the angel appear to Manoah? Nope. Yet Manoah gets top billing. Go figure.

Anyhow, the angel of the Lord appears to Samson's mother (we'll call her Sophie), telling her that although she is barren, she will give birth to a boy. Sophie responds, "You've got to be kidding." (Judges 13:2) The angel stresses that he isn't (Judges 13:3). He then tells her to avoid alcohol, fatty foods, and anything with a cartoon on the label.

"Oh, and don't cut his hair," the angel adds.

"Now you're kidding, right?" Sophie asks.

"Do I look like I'm kidding?" the angel responds as he ascends to heaven on a pillar of fire.

Samson grew tall and strong, eventually defeating an entire legion of Philistines by boinking them on the head with the afore-mentioned jawbone. Eventually, though, his hair grew so long that he resembled Cousin Itt, and decided he needed a trim. Unfortunately, his barber was a Philistine woman named Delilah who gave him a flat top, stealing away his strength, and worse yet, making him look silly. Flat-tops were *sooo* last century.

Samson was blinded and imprisoned, but eventually grew his hair back. He thus regained his strength just in time to repay the Philistines by bench pressing two load-bearing pillars and destroying their temple. Said Sophie when given the news, "That's ma' boy."

Then there was Sarah, wife of Abraham, mother of Isaac, who said unto her husband on one particularly trying morning, "Are you nuts? A voice from above tells you to kill our son, and you don't think to question it? Did you even ask for I.D.?"

Abraham lowered his head and said meekly, "I'd better get to the gardening."

"Ooooooh," Sarah said, sounding ominous, "Dooo the diiiiishesss! I comaaaaand you!"

And it's here where we step out of the Old Testament and into the mid-1900s where a woman gave birth to a strange boy who couldn't part his hair, much less the Red Sea; whose greatest challenge was not in fighting armies but in getting the rabbit ears just right on "Outer Limits" night; and who also had the jawbone of an ass, but which was unfortunately attached to his face.

And while there were times when she said unto God, "If you're thinking of tempting me like you did Abraham, you won't be disappointed," such times were rare. More often than not, she stood by her timid child, telling him as he headed to school each morning to hold his head up high, that he was just as good as anybody else.

And while her words would be challenged again and again by low grades and highly motivated bullies, her voice would be there still, urging him to never give up, never lose heart. For there is One Love, she taught me, even greater than that of a mother for her child, a love through which we find our greatest value, that as sons and daughters of an all-loving God.

# Never let go of your dreams

One of the many things my dad taught me was to never forget that what may seem impossible one moment, can be entirely possible the next. He verbalized this with one simple statement he has said again and again: “Never let go of your dreams.” The most difficult thing about seeing beyond what we perceive as our limitations -- about following your dreams -- is taking that first step, that first giant leap.

(He also taught me the many imaginative ways that cow pies can lend themselves to humor. In fact, when taking that first step, he says, you want to be sure and watch just where you’re stepping.)

These two lessons came together in an astounding way a year ago last Christmas when he presented me with one of the best gifts he’d ever given me: “Mr. Brown.” Mr. Brown was raised on a farm in the town of Arrowville in the Deep South, and spent his adult years working as a blacksmith.

His best friend is a tall, retired woodworker named Andy, bald and with big “mule deer” ears. In World War II they went through the Navy together, stationed on the same ship in the North Pacific. (While it’s in few history texts, it is a known fact that the two personally captured four Japanese soldiers who were in actuality Japanese American volleyball players who’d been conscripted by the Japanese army while on tour, and were more than a little happy to be captured.)

His other pal is Zeke, a skinny, nervous old fella’ whose favorite exclamation is “I’ll be dirty dishwater!” Although he, like Mr. Brown and Andy, is 85, he still runs a hog farm, sometimes enlisting the help of Andy and Mr. Brown, the latter who recently helped him move a 400-pound sow. (“I tell

you true, there are times when you can read the look on an animal's face, and I'm tellin' you, that sow had the look of an old lady what prided herself on not lettin' nothin' or nobody tell her what to do." – Mr. Brown)

Mr. Brown was born on a yellow legal pad some 10 or 12 years ago while squirrels played in Dad's backyard and Dad's dog, Cricket, snuggled at his side. Every now and then Dad would burst out laughing, Mr. Brown having gotten himself into another fine mess courtesy of Dad and his mechanical pencil. Mom would look at him with a smile, waiting for Dad to describe what he'd just written, and often offering an idea or two. Many of Mr. Brown's adventures were based on Dad's life, such as his service in the Navy, and in later years, going to the eye doctor:

"The chart's on this wall, Mr. Brown."

I turnt and realized I'd been tryin' to read the writin' on a picture which advertised the Grand Tetons.

"Now read the top line."

I asked if they had another eye chart I could try, one that weren't so fuzzy....

A year ago last Christmas I took a step toward an end that I'd previously thought was impossible. Can I call myself a writer when I've never been able to get past the first few pages of writing a novel? I'm not smart enough, I told myself a dozen times. I'm not creative enough. I'm not patient enough; not talented enough. Sure, I'm good-looking enough, and I have nice penmanship. But I'm not sure good looks and penmanship lend themselves to novel writing. If only they did. If only....

Anyway, soon after I arrived home for the holidays, I suggested Dad dictate his "Mr. Brown" short stories to me. Once I had Dad's stories in the computer, I started to piece together an idea for a novel based on Dad's stories. I later added a

handful of my own short stories. Inside that same room which years before Dad had given creative birth to that old, lovable fellow from a town which sounds suspiciously like Spearville, I began clacking out a novel. With Dad's help, six months later we self-published our book.

Dad's love for humor combined with his limitless gaze into the realm of possibilities had allowed us to achieve a dream I thought impossible, and for that I'll be ever thankful.

Today, Mr. Brown's on his next set of adventures. I'm on page 200 of a novel that's about three-quarters finished. Every page, every word is lent humor by my dad's funny bone, of which I'll always be envious. He comes up with scenarios I could never begin to imagine.

One of the great joys of writing Mr. Brown is the fact that he's an innocent. He looks at the world not like a child, but as a kindly country grandfather. Not one member of humankind does he deem as unworthy of being treated as his grandchild. To all he lends his gracious kindness, patience and example of deep faith, often thanking the Good Lord for his blessings, even amid adversity. In effect, he is what we all strive to be, but perhaps without realizing it: an emulator of Jesus Christ.

Come to think of it, that ol' Mr. Brown is a whole lot more like my dad than I imagined. Happy Father's Day!

## Dear extended family,

**N**o matter your background: regardless of what you've done in the past or failed to do; even if your best friend is a houseplant named Bridget Begonia, or if, when someone says "Benjamin Netanyahu" you reply, "Gesundheit"; whether or not you think a wild boar having a bad hair day looks more dashing than you do; regardless if you are young, old, big or small, or a little of all four; regardless of all these things, I have something to tell you which you may find disturbing: You are officially and irrevocably my brother or sister.

Whether this makes you happy, sad, or a little creeped out, is irrelevant. See, we all – everyone, you and I ... and that person sitting next to you (yes, that person, too) – are one family, all brothers and sisters. Can't be helped. God said it, not me.

### **RACE**

But it is hard to remember. Have you ever been cut off on the highway and the person doing the cutting off has skin of a different hue than yours? What's the first thing that goes through your mind?

If you're honest, you probably just admitted to finding an entire race of people culpable for that one person's mistake of switching lanes at an inappropriate moment. Then again, perhaps you're right. Perhaps everybody from that person's country or origin switches lanes at inappropriate times -- a genetic mutation restricted to that particular race.

Chances are, though, the man or woman probably just had a momentary BDM (Bad Driving Moment). We've all had them, including me. And most of mine have had nothing to do with my skin being a pinkish hue.

What's the very best way to knock down the wall of racism?  
A touch of kindness; a smile. Easy.

### **NATIONALITY**

When you think of Russia, you don't generally think of someone coming home from their job, the only thought on their mind being that it's Wednesday, the night they and their spouse curl up on the couch with fried chicken and watch the Russian version of "Antiques Roadshow."

No, you think of the U.S.S.R.; Putin; and the guy with the birthmark on his head. And maybe a bit of history – Stalin, the Berlin Wall. But the people of Russia are not all little Putinites, or ... um ... wallies. They're just people. Same as us.

My wife once (and this is true) became stuck in a bathroom stall at the Moscow airport as her plane was getting ready to depart. A Russian woman the size of a linebacker had to throw all her weight into the door to free her. "Spaciba! Spaciba!" ("Thank you, thank you!") Charlene shouted as she raced out the door, thankful for the one Russian word she knew. Upon later reflection, she was equally thankful for having not been squashed.

### **FAITH/ENTHNICITY**

Years ago I had a good friend from Ethiopia. He and I would play the game, "Mastermind." Because I had the analytical skills of a tomato worm, I would make moves that were, what physiologists term, "void of brain thinking". Alebachu would respond to my moves by shaking his head and saying, "Oh, Dave. You are so stupid." It always gave me a laugh, and besides, I preferred it to the silent look that people sometimes give me indicating they're wondering if I should undergo tests.

The fact that he was Muslim meant about as much to me as whether or not he liked relish in his tuna salad. Personally, I like mine without.

Rather than accept and acknowledge people as our family – all children of our heavenly Father -- we tend to judge

them – by their race, their religion, and often times by their government. We Americans do it, and we Americans have it done to us.

Instead of loving one another, we look at ways to separate us from them, you from me. It's easier, isn't it? Love takes more energy, more thought. Hate doesn't take any thought at all. We are all children of God! We shouldn't be knocking each other down! We should be building each other up!

Our Lord wants us to recognize this fact, which is why Jesus said, "C'mon people! We shouldn't be knocking each other down! We should be building each other up!"

He also said, "What you do unto the least of your brothers, you do unto me." What we do and say unto others we are really saying and doing unto Christ, and in effect, ourselves.

We're being told again and again -- especially during political seasons -- why it is you and I are just so different; why we should unify under a shared dislike of them – a shared fear, a shared paranoia; why we should understand that what we are is more important than who we are.

This is an illusion. Jesus spent his life on earth telling us that we are all one family, all a part of the living body of God, that who we are is the meat and potatoes of life, and that what we are is gravy.

We desperately need each other, we just don't know it. God put us here, a family, children of the same Father in Heaven, to be a mutual support group. If we could only recognize the gifts that every person on this planet has to offer, we would see that our differences are a reason for celebration, not fear and bigotry.

If we could only take off our blinders and see the Holy Spirit who is truly housed in each and every living person on this planet, we would never ever doubt again that they are our brother or sister.

# What makes a saint a saint?

I've often wondered: What makes a saint a saint?

When I was a child, I thought that saints were people who spent their entire lives without committing a sin, and that being "sainted" was sort of like receiving a divine knighthood.

I read as a boy that *each and every one of us* was capable of achieving sainthood, which I interpreted as meaning that if I tried hard enough, I could live a life void of both venial and mortal sin -- even though just thinking about some things was considered a sin. I mean, c'mon ...*thinking* could be a sin? Talk about pressure!

Then came the day when everything changed. That was the day that Julie Johnson seemed to magically transform from an annoying girl in my math class with Coke bottle glasses and pigtails into something no less than radiant.

That morning, with just a brief glance in her direction, I forfeited my chance at ever becoming a saint.

So, you can understand why it was a glorious day when I learned that saints not only could be imperfect, but that some had been downright mischievous at some point in their lives. It gave me hope. It spelled out the truly forgiving nature of our God.

Consider the story of St. Francis. Before giving his life to God and becoming the St. Francis beloved by humans and animals alike, he was a troubled youth whose yen for misadventure eventually led him into the military.

But even after later devoting his life to God and becoming one of the greatest emulators of Christ history has known, he never lost his humanness. Consider the following:

Late one night when Francis and his friars were in the midst

of a lengthy fast, St. Francis got up to get a drink of water. There, at the kitchen table, he found a man (we'll call him "Dennis") chomping on a chicken leg.

What did Francis do? What would you have done?

Now, there are some Catholics who would have raised their nose in the air, pursed their lips and left the room in disgust, fully intent on having their scribe write up a full report first thing in the morning. Others would have confronted him: "For shame, Brother Dennis! You get your rear up to bed and report directly to my hovel in the morning!"

But what did Francis do? Seeing the look of shame on the man's face, he smiled and said, "Still hungry? How 'bout we order a pizza? You want extra cheese?"

Fasting is a powerful form of prayer, but for Francis, an even stronger form of prayer came in a simple act of compassion.

"When I was in sin the sight of lepers was too bitter for me," Francis later wrote. "And the Lord himself led me among them, and I pitied and helped them. And when I left them I discovered that what had seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness in my soul and body."

Another great example is Mother Theresa, who is on her way to being beatified. The woman was totally void of ego -- a selfless person who devoted her life to serving God's most in need. And she was also a wonderful eccentric.

Mother Theresa was known for collecting unopened peanut packets from her flights to give to the poor, and even offered to serve as a steward to pay for her flights. She typically refused the pomp of welcoming ceremonies as well as extravagant meals served at her appearances, often to the embarrassment of the organizers.

Several years ago my wife attended a press conference with

Mother Theresa. Sitting around a large table, Charlene tried to work her antiquated tape recorder when the “record” button popped up into the air, bounced across the table and onto the floor. Of all the other reporters and religious dignitaries in the room, it was Mother Theresa who got down on all-fours and searched for the elusive button.

She was a sweet soul who carried on her back the burden of every single suffering human being, even an embarrassed reporter with a temperamental tape recorder.

What you find in studying the saints, is that many had a direct line to God – an almost supernatural tête-à-tête with the Almighty through which God offered an unobstructed view of His existence through simple faith and extraordinary miracles.

What you will also find, is that these people didn’t exist in some ethereal plane, but were housed firmly on earth, their humanness and all its frailties and imperfections serving as the foundation for a life lived in devotion to God’s love.

# Shine

When I think about Halloween, I think about masks. And when I think about masks, I think about appearances. And when I think about appearances, I think about that one mirror in my house which, when the lighting is juuuust right and I stand a certain distance away, I look ... well, pretty darn good! Shirtless, I appear like nothing less than a middle-aged Tarzan.

But as I move closer and the lighting increases, my reflection seems to morph until -- until instead of being an Adonis, I slowly take on the look of a laundry bag filled with oatmeal. *If I could only control the lighting everywhere I went and demand people keep a distance of at least seven feet. Then I would be considered quite a handsome man. In fact, I could be truly spectacular looking and worthy of magazine covers across the globe, but only when I'm in a room too dark for anyone to see me.*

Which leads me to this thought: If people need a flashlight to see the real you, you need to turn on the *Light*.

I always wanted to be the James Bond type; you know – tall and straight, every suit fitting perfectly, not a hair out of place, my smile like a marshmallow taco. Instead, my stature is more akin to an aging Neanderthal with a bad back; I envy my dog's toothy grin; and my clothes *always* look rumpled (leading me to wonder if perhaps my clothes ... are fine and it's me who's rumpled).

Then there's my hair. My hair is long enough now that I require a several inch thick layer of hair spray to hold it in place at work. When I'm done spraying it feels like I'm wearing a helmet. I use so much hair spray that Procter & Gamble sends me an annual Christmas card with pictures of their grandson

whom I'm putting through college. His name's Billy Proctor & Gamble. Their last card said he had made the football team. *They grow up so fast.* (I also get cards from the Cocoa Puffs people.)

Why do I feel so compelled to have long hair? James Bond didn't have long hair. Sean Connery has hardly any hair at all.

The other day I was at Pizza Hut when my waitress made it clear she was having a very bad day. As I'm typically mild mannered almost to the point of sedation, she appreciated my patience, and when I went to pay, this young girl really did ask me, "Can I ask you a question? Are you a hippie?"

By Jove! Was my long hair an attempt at freeing the hippie within – to let people know there's a free spirit hidden under these frumpy clothes and Microsoft-weary eyes? Or is my hair an attempt to make people *think* I'm a free spirit, not because it's what I am, but because it's what I'd like to be?

I guess we all try to fill in the blanks now and then. We try to be the things we wish we were, because we're afraid that the way God made us just isn't enough. We're so afraid of being ordinary, that we try to fool the world into thinking we're extraordinary.

If only we knew just how extraordinary we truly are.

I can't tell you how many times, driving the 17 miles home from work, I've fantasized about being more than I am. There's the really smart Dave, the really strong Dave, the rock star Dave, the kung fu Dave, the humble guest on the Tonight Show Dave .... Yep, I have quite a list.

The fact is, I'm no Einstein; I only sing to scare predators; and I couldn't fight my way out of an egg carton. And if anyone cares? Well ... *who cares* if anyone cares!

The following is a true story. A long time ago in a place far, far away, I had a friend who looked a bit like a jack-o'-lantern.

(I don't mean to sound insensitive. He knew it and even joked about it.) Yet, he was surrounded by friends, and even had girls yearning to go out with him.

Why was he so popular? Because *he made it clear that couldn't care less about his looks!* He had such a love for life that it transcended his physical appearance. He wore no mask at all. If he had – if he had been worried about his appearance -- it could have eaten him up inside.

The masks we wear are constructed by our own insecurities, but instead of hiding our insecurities, they often highlight them. Taking off the mask means accepting *you* the way *you* are -- the ordinary, extraordinary you – the way that God breathed life into you, warts and all.

Taking off that mask means letting the light of God shine through you. Don't make people use a flashlight to see the real you. *Shine!*

## Send in the clones

***Editor's note:** This week, Myers has decided to use his column to address a serious topic, that of cloning. The humor column typically reserved for this space will resume in the next issue. Myers hopes that by addressing a serious topic from time to time, the readers will begin to accept him as an intellectual. Myers also said that he intends to write more "editor's notes" in future issues, because, being the editor, he finds writing about himself in the third person strangely therapeutic.*

As you may know, England recently approved embryonic cloning for medical purposes. According to the Catholic bishops of England and Wales, "It is immoral because it involves the deliberate creation and destruction of new human lives for the sole purpose of extracting stem cells for research."

I wholeheartedly agree. Speaking on behalf of the bishops was the mother/clone of Dolly the sheep, who also agreed with the bishop's assertion: "It's baa-aa-aa-aa-aa-aad." Dolly's mother/clone explained that she had already been blamed for 13 overdue library books and was once questioned by the police for spray painting "Ewe Stink" on the side of a cow, all acts she said were committed by her clone, Dolly.

When the *SKR* tried to contact Dolly, she had shorn her wool and changed her name to "Spike."

***Editor's note:** Myers wishes to apologize for the previous paragraphs. He promised to write on the very important subject of cloning in a serious manner, but he is obviously too immature to do so without eventually gravitating toward the*

*weird. Myers assures us that the remainder of his column will be handled in a serious and professional manner.*

As cloning comes of age in our society, we must keep embedded firmly in our minds that in the hands of doctors and scientists, we have placed not abstractions, but human lives balancing on the decisions of governments and institutions. While cloning may lead to certain medical advances, it should not be done at the cost of human lives, including those on the very earliest precipice of life.

Besides, if cloning ever becomes commonplace, the self-esteem of millions would plummet. The human condition isn't prepared for an objective and unhindered view of itself.

I can clearly envision walking into a store to the vegetable section. There, staring as if in a daze at the turnips, is a man who looks strangely familiar; as if I've known him my whole life. He's shaped vaguely like a potato, his hair draped across his face like skinny, blond fingers, and his beard is oddly fern-like.

Inch by inch, step by step, I creep toward the turnips, careful not to disturb the obviously disturbed man. Slowly he turns and ... "It's the clone of my third grade gym teacher! *Aahhh-hhhhhhhhh!*"

And that's just the start! Some day a terrible war would break out between our clones and us, the battle cry for which would bellow across the lands, "There I am! Get me!"

**Editor's note:** *"There I am. Get me." Sheesh. I've read funnier lines on a box of Frosted Flakes. Myers is obviously dealing with some type of mental disorder. What can you expect from a guy who thinks St. Anthony de Padua is a brand of spaghetti sauce.*

If the cloning of human beings ever did become legal, then the question we would most assuredly be forced to ask would be, "Who and what should be cloned?" Not a matter to be

taken lightly, as any historical figure whose remains could provide a DNA sample could theoretically be cloned. I would expect that scientists and spiritual leaders from across the globe would gather at a world-wide summit to discuss the ramifications of potential clone subjects.

With prayerful thought and careful consideration, I have come up with a brief list of those who, through their ideals, deeds, or by virtue of their very existence, would, through their re-emergence (so to speak), grant humankind a scientific, spiritual or emotional boost:

The guy who played “Mr. Drucker” on “Green Acres;” Ernie Kovaks and his gorilla band; Jim Henson, the only true voice of Kermit; my old poodle, “Charlie;” my old goldfish, “Spooky;” a brontosaurus; a plesiosaurus; a pre-60s Elvis Presley; Mama Cass Elliot; Andre the Giant; Lana Turner; C.S. Lewis; Alfred Hitchcock; John Lennon; my old goldfish, “Spooky II;” the guy who invented Fritos; and the original Flipper.

***Editor’s note:** Readers should be assured that Myers most certainly will be reprimanded for addressing the important issue of cloning in such a ridiculous manner. The idea of destroying a human life under the guise of “medical research” is many things, but it is certainly not ridicu....*

# The most beautiful place on Earth

Where do you think are the most beautiful places on earth? Maui, maybe? Inside the Sistine Chapel? Somewhere in the Alps? Perhaps Venice, or the Smoky Mountains? Or perhaps it's when you are home, surrounded by loved ones.

I have several favorites: Inside a darkened movie theater just as previews begin; that perfect camping spot in the Rockies; gathered at home with loved ones on a wintry Sunday afternoon; arriving home after a harrowing drive through a storm; the smell and feel of the church on Sunday morning; plopping down on the couch on a Saturday night and finding "It Came From Outer Space" on TV. It should be noted that these are not in any particular order.

• • •

In the mid-1970s, a documentary focusing on life after death came to my home-town theater, the Arvada Plaza. The theater was the size of the Roman amphitheater by today's multi-plex standards -- non-smokers on the left, smokers on the right. I can still remember sitting in the darkened theater, the little dots of glowing embers across the aisle creating a haze through which the film had to filter before reaching the screen.

I was 12 years old in 1975, ripe for a movie about the mysteries of the universe. I can remember only a few snippets of the movie, among which was the description of how someone had actually seen a soul rise out of a body at the moment of death.

*Wow, really? They actually saw it?*

The movie introduced to me the weird notion that there

were people who sought proof of the life-after. I didn't care whether or not the soul left the body like a little smoke signal (although it *was* kind of a cool thought). To not believe in the after-life seemed alien, like licorice flavored ice-cream. It just didn't make sense.

What I've come to believe over the years is that at birth we are each given that gentle kiss from God, that life-giving, welcoming embrace -- that kiss given a newborn by an excited Father. It's our soul he is giving us, that home, home on the range for the Holy Spirit -- the spot God calls one of the most beautiful places on earth.

When we look into each other's eyes, we are seeing the landscape of heaven, home to the Holy Spirit who tips his hat and wishes, "*Happy trails! Vaya con Diós!*"

Which is why I don't think we have far to travel when we die.

Perhaps the door to heaven -- those big pearly gates -- are within us, waiting for us, ready to appear in the blink of an eye between life and death, the womb through which we are born into our new life -- as close to us as our mother's womb once was.

About 10 years ago a friend of mine died. He had been my reporter for a few years, and when he died at age 23 in a car accident, I, for the first time understood what they meant by "living on in our memory." It was strange to me how alive he felt. So vibrant were those feelings that sometimes I wonder if what I and others experienced were more than mere memories.

I wonder if, perhaps, those feelings weren't a bit of a sneak peak into eternal life. In other words, do we feel their presence so strongly because this was someone who carries our affection, our love, into heaven -- not off on some ethereal plain a

universe away – but instead right here, so close he or she can hear our whisper even as they pass through the pearly gates?

I like to think that heaven is in every direction -- all around us. And that our souls, having received that kiss from God, are, in a way a part of heaven's landscape. I like to think that our loved ones who have died are really and truly alive within each one of us, so close they can feel the beating of our hearts, can hear our cries, can pray for us. ...

Could that be why we sometimes feel their presence so strongly, even long after they've died? When we're suffering -- whether you're battling addiction, dealing with problems at work or at school, or if you think you're alone in the world -- perhaps it's good to remember that heaven is closer than we think, that the souls of our ancestors, of all our family and friends who have passed, are not far away, but right here, right now, praying for us, cheering us on.

When we march through those pearly gates some day, we'll receive yet another excited welcome. We'll once again be a newborn receiving a welcoming kiss by our excited Father.

Not that he was ever far away. The soul, after all, is the most beautiful place on earth, because it is where God resides.

## The joy of ‘singing’

**A**t a Liturgy Day gathering, the keynote speaker spoke about the importance of “full, conscious, active participation” in Mass. For example, when it comes to singing, he said, “It doesn’t matter if you sound like an old tuba. God wants to hear you!”

Hmmmmmm. *Does he now?*

God revels in our voices no matter how painful the sound of someone’s voice may be to our ears, or ours to theirs, the speaker said (in so many words). The important thing is simply that we sing.

But then, the speaker has never heard *me* belt out a tune (and by “belt,” I’m referring to a form of punishment).

It is not that I sound like an old tuba; my problem is that I sound like an old tuba being run over by a cement truck. God, being really, really nice, *says* he appreciates our singing, and for many of us, he’s serious. But for me and those of my ilk, when we take to singing, God plugs his ears and shouts, “LA LA LA LA LA!”

I recall it was a Sunday, and the unsuspecting Catholics of Dodge City were entering their cathedral for Mass.

Sitting in row 14, pew D, was a Catholic newspaper editor who had decided to celebrate the start of a new day by daring to do something he hadn’t done in some 20 years.

I decided to begin this new day by crawling up from the floor of the ocean of life and daring to swim to the surface and dive toward the sun with seal-like zeal! I would *sing*, my friends, sing large and loud like a blue whale that refused to be blue!

The congregation stood as Father Ted Stoecklein (back when he sported an afro) was ready to approach the altar. The music

started. I opened my mouth and slowly and with tremendous strength of will, emitted the first sung syllable I had emitted in years.

Immediately an elderly lady turned around to see if someone was being strangled. When she realized the sound had come from my mouth, she gave me a look which she might otherwise have given had she seen Ricardo Montalban climbing out of my nose.

I closed my mouth tight against the onslaught of the stink-eye heaved at me by the little old lady. Meanwhile, the church was bathed in song as Father Ted walked to the altar.

I listened, and I was made sad. *Another day begun slinking along the bottom*, I thought as I stood closed-mouth; *another day afraid to take life by the angel's wings*.

As the voices danced across the church, I suddenly felt a wave of strength, as if God was saying to me, "Don't be such a pansy, Dave." *You're right, Lord! Not today! Not here and now! It's time to leap from the waters!* So, I filled my lungs with air, and with the determination of the heavenly choir itself sung loud and proud, "ALLELUIA!!"

Unfortunately, the song had already ended. Between my guttural voice and the profound silence surrounding it, it was as if I had turned on my own personal foghorn. The latter two-thirds of the word -- "eluia" -- melted quickly into space as I blushed as red as Father Ted's goatee (that's the way he wore it back then). Every single person in the cathedral turned in my direction. Those named "Al" looked with particular interest.

The wave of strength was gone; the contents of my stomach felt like it had suddenly relocated; and my left eyebrow fell off. I didn't know embarrassment could do that. I stood there with my one eyebrow, my legs shaky, knowing that this was the moment we all have in life, when we must decide if we will take the path of least resistance, the road less traveled, or

if we should just stay home and watch TV.

My friends, should I have become discouraged? Should I have stopped singing? Would your answer be different if you had been standing next to me?

When time came for the next song, a couple of people occasioned a glance in my direction as if awaiting the judge's sentence. *Would he sing? Nooooo, of course not. No need to be nervous or afraid. He's in church, after all. He wouldn't subject us, his fellow Catholics, to his hideous vocal manifestations.*

The music started. Just a few ... more ... notes....

And then I sang. I sang as if I were Pavarotti at the opening of a spaghetti restaurant in Heaven. I sang like each syllable was drawing me closer to our loving God. The music was a wave; I had been lost at sea but now was surfing toward shore.

My wife looked at me, trying to recall if perhaps she had been heavily medicated when she married me, and wishing she had some of the same medication now. She stared at me, her one-eyebrowed husband emitting sounds one doesn't usually associate as coming from the mouth.

The lady on the other side of me quickly excused herself. Two small children in front of me began to wail, thinking that the monster that hid in their closet had somehow managed to sneak into church and was standing behind them. A man threw a missal at me, but my anti-missal defense system kicked in and I brushed it away.

*Should I stop singing?* I asked myself then. I had given it the ol' college try. I dove toward the sun and fried on re-entry. Perhaps it was time to wrap.

That's when I looked up at Christ on the cross. Was it my imagination or was he tapping his foot? Of course it had to be my imagination. Still, I realized then that I had been singing to *God*, not to the people around me! And even if my voice made God wince, he would embrace the heart and soul that went into

the effort of the prayer prayed in song!

So, if you're ever at church and hear what sounds like a tuba being run over by a cement truck, you'll know just how loving our God truly is.

### **Tear down the walls!**

I'd always heard that when you sing in Mass, it's like praying twice. While in Denver over Thanksgiving, a priest pulled me aside after Mass and told me that in my case, it was like "praying one-half." I told him that in the future I'd speak the words, kind of like a rap. He paused for a moment and told me that he heard the Lutherans were accepting new people.

Have you ever had days like that, days where you feel like your membership to the human race has been revoked? Maybe we're not good looking enough, or smart enough .... It's just so darn easy to build those walls between you and I.

I guess these kinds of things, those things that seem to construct walls between us and everyone else, when added up, can make us feel like an outcast of sorts. It's a title self-imposed by those who are simply shy, socially awkward, maybe fashion-challenged (for me, if it's not too tight and doesn't itch, it's fashion), or who just feel different -- for whatever reason. It's a wall that we build ourselves, brick by brick.

As I was sitting in church that day, I glanced up at the cross and saw the greatest outcast who ever lived. The more I looked at him hanging on the cross and thought of the intense, unimaginable suffering he went through for us, the more I found myself thanking him for making me just exactly as I am, a socially awkward, neurotic with funny hair and crooked teeth.

And as I so often do when I turn to Christ, I felt that ol' brick wall come tumbling down. -- *Dave Myers*

# The day I decided I didn't want to be me

One day I decided  
I didn't want to be me.  
So I thought and I thought  
just who would I be?

I wanted to be strong  
and smart and let's see ...  
good looking and able  
to swim in the sea.

I thought it'd be nice  
to be tall with black hair,  
with a nose that isn't  
as big as a bear's.

So I sat by the mirror  
and prayed really hard  
to God and to Mary,  
Sts. Paul and Bernard.

I prayed for an hour --  
or two -- I don't know  
and when I opened my eyes  
it was quite a show!

I was tall and dark haired,  
just like I had prayed.  
My muscles like Arnold's:  
"I'll never be afraid!"

And was I good looking?  
You got that right!  
Brad Pitt watch out,  
a new heartthrob's in sight!

I walked into the kitchen  
and boy did Mom scream!  
"Get out of my house!  
You villain, you fiend!"

I ran from the door  
and saw Jenny Lou.  
I stopped and I said to her  
"How do you do?"

She looked at me square  
then said with a kick,  
"I don't talk to strangers!"  
I left, feeling sick.

Nobody knew me,  
not Billy, not Joe!  
Not my teacher or Dad,  
Not my dog, Moe!

I sat and I prayed  
to be me once more.  
Not smarter or handsome.  
Just me! Nothing more!

# Thank you, veterans

In recognizing our veterans on Veteran's Day, we honor all those who fought today, yesterday, and a multitude of yesterdays ago. It's to honor my dad and uncles who fought in WWII, and my great-grandpa and great-uncle, who fought in WWI. In other words, *pressure's on, Dave*:

*Think, Dave, think. What if it was you on the battlefield? It's difficult enough imagining boot camp! Could someone who looks forward to "Antiques Roadshow" and decaf mocha lattes survive boot camp?*

"WHAT A LOUSY LOOKIN' BUNCH OF NEW RECRUITS! WHAT'S YOUR STORY ... OSCAR MYERS?"

"SIR, IT'S 'DAVE', SIR! OR DAVID. EITHER IS FINE, REALLY. ANYWAY, I WAS BORN ON A COLD AUTUMN AFTERNOON IN CASPER, WY --"

"DID I ASK FOR YOUR LIFE STORY, OSCAR MYERS?"

"SIR, YES, SIR. UNLESS BY 'STORY' YOU'RE REFERRING TO ONE I WROTE BACK IN SCHOOL ABOUT A BOY WHO FOUND A MAGIC UMBRELLA THAT RAINED GUMDROPS, SIR!"

*"WHAT DID YOU SAY!?"*

"SIR ... THE WHOLE THING, SIR, OR JUST THE PART ABOUT THE UMBRELLA, SIR?"

"ARE YOU TOUCHED IN THE HEAD? DID THEY SEND ME A LOONEY TUNE?!"

"SIR, NO SIR! ALTHOUGH I DO HAVE A NUMBER OF NEUROSIS! I'M SCARED OF ... LET'S SEE ... HEIGHTS, SMALL SPACES, LARGE CROWDS, LARGE CROWDS IN SMALL SPACES, CLOWNS, CRICKETS, USED CAR

COMMERCIALS AND ... UM ... GREEN OLIVES, SIR!”

“HOW ABOUT GUNS? *YOU AFRAID OF GUNS, OSCAR MYERS?*”

“SIR, NO SIR! JUST THE BULLETS, SIR!”

*Two weeks later:*

“OSCAR MYERS! I ASKED YOU TO TAKE THAT WEAPON APART AND PUT IT BACK TOGETHER! *WHAT IN TARNATION IS THAT?!*”

“SIR! IT’S A PLANTER, SIR! I ... I THOUGHT THIS WAS A CRAFT EXERCISE! SEE HOW THE BARREL MAKES A NICE VA--”

“OSCAR MYERS, HOW IN TARNATION ARE YOU GONNA DEFEND YOUR COUNTRY USING A PLANTER?!”

“SIR! WHILE THE ENEMY’S DISCUSSING WHY SOMEONE WOULD BE POINTING A GARDENIA AT THEM, OUR SOLDIERS COULD GO IN AND BOINK THEM ON THEIR HEADS, SIR! THERE’S ALSO THE OFF CHANCE THAT THEY COULD BECOME SO CONFUSED THAT THEY GIVE UP, SIR!”

“SON, WHAT IN HEAVEN’S NAME ARE YOU DOIN’ IN THE MILITARY?”

“SIR, I WAS DRAFTED SIR!”

*“WHAT?! THERE AIN’T NO DRAFT, OSCAR MYERS!!”*

“SIR, BUT ... but my girlfriend said I’d been drafted and that I’d better report right away, sir! I guess she just wanted to get rid of me. To be honest, we weren’t very compatible, sir! She didn’t consider Taco Bell ‘going out to dinner.’ Can you imagine? I wondered if we’d ever be able to get beyond it. Still, we’d only been dating three weeks. She could have just sent me a text, sir!”

\* \* \*

I’m probably making myself sound far (and I mean, FAR)

more confident than I really would be in those circumstances, under that kind of pressure.

My dad was 21 when he led a group of men on a small vessel in the North Pacific amid WWII, watching for Japanese ships while fighting a vicious ocean; listening to Tokyo Rose; hearing the reassuring voice of Dinah Shore sing them “good night, sleep tight” each evening.

I’m well over twice that age now, and yet if I were drafted today I’m certain I’d make Pee Wee Herman look like General MacArthur.

As Dad was fighting in the North Pacific, one of his brothers helped liberate a Nazi death camp. Another continued his military service into Vietnam where his job was to fly in and recover soldiers killed in battle. Mom’s brothers also took to fighting the führer until he hid like a mouse in his Nazi bunker.

While I can chuckle about boot camp, it’s way too far outside my experience to even consider what it would be like serving on the battlefield. I mean, I become upset when a mosquito flies in my bedroom at night. And don’t get me started on crickets! How on earth would I handle a battlefield? I can’t comprehend that kind of emotional and physical demand nearly enough to be able to envision the reality of it.

That’s just one reason I hold close to my heart those young men and women who fight the intense emotional and physical battle to defend the United States.

The other reason is far more personal. These young men and women are, each one, a child of God, a masterpiece of the Lord placed in harm’s way by a madness that dictated war.

Those who start wars advocate death. Those forced to finish them do so in defense of life.

This Veteran’s Day, I pray for all the soldiers – those who have fought, those who have died, those who are fighting today – whether on the battlefield, or here at home to heal

from the wounds they've received.

For all those who fight not to perpetuate war, but to end it, including all our soldiers who have and continue to valiantly put their lives on the line, I salute you and I thank you.

### **The wonderful struggle**

Life, I've realized, is a wonderful struggle. While it could be that my optimism stems from this being one of those unusual moments that I'm not neurotically worried about something, it's also true that Jesus is at my side every single second, cheering me on. In fact, he's right here next to me this very moment if you want to say hi. (Now he's telling me not to be a Mister Smarty-pants, that he's right next to you, too, and that you don't need me to pass on your "hello".)

I was thinking of the "wonderful struggle" notion as Washington, D.C. fought with the fiscal cliff. I was reminded a little of Frankenstein's Monster lumbering through the village, smashing doors and scaring villagers, and all the while uttering, "Friend?" At least Frankenstein was sincere; he just had a difficult time with self-expression. Too bad one of those extreme makeover shows didn't get a hold of him. A nice sports coat, grow the hair out a bit, perhaps a goatee, and loafers – get rid of those big monster boots.

The wonder is that throughout it all – throughout all the sad examples set by people who should know better, throughout the pain and sadness we sometimes experience -- Christ is at our side every single moment, urging us on.

-- *Dave Myers*

## In thanks for the cathedral on the plains

When I was hired in 2000 at the *Southwest Kansas Catholic Register*, I was told that I would be covering the lead-up to, and the construction of, the new Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the completion of which would coincide with a 50-year anniversary celebration of the founding of the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City, Kansas. It would be a major undertaking, I was told.

“Do you think you can handle it?” I was asked during my interview.

“Um ...”

“I like your moxie, kid. You’re hired.”

Over the next several months, I watched as that vast, windy prairie -- our home, home on the range -- slowly gave birth to a beautiful cathedral. The rough, limestone exterior looked like it could have grown right out of the soil.

I’ll never forget seeing the very first stone that was set into the mortar. I was both moved and awe inspired, which was confirmed by a doctor who reminded me that you should always wait at least one hour to be awe inspired after you’ve been moved. Even as I sing the praises (to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy) of the first stone that was set, I admit that stones and mortar have very little to do with a cathedral.

Yes, they hold up the roof. Yes, they protect you from the biting freeze of the Kansas winds and the rain and snow. And yes, they provide a place to put the pews. But otherwise, they have nothing .... Upon further reflection, I have decided that the stone and mortar have a lot to do with the cathedral. Unless you want to be cold and wet. And pewless.

What really builds a cathedral -- and any church for that matter -- are the people. People like you and like me. And the person next to you. And the person next to her. But not the person next to that person. He said he helped build the church, but I happen to know he was playing Bingo. I drove by the Knights of Columbus Hall and saw his car.

It's the people (except for that one guy) who made the cathedral what it is. The people for whom former Dodge City Bishop Stanley Schlarman was told 14 years ago, "*If you build it, they will come.*"

"Who?" Bishop Schlarman asked the voice of God as he knelt in prayer. "*Who* will come?"

"What ... you want specifics?" God responded.

"Just a general head count would be nice, you know, for meals and such."

"Oh, okay. Let's see. There's the Steins. And the Ackermans.... Hmm. That's all I can think of right off hand."

"That's not very many."

"C'mon! Between those two families you have like 400 people. Besides, you won't even be starting construction for three years."

God was right. Three years later, with Bishop Ronald M. Gilmore now leading the Catholics of the Diocese of Dodge City, ground was broken. (Plans were stalled until the ground could be repaired.)

As then-temporary editor of the *Southwest Kansas Catholic Register*, I had the honor of watching the cathedral be built from the ground up. (They tried to do it the other way around, but it was too hard on the construction workers' backs.) When any of us went out to observe the construction, we'd first don our hard hats, a requirement when at the construction site -- then our flippers, our lab coat, our mask of our favorite Disney character, and our Lee Press-On Nails -- also requirements.

I recall sitting in on meetings with the engineers and our finance people. Not one to speak up at meetings, I had to gather my nerves before suggesting the cathedral have a moat. They didn't like the moat idea. Then I suggested gargoyles. I wasn't invited to any more meetings.

And later I saw the artwork slowly trickle in: statues of St. Therese the Little Flower, St. Isadore the Farmer, and for a brief time, Rocky Balboa (after the UPS guy got mixed up at the foundry). Personally, I thought he made an awesome St. Joseph.

Even a greater honor than seeing the cathedral being constructed (despite the lack of a moat and gargoyles) was being a witness to the many incredible events that have occurred there over the past decade.

We have, on more than one occasion, reached out ecumenically to our human family. Just months after the bombing of the World Trade Center, Bishop Gilmore invited four Muslims into the cathedral where they spoke about their faith and provided a visible example of a people so very misunderstood due to the actions of a handful of extremists. I've heard the loud boom, boom, boom of the Azteca dancers; seen a Chinese New Year dragon dance through the gathering area; and heard, at one gathering, a Rabbi blow a *shofar*, a ceremonial ram's horn.

I've witnessed married couples -- some married more than 70 years! -- renewing their vows at the annual anniversary Mass; I've enjoyed laughing with disabled children and adults at the Faith & Light gatherings. I've attended any number of "Scripture" days and "Stewardship" days, designed to enlighten and educate. I've gone to incredibly moving Easter vigils, watching, on many occasions, parents and their children baptized at the same time. There are the weddings, and there are the funerals.

I've loved arriving at the cathedral parking lot and seeing beyond its walls unending land carpeted in wheat to the north and west, and hearing cattle conversing in the distance about that which only the cattle know.

But most of all I've enjoyed walking into the worship area for Mass or for any event. Those many "first" glimpses I've had into that incredible house of God for the last 10 years is like peering into the open arms of God, inviting us in for a warm and loving embrace.

If you haven't been to the cathedral, I'd encourage you to visit. But even more importantly, I invite you to enjoy that wonderful, gracious gift of God's home in your own community, built by the people around you, their family, their ancestors. Enjoy the beauty of God's embrace that reaches far beyond the church doors.

# Correction

In the last issue of the *Southwest Kansas Catholic Register*, a headline contained the misspelling of the word “sense”. A last minute change caused the editor (*um ... me*), to revert to the British spelling, “sence”, which you would only know if you are a reader of English literature, or had spent time in England, as I have. True, it was only a 24-hour layover, but it was a very educational layover.

My nephew’s wife, Kay, who is from England, just this moment called me to say that they spell “sense” the same way we do. She also said I should stop pretending I’m hot stuff just because I once had a 24-hour layover in England. “Lots of people have had lots of 24-hour layovers lots of places,” she said. “Do you hear *them* bragging about it?”

I realize now that my misspelling wasn’t a revert to the British, but a *re-revert* to the *ancient* British spelling -- when Britain was under Roman rule. This you would only know if you 1) had lived in Britain when it was under Roman rule and are thusly a first person witness to centuries of historic spelling-related events, or 2) had watched Masterpiece Theater’s “I Claudius”.

Derek Jacobi, who played Claudius in the series, just now called me. He said to quit blaming my misspellings on Masterpiece Theatre. He said that if I didn’t stop, he would see to it that I was “turned into a syllable.” I have no idea what he meant by that, but I’m not taking any chances. It sounds painful.

The second error came in a picture that I found for Tim Wenzl’s “Mining the Archives” series, which focused on the Native American ruins near Scott City. The graphic contained a portrait of an explorer discussed in Tim’s article. Only after

it was published did someone notice that the death date on the portrait was before the birthday of the person of the same name discussed in Tim's article. Because one was born after the other had died, one can only assume that they are not the same person, and hence, are different people. While I'm not one to dismiss the notion of time travel, upon further examination of the portrait, I noted no clues to a later time period, say cell phones or digital watches. While he may simply have had his cell phone in his pocket, I would admit maybe that perhaps I was possibly mistaken in running the portrait.

Other mistakes:

1) In an article sent in about a gathering in Jetmore, instead of type-setting: "Following the event, the Knights of Columbus provided a meal of roast beef and mashed potatoes," I accidentally wrote, "Edna Johnson's School of Quality Tap Dancing." This I blame on an interruption from a telephone solicitor whose voice reminded me of Sammy Davis, Jr., which led me to dwell on my decision not to peruse a career in tap dancing, and that perhaps I should reconsider taking lessons.

Edna Johnson just now called me. She said I'm too old, entirely unqualified, and delusional, but that she *would* consider hiring me to clean up after her family of pet geese, as long as I would agree to first attend the day-long workshop, "So You Want to Tend Geese," July 12 at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City. Local hotels are filling up fast.

2) Under a photo of a First Communion in the last issue, instead of writing the names of the children, I accidentally pressed enter after making my grocery list. Just to avoid confusion (and for the individual who was sure she once went to school with the mother of "Noxema Medicated Skin Cream"), here are the actual names: Noxema: Noreen Davis; Taco Sauce: David Justings; Coco Puffs: Anne

Larson; Weed and Feed: Tyler Griffiths; Green Beans: Marion Martinez; and Mr. Clean: (ironically) Dennis Clean. To protect the pastor's name, I'll only offer my apology for listing him as "Canned Ham".

3) Regarding the weekly listing of the Bishop's Calendar, it should be noted that the bishop is *not* singing classical jazz at Johnny Cool's Diner in Topeka from 9 p.m.-midnight a week from Friday. The singer is actually "Josh Brongart," and is in no way associated with the Catholic Church. To those who sent in \$14 for the ticket/cover charge, the Diocese of Dodge City appreciates your donation.

4) In the cover story about the two popes recently sainted by Pope Francis, it was incorrectly noted that before becoming pope, Pope John XXIII served as a police sergeant in the 15th precinct of the Chicago Police Department and was responsible for assisting in the arrest of Al Capone, and later, Anita Bryant. (She was eventually exonerated and the whole incident wiped from her record. In fact, I'm only guessing that it ever even happened.)

The fact of the matter is that Pope John XXIII never served as a police sergeant with the Chicago Police Department. He was a lieutenant.

The *Register* newspaper strives for accuracy and apologizes for these errors, as does this editor, who has strived for accuracy throughout his life, but who seems to occasionally fall head-first into the mud-puddle-of-life, due to bad decisions, poor judgment, incorrect grammar, or a combination of all three, but who thanks his lucky stars that he has a God who is ever-forgiving, and who has long accepted the fact that his creation – these funny creatures called "people" – are perfect *only* in their imperfection.

Because even God doesn't want a bunch of know-it-alls.

And thank God for that.

## Pity or impatience?

The other day I was second in line at the pharmacy when a woman at the counter realized she could not pay the higher-than-planned cost of her prescription.

When she walked away without her medications, I felt sorry for her, but also a hint of relief that less of my time would be taken up. (Am I the only one who has these “bonehead” moments, moments I store away for future use should I ever start to feel too good about myself? Am I the only one, who, if asked, “Do you have any regrets?” would have to refer to a multi-volume set?)

The young woman in front of me took her turn at the counter. I was next. I had arrived at a good time. The line was filling up fast, winding nearly back to the electronics department; I realized it was one of those self-defining moments. Do I feel pity for the people in line, offering a quick prayer for their recovery? Or do I hope I don't catch any of whatever illnesses they have? Or do I do both? “Lord, please help these people, and protect me from their germs. And not necessarily in that order.”

While the young woman was paying, the first woman – the one who couldn't pay -- returned. She stood to the side at the counter with a handful of ATM cash, a look of resignation on her face.

The person ahead of me finished up, and the first woman – the one who had left to get her cash -- held out her money to the pharmacist. She didn't speak fluent English, but when the pharmacist looked at her and said, not unkindly, that she was afraid she would have to get back in line, she knew what that meant. She turned a slight shade of green.

I turned and saw the line winding back over the department store's horizon like the Mississippi River. The guy at the end

of the line was in a different time zone.

At that precise moment, the person directly ahead of me finished up. I was next.

Realizing she would have to do the unthinkable and go to the end of the line, the woman – the one who returned to pay, I mean -- turned around and slowly took a few steps. I started to speak. She turned quickly toward me, hoping beyond hope that I would allow her to go ahead. I could see hope and struggle written on her face. She waited for me to say what I was going to say, as if all her struggles, her burdens, would somehow be lightened if, on this day, at this moment, someone showed her one simple act of kindness.

I looked at her with pity. I smiled. She smiled. I told her to go to the back of the line. Rules are rules, I said.

I'm just kidding. I didn't really do that. Did you actually believe I would do that? I thought we knew each other better than that. I'm disappointed. I really am.

Anyway, I told the pharmacist that the woman had been ahead of all of us anyway, and that we could wait another few minutes. With great relief, the woman gave me a shy "thank you," and went to pay.

Most of the people in line had arrived after the woman had left to go get her money, so they didn't know the story of how she had left for only a few minutes. Or of her struggles -- burdens that many of us carry. Of her child who wanted to be a baseball player but had to give it up after a ping pong accident involving an arrant Tonka Truck and a plate of egg rolls (I made that last one up). I didn't think most of them would mind though.

That is, until the pharmacist misplaced her medication.

She had them all sacked up not five minutes before, but since then someone else had placed on the counter an impressive pile of items to be gone through and stored away. At one

point, the poor woman – the pharmacist, I mean – threw her arms up in exasperation. The woman – the one with the cash, I mean – turned and looked at me as if to say, “Sorry! I’m not in control of this!”

I had done a good deed, and yet I started to feel daggers in my back from the rest of the line. I wondered if perhaps I should have sought permission from all those people before allowing her to go ahead. I could have counted hands, perhaps distributed ballots, or even rated applause. I always have my best ideas when it’s too late to use them.

I waited and waited, cringing, weighing my good deed against the onslaught of daggers being hurled into my back. The daggers weren’t winning, but it was a fierce battle.

Suddenly, the pharmacist was holding a medicine bag. Was it the right one? *Yes!*

The woman paid, offered me another quiet “thank you”, and was gone. I got my prescription and walked toward the dairy to buy some cheese to eat on the way home. It was a wonderful moment, and not just because of the cheese. We are asked at times not just to hold others ahead of ourselves, but to act on their behalf despite the dangers – despite the many who may hold you in contempt. While my example is fairly insignificant, others aren’t so much. Think Mother Teresa, Ghandi, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., any number of saints who gave their lives for others.

When you think about it, there are many, many people right here who need support, defense, the determined few who will stand for them. Who will be a voice for them? For the unborn? The poor? Who will be a voice for the incredibly sad injustices against immigrants?

We are called to stand their ground because we know it’s right. If Christ hadn’t done just that, he never would have died for us. And we would be lost, indeed.

# Life is what happens after life happens

As it turns out, what we were told about the caterpillar when we were children – how it forms a cocoon and turns into a butterfly -- was only part of the story: Here's how I learned the rest of the story.

Last month, my wife and I boarded a plane for Virginia. Neither of us had flown in more than a decade. A lot has changed since then. They now charge \$25 for each checked bag(!), so we packed all our clothes into one large bag, she taking nine-tenths of the bag, me squishing my clothes into a space the size of a shoebox. This is what husbands do.

Did you know that now there are seats other than “economy” and “first class”? Because it was such short notice, we were stuck with seats by an exit hatch that had five extra inches of leg room, all for a mere \$45 extra, each. Worst of all? They served no peanuts. *What kind of people are these!?*

Those costs, plus the cost of tickets and parking for nearly two weeks, would leave me taking out a second mortgage on my house and holding a telethon. After having committed my life's savings to this trip, on the morning we were to drive to the Wichita airport I developed a full blown stomach virus. Well, maybe not full blown -- partially blown. It was like I had motion sickness before I was even in motion. I felt as if I had swallowed one of our department head meetings.

I looked forward to the drive to Wichita and flying for several hours like one might look forward to being slowly eaten by angry gerbils.

Gathering all the strength I could muster (and I couldn't muster much), I drove us to the airport. I took deep breaths all along the way, hoping my insides would stay inside.

The last time I flew, it was in a large intercontinental plane with nine seats across. Each chair had a small TV screen on the back. They served snacks and meals. It was roomy. The flight was smooth. It was delightful.

Instead of entering a roomy, luxury 777, we had to actually bend down to enter what amounted to a recycled Pringles can with wings. I felt like an old sock being stuffed into a drawer. Or like a ... well, actually the sock thing says it pretty well.

My wife sat down next to me and realized that her chair wasn't able to stay in a full, upright position. No big deal, I thought. So, she gets to do a little reclining on take off. Can't be helped.

Or so I thought, until the stewardess happened by and told her that for her own safety, she would have to move. A few minutes later, I could see my wife a few seats up, trying to get her little plane light on so she could read. It wouldn't work. I wondered what else didn't work. I began tying my clothes together into a makeshift parachute. Just in case.

Our first stop was Chicago where a delay in landing left us with 12 seconds to run across the airport to our connecting gate – approximately three miles away. Being the larger of us two, I provided blocking to clear a path for Charlene. I felt bad about the little old lady in the walker in front of us, but I *had* shouted a warning.

It was just like in the movies. As the gate lady was closing up, we came running like a couple of wildebeests fleeing a fire. She flung the doors open, glanced at our boarding passes, and shouted, “Hada gool blup!” Either it was a foreign language, or my ears were stopped up from the first flight.

Speaking of which, midway through the second flight, the pressure made me feel like I had an ice pick in my ears. Other than the ice pick, the sour stomach, being inside yet another flying Pringles can that I was certain would fly apart

like a jalopy in a Laurel and Hardy movie, they were perfectly pleasant flights.

We finally arrived in Richmond, Virginia. Charlene's brother Rod picked us up and drove us to a rehabilitation center where his wife was wracked with cancer. She was unresponsive when we arrived. Rod knelt close to her and bravely told her that she "could go to Jesus and her mom and dad," that he and their kids would be looked after, that everyone would be okay.

Judy had been a stalwart foe of Governor Bob McDonnell, challenging on the senate floor his decision to save a few dollars by closing centers serving the developmentally disabled, where one of her two sons lived.

We said hello to her, with only faith to know that she could hear us. We told her that we loved her.

A few hours later that same evening, as we sat at Rod's house, the call came. Rod collapsed and wept. I hugged him on one side, Charlene on the other. I drove him back to the center where we sat with Judy until their son and his wife arrived from their home an hour and a half away.

The next several days were spent making the long drive back and forth to the funeral home, where Rod used his faith and humor to get him through an impossibly difficult situation. Rod is the funniest human being I've ever known, and even had the funeral director helping to laugh away his pain.

The funeral was deeply sad and yet a time of grace. It was then -- and at the rehab center before -- that I began to put together the story of the caterpillar. See, the most difficult thing about death comes as a result of our own limited faith. It's nearly impossible for us to fully accept the reality of our new birth into Heaven.

If we only could understand the wonders of wonders that we will experience -- that *they* are experiencing -- the peering into the eyes of God, the unparalleled love (and you gotta admit,

love is grand); if we could only understand the awesomeness of this new birth (not death; Christ defeated death, remember?), it would be a time of sadness still, but also of great celebration!

We've all seen a caterpillar as it crawls along the stem of a leaf, every now and then peeking up and around at the world, appearing almost infantile in its naïve grace as it makes its journey.

And then, the unimaginable happens. The unbelievable metamorphosis that changes this tiny, crawling creature into a butterfly -- with colorful wings to take flight when it could only crawl before.

This is the example!

Death? Naaaaaa. It's a metamorphosis, a new birth. It's a blink of an eye between a life on earth and a life in Heaven. A change, yes, but *life* still!

# The story of St. Bet'sie

The other day my wife and I were theorizing about Heaven. Theorizing is one of my favorite hobbies. It makes me feel smart. Theories are conclusions drawn from a mixture of facts and possibilities. For example, I know Heaven exists, but whether or not they have their own volleyball team is left entirely to theory. Our conversation reminded me of something I once read. Or maybe I made it up. Or dreamt it. Regardless, here it is:

You may have heard of St. Bet'sie De Moutoné (1522-1603). In Dr. Galen Rodget's text, "To Heaven and Back Again," Dr. Rodget shared a description of the saint's death and subsequent resuscitation, which the future saint wrote about in 1554. "Having suffered ill, I found myself pouring toward that heavenly light so oft told in days past. It was as they say -- beautiful, warm, inviting, and really bright. Once having reached the light, I beset twixt two large doors and into the embrace of our Savior, who stood grinning in such a way as to set upon one the feeling you were his close pal. He led me into a room in which stood several long tables, each with place settings for eight, and one small table for kids. On another was set a banquet of victuals, the scent of which set the stomach to want. It was to be served buffet style. I was particularly drawn to the little tortillas in which were wrapped cheese, peppers and unrecognizable things which I questioned not.

"Appearing before me was my dear mother and father, long these many years past, who embraced me in that warm light, and led me to another in wait, my husband, George, who shook my hand with tender vigor. George was never want for hugging. Oh, the joy! The unparalleled delight at greeting my

Savior! The unequalled pleasure at embracing long lost family and friends! The slight elation at seeing George!

“Christ then led me to the center table, where, after taking a seat, he bathed my feet tenderly and anointed my head with oil. Therein I experienced a love that the mind on this earth cannot comprehend, a total love, a love without pause, without condition, a love constant. Then we had a slide-show. Christ signaled a man in the back who flipped a switch on a projector. My Savior whispered to me that whilst the projector would not be invented on earth for 500 years, ‘in Heaven they are quite popular.’

“With Christ at my side and surrounded by family and friends, we thence viewed the highlights of my life these 32 years, from my birth, to playing with my first toy, a stuffed pigeon named ‘Mr. Feathers.’ I saw my dear parents taking me and my brother to church. I saw my first Communion. I laughed as I saw myself enjoying my eighth birthday party. Father had hired a Queen Mary impersonator who juggled six oranges while reciting a treatise on the subjugation of Protestants. Father bid him good riddance and paid him not.

“I watched as my life stretched onward; my youth – oh, how the good times did runneth over! Doubles chess -- the year we took second place to the Dalmónt twins.

“And hope. Hope for the future: hope to one day serve God’s dejected children.

“I saw picnics by the lake with Aunt and Uncle. One image appeared showing Uncle Richard flying from a rope into the lake as I stood to the side bent with delight. From his audience in the heavenly banquet, Uncle shouted, ‘Unlike *some* people, *I* could not walk on water!’ to which my dear Christ laughed louder than anyone.

“I saw my marriage to George, a handsome gnu farmer who owned ‘Good Gnus Bar and Grille’ on the side. I saw us in

prayer. Although I heard not, I knew without doubt we were praying for a child to bear. The next photo showed our hands clasped, another showed my face looking to God through teary eyes. I could hear people weeping in the heavenly banquet room. The next picture was sadder yet: my husband, George leaving for work, I at the table, downcast, dejected, alone.

“So it was, then, that I became burdened by my own dismay, a hope lost, and with it, my faith. I had so wanted to serve God’s dejected children, but in not having a child of my own, my desire to serve was lost in a haze of self-pity. It was only through this intense love that now enveloped me that I could see clearly the folly of my actions. My husband had fallen ill and died, and so did my desire for life. It was this that stole my health and led me to this heavenly banquet.

“‘Dear Lord,’ I whispered to Christ as he popped a little rolled up tortilla into his mouth, ‘I should have rejected despair and replaced it with desire – desire to lend hope to others where it had escaped me.’

“It was then I realized that the weeping I heard was not because of the slide-show, but because those who loved me so deeply in this room would again be saying goodbye to me.

“My Lord smiled with sympathy. It seemed my life wasn’t complete. He walked me to the front door, allowing my re-birth into my physical body on earth. When I awoke, I felt that same great love I had felt in Christ’s presence. He was still with me. I vowed that I would honor him each and every moment, never again to reject the hope and that magnificent love he placed in my heart.”

## Mrs. Moses and the joy of marriage

**L**ong before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered -- long before the Dead Sea was even known as the Dead Sea (back when it was the “Not Feeling At All Well Sea”) -- another set of scrolls were discovered. Within these scrolls was contained a conversation between Moses and his wife, which I thought might be appropriate for this special wedding issue.

It begins when Moses comes home after another day of leading the Israelites through the desert: He notices that his wife is being oddly quiet.

“Are ... are you *mad at me*?” Moses asks as he leans his big stick against a pile of sand shaped like a recliner.

“Why would I be mad?” Zipporah responds sharply as she continues washing the dishes.

*Uh, oh.* “I don’t know,” Moses responds, mentally searching for whatever he said or did that made her mad. “That’s why I’m asking.”

“What makes you think I’m mad?” she asks again, refusing to face him.

“Well, you’ve barely spoken unto me all day, and when you did, it was to tell me I was likened unto nasal discharge.”

“Well ... nasal discharge is a good thing,” she slowly replies as she wipes a dish dry. “It frees the sinuses. ... Perhaps if you spent as much time with me as you do *freeing* things, you wouldn’t have sinus problems.”

“What? I don’t have sinus problems! ... Wait. That doesn’t even make sense! Look, if by ‘freeing things’ you’re referring to the Israelites, I think that leading an entire race from bondage takes precedence over discussing how you’d like to

arrange the kitchen if money weren't an option. And if we had a kitchen."

"I'm just saying maybe one day a week we could have an 'us' day," she said, turning to her husband. "Maybe play a board game or two, have some people over. You know, it won't hurt the Israelites to lead themselves now and then."

"Look, Zippy, God charged me with one duty, to lead the Israelites out of bondage. What kind of prophet would I be if I couldn't complete so simple a task?"

"Oh, I see," she responded, angrily. "And what was it God wrote about 'keeping holy the Sabbath' on those thingies you brought down the mountain – which you were lugging, by the way, at the same moment that you were supposed to be coaching Gershom's soccer game?"

Moses went silent for a moment. "Oh, yeah," he said, recalling the Fifth Commandment. "Sorry, dear. ...But as for the game, you're fully aware I had to give up coaching when God called upon me to free the Israelites."

"Yes, I know dear," she said with a sigh.

He then took his place beside his beloved wife, who was, to his chagrin, so often right, and dried as she washed, being especially careful not to drop a dish, especially after what happened with the third tablet.

Despite the rough spots, Moses and Zipporah trekked on together across the desert along with their sons, Gershom and Eliezer, whom Moses lovingly nicknamed Sven and Lil' Bill.

I truly believe that this account, discovered on the scroll, is an attempt to exemplify a successful marriage -- a successful marriage in a *desert atmosphere* in which *thousands of people* are sleeping over for years on end -- and this despite Moses having long ago *gone through all the cheese dip* (which to his chagrin, God would not provide more of despite how many times Moses attempted the "miracle of the cheese dip").

To assume all marriages are perfect is to live in a happily-ever-after fantasy world. Or to be heavily medicated. Often times, the problems that arise simply require patience, time, and most of all, prayer -- all of which build strength for the next troubles that arise. And sometimes they are insurmountable. This God understands.

Having said this, can you imagine being married to someone whose hobby is ark-building? Noah and his wife (who is unnamed so we'll call her Laverne) were married for upwards of 600 years.

Now, imagine you're on, say, year 450, when your husband decides to share a little news. Laverne had just gotten her gardenias planted when Noah mentioned between bites of a liverwurst sandwich that he was going to build an ark in their backyard.

"And ... uh, it's going to be big enough to hold two of every living creature -- although I have to get back with God on the Big Foots, unicorns and jackalopes."

"Tell me this is one of your jokes," Laverne said, "like when you named our son 'Ham'."

"Not that again! You know it's a family name! At least I didn't name him after Uncle Hamon-rye! Look, if a voice came from on high and told you to build an ark because he was going to flood the world, wouldn't you listen? Especially if the voice was really deep and all *oooooh*-sounding?"

"Honestly, Noah! Did you ever think to ask why He wants to flood the world? Maybe He just needed somebody to reassure Him, to tell Him that everything's going to be okay!" Although Noah wouldn't admit it, he suddenly realized how much money he may have thrown away on carpenter nails.

Now, I'm no prophet. And I've never built an ark (although, if I had a son, I would have named him Ham. Or Bacon. Anything in the pork realm, really).

But I have learned a lot about marriage. I know how incredibly lucky I am to have been blessed with an awesome spouse. God bless married couples, and give them the grace they need to be happy and to cherish each other all the days of their lives.

### **What can't you do well?**

When we look at the works of the master artists like Michelangelo or DaVinci, we tend to forget that there was a time when they didn't know one end of the chisel from the other.

Did you know that Michelangelo had to remake his sculpture of "David" three times before he got it right? Michelangelo's first sculpture had David wearing a big grin, which the artist realized too late looked "downright creepy."

Yet, when I think of Michelangelo and other great masters, my mind boggles. It's the same feeling I get when I look at the great cathedrals, knowing that some cathedrals, such as Notre Dame, took centuries to complete -- each stone hand hewn, the tiniest dab of paint intentionally placed, every square inch of wallpaper glued by the work of a Renaissance-era master wallpaperer, bean bag chairs placed with unimaginable care by bean-bag artisans of old.

And yet, did you know that DaVinci never passed Home Ec? He couldn't make a simple cinnamon roll! These are impossibly talented people with wonderful failings. I believe in embracing my foibles! They give me humility. They keep me from being too prideful. They remind me that I don't have to be perfect to be loved by our gentle Jesus. In fact, I can be pretty far from it!

Kind of gives you comfort, doesn't it? -- *Dave Myers*

# The morality of Cocoa Puffs

This morning while eating breakfast and watching “SpongeBob SquarePants,” I began to reflect on the nature of God and this great mystery we call “life.” With all the craziness in the world – all the shootings, bombs going off, and threats of war – I think I’ve come up with some simple truths, that, if heeded by the worlds’ leaders, would end civil strife as we know it.

Wherever you are, what ever you’re doing, be friendly. Friendliness is very underrated.

For some people, being a person of faith means putting themselves on a pedestal. Nobody should be on a pedestal unless they’re replacing a light bulb.

You’re never too good to listen to a stranger for a few minutes. Cashiers should keep this in mind on senior discount day.

Listening to a friend or loved one’s story about how their day went is far more important than seeing whether or not your team got that next first down. Unless it’s the playoffs.

Don’t flush your good will down the toilet just because someone treats you unfairly. Good will is never as pleasant when served wet.

When someone is mean to you at school or work, pray for them. Pray that they can come to understand that what they did was wrong. Pray that they learn it’s better to be nice. Pray that they get relocated.

It’s better to email one sentence of personal greeting to a close friend or loved one, than a long, involved joke that was auto-sent to three dozen other recipients.

Eating Cocoa Puffs for breakfast may not be great for the

body, but on occasion, it can be good for the soul. If more world leaders ate Cocoa Puffs for breakfast, there would be fewer wars.

War is like burnt chocolate pudding. If the world would just simmer down a bit, everything would be fine.

Russia, Iraq, the Unites States, and every other country in the world have at least one thing in common: They each contain people who would rather share a drink and play a game of beach volleyball than go to war.

If you're looking for an answer, don't go to an adult. If it's a simple truth you're searching for, ask a child.

Never begin a home improvement project in a bad mood. It's a little know fact that the Spanish American war began when the king of Spain became angry after he was unable to figure out how to apply weather stripping to his bedroom window.

Fixing a leak in the plumbing is the closest we come to knowing what God feels like. Having children comes a close second.

If you are comfortable in your own skin, you will be attractive regardless of what that skin looks like. Healthy self-respect and a good self-image is a real babe-magnet.

There's no sense in trying to look as good as the people on Baywatch. Not that you couldn't do it, there's just no sense in it.

With a little rotten behavior, the best looking man or woman can turn into a hideous monster. The Creature from the Black Lagoon was once Frank Morgan, dashing head of computer maintenance at the accounting firm of Davis, Dingham & Malroy. What began with belittling his staff and making unwelcome advances on his secretary, Trudy, eventually turned him into the monster we know and loath today.

Being a gossip is like eating a foot-long chili-dog. It tastes

good going down, but it soon makes you unpleasant to be around.

Turn to God not just in times of need, but in times of thanks, in times of wonder, in times of complete indifference. Turn to God when all you want to do is say “hello.”

The greatest person on the planet earth – the one with the most potential, the one with the greatest ability to positively affect the lives of those around them – is the person looking back at you in the mirror every morning.

God doesn't just love you, he likes you. He really, really likes you.

# Tumbleweed dreams

I was in my back yard when it happened.

It was a warm night in downtown Spearville. Too warm for bugs, which were all inside watching TV. Bugs love *Antiques Road Show*, especially termites. A few weeks ago, when the show highlighted an antique English oak hunters cabinet, I heard a collective *ahhhhh* coming from a crack in my living room wall.

The night sky was filled with stars. I lay on my patio recliner, staring up at the Milky Way. I was filled with wonder at the majesty of God's creation.

Suddenly, I noticed movement near my fence. Beyond the glow of the patio light, in the pitch black of the night where you could see nothing at all, I could see something. *But what was it?* It was too dark -- due almost entirely to the lack of light -- to see what it had been.

Suddenly a car went by, its lights traversing my yard in an arc which stretched toward the fence. That's when I saw it in the quick passing of the light. It was a tumbleweed, that's all, blowing in the breeze, flitting against the fence. No, two of them. A third on its way.

Odd. In all the years I'd been living here, there had only been 50 or 60 times when a tumbleweed had blown up against my fence. It didn't make sense! So strange, the goings on!

I returned to my pondering, which had gone from wondering at the night sky to asking the cosmos why it was that dogs walk around in three circles before laying down. Suddenly the third tumbleweed pounced onto the other two allowing a fourth to bounce on top and over the fence, almost as if they -- and I know this sounds crazy -- had given it a boost!! I ambled up

off the patio recliner clumsily, like a child climbing out of the deep end of a pool.

Then another tumbleweed bounded over the fence, and another, until I was surrounded -- surrounded by tumbleweeds! I backed up into the yard until I felt my backyard shed, cicada shells stuck to it like remnants of an insect army.

The tumbleweeds closed in, animated by some unknown force not known to me.

And that's when Eddy Albert (of "Green Acres" fame) appeared. *Thank goodness*. The guy is really smart, let me tell you. And he hadn't come a moment too soon.

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If you drive by my house on any given warm, weekend night, there is a chance that you will see a glowing, ghostly figure or two in my back yard.

Do not be frightened! Those ghostly figures are simply the reversed images from a movie being shown in an outdoor theater I have constructed.

I know what you're thinking, and no, I'm not Donald Trump. In fact, when it comes to the handling of money, I'm probably closer in skills to The Donald's dog (The Spot). I built my little outdoor theater almost entirely with donated materials. If you saw it, you would think it was only a little brick patio and a fence. But on movie night?

You see, for more than two years the thought egged me on -- a vision that included a dreamy one-way journey to the mountains of Colorado, the hills of Oklahoma, or perhaps the deep, Kansas prairie.

This vision that tried as it might to pull me from my downtown Spearville home wasn't that of sitting amid the serene countryside, away from the things of humanity, gazing at God's creation, whether it be mountains of Colorado, the cornfields of Kansas or whatever it is in Oklahoma.

It was an outdoor movie theater.

First, I should explain that in the last two years, I've observed more suffering from people close to me than I've seen all the rest of life put together. I'd rather take on the ailment myself than contend with the suffering of loved ones. Yet, even when loved ones are in the throws of the worst suffering, God's blessings appear as if out of nowhere.

One of the blessings I received was a desire to chase after the little dreams I had so long put off. I decided that I didn't want to be a barnacle clinging to the ship of life. I wanted to be the ship -- or at least a tugboat, maybe a canoe or one of those pedal boats -- cutting my own way through the sea of life.

Dreams are a dish best served right out of the oven. Don't wait.

What I decided as I observed and participated in the suffering of my loved ones was that I should reach all the harder to achieve dreams in my life, even if the dream represents just a happy, healthy diversion.

The outdoor movie theater was a little dream; it wasn't going to be for the betterment of humanity or bringing Christ into someone's life, yet it was a dream just the same.

So, I decided not to wait until I found my home out in the country. I went about building an outdoor movie theater right there in my Spearville backyard. Using bricks given me by a neighbor several years ago, wood taken from palettes given me by the *Spearville News*, a white sheet from Salvation Army, and a \$50 DVD projector from Ebay, I took to building.

It isn't perfect by any means. The brick part is far from level (a little wavy, actually), the picture is far from perfect due to the cheap projector, not to mention a screen that waves in the breeze, occasionally distorting the actors as if you're looking at their reflection in a hubcap.

It's all wonderfully flawed. And yet, my wife and I sat outside

on a warm night under the stars, and together watched an *Outer Limits* episode in which Eddy Albert and his wife are attacked by tumbleweeds (which I thought was *awesome*, but which my wife found as engaging as anyone would who otherwise enjoys movies about Victorian England).

As I sat out under the stars, I came to realize that life isn't only about the big picture. It's about *moments*. Simple, remarkable moments of simple, remarkable joy for which we should always be at the ready to thank our truly remarkable God.





David Myers, editor of the *Southwest Kansas Catholic*, is an award-winning columnist and journalist. Among his honors are two first-place awards for best humor column from the Colorado Press Association. In 2011 he won a second-place award from the Kansas Authors' Club for fiction writing.

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