Me, Myself, and
My Family and Friends

Edited by David Bruce

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My Painful Utah Memory

By Matt Bachman

We all have vivid memories of those family vacations that take place in paradise at the beach, within the vastness of New York City, or even in the historic cities of Europe. Each vacation is sure to have a few unforgettable moments. Those moments that are etched in my mind the deepest include watching a group of dolphins glide alongside our boat as if we were racing, seeing the beauty of Central Park on a mid-summer's afternoon, and treasuring each step while making my ascent to the top of the Eiffel Tower. After all, isn't the point of family vacations to have fun and grow closer? This past summer, my family was certainly able to accomplish this; however, an extremely unfortunate event led to it.

During Winter Quarter last school year, I got a phone call from my father. He asked how my classes were going, how my friends were doing, and he gave me an update on how things were going back at

home. Fifteen to 20 minutes later, we were at the point in the conversation where it was running dry.

"Well… that's about all that's new back here at home," my father stated.

Sensing this was the end of the phone call, I replied, "Okay, nice to talk to you. Tell Mom I say 'Hi.' I'll talk to you later!"

My dad then chimed in as if he had forgotten to ask me about something, "Wait, Matt! How would you like to go out West this summer for vacation? We'll fly into Albuquerque, rent a van, and go from there. It will be a lot of driving, but I promise it will be a blast."

Having never been out there before, I enthusiastically replied, "YES!"

I later found out that on the vacation we would be making stops in Colorado, Utah, and Arizona. I could not wait to see the Rocky Mountains, the beauty of nature, and even see the buffalo roam (you know, like the song).

Five months later, the day arrived where we departed for the Wild, Wild West. The first two legs of the trip were simply amazing and nothing short of beautiful. I was thrilled that my dad chose this location for our family vacation; that is, until our family met Utah.

Zion National Park, located in Springdale, Utah, was our chosen destination. My mom had her hands full from the beginning.

"PETER LOUIS BACHMAN!" she shouted at my 9-year-old brother, who was standing too close for her comfort on the edge of a mammoth-sized rock. "Get away from there now!"

Given the full-name treatment, my brother did the smart thing and immediately responded, "Yes, ma'am," and backed away. The last thing you want to do is make Mom or Dad mad on what should be a relaxing family vacation.

My mom likes to refer to Pete as being at 'that age,' meaning he is a rebellious, I- can-do-what-I-want type of kid.

Mom then turned to myself and my 16-year-old brother, Joe, and said, "I could really use your guys' help with Pete today. Don't do anything that will tempt him to try it, too."

Joe and I wanted to explore Zion a little more than the typical tourist, so we were a bit bummed when my mom said that. We reluctantly replied with an elongated, "Alll riiight, Mom."

From then on, I made sure that Pete was always directly in front of me. As I was shadowing Pete and tracking his every footstep, Joe was off being the explorer he is. Sure, he might have been bending the park rules a bit by being off the trails and occasionally in a restricted area, but he has been climbing and attending summer camps for years. He was having a blast. I, on the other hand, was itching to get the rascal away from me. After a few hours of sightseeing and hiking the wide variety of beautiful Utah wilderness, it was time for lunch. For me, this meant it was time to pass the shadowing duties off to Joe. It was

my turn to get to know Zion National Park and to see what it had in store for me.

After we had filled up our empty stomachs and re-hydrated ourselves, my dad asked, "Ready to get back out there?"

Having been finished eating lunch for some time, I wasted no time in replying "Yes! Let's go!"

As we got closer and closer to the next trail, Joe tried to walk faster and faster to avoid 'Pete duty.'

"Joe!" I yelled in a somewhat demanding tone. "Get back here!"

"What do you want?" Joe questioned.

I began to chuckle and in a smartass way said, "Ha Ha… are you serious? It's your turn to watch over Pete."

Joe tried to act as if the news didn't bother him, "Oh yeah, I know. I'll take care of him, Matt. Don't worry about it." Although he tried to hide his anger, I could sense it was there.

Once Joe was all squared away with Pete, I went about my exploring. I was just ahead of the rest of

the family. This trail we were hiking had it all: a view of the mountains at one point, a river within sight around the next corner, patches of forest that would sporadically appear, and a dry and barren stretch of desert-like terrain on a slight hill. I had seen mountains, rivers, and forests before in my travels, but never had I seen cactus and an arid environment like this. From the minute I learned of this trip back in Winter Quarter, I immediately thought of seeing a cactus. It is what comes to mind when I think of the West. I just wanted to see one. The stereotypical cactus with the one large, pole-like trunk and a few arms sticking out from each side would have satisfied me; however, it turned out to be a hillside of different types of cacti.

I was loving every second of my hiking. Joe, on the other hand, was not. I could hear him complaining from a distance, "Mom, can't you or Dad take care of Pete for a while?"

My mom replied with an emphatic, "Joe, what did I tell you earlier?"

Joe, knowing the answer, did not even bother wasting his breath. Disappointed, he took it in stride and kept on walking side-by-side with Pete.

I was beginning to get a bit curious by getting a little closer to the different types of cacti. Each type had a different look to it, be it color, size, or thorn formation. I was completely fascinated, but not to the point where I would test the sharpness of a thorn—voluntarily, that is. While I became so enthralled in the cacti, the rest of the family kept their steady pace going, leaving me a bit behind. As I attempted to catch up to them, I continued to take in the oddness of the terrain and what it had to offer. I began to walk faster and faster so I didn't have to make everyone stop for me.

"Let's go, Matt! Catch up!" my dad yelled as if we were racing against a clock.

"Okay, Dad. I'm a-comin'," I replied in a happy-go-lucky tone. So I began to briskly jog back towards the trail. I was watching each step very carefully due to the loose rocks and cacti. Scratch that—I thought

I was watching carefully. As I planted my left foot, I landed on a pile of small rocks and I took a spill. In my attempt to catch myself from hitting the rough Utah ground, I slipped even more, this time resulting in my entire left arm landing on top of, what do you know, a cactus! It was, by far, the most pain I had felt in quite some time. Joe heard my screech for help and came running back to check on me. By the time he got to me, I was already standing and the blood was beginning to run down my arm. There were around 15 half-inch inch thorns stuck in my arm, as well as hundreds of smaller ones that couldn't be seen, but their presence was most definitely felt. Luckily, the trail we were on was the nearest to the Visitors' Center. Not wanting my parents to mess with the thorns, we rushed back to seek professional medical attention. Once we ran into a park ranger, he wasted no time in very carefully removing the bigger thorns. He never did attempt to remove the small 'spikes,' as Pete called them. Instead, he told us to find the nearest supermarket and to buy a

bottle of rubber cement. I heard this and was somewhat dumbfounded.

"Rubber cement?" I asked in a very curious voice.

The park ranger then explained very confidently, "Yes, sir. Apply a thin layer of rubber cement all over your arm, wait until it dries, and very carefully peel it off. This should get most, if not, all, of those smaller thorns out."

My dad ran into the first store we saw outside of the park to buy the remedy, applied it to my arm in the parking lot, and within a half-hour all of the thorns were gone! However, my arm remained swollen, red, and had an itching and burning sensation for quite some time.

Unforgettable moments were aplenty out in the Wild, Wild West, and this is one that will certainly join those that are etched deeply in my mind. The point of our family vacations is to have fun and to grow closer. If hiking through canyons isn't having

fun and if applying rubber cement isn't growing closer, I don't know what is!

When in Rome

By Natalie Bevilacqua

Many college students dream of the opportunity to study in another country. For a small number of these students, this dream will become a reality; I am one of those students. Last summer, I had the opportunity to study in Rome, Italy, for two months. Along with the excitement that goes with traveling to another country, I also felt a significant amount of anxiety, as most people would. Friends and family warned me over and over again of the dangers that I might encounter while studying in Europe. "Don't go anywhere alone, especially at night," my mother said repeatedly, as if I didn't know this already. "Don't let the boys pinch your cooley," my grandfather warned in his heavy Italian accent. No warnings, however, could've prepared me for the experiences, both good and bad, I encountered throughout my trip.

"Goodbye, I love you!" I shouted as my mother drove off, leaving me alone at the Pittsburgh airport

to fend for myself. This being the first time I had ever traveled alone, I had my worries about checking-in and making it to the plane on time. My mother, however, assured me that I would be fine. "The airline will take care of everything and you have plenty of time," she promised. I checked into the ticket counter and said goodbye to my two pieces of luggage with confidence; I still had plenty of time before the plane's departure. Little did I know that this would be the last time I would see my luggage for a long time.

We've all heard the horror stories of losing luggage while traveling overseas. This had never happened to me, however, so I didn't think twice about my luggage when I arrived at my first destination, London Heathrow Airport in London, England. As I waited at baggage claim for my bright pink duffle bag and my large black suitcase with the pink ribbon, I began to worry. "Is it really possible that both of my bags are missing?" I wondered to myself. As the last bag flew down the ramp and onto the turnstile

and the last remaining passenger gathered their luggage, I realized that the unthinkable had just occurred; both of my bags were lost! After reporting my missing luggage to customer service at the London airport, and being assured that my bags would arrive at my hotel before my departure to Italy, three days later, I joined the rest of the students whom I would be spending the next two months with. After a short three days in London, however, I boarded the plane from London to Rome still without my luggage.

For the next two weeks, I was forced to spend an obscene amount of money and time shopping for clothes and other essential items, as well as countless hours on the phone with the airports in the United States, England, and Italy. When my luggage finally arrived in Rome, 15 days after I had last seen it in the US, I was beyond excited. "Wait, Natalia…" the school coordinator quietly said when she called to inform me that my luggage had arrived. "Your luggage…well, you'll see when you pick it up," she said

before hanging up the phone. I rushed to the school, only to find that my luggage had been delivered, but my bright pink duffle bag was soaking wet. It was as if someone had dropped it into the ocean or left it out in the rain for hours. The textbooks that I had packed in this bag, as well as countless articles of clothes and shoes, were completely soaked and ruined from the mildew that had developed over the two weeks my luggage was missing. Luckily, I was able to look past this horrible situation and enjoy my time in Italy because if I had had a bad attitude, there is no way I would've been able to endure the countless other mishaps that occurred throughout the remainder of my trip.

The day after my luggage arrived, the school I was attending was scheduled to take a weekend holiday in Venice, which is four hours from Rome by train. We checked into our hotel room, where the man at the front desk began shamelessly flirting with my friend Brit. "She's taken, sorry!" I quickly interrupted, hurrying to her rescue. I politely smiled at

the creepy man and rushed upstairs with my friends. My roommates decided to get a bite to eat while I took a quick shower. When I got out of the shower, the man from the front desk was sitting on one of the beds in my hotel room.

"Who are you? Get out of here!" I screamed, as I reached for my cell phone.

"*Aspetta*, mam! Wait! But you flirt with me downstair," the man pleaded in broken English.

"Get out!" I shouted again and again until the man finally left. When my roommates returned, they couldn't believe the incredibly funny and awkward situation that had occurred in their absence. The rest of our holiday in Venice was relaxing and enjoyable. It wasn't until we boarded the train home that the next mishap occurred.

About two hours into our train ride back to Rome, the train suddenly stopped. Not thinking anything of it, we continued talking amongst ourselves until the conductor spoke on the loudspeaker and informed the passengers, in Italian, that we needed

to abandon the train immediately. He never bothered to tell us what had gone wrong, just that we were to exit the train at once. After waiting at the train station in 100-degree heat for over an hour, we were finally able to board another train that was heading to Rome. There was a catch. This train was completely booked and all 50-some students who were traveling together had no other choice but to sit on the floor of the train. Not only were we sitting on the floor, but the only available floor space was right outside the bathrooms. After the most uncomfortable and dirty two hours of our lives, we finally arrived back in Rome. With all of the confusion regarding the train ride, my friends and I were eager to go out and enjoy ourselves that night.

One stereotype that many Americans have of foreigners, especially Italian men, is that they are extremely forward when it comes to women. This was certainly true of the man at the hotel front desk. Although most Italian men treat women with the utmost respect, some fit this stereotype perfectly. Go-

ing out to dinner and then to the pubs in Campo di Fiori became an almost everyday ritual for my friends and me. While drinking in Campo, we encountered several of those stereotypical men, most of whom were not even Italian. "*Bella*, *bellisima*! I buy you some roses – only ten euro for 12. Come back, *bella*," an Arab gentleman said approaching our table and placing his hand on my shoulder. He was obviously confused about the meaning of the word "buy," since he was trying to sell us roses.

"Um, no thanks," we all replied in unison. The gentleman was then joined by a few friends, each carrying a variety of random objects. "Hello megaphone. Hello megaphone," one man shouted into a megaphone he was attempting to sell for 15 euro. This same group of men, or a group very similar to them, appeared at Campo every single night and continued trying to sell roses and megaphones to us night after night. Although we thought this was extremely annoying at the time, it is something that we have all admitted to missing.

Just as Americans have stereotypes of Europeans, Italians also have several stereotypes about tourists, and more specifically American tourists. Many Italians would describe Americans as uncultured, disrespectful of their strong religious values, and irresponsible. Living in Italy for two months, we were victims of these stereotypes several times, some more deserving than others. "Look at the paintings! Look at the paintings!" the small Italian man who was leading us through the catacombs shouted, while shining his flashlight in our direction. Maybe we weren't paying quite as much attention to the details of the ancient murals as he would have liked, but we were busy obsessing over the idea that thousands of people were buried in the walls around us. "Can you believe that there are bones in these walls?" Rachael asked, astonished.

"Oooooh, let's go down here," Kimie whispered as she headed down a dark pathway that was definitely *not* included in our tour. Just as we were about to sneak away from the rest of the group, our

friendly tour guide placed his hand on Rachael's back, causing her to scream loudly. "If you don't have a respect for da dead, you are more dan welcome to leave da catacombs!"

"Sorry, we're so sorry. We were just curious about the era of this wall painting…," Brit rattled on with her art historian knowledge, saving us from getting kicked out of the catacombs for good.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do. After living in Rome for two months, I know that I felt more like a Roman than an American. This might have had something to do with the fact that I was dressing like a Roman, due to lost luggage, traveling like a Roman, and being treated like a Roman. On more than one occasion, tourists had approached me asking for directions in slowly and carefully pronounced English, as if I didn't understand what they were saying.

"Do…you…know…where…we can…find…the Pan-the-on?" one tourist asked me in more syllables than necessary.

"I…speak…English…," I would respond equally as slowly before politely answering their question.

My time in Rome was definitely more good than bad. I admit that if it weren't for my experiences, both good and bad, I would not have taken in as much of this no longer foreign city. Losing my luggage, being approached by more than a few Roman men, and nearly getting kicked out of a number of historical sites forced me to step outside my comfort zone and interact with people who I normally would have avoided. Looking back on this amazing summer, I cannot help but smile, even when I think about the so-called "bad" times. Because, really, what can be bad when you're living in Rome?

Adventures with Martha and Lydia

By Martha R. Blaney

On November 16, 1988, when I was two years old, I was blessed with a little sister. Although I obviously do not remember much of what occurred on or around that date, I do remember the years following it. Lydia and I spent much of our childhood pretending and playing games from sunrise to bedtime at our four-acre ranch in Lancaster, Ohio. Over the years, we have had great times and of course our share of fights too, but the positive memories definitely outweigh the negative ones.

Being the first-born child, I was always bossing Lydia around and making her follow my rules. When we played school, she would always be the student while I got to play the much more exciting role of the teacher, making up worksheets for her to complete. When we played house, I got to be the mom and Lydia had to be the child. And if it was playing doctor, I got to be the one to treat Lydia, the injured patient. I remember the black medical bag

with its plastic contents like it was yesterday. Two tan play Band-aids that were round and slid onto our arms, a plastic syringe to give shots and draw blood, a reflex hammer that weighed as much as a light ink pen, and a brightly colored stethoscope to check a heartbeat were all I needed to fix my sister.

If I was not bossing Lydia around while playing school, house, or doctor, we could usually be found in our bedroom or the living room during the cold months of the year. Most of our favorite activities took place in our bedroom, a room of our previous house I will never forget. There were two large windows with light purple and white curtains handmade by our mother. The carpet was mint green, which matched our wallpaper perfectly. On the walls was a border that ran waist high around the room with brown dancing bears in purple tutus and various dance positions. Above and below the border was wallpaper with a pattern of tiny purple flowers connected by mint green vines. Our bedroom furniture, matching twin beds and dressers stained a dark

oak color, were our father's when he was a child. The room was completed with our matching light purple comforters and white dust ruffles on our beds, made by my mother to match the curtains and the rest of the décor.

Lydia and I would have fun for hours on end in our princess-like bedroom. Reading books, playing with our Barbies and their houses and cars, and making tents were only a few of the activities we took part in on a daily basis. We had a bright pink tent made to fit over a twin-sized mattress that we used to play and sleep on for days at a time. The bottom of the tent was our mattress and there were plastic rods that slid up the sides to pop up the tent. It even had a door and windows with Velcro so we could shut them and be secretive about what we were playing. Making tents was one of our favorite things to do, and with the help of our mom we would often make tents in the living room also. Mom would move the couches so that the backs were towards each other and there were a couple

feet of space between them. Then we would lay blankets across the tops of the couches, creating our own hidden haven where Lydia and I could gather our favorite dolls and toys.

Sometimes in the winter, we would have sleeping-bag sleepovers in the living room with our mom, lying on the floor in front of the fires she would keep banked in our brick fireplace all night long. During the day, we would imitate mom by cooking on our own plastic kitchen set kept on the opposite kitchen wall as the real appliances. Lydia and I loved playing hide and seek with our mom, too. When I was three years old, I began answering the phone, and one day while in the middle of a game of hide and seek I told a woman from our church that "Mommy can't come to the phone because we are playing hide and seek and it's her turn to hide." My days as a secretary went on, with a funny and embarrassing instance occurring when I was four. The phone rang just like always, and I ran to answer it, reaching to grasp the receiver hanging

on the wall in the kitchen. "Hello?" I said with a tone of importance in my voice. "Hello, Martha. What is your mom doing? Can I please speak to her?" replied Aunt Gayle, my mom's sister. "Yes, well, first Lydia peed in her training pants, then she pooped in her training pants, and mommy is putting them in the toilet," I commented. Aunt Gayle burst into laughter and then told me to tell my mom Father Noon was on the phone. Father Noon was the priest at our church and my preschool. So I hollered to my mom, "Mommmmyyyyy! Father Noon wants to talk to you!" Needless to say, my mom had been listening to my end of the conversation and came running only to find Aunt Gayle on the other end of the phone laughing.

In the summer and warmer months, our clubhouse outside became our refuge. Lydia and I would play outside for hours, my mom bringing our lunch way out to the clubhouse so we did not have to miss a second of playing. Our clubhouse was better than all the neighbors' with its bright yellow bumpy slide,

firefighter pole, and canopy to shade us from the sun. While we never had a sandbox in the square wood section in the bottom of the clubhouse, our mom helped us make good use of the space. Lydia and I had a four-piece kitchen set just our size which included a refrigerator, tall cabinet, sink, and stove. Mom would carry all four pieces out to the clubhouse for us to put on the bottom floor of what we referred to as our "house." The upper level was our bedroom, so of course we had to carry all of our books, baby-dolls, stuffed animals, pillows, and sleeping bags out to the clubhouse, too. We always hated seeing mom come out on the back deck when the sun was beginning to set because we knew exactly what would be coming out of her mouth: "Martha! Lydia! Time to start packing up! It's getting dark outside!"

I will never forget the day I decided to make my own rules and run away from home. Lydia was two at the time, and not around when this important decision was made. It was a warm summer evening

and for some reason I was mad at my mom. So I packed up my pink suitcase that said "Going to Grandma's" on the side, and loaded it into my wooden wagon along with blankets, a pillow, my baby doll, and teddy bear. As I set off through the grass towards the big willow tree in our front yard, I came across Lydia. So naturally, we had to go back inside the house to gather her valuable items so she could run away with me. After packing her matching suitcase and loading it into the wagon, we headed off towards the tree, like we were Lewis and Clark on an expedition.

Just as the blankets were laid out and everything was set up for our stay under the tree, my mom came out of the house. I am sure she knew what we were up to but decided to let us proceed for a while so she could get a laugh out of it. Anyway, mom not only came out to see us, she wanted to tell us it was dinnertime. Being the smart girls we are, and realizing we were getting hungry, Lydia and I loaded the wagon up and headed inside just as it was

getting dark. That was the end of running away. We never even made it out of the yard.

Now that Lydia and I are both in college and do not get to see each other nearly enough, I love looking back and daydreaming about our childhood adventures with one another. Since she is the only sister I have, Lydia and I always seem to make more memories every time we get the chance to spend time together. As our mom would say, "One day you are all each other will have, so you better make do!" Good thing I love my sister, huh?

A Glimmer in the Past Makes the Future Shine Bright

By Martha R. Blaney

Over and over the phrase "Good things happen when you hustle," a motto our athletic director lived by, crowded my mind as my heart raced and I wiped my sweaty palms on my nylon shorts. The gun went off and the next thing I saw was a clump of girls on the backstretch of the track, running in the stadium lights. The air was cold and damp with the smell of wet grass around the rubber track. It was spring of my sophomore year of high school, and I was the anchor on the 1600-meter relay team, also known as the 4 x 400-meter relay. As I screamed for my teammate, thousands of thoughts rushed through my head. "Get her, get her," I whispered to myself, as my teammate chased down our opponents right before my eyes.

We were in third place as I grabbed the baton and raced after the girls in front of me. I rehearsed in my head what I had been taught for the past two

years: "All out on the first 100, stride the backstretch, and bring it home with all you've got left." The first 100 meters flew by and I could feel my muscles tightening, tired from the other events I had run earlier. My strides elongated as I started down the backstretch, still focusing on my competitors in front of me. I heard my teammates chanting "MAR-THA, MAR-THA, MAR-THA," as I ran past them on the backstretch. Rounding the third curve, I finally passed the girl who was in second place. The fourth curve came and I was on the heels of the leader. Slowly moving to the outside of her, I struggled to pick up the pace even more and get ahead of her even an inch. "Use your arms, Martha, pump them faster, you can do this," I thought to myself. Using all of the strength in my body, I ran side by side with my opponent, struggling down the straightaway on the lit-up track. I leaned forward as I crossed the finish line, trusting the automatic timer to capture our team's time as the faster one. It was not to be, though; we had come in second place by a

mere few thousandths of a second. I collapsed to my knees, exhausted, feeling as though someone was pulling on my leg muscles like a rubber band. It was all I could do to keep breathing while my heart raced and tears streamed down my face.

My three teammates from the relay pulled me up and off the track, out of the way of the competitors still finishing. We embraced each other, knowing that each of us had given an all-out effort trying to win the 1600-meter relay. Fumbling to stand and clothe my sweaty body with my cold team warm-ups, I reflected on what a long day it had been. After monotonously untying my spikes to replace them with worn tennis shoes, I did a few cool-down laps with my teammates, and the stadium lights went out, making the sky black once again.

Guided by the dim lights in the parking lot, I slowly walked back to the bus with one of my coaches. Joe Muck was the toughest coach I had during my high school career in track, and we all knew that if he was not talking he was extremely

mad or disappointed. Yelling was his specialty, but unlike most of my teammates who could not stand the criticism, I thrived on it. Coach Muck pushed me to my limits, not afraid to upset me or bring stinging tears to my eyes. While I lashed out at times and talked back in a tempered manner, I knew he only wanted to help me achieve my goals.

I was silent while walking next to him for what seemed like an eternity. I thought to myself, "Why is he so mad? Did he not see the all-out effort I just gave for our team? What a jerk! We can't ever seem to make him proud." Then, as I slowly looked out of the corner of my eye to see the reaction on his face, I saw something particularly surprising. "Are his eyes hazy? Why is he clenching his teeth?" I wondered. As he turned to look at me, I tried to look a little less confused and startled by his expression, but it was no use. Mumbling in a soft voice, Coach Muck said, "Martha, I have seen you want to win, but I have never seen you fight the way you did tonight." He quietly went on, telling me I had done an excellent

job at the meet, especially anchoring the relay. The time I ran had earned me a spot on the varsity 1600-meter relay team. I was speechless. "Thanks, Coach Muck," I replied, as I cracked a slight smile. I am not sure how it happened, but the next thing I knew I was hugging the coach who helped me be the best athlete I could possibly be. As I climbed onto the bus and fell into the cold leather seat, I was relieved to get off my feet.

Roll call was taken and Coach Henwood, our head coach, stood up as if he had something to say. He announced that a Rising Star Award was being given out to one athlete who competed at the meet. An athlete from each team was nominated, and all of the coaches chose the winner at the end of the day based on performance and effort. With a tired grin on my face, I looked across the narrow bus aisle at my best friend. Thoughts of how well Tarah had competed and how she would probably get the award flooded my mind. Coach Henwood went on, raving about the individual from our team who had

won the award; I slowly started to drift off with thoughts of the gobs of homework I still had to finish. The next thing I knew, a name was called and my teammates instantaneously began clapping and cheering. Naturally, I looked around expecting to catch a glimpse of a teammate receiving the award. But much to my surprise, I was the one being stared at. "Martha, get up! You have to go get it!" cried Tarah, referring to the trophy. In disbelief and shock, I slowly stood up and shuffled to the front of the bus where Coach Henwood handed me a tall shiny trophy about a foot and a half high. I beamed with excitement.

Coach Muck had informed us before the race that if we won the relay we would win the entire meet; unfortunately, we had not won the relay. Our team lost the freshman-sophomore meet that day, partly as a result of us coming in second place in the 4 x 400-meter relay. That meet was only the beginning of my quest to make it to the Ohio Track and Field State Championships as a sophomore, but it

had great meaning since I set future goals for myself that day.

That June, as I stood in the middle of an 11,000-seat stadium on a hot turf football field at the Ohio Track and Field State Championships with the sun beating down on me, I took a deep breath. Surrounded by a simple 400-meter track, and the best athletes in the state, I remembered what I had accomplished earlier that year. Our first indoor meet of the season, back in January, seemed like such a long time ago. All of the struggles, smiles, triumphs, and tears were incredibly worth it. It would not be the last time I stood in the middle of that enormous stadium on a hot summer day, but I was certainly glad it was the first.

Ronald & Me: It Will Never Be

By Kaily Buemi

At the ripe age of three, my true fear came to life, and this was not just any old fear. This fear involved something terrifying: something that is not human. It involved something with white skin, ruby lips, round nose and fire hair. It had feet the size of Montana and hands that could easily rip you in half. Of course, I am talking about a clown, but not just any clown. It was a clown whose image makes my skin raise and crawl around like centipedes. Now who could that possibly be? Ronald McDonald. I know—he scares you, too. Don't worry, I'll spare you the vivid details of his appearance and focus on why I've been plotting my revenge against him for the past 17 years.

It was just like any normal Saturday in the Buemi household. Dad was chasing me around the kitchen with his hand shaped like some kind of crazy claw trying to tickle me, and mom was reading a book while wondering how she ever fell in love with such

a man. But today was not any ordinary day, oh no—today was the day my worst nightmare came to life.

Every Saturday in my house was a day of relaxation. My father didn't work, and my mother didn't cook. Instead, my parents would treat me to the meal of my choice. "Of course I want McDonald's, daddy!" I'd say as loud as my little lungs could puff out the words. "I don't know, hunny. Why not somewhere with a healthier selection?" my mother chimed in. Instantly I turned to my mother and gave her the saddest puppy face I could. "Pretty, pretty please, mommy?" It worked every time. "Okay," mom gave in, "only if you promise to be a good girl." I batted my big blue eyes and smiled angelically, "I'm always a good girl, mommy! I am your little angel!" I was a crafty child and from a young age knew how to wear them down. "McDonald's it is," mom said.

I was so happy I could hardly contain myself. I ran excitedly to my room and picked out my favorite OshKosh B'Gosh pink-corduroy overalls and put

them on—backwards. My mom walked in and instantly broke out in laughter. "Are you trying to be a big girl today?" she laughed and redressed me appropriately. "Don't you want to look presentable? And what if we see Ronald McDonald?" Who? I had no idea who she was talking about, but there is nothing threatening about the name "Ronald," right? That's what I thought, but I couldn't have been more wrong.

I climbed into the back of my dad's navy-blue Cougar and prepared for our adventure. I did everything I could to keep myself calm. I watched the birds flying above—I sang Disney tunes—I did anything to occupy myself on that seemingly endless seven-minute journey. At last, we made it. I could hear the Hallelujah Chorus playing in the back of my head. I ran inside so fast that I nearly tripped over my own feet, which seemed to be moving at a much quicker pace than the rest of my body. Before my parents could even get inside, I ran through the crowd and maneuvered my way to the front of the

line. "Um, ok, I'm ready! Can I please have a hamburger kid's meal with a soda and a Barbie toy, please?" I had been ready to say that all afternoon. My parents squeezed their way through the crowd and found me at the register. "What can I say? She's a big girl now," my dad laughed. I got my meal and headed for a table, and up until this point, I was the happiest girl in the world. However, that all changed in about three minutes.

I am not sure if this was part of my parents' ingenious plan to cure my fear of clowns, but if it was, they failed miserably. I'd already experienced a few bad encounters with these satanic creatures at birthday parties, and my parents knew that I did not take this fear lightly. It just so happened that Ronald McDonald *was* visiting our local McDonald's that day, and allegedly our encounter was purely coincidental. What could be worse than being in the same room as that monster? I would have to say it was being within reaching distance of those fingerprint-concealing gloves. I was the youngest child there—

how perfect. Of course, this is what directed Ronald's attention to me. He immediately wanted to pick me up and entertain me, or abduct me—I'll never know.

Let me quickly explain my reasoning for being terrified of clowns, because I know many can't understand this fear. What is it exactly, that draws these crazies to children? These crazies are big, scary strangers who conceal their true identities and then go play with other people's kids. I don't know about you, but that sounds a little whacky to me. Apparently, I was the only one smart enough to recognize that, because when that crazy man dressed in crazy clothes picked me up, I began crying hysterically. I did not know this man, or why he was covered in white and red makeup and had shoes that could crush me. Going back to my general knowledge as a young child, the phrase "Stranger Danger" rapidly ran through my mind. I was pretty sure he was going to make a run for the door with me still in his arms. That, or his teeth were about to turn into giant fangs

so he could devour his lunch, and baby-back-ribs were the specialty of the day. So I did the only thing I could as a helpless child—screamed my bloody lungs out.

I looked around with my blurry, bloodshot eyes for someone to help me. My dad was standing close by, laughing embarrassingly and watching Ronald try to nervously calm me down. I could hear the chuckles around me. People were laughing, but I didn't think it was funny. Tears were streaming down my face, and I couldn't control my screaming. "It's okay, pumpkin pie, he doesn't want to hurt you," my mom said, trying to calm me down. In my mind all I could think was, "Oh, really? How do you know that? I'm pretty sure he probably has a secret dungeon of torture for kids whose parents are dumb enough to trust him." This may seem over-exaggerated, but watch the movie *It,* and you'll quickly rise to my level of concern about these beasts that freely roam the streets.

I realized that simply screaming was not sending across the appropriate message. It was sending an "I am really scared and don't like this" message, but I wanted to send a "PUT ME THE HELL DOWN" kind of message. Once my screams turned into violent struggling to get free, good ole Ronald got the picture. "Oh, okay then, here is your daddy," he said nervously as he handed me back to my father, who was still laughing at the whole situation. "Calm down, you're fine," he said with a sigh. I was relieved, and my breathing slowly stabilized. My parents high-tailed it out of there, probably due to the embarrassment I had just caused them. From that point on, I never had to deal with clowns again. My parents learned that day to never again test the boundaries of my fear, or my lung capacity.

The Park

By Joe Burton

Remember summer? Summer was the best time when we were young. No school, no responsibilities whatsoever; there was nothing wrong with this wonderful time of the year. Then, we grow up. Once you hit high school, or earlier for some, summer becomes more of the same; sure, there is no school, but you still have to get up early in the morning to be at work on time. Summer just isn't summer anymore. You aren't supposed to be immature and make horribly irresponsible decisions anymore. My brother missed that memo.

It was the summer of 2006, my first summer as a college student. Nothing really made it any different from any other summer, except my school started later, I had to be at work earlier, and my curfew changed to 2:00 AM. My younger brother was a senior in high school and discovering who he was. This particular Saturday night was no different from any other Saturday of the summer; I was out, until cur-

few, made it home on time, and started to watch TV downstairs. That's when I realized that my brother, whose curfew was one hour earlier than mine, wasn't home. I didn't think too much of it. I just figured he was spending the night somewhere. Little to my knowledge, my parents had been calling him for about an hour by the time I had gotten home. About half an hour had passed when my mom yelled down in a groggy and rather unhappy sounding voice, "Joe, do you know where Paxton-Ramsey Park is?"

"Yeah," I replied, "that's where our drama picnic was."

"Well, you and your dad are going down there to get your brother," she said as if there was nothing particularly wrong with this sentence. "He's stuck."

"OK," I responded, knowing that the night that was to unfold would not be a pleasant one for my brother. My dad and I got ready and drove out to the park. The whole way I'm trying to picture what "stuck in the park" is going to look like, thinking that he was there after dark and got stuck driving

around the gate. We pull up to the closed gate of the park to find my brother standing and waiting for us, knowing what was going to happen. My dad asked me to stay with the car in case a cop came by, so I could move it across the street where it wasn't illegal to park.

"Where's your car, son," was the last thing I heard my dad say as they walked into the darkness. He never gets really mad, but if you're being "sonned" then you know you have done something rather disappointing. I sat there for a good 15-20 minutes, hoping to see the headlights of my brother's Dodge Neon coming toward the exit. That never happened; instead, my dad and brother return. My dad got behind the wheel of the car, face red with fury, and my brother got in the back seat as sheepish as I have ever seen anyone move. This was one of those car rides where I could never be comfortable. My brother is in huge trouble, my dad is furious, and all I can do is try not to say anything to make the situation turn on me. So the 10-minute car

ride home was kind of like being in a library, except quieter, and with the chance of someone getting hurt. When we got home, my mom was asking where the car was, and I just was trying to get out of everyone's way. All I could gather was that the car was on a bike path. I tried to imagine where the car could be, but I just didn't understand that this was something that you could never imagine. At least, not until you actually see it with your own two eyes. Finally, I was able to fall asleep.

"Let's go, we have to go and try and get that car out of there," my dad yelled down the stairs at me, abruptly ending my three hours of sleep. I couldn't believe it, 6:30 AM and I was awake again. We drove down there and began our trek to get my brother's car off of the bike path. We walked and walked down that path, but there was no car. The paved path turned into a mulch and mud hill that I can now compare only to Jefferson Hill, the steepest hill on Ohio University's campus.

For those of you who are not familiar with it, a Dodge Neon is a small, four-door car, a great first car for any young driver: dependable and pretty easy to drive. You could read the entire owner's manual and never see "4x4", or a chapter on off-roading. So, imagine my surprise to find his tiny silver car at the bottom of this hill, in its very own parking spot in the woods. It was positioned on what can very loosely be termed a bridge, in that it was a thin piece of land that happened to be on top of a creek that tadpoles would struggle to swim in. This area of land was just as wide as his car, maybe leaving a foot to spare. We pushed, we pulled, we tried everything imaginable to get that car up that hill, but it was not going to make it.

We came back out of the woods, concluding that we would have to call a tow truck, but they wouldn't touch it because it was on private property, and they didn't want to risk getting their own truck stuck. Our last option was to call the police. I could hear only one half of this conversation, but I can imagine what

was going on at the other end. "Uh, we have a car stuck in Paxton Ramsey's bike path," my dad shamefully admits to the operator.

"Where did you say, sir?" It was still early, so the operator knew she had just misheard what was said.

"The bike path at Paxton Ramsey Park—we are going to need a tow truck."

I'm not sure my dad could believe that he was saying it either.

"OK, sir, we will have someone right over there. How will we know which one is you?" questioned the operator. This seemed to be a reasonable question; it was a cool, beautiful, summer Sunday morning, the perfect situation to be walking or just relaxing outside.

"I will be the one down here beating my kid," spat my dad without any hesitation. It was nice to know, or at least hope, that his joking side was still around.

I would imagine that for a normal minor car accident, involving one car, that one cop, or maybe

two would suffice. Four cop cars visited Paxton Ramsey Park on what must have been a slow crime morning. Could you imagine sitting at your speed trap, when you hear "*Report of Dodge Neon stuck on the bike path at Paxton Ramsey Park,"* come in over the radio. If it were me, I would have to see this.

The cops came and assessed the situation, citing my brother with a few minor traffic violations, mainly because they knew they couldn't do anything worse than what was going to happen to my poor brother once we got home. The cops got a tow truck to come in and work for about a half hour or so, until they finally pulled the car to the top of the hill.

At this point it was almost 9:00, and we had to work at 12:00 as pre-T-Ball coaches for the local league. Standing out in the hot sun all day after getting no sleep did not sound appealing at all. My dad told me to go home and get some sleep so that I could go and coach, while he and my brother figured out all of the car stuff. That meant I got the wonderful job of explaining to the head coach why I was the

only one showing up and would be the only one showing up all day.

Over time, this story became a staple at family gatherings. Anytime we saw a car in the grass, my brother heard about it. There was no way he would ever live down the stupid decision that he had made.

Until the day I backed into my brother's car.

DR Conrad

By Dylan Conrad

All parents have high expectations for their children, and mine were no different; or so I thought. I was born Dylan Richard Conrad on October 1, 1984. As I grew older, I began to wonder why my middle name was Richard considering no one in my immediate or extended families held that name. One afternoon, I decided to ask my mother since I had never inquired before. Her answer left me dumbfounded. My mother's incredible logic was if I ever wrote my first two initials followed by my last name, it would look good on paper spelled as "DR Conrad." After pondering this for a moment, I came to realize the effect that drugs had on her generation. I also understood she obviously had no faith in me ever attaining a doctorate. So much for those high expectations. Using my *full name*, I applied and was accepted to Ohio University. There, I began what was sure to be five years of low self-expectations.

As a kid from Pittsburgh, I knew it would be difficult to make friends as a freshman in Ohio. In the dorm, I had been placed with a roommate named Ben who was with the marching band. From this information alone, I was able to deduce that he wasn't going to be much fun. So I decided to come to school early my freshman year to try and meet some new friends before moving into my dorm. In an effort to become familiar with the campus, I found the dorm in which I would be living for the next year. Outside, a young college student sat taking slow drags from a cigarette. Excited to meet the first student I had seen on campus, I asked to bum a Camel and sparked up a conversation. He asked what I was doing outside the dorm a week before it was scheduled to open. I told him that my roommate was some "band geek" and I wanted to meet other people before he got down here. After asking the stranger the same question, he responded awkwardly that band people move in a week early and he may know my roommate. After telling him my roommate

was someone named Ben, he said "Ahh, you must be Dylan—Ben Shipley, nice to meet you." After I apologized profusely, we managed to get along well the rest of the year.

For my sophomore year, I decided to live with Ben and two other friends who had been our neighbors freshman year. One of our neighbors this second year, however, was not the kind of person we wanted to be friends with. His name was Eric, and he never ceased to annoy the hell out of everyone he met. He would constantly visit us and stay for hours during which time he would seek out and hold our TV remote as if it were a life preserver. Although none of us had the heart to send him back to his single room, we all knew something had to be done. Our passive-aggressive plan included strategically placing a salmon filet in his air conditioner. About three weeks later, Eric decided to move rooms. Although we thought we had achieved victory, the plan quickly backfired on us. First, Eric was placed in a room with one of our friends who was not too

happy with us. Second, he was now only one floor away and visited with his new roommate more than he had before. But the worst consequence of the salmon fiasco was the smell. Since no one had moved into the room, everyone walking past our corner of the building thought our room was the one that smelled like rotting fish.

Leaving the dorms after sophomore year had its drawbacks. For one, it became much more difficult to meet women. This is part of the reason I was so excited to meet Megan. Megan was the type of woman who really stood out in a crowd. Her flowing blonde hair and hazel green eyes seemed to beckon men from across the room. Although notable, her attractiveness was not her best feature. She was a third-year biology student looking forward to med school. Since she had the treasured bright and beautiful combination, I had told myself every day of the eight months we were together, "This is too good to be true," and sure enough, it was. Unfortunately, despite her remarkable intelligence in academic studies,

she lacked common sense in nearly everything else. One time, Megan and her friend Ali were getting ready to go to a surprise party when I overheard something that nearly made my head explode. Megan said, "Ali, I'll tell you what. I'm gonna throw you a surprise birthday party next year." I connected eyes with Ali and we stared at Megan for nearly five minutes waiting for her to catch her error. She never did.

Although many of these comments were made through the months, one finally alerted me that this woman was too good to be true. In an effort to do more things together, she came over to watch a football game with me. Being an avid football fan, I allowed this as long as she didn't talk. About 10 minutes into the first quarter, she mumbled an exasperated, "How in the…?" Recognizing that this comment was made while nothing was happening in the game, I became intrigued. I asked Megan what she wanted to know. She responded, "OK, I just don't get how they can get that yellow line onto the

field so fast and then make it green again." After a moment of confusion, I realized she thought the computer-generated yellow-line first-down marker was being painted onto the field between each play. In an effort not to seem shallow, I waited two weeks before breaking up with her.

Meeting females in college got easier as time went on. Near the end of my academic career, I can remember an awkward and embarrassing encounter with one of these females. Since most of my friends had graduated, I really had no one to live with.

I ended up in an apartment with another fifth-year student whom I did not know. After hanging out with him several weekends, I came to the conclusion that he was a good guy. One night, he decided to stay in with his new girlfriend as I hit the town. After a long night of drinking, I noticed a woman that I recognized from across the room. She knew who I was, so we started talking and hit it off right away. At this point, it was too late to ask her name or how I knew her, so I just avoided the sub-

ject. We ended up back at my apartment where my roommate was already sleeping. The next morning, I offered to give the girl a ride home. While she was getting ready, I spoke with my roommate about the anonymous woman and we had a short-lived laugh. To my surprise, she walked out of my room, looked at me and began storming towards the door. She screamed, "A**HOLE!" and slammed the door behind her. Confused, I turned to my roommate and asked, "What'd I do?" He smiled and calmly responded, "That wasn't meant for you. Her name is Danielle, and you know her through me." My face began to glow red as I now remembered how I recognized her. She was my roommate's girlfriend up until the week before when he began dating one of her close friends. It was obvious that I had been used in attempted retribution for his transgression.

Although I originally resented my mother for her lack of confidence, my time at OU has helped me realize that she was correct. While I may never hold

a Ph.D., if I'm ever in a pinch, I can always fall back on my given name, DR Conrad.

A Great Time in "Hell"

By Brian Cronin

I was on my way, with no way of returning. The plane ride felt like eternity; I was nervous yet excited to be starting a big new piece of my life. This plane ride out to Texas was the start of a career in the United States Air Force. I was headed to basic military training.

I had no expectations. No one had really told me what to anticipate. All I knew was what I had seen in the movies, where everyone got yelled at and the instructors made the recruits do pushups. After arriving to the airport in San Antonio, Texas, forty or so others and I had to go and wait in a lounge to be picked up and taken to the base.

Finally, a woman in a camouflage uniform came walking down the hall of the airport. She looked very mad. I thought in my head, "Here we go… So it begins."

"Up on your feet, single file line! Move it! Move it!" the woman in the uniform started yelling. We all got our stuff together to get in the single file line.

We were on our way on the bus to the base. There was nothing but silence. No one made a sound. We had no idea what was in store for us. When we arrived at the base, it was dark. The bus slowly came to a stop. Sergeant Thomas started yelling, "Get off the bus right now! Welcome to a place called hell. You all are going to have a great time here." From then on, I knew this was going to be a challenging adventure. My goal was to try to stay under their radar. I did not want to be noticed.

We arrived at the dorms where they made us dump all of our possessions on the beds. Six or seven instructors were all going person-to-person just screaming at us and just trying to crack one of us. They would be five inches from your face, calling you names and trying to find even the littlest things to throw at us for messing up. I do not mean physical things, but mental things. They would pick out a

blink, twitch, or even stutter and just pounce on it. They would twist it to make it seem like you had a problem and tried to make you more nervous than you already were.

The instructors made us go through all of our belongings and pointed out stuff that we could and could not keep. As soon as that was done, they made us go downstairs and form into four lines. They picked three people to be element leaders by asking us questions to help them decide who would be best. They asked, "Has anyone ever been in a marching band?" Not knowing what I was getting myself into, I raised my hand. They yelled, "You, up to the front." I looked around and it was very obvious that they meant for me to go up to the front. I got to the front of the line in a hurry. This was the biggest mistake of my basic training experience, and I was not maintaining my goal. I was no longer under anyone's radar; I was an "Element Leader." A flight at basic training is divided into four sections. Each section forms an element and an element leader is in charge

of an element. This is something that I definitely did not want to be.

After marching us to get our uniforms, they made us go back to the dorms because it was getting late. We were standing at our footlockers not knowing what to expect. We were all at attention, while our Training Instructors (T.I.s) got introduced.

All of a sudden, like a light bulb switch that someone turned on in the instructors' heads, they started yelling again. "You have exactly twenty minutes to get a shower, get this place clean, and get your asses into those beds. So move it, move it, move it!"

All I remember from that point was looking around dumbfounded. A T.I. yelled, "Get in the shower. You better get your stinky asses clean in one minute." They sent one element at a time and I was in the second element. I was not prepared for this part. "WHAT ARE YOU THINKING? You think you are going take a shower in your underwear? You got another thing coming! You better strip down and

get in those showers, ladies!" I did not really think about how we would take showers. I never thought I would have to share a shower with forty other naked guys before that instant. I was very nervous, but my nervousness quickly was replaced by astonishment. "What the hell are you doing, boy? You think you can waste my time? You better move before I make you move," a T.I. started to yell at me. I quickly stripped down and was on my way to take the quickest shower in my life. I was in and out. I do not think I even scrubbed my body. They did not give us time to. Basically, as soon as you got wet you had to get right back out.

Being an element leader quickly became a problem for me. I learned very quickly to not raise my hand for things and not to volunteer for things. The best thing to do was to stay below their radar and not get noticed. But as mentioned before, being an element leader did not allow me to do that. I had to take all the heat for my element when they got into trouble. I was the one yelled at and I was made an

example of. As soon as someone in my element had a messy wall locker, I heard, "Cronin! Get over here! Why is his locker a mess?" the T.I would ask in disgust. He would then make me do pushups until the trainee got his locker into order. This quickly became old.

I was fed up with taking other people's crap and having my element not listen to me. The crap was wearing on me and I would always be in a grumpy mood. I eventually made up my mind to go and talk to the T.I. when he was in his office. "Sir, trainee Cronin reports as ordered," I had to say as my reporting statement. "I know I am an element leader, but I feel that I am not the right one for this flight. Can I step down and trade positions with trainee Metzger?" It was a good thing I had talked it over with trainee Metzger, or I do not think the instructor would have taken it well that he had to choose a new element leader. All I could do was stand there at attention and hope that it would be ok. Finally, after a few minutes of explaining, I became "Latrine

Queen." This was the person in charge of the bathroom.

It might sound bad, but it was the best thing that happened to me. It was quickly forgotten that I stepped down from element leader and things were good from that point on. It might have taken me a long time to come up with the courage to step down, but it was the greatest decision I made the whole time at basic training. I could go the rest of the time there with me being under the radar of the instructors, or at least not getting yelled at for every little thing that other people would do.

Shortly after not being an element leader, I did not have as much stress and started to have a good time. I could actually joke around and the instructors did not bother me as much anymore. I even started to have a good relationship with the instructors. They started to call for me, but not for bad things. It was for me to do things. They could rely on me to get things done for myself and the other trainees in the flight. This was a good thing because they got to

know me, but then they continued calling on me to do things.

I never got a derogatory for my stuff not being up to the instructors' standards. My wall locker would be clean and fit, the latrine would be spotless, and my uniform would be in tip-top condition. Even if it took my crew and me getting on our hands and knees to check for lint on the latrine floor, while the lights were off, and using flashlights to spot the lint, we would get the job done. After doing all the hard work, it paid off and we all graduated as an honor flight.

My advice to anyone who goes to basic training is a few things. One would be to never volunteer for anything unless you have to. Another would be to avoid being an element leader. The last advice to give would be to not let the instructors get to you. You are there to do what the instructors say and follow directions. It is definitely a learning experience and you get a lot from going to basic training. Just know that the instructors are not going to hurt you,

at least not physically. They will just make you do work (like pushups, leg lifts, or even extra chores). They will try to make it seem like they will hit you, but instead they will play all kind of mental games with you; do not let them get to you. I always found it comical when they would try to mess with my head. Going to basic training has taught me discipline, a sense of urgency, pride, and teamwork. I feel that the military has really opened my career possibilities and getting through "hell" was the start of it all.

The Candle Wax Castle Club

By Kevin Dean

Every year when the first snowfall came to Ohio, and the days grew shorter and considerably colder, I would look forward to another unforgettable Christmas. Christmas time meant crackling fires, music, dusty family photo albums, and hours spent outside with my brother and sister building another snow fort that we would never quite finish. We would have our usual days of sipping hot cocoa by the fire, watching *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* yet again, and penning ridiculously long Christmas lists to be delivered to the North Pole—which we later found out to be located in my parents' closet.

When Christmas Eve was finally upon us, I could hardly contain my excitement. I knew the day would consist of eggnog-drinking, cookie-eating, fireside-napping, movie-watching, snowman-building (provided snow was on the ground), present-wrapping, carol-singing fun. After an exhausting day of jubilee and merry making, it would be time for us to don

our gay apparel and go to church. Our church, like every other church I would imagine, put on an incredible evening. The young ones would act out the nativity scene and the night that the wise men followed the star to the birth of Jesus. Then the choir would sing some engaging hymn about joy and happiness in the world, accompanied by my piano teacher who always smiled at me during our church services as if to say, "Yes, I know that you have not practiced for your upcoming lesson." How she could tell, I have never quite figured out but on a night like Christmas Eve I didn't have time to be worried. I was too busy scrawling a personal letter to Santa on my service bulletin, playing with the unlit candle we were handed as we were being seated, and fidgeting like I had been put in the timeout chair and told not to move.

Just when I thought I couldn't last any longer, the lights would be dimmed, and the whispering congregation grew silent as the altar boys came down the aisles to light our candles. Having been

through this procedure many times, I knew to carefully tilt my candle into the flame of the candle next to me to prevent the hot wax from dripping on my hand, my clothes, and sometimes the people around me, which used to happen rather frequently. As we began singing the words to "Silent Night," I knew I had to get to work as quickly as possible. I had only a few minutes to accumulate a larger pile of wax on my bulletin than my brother, who always seemed to have twice as much. The catch to this was that if you were foolish enough to get caught by Mom or Dad, then not only did you lose the game, but according to the rules set forth by the founding fathers of the Candle Wax Castle Club, you had to run around the house twice in nothing but snow boots, while the winner threw snowballs at you.

As juvenile as this may sound, it was the highlight of the evening for my brother and me, and it was no laughing matter. This was life or death, and I wasn't about to lose again. Securing a win gave you the freedom to boast about your victory for an entire

year, not to mention it meant that you didn't have to brave the freezing cold and run around the house, fearing the sting of an icy snowball against your bare skin, and the embarrassment of being in the nude in the first place. Unfortunately, despite my best efforts, I lost yet again, and I got caught by Mom and Dad yet again.

On this particular Christmas Eve, just hours after thanking God for giving us his only son and all that good stuff, I found myself facing the chilling reality of my task. The one rule for the game was that you were allowed to start in any direction you chose, which never really gave you that much of an advantage anyway.

So there I was: pale skin, and awkward body glowing under the Christmas Eve moonlight, hiding behind those snow-covered bushes that never seemed to be tall enough to provide any real cover. Without warning I leaped over the bush and fell into the rhythm of a full sprint as I tore across the frozen tundra. I could hear the snowballs exploding like

gunshots on the windows and siding all around me as I made the curve around the house to the back-yard where I could catch my breath and prepare for another surge. I was feeling especially good this time because I realized that my brother had been unable to strike me with his tightly packed snowballs that felt like stones when they hit you.

I made the turn to the front of the house at full speed, and I could feel the adrenaline that had been carrying me begin to fade in the presence of burning lungs and fatigue. Still, I was finding energy to push through the lactic acid that was filling my legs with each stride I took. In the final surge I shot a glance over my shoulder to see my brother standing up from behind his manmade snow wall. I threw my hands up in the air like I had seen sprinters do at the end of a race when they know that they've just won, and I let out a celebratory yelp that sounded like the noise a cat makes when you accidentally step on its tail.

I was still smiling as I lay there on my back in the snow, the wind completely knocked out of me after I had hit an unmovable object. Steam was rising all around from the heat of my body in the snow, and my head was spinning so fast that I thought maybe I had run into a wall of some kind. It took me a few seconds to put it all together but when I saw my father's tall figure towering over me, and the pieces of firewood scattered around, I could see I was in big trouble. He reached his arm down to pull me up from the ground as he dusted the white flakes from my hair. He had been out gathering more wood for the fire when I had been abruptly stopped by his 6' 2", 200-pound frame like a fullback being rejected by a linebacker. In my confusion I looked up at his face, bracing to see the mask of sheer anger that I had been witness to only one other time, but instead I saw that he was laughing uncontrollably. It was the kind of laughter that happens without any sound at first and continues to the point when people begin to stare at you wondering if you are ever going to

breathe, when all at once the laughter erupts and you find yourself on the ground for minutes, clutching your side from the pain, and gasping for air. My brother came racing over to join in the fun and we three 'men' carried on for a while. Pretty soon, however, I realized that I was as standing in front of my Dad and brother in nothing but my snow boots, so I ran inside as quickly as I could.

A few minutes later the two of them came in through the front door still chuckling, their cheeks hurting from smiling so much, as they settled down in the living room where the rest of the family was laughing as well. I came downstairs in my fleece Batman bathrobe and tried to slip into the room with my mug of hot chocolate without being seen. It was no use; they were all turned to face me as I sunk into the cushions of the sofa. Apparently a certain younger sister of mine had compromised the secrecy of the Candle Wax Castle Club, and my family had witnessed the entire ordeal by peeking out through the blinds. The rest of the night was spent retelling

the story with many absurd variations, playing that gosh darn Christmas trivia game where every other answer is Bing Crosby or "White Christmas," and consuming an inordinate amount of eggnog, freshly baked cookies, and marshmallows with some hot chocolate on top.

My brother is now working in Washington, D.C., at the Pentagon designing ships for the Navy instead of pristinely crafted snowballs, and my sister is studying journalism at Kent State University, where she has probably written about the incident many times. Though we are much older now and surely do not engage in childish games anymore, each year when the first snow falls and the days grow shorter, we all look forward to another unforgettable Christmas with the family. Instead of continuing the tradition of the Candle Wax Castle Club, we find it much more enjoyable to sit around that old familiar living room and retell the story as if it were yesterday. When the stories are over and our bellies are full of Christmas cookies, and our hearts with Christmas

cheer, we never forget to leave a plate of carrots and cookies out for old Kris Kringle and his reindeer.

St. Nick and the Pink Ball Adventure

By Kevin Dean

Runners are odd but fascinating people. We are all tied to a sport that can shake you into a thousand pieces and leave you with a feeling of utter failure, yet it can also hold you together and provide stability and meaning in your life. Driven to succeed and fueled by the will to improve upon their god-given talents, mile after agonizing mile, runners are one of a kind.

Meeting the guys on the Ohio University cross-country team was quite intimidating. There I was, a lowly freshman boy among bearded and suntanned men who trotted around before practice like horses before a race, their finely tuned muscles flexing with each stride. I remember looking down at my scrawny, undefined legs and wondered if I would ever look like a college distance runner.

We ran every inch of every gosh-darn country road that we knew. Mile after mile, hill after hill, we were chased by dogs that barked with a vengeance

and flashed razor-sharp teeth in hopes to sink them in somebody's leg. We ran hard; we pushed paces to 6:00-minute miles. I will never forget that first run where I found myself driving all cylinders only to find that my teammates were smooth and relaxed with their efficient strides devouring the road as they laughed, talking about girls, sports, parties, and the meaning of life.

Jason was the captain of the team; he was built, dark complected, and quiet. I was immediately drawn to his calmness and smile that said, "I was once in your shoes, so stick with me and you'll be fine." Kempe was just the opposite. He had the wisdom of an elder at times, but the temper of a child. At the time he was our graduate assistant, but had been a member of the team as an undergraduate. He ran with us because he loved us. He was addicted to the routine, and most of his friends were still on the team. He also ran with us to be sure that freshmen, like me, understood how to respect my teammates and upperclassmen. The first words out of Kempe's

mouth when I met him were, "Dean, I wouldn't even bother stretching today. This is going to be the worst run of your entire life." With a smile and slap on the shoulder, he strolled away and left me with those words echoing in my head. He wasn't trying to be mean or put me down. He was a college runner, and he called it like it was.

Later that week we were out on one of our 10-mile sprints, as I thought they were, when I was given my first assignment as a freshman. As the pack was running past a worn-out trailer home with several abandoned cars serving as lawn ornaments, Kempe shouted over his shoulder requesting my presence at the front. I was in the back of the pack doing what I could to hang on to the pace while showing as little discomfort as possible. I made my way past some of the other guys, past Jason who gave me that encouraging smile yet again, to the outside shoulder of Kempe and his sidekick Drew. Drew shared many of the characteristics that defined Kempe, but he could also be more intense. Kempe

was at least grounded by the reminder that he was now a graduate assistant with hopes to become a college coach at some point, whereas Drew was a senior and was ready to rage. He was a hysterical guy, nonetheless, who loved to talk about music and sports in great detail, but he could turn on you faster than a pitbull and he wasn't afraid to stand his own ground.

Kempe began speaking to me in a sarcastic yet somehow sincere tone that you hear in movies when the villain is pretending to be nice to someone for a few minutes, just before he says something like, "And because you're such a nice guy, now I have to kill you." My punishment was not nearly as harsh, and I was encouraged to think of it as a challenge instead of a punishment for being the lowest on the proverbial food chain. Kempe pointed off to the right and said, "Dean, do you see that wonderfully shaped pink ball over there? Yeah, I want that. I want that pink ball, Dean." I laughed nervously as we continued on our run because I couldn't quite tell

if he was being serious or if he was just trying to have some fun. I humored the group by belting out in a deep country-western voice, "For you, Kempe, I'd lasso the moon."

Throughout the rest of the run, the conversation continued, touching on everything from how lame the girls on our team were, to reciting lines from *Anchorman*, and which freshman girls on the team could be saved from their fate of lameness. As we finished our run clipping off 6:30 miles on the bike path, Kempe looked over at me and exclaimed, "Dean, I want that pink ball!" I laughed again, and said in a slightly sarcastic tone that I was on top of it, and not to worry. Drew chimed in enthusiastically to remind me, "You don't really have a choice in this one—you pretty much have to get that ball." As we trotted back to Peden Stadium where we would end our runs, our coach was standing there rocking back and forth in a calf-stretching motion as he greeted us with his usual, "Uh yep, uh huh, how'd it go?" As I gathered up my clothes and began jogging back to

my dorm, Kempe shouted to me one last time, "Dean, I need that ball by midnight!"

After dinner, I sat in my dorm room racking my brain to figure out a plan for how I could get that ball. We were at least five miles into the run when we saw that trailer home, and I wasn't even sure I could remember which road it was. I had been at school for only one week, and all of the roads and hills we ran were mixed together in my mind. I thought about borrowing a car from a friend but soon realized that I didn't know anyone yet who owned a car.

By the time I started walking down West Union Street in the direction of this random country road, the sun was beginning to set, off behind the trees, casting a pleasant orange glow over the campus. It was still early September so the air outside felt warm and comfortable, but my thoughts were focused on the task at hand. I felt like I had been walking for miles when I realized that it was getting dark and I still had a long way to go. Somewhere between want-

ing to impress my upperclassmen, the freedom of being in college and away from home, and the distance runner's mentality to never give up, I came to the conclusion that I had to find some wheels. I needed horsepower, and I needed it fast. As confidently as I could manage, I stuck out my arm with my thumb thrust upwards toward the sky. Part of me thought it was absurd and comical at the same time, while the other part of me was getting angry at each car that passed and didn't stop. Just when I was about to give up on the idea, a truck pulled off into the gravel on the side of the road. The truck was small, rusted, and sporting a yellow paint job that had been faded to the point that it almost looked white. The mystery driver inside the truck looked like he had come straight from a Hollywood murder movie set, complete with creepy classes and a beard that rivaled St. Nick's. He asked where I was headed and I tried to explain that I needed to pick up something at my friend's house. He agreed to give me a

lift, and without much hesitation I was in the passenger seat praying to make it back safely.

When we approached the trailer home, I asked the man if he would kindly pull into the driveway opposite the house while I picked up something. By this point my adrenaline was running so high that the kennel of angry dogs barking didn't even phase me as I snatched the pink ball from between the cars and the tipped-over lawn gnome. I threw the ball into the back of St. Nick's pick-up and off we went like I had just robbed a bank and he was my accomplice. When we got back into town, I started to get nervous because I suddenly realized that we weren't on the same road anymore. I had asked him to drop me off near the West Green dormitories and he had agreed, but I didn't recognize where we were. Luckily he pulled into a gas station and I convinced him that I was fine walking the rest of the way. I didn't know exactly where I was, but I could see the Convocation Center in the distance, and I surely was not

going to stay in the car with him after he had a full tank of gas.

I glanced at my watch to find that I had only 20 minutes to deliver the ball to the hands of Sir Kempe. So there I was, running down the sidewalks in a collared shirt, cargo shorts, and carrying an oversized pink ball. I made it to Jason's house where I bolted in through the door gasping and sweating like a cold can of Coke at the beach. I asked Jason if he would purchase a six-pack of Honey Brown, which happened to be Kempe's favorite beer. He was laughing the entire time, and looking back on it now I realize that I must have looked like a wreck. He dropped me off near Kempe's house with two minutes to spare, and I casually strolled up to his front porch.

Kempe and Drew lived together in a house that must have been designed by a cartoonist because it was a stunning shade of purple. The entire lodging was leaning considerably to the right, and everything about it seemed miniaturized. I knocked on the door

just as my runner's watch beeped midnight. Drew opened the creaking door and yelled, "Holy Shit, it's Dean!" He turned away shouting profanities and praise over his shoulder as he ran back into the house to get Kempe. When Kempe came to the door, his jaw dropped like a teenager at a strip club. He was beaming with the biggest smile as I handed him his gifts. I felt like a wise man who had traveled across scorching deserts and fought off wild animals to make it to this tiny purple dwelling where I could present my gift of hops, an inflatable bouncing ball, and my loyalty as a teammate.

Kempe invited me inside to partake in some casual drinking which then led to some not-so-casual drinking, which easily carried us into the wee hours of the morning. I recounted the entire story to him, including as much detail as I could about the old man in the pick-up and the dogs barking. Kempe ceremoniously placed the pink ball on top of the television set and told me how proud he was.

The next morning I suffered through my philosophy class, and found myself wondering what the rest of the team might think of my excursion. Later that afternoon when I arrived at practice, I was given a welcome fit for a king and heralded as the new 'hope' for the team. I went on to win the Justin Kempe Memorial Freshman of the Year Award at the cross-country banquet for my outstanding performances as an underclassman, a runner, and the new 'hope' for the future of the team.

Throughout my four years as a collegiate runner, I have taken the concentration, discipline, and honest effort that I've learned from the sport, and applied it to all aspects of my life. When life asks you to retrieve a pink ball from a sketchy house on some obscure country road, by God you hitch a ride in St. Nick's pickup and you get that pink ball!

The Little Houdini

By Ashley Garner

My life has always kept people, especially my family, amused, and always guessing what I am going to do next. Car rides with the toddler version of me proved to always be interesting, whether it was a trip to the grocery store or cross-country trips to grandma's house. I had gone through eight different car seats by the time I was finally big enough to ride in the car without one. I was like a little Houdini; I was able to wiggle my way out of even the most intricate systems of straps. I was able to learn to maneuver my way out of each new seat within ten minutes. Finally, one day my parents took me to the baby supply store and asked the salesman, "Would you mind if we placed our child in the car seats for about 10 minutes to see if she can escape?" He was very confused but nonetheless agreed to this strange request. He asked, "If you don't mind my asking, why do you need to see if she can get out of this? She looks like a perfect angel." My mom and dad

snickered and then said, "This will be our ninth car seat. Every time we buy a new one, she figures out how to get out of the seat." The worker finally understood and wished them luck, and trust me they were going to need it the next few years. After waiting ten minutes, they saw that I could not escape this one, which made this trip to the store the last time my parents needed to buy a different car seat. My father always joked that he was going to resort to using duct tape if they couldn't find a seat that could contain me.

Just when my parents thought that they had their little Houdini under control, I unveiled my next trick: climbing. You might be asking what a two-year-old would be climbing, but I learned how to climb out of my crib. I think I just hated any form of confinement. One night my mom heard a loud thump. "*Gaylord*," my mom said while shaking my dad out of a good night's sleep, "What was that—did someone just break-in?" They both jumped out of bed and headed down the steps half asleep. My

dad had a flashlight in one hand and a baseball bat in the other. When they got downstairs, there were no broken windows or doors open—just the dog sleeping in its bed. They marched up the steps and went to check on their three kids. First they stopped in my sister's room, who, to no one's surprise, was sound asleep with only sheep on her mind. Next they visited my brother's room and once again they found a snoring little child. Finally they were at my room. They were first shocked by the giggling that was coming from inside my room, then they looked at each other and said, "Why didn't we guess—of course it was Ashley." When the opened the door, they were surprised to find me sitting in the dark in my middle of my room playing with my baby dolls. They picked me up and put me back to bed. "This is no hour for a little girl to be up," my mom said while she tucked me in for the second time that night. As they walked out of my room, they knew they had to do something, so the next morning they lowered the base of my crib, but I still managed to find a way out

of it. However, unlike the car seat, there was no way to fix this problem. They just had to deal with the fact that I was going to climb out of the crib no matter what.

A few years later, when I was not yet four years old, my family decided to take a trip in our brand-new station wagon, which had rear facing seats in the trunk. As children, my siblings and I fought over who would get to sit in the back seat. It was an extremely hot summer day when we left our house in Ohio and hit the road for Myrtle Beach. As usual, the luggage was placed on the roof rack in a huge plastic bin, so the back seat was available for passengers. I got to sit in the back seat. We were in our fifth hour of travel and the yelling between the siblings had begun: "Mom, she's hitting me." "Give it back—that's mine." Before my parents could separate their bickering kids, a loud, "hoooonk-hoooonk" came from a huge semi behind us. My dad quickly looked down at the dashboard to see if something was wrong, but everything checked out

fine. Before they knew it, the truck honked again. Suddenly my sister yelled, "Mom, it's Ashley, sh-sh-she's NAKED." My dad pulled the car over and before it even came to a complete stop my mom was out of the car and at the back door. I was standing up in the back seat dancing for the passing cars. I truly did not understand what was going on or what was so wrong with me taking my clothes off. I was very hot and uncomfortable with them on. Don't worry, now I completely know why it was such a big deal. Even though I didn't want my hot sweaty clothes back on, there wasn't anything that I could do about it. My sister and I changed seats and for the rest of the trip, she got the best seat and I had to sit behind my mom and dad. I never again got to sit in my favorite seat.

When I got old enough to use art supplies, around four years old, I got very interested in scribbling, painting, or just doodling. However, I think what kids love the most, or at least I did, is creating artwork for their parents. One day I went down to

the basement to make a painting for my dad because he was getting home from a weeklong work trip. I started painting and really got into it; paint was literally flying everywhere. When I looked at the wall to my left, paint splatters were all over it. Normally I would try to clean them up, but not today. Today I wanted to make the wall my canvas. So without truly thinking about what I was doing, I started painting hearts, suns and handprints all over the wall. "Mom, Mom, come down here. I want to show you what I did. I think you are really going to love it," I shouted up the stairs. I tugged her hand and pulled her over to the wall. "So what do you think?" I said, showing it off as if it the best piece of art I had ever seen. "It's…it's… on the wall, what made you think that this was a good idea?" I could tell she was not pleased with me. I really don't remember what I said because I was a crying mess as I ran up the steps and hid in my room. Even though my mom was upset with me, we talked about why I wasn't allowed to

color on the walls. From that day on, all art projects were completed in the garage or outside.

Throughout my childhood years I definitely kept my family guessing as to what little act I was going to get myself into. However, it's times like those that make me laugh when I look back at my childhood, and, most of all, it gives me a better appreciation of my parents for tolerating all of my antics. I bet they're still thinking what their little Houdini will think of next.

Ketchup and Mayonnaise

By Brittany Hayden

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we would like to welcome you to San Jose International Airport," the flight attendant said into the intercom. I was anxiously looking out the window at what would be my home for the next two weeks. As I walked through customs with my luggage in tow trying to find the taxi service that would be provided for me, I looked around in awe trying to fit in as much as I could with the crowd. *"¿Chofer, senorita?"* I was being asked by random cab drivers in the airport. Finally I found the one I was looking for. As I was getting ready to lift my luggage up into the cab, a short Tican came to my side, picked it up, and placed it into the cab for me saying *"¡Colónes!"* I was warned about these people that would do anything to make money; I was told to stay away from them. Instead, as soon as I land, I had gotten myself in a situation in which I had no idea what the man was saying. Luckily, the

cab driver escorted me into the taxi so I could get away and make it to Hotel America on time.

After a four-hour bus ride on a Lakefront-like bus and another two hours on a rusted-out pickup truck-like bus, we made it to San Juanillo, Costa Rica. Children of all ages, jumping up and down with excitement, were waiting for us at the bus stop. They followed us to the plaza in the center of the small village, which used to be an airport runway. "*¡Bienvenidos!*" the children screamed. In the plaza, we were introduced to the families of San Juanillo and served bread and fresh pineapple juice made by the women especially for us. I was introduced as *Bretaña* to my *madre*, Ida, and to my seven siblings whom I would have the joy of spending two weeks with. I did not realize that I was going to inherit a family on this volunteer trip with International Student Volunteers, Inc. After introductions, my siblings took my luggage and led me to our house. The house had four rooms and the walls did not meet the ceiling. The floors were cement, the doors were wooden, and the

windows were just holes in the walls. It was going to be an interesting experience.

Just before sundown, we decided as a group to explore the beaches where the fishermen worked. We walked along the beaches at low tide and had fun joking around with each other. We stayed at the beach to watch the sunset, and that was breath-taking! Words cannot even begin to describe the scene. The sky had hues of orange, blue, and pink with a ball of bright light slowly slipping below the surface of the ocean, highlighting our footprints in the sand as the water glistened. Little did I know that this would be the last moment of peace until I would land in the States ten days later.

"¡Hola! Me llamo Brittany," I said as I was meeting my 18-year-old uncle, Yorjani, for the first time. "¡*Hola*, Britney Spears!" he responded.

"No! No! I'm not Britney Spears!" I shouted as he stood there laughing at me.

"I know. I thought it would be funny," he said in English, shocking not only me but also my roommate Erin.

"So you know English? That's good because we are going to need some help with translation," Erin said to Yorjani.

"A little," he said with his thick Spanish accent.

"¿Qué? ¿Dónde Britney Spears?" Nancy, one of my sisters, asked. She and Yorjani discussed things in Spanish that I could not understand, but when their attention was with Erin and me again, Britney Spears was my name. "You lie!" I said to Yorjani, and as soon as I said that, Nancy started repeating it. "You lie, Britney Spears," Nancy would say every time she saw me. From that night on, the kids in the village would call me "Britney Spears" and my siblings would say "you lie" every time I would talk to them.

The craziest day happened when we were working on the recycling center that we were building for the village. We were putting on the walls, which are sheets of aluminum. It was so rainy the night before

that we were basically working in mud. I went over to drill in a nail when my foot slipped in the mud and I ended up slicing my leg on a sheet of aluminum. I did not think anything of it until I saw the blood run down my leg. Laura was talking to a couple of the other girls when all this happened.

"Does anyone want to take my spot?" I asked.

"Are you sure you don't want to do it anymore?" Katie asked.

"Um, yeah, I'm pretty sure." I said as I looked down to where I had been cut.

"Wot did you do?" Katie asked with her British accent.

"Oh, you know, I thought I would have a little fun with the aluminum. But I think that I need to go sit down now," I said with a little sarcasm as I headed to the other side of the road where all of our bags were. Laura ran to get her first-aid kit and told me to go and sit on the bed on the truck. She came over and with gloves, put on a white first-aid cream after cleaning my wound with alcohol.

"Eww, that looks like ketchup and mayonnaise!" Elise shouted and then started laughing.

"Oh, my God, you're so right. I don't think I'm going to eat that combination for a while." Erin responded to Elise's comment.

A couple of hours later, we called it a day and we headed back into the village for dinner. As I limped into my house, Ida saw the ketchup and mayonnaise mixture on my leg and pointed. "It's just a cut," I said. "No *problema*." I tried to act if it was no big deal. All she could do was draw in a breath and sigh. After dinner, Nancy came out of the house with a matchbook and a spoon. *"¿Qué tienes?"* I asked her. She decided to play dumb and responded *"Nada."* I could not think of anything safe that she would do with those matches. She was being really secretive with a devilish grin; because of the grin, I was very afraid to be around her. "I think she's going to melt your skin together to heal your cut." Erin said. I jumped out of my seat as Nancy was getting closer. I am not afraid to admit that I was very scared of this

13-year-old girl. Yorjani came out of the house and started laughing at me. He took the dictionary that was lying on the table and looked up a few words. He came over to me and said, "That will not hurt you. It heals faster." I still had no idea what he was talking about. My *abuela* came out and took the matches and spoon away from Nancy. She took a match and struck it as Yorjani poured a purple liquid into the spoon. My *abuela* took the spoon in one hand and with the other hand brought the match underneath the spoon to heat the liquid. After it was warmed, she dipped her finger in the liquid and spread it across my cut on my leg. She said something to me, but I did not understand.

Yorjani said, "See, it makes it better."

"It looks like grape jelly now," Erin said as she started to laugh.

After this little incident, I knew that I was going to be scarred for life.

A Life of Unfortunate Events

By Caitlyn Holleran

My father is brilliant. He graduated third in his law school class at Cleveland State University, has another degree in pharmacy from the University of Cincinnati, and has a high enough IQ to be a member of Mensa International (a society for people with exceptionally high IQ's). However, borrowing a line from the movie *Forrest Gump*, my father often says, "I'm not a smart man." My dad has the worst of luck, and has gone through so many unlucky events in his life that he should write a book: *Tim Holleran's Life of Unfortunate Events*. Most of these events he brings upon himself, which is why he does not feel like he's a smart man. Other events are simply unlucky occurrences he attributes to fate. Either way, my father's unlucky life stories have been told and retold to his children on countless occasions. My father always puts a humorous spin on his anecdotes, which allows everyone to laugh at my father's foolishness and, in general, his lack of luck.

During his first few months of kindergarten, my father learned the importance of thinking before acting. Billy, the little boy who sat next to my dad in class, crossed the room to sharpen his pencil. Being the practical joker that he is, my father quickly concocted a prank to play on Billy. As Billy started to sit down, my father kicked the chair out from under Billy, causing Billy to miss his chair and fall to the floor. But my dad had not factored in one thing: the radiator that was right behind their table! Poor Billy hit his head on the radiator and the teacher immediately shouted for my father to come to the front of the room. And what was the teacher's punishment? My dad had to sit in 'the hole' (sitting Indian-style with your head bent down between your legs) every day during snack time for the rest of the year. Billy may have suffered temporarily from his head injury, but my father suffered in the corner for the rest of the school year because of one spontaneous decision.

Decades after the 'kindergarten incident,' as my dad refers to it, my father and mother got married and moved into their first apartment together in Cincinnati. My mother's sister came to visit the newlyweds and help unpack. At one point during the day, my Aunt Sandy noticed my dad's careless use of a box cutter and warned him to be careful with the sharp razor. My father responded, "Don't worry, Sandy. It's not sharp." As these words came out of his mouth, he took the box cutter, thinking the blade was retracted, and swiped it across his forearm in an attempt to scare my aunt. Unfortunately, his joke did not go according to plan. He quickly realized the blade was not retracted as his forearm suddenly split open and started squirting blood all over the new apartment. My aunt, who has never been a fan of blood, turned white and almost fainted, while my mother ran to find the box packed with bandages and gauze. Fortunately, my mother was in nursing school at the time and finally got the bleeding under control. My father refused to get stitches and now

has a prominent scar to serve as a reminder of his joke that went terribly wrong.

Then there was the time my father accidentally killed Bambi. I had been asleep in my bed for a few hours when I heard the phone ring in my parents' bedroom. I looked at the clock and wondered to myself, "Who the hell calls the house at this hour?" Concerned, I walked into my parents' bedroom and found my mother, extremely upset, on the phone talking to my dad. I heard her say, "Why don't you call the State Highway Patrol and have them come find you?" A few minutes later, she hung up and leaped out of bed, racing to put on clothes and find shoes.

"Mom, who was that? What's going on?" I asked.

"It was your father. He's been in a car accident. He said he hit a deer and it went through the windshield. He has no idea where he is, but he can hear trucks rumbling nearby."

My father had been in Columbus and decided to drive home late at night rather than get a hotel room

and come back the next morning. When my dad was less than an hour from home, a deer sprinted across the highway from the left and caught my father completely off-guard. The deer went through the windshield, breaking the glass into a million pieces. My father swerved and came to a stop on the side of the road, but he couldn't open his eyes because the glass from the windshield flew into them and he felt blood on his face. After he called my mother, my dad contacted the State Highway Patrol and they were able to locate him quickly. An officer called my mom and told her where they were taking my father. She told me to take care of my siblings and make sure they got ready for school in the morning, and then she was out the door. As my siblings were packing up their book bags, my mom and dad walked through the back door. My father, bruised and bandaged, looked like he had just come back from a fight with Mike Tyson. The doctors spent an hour or two removing fragments of glass from my dad's eyes, and made him wear a patch over the eye

that was the most damaged. It took my dad a couple of days to recover, but he had to continue wearing the eye patch for a few weeks. Now, the actual accident is not very funny, but it's how my dad behaved afterwards that made this unlucky event another humorous story in his comedy annals. After his first day back at work, my father came home with a smiley face sticker on his eye patch (trying to make it seem a little less intimidating, I suppose). I had just started to date a new boyfriend a week or two before my dad's accident, and I had to deny my dad's requests to meet 'the new boy' because I was worried the eye patch would scare the guy off! To this day, my dad is deathly afraid of deer and thinks they can sense his fear from miles away.

Last Christmas, another bout of bad luck hit my father. On Christmas Eve, my mom asked my dad to pick up some pies she ordered from a local bakery. It was one of those windy days where the tree branches almost touch the ground and you can hear the wind howling through every crevice of the house. My fa-

ther snatched the money for the pies off of the kitchen counter and got into his three-month-old car to begin his journey to the bakery. About fifteen minutes after he left, my mother received a call. Standing right next to my mother, all I could hear over the phone was "F***!" "SH**!" and "attacked my car!" My mom was turning red trying hard to hold back a laugh at the foul words shouted on the other end of the phone, and hung up the phone with a quick but pitying "I love you." She turned to me with a sad look on her face and explained, "Your father was driving on the Interstate when one of the little I-90 signs came out of the ground and hit his new car. He is not a happy camper!" It turns out that the windy weather uprooted the sign from the ground and flung it across the highway at the exact moment my father was passing. Under normal circumstances, a scratch on my father's car would not be such a big deal. However, this car was his new "baby." This was his first new car in over a decade and he washed and vacuumed it every other week, so

a little scratch on it was a huge deal to my father! After his initial reaction, my dad calmed down and finished his errand. When he got back to the house, he told my mom, "I was so upset about my car that I just had to buy some other goodies at the bakery. I may have spent twice as much as I was supposed to." Thus, my dad resolved the situation with a little bakery-related retail therapy!

A few days after the Interstate sign attacked my dad's car, another inanimate object attacked my dad. For Christmas, my parents purchased a large projection screen for our basement. The day after Christmas, my father, a lousy carpenter, woke up early to install the screen so he could enjoy the upcoming college football games on the big screen. My family was upstairs trying to stay out of the mad man's way when we heard a thundering crash from below. There was no audible screaming or cursing from the basement, so we all assumed my father knocked over his toolbox. Later that night, after he had installed the screen, my father came down to the kitchen

wearing a pair of shorts. With no warning, he said, "Hey, everybody, look at my leg." With that, he lifted up one side of his shorts to show the ghastly wound on his thigh where a nail had gouged his skin. Apparently, the loud crash we heard was not my father knocking over his toolbox, but the screen coming loose on one end. My father was screwing in the other side when the screen swung down from the ceiling and a nail used to secure that side hit my dad directly in the thigh. On any given night, you can find my father sitting in the basement watching the news or sports on the big projection screen, but I do not think you will see him taking on any more home improvement tasks anytime soon.

Although my father has had many unlucky events happen to him throughout his life, he isn't an unlucky man. He has a stable, well-paying job, a wife he's been married to for 25 years, and six healthy, wonderful children. My father has learned that he won't ever be able to avoid his knack for unlucky situations, so he's made the best of these situations

and tries to find humor in everything that happens to him. The stories above address only a small fraction of the crazy, unlucky anecdotes my father has shared. I haven't even begun to elaborate on how my father taught us the true meaning of stop, drop, and roll…

We Can Wrap It!

By Caitlyn Holleran

I had just moved from a private elementary school to a public high school. I barely knew any of the students and had missed all of the fall sports try-outs. That is when a different kind of team that I had never heard of fell into my lap: student athletic training. My brother was a senior football player and was dating one of the student trainers at the time. She would frequently visit my house and talk with my parents about the football team and training. I found her stories very interesting, and she volunteered to bring me to the winter quarter meeting to see if I wanted to join the athletic training team. I started my student athletic training career the winter of my freshman year and did not quit until I graduated. Athletic training not only shaped my high school experience into a positive one, but it also left me with a lot of memorable moments that I still think about today.

The oddest of all my memories has to do with feet. As a trainer, I would spend at least half an hour taping ankles or covering blisters before football practice. The other athletic trainers and I even went as far as to order shirts that stated, "We can wrap it!" on the back, meaning we could tape anything! Before the typical practice, the boys would start piling into the training room and would fight to have their favorite trainer tape their ankles. The first football player would jump up on the taping bench and tear off his sock, waiting for the trainer to begin. The absurdly long toenails as well as the rank smell of body odor wafting from the players' socks always disgusted me. I was able to stomach the nasty feet just long enough to tape the players' ankles and send them out the door. The one pair of feet I could not bear was Bob King's. He had the ugliest, most foul-smelling, fungus-infected feet I've ever seen. He had to peel his sock off of his foot because his sweat made the fabric stick to the bottom, and then he would wiggle his toes, showing off his thick yellow

toenails. Those jagged toenails could pierce the skin! Every time I had the "pleasure" of taping his ankle, it was like a race against time. I would finish taping Bob's ankle in record-breaking time, mainly because I wanted to finish while I was still holding my breath. I have never forgotten Bob's offensive feet, despite taping hundreds of ankles over a four-year span. He wins my award for having the most stomach-churning feet of any football player in all of Avon Lake.

I also fondly remember how athletic training brought a new boyfriend into my life. I had seen Danny around in the halls—he's hard to miss at 6'6"—but knew him only as a friend of a friend. He played football, basketball, and baseball, so he was in the training room at least once per season. It was not until the summer football practices before our senior year that we really started to notice one another. He would come in every morning and have me bandage and tape a blister that had developed on the back of his ankle from his new football cleats. It became a

daily routine: Danny would show up, wait in my line, and I would let him cut in front of the younger players. After a few weeks, the other players started to hassle Danny for cutting in line, saying, "You don't even have a blister anymore! What are you getting taped?" to which he would reply, "I am trying to prevent future blisters from appearing!" Once, I heard the other players tease Danny, I started to realize that maybe he was coming in every day to see me. We got along well and found something to joke about every morning, but I honestly thought he needed his blisters taped!

When school started again in August, his locker was located right across the hall from mine. He would come over and greet me every morning—when he wasn't late for class—and would walk me out to my car every afternoon. At the football games, he would somehow always find me and stand next to me almost the whole time (he did not play much). One day while taping his ankle, I hinted that my parents were not going to be around right after

the game that night and maybe he should stop by and I would cook him an after-the-game snack of macaroni and cheese. He gladly accepted my invitation and sure enough, thirty minutes after the game, he was on my doorstep, hungry as a bear—or worse, a teenage boy! I did not think he was really going to show up, so I had to quickly cook some macaroni and cheese for the ravenous boy—thank goodness he loves Easy Mac. That was the first of many entertaining Friday night date nights for us!

I loved being a student athletic trainer in high school, as it helped me make friends and get to know my fellow classmates. However, as much as I liked being a student trainer in high school, I knew that my passion was teaching; consequently, I chose to major in education in college. I dedicated four years to athletic training and loved every minute of it. This unique group allowed me to be active in my school, attend all my favorite sport events for free, and, best of all, meet my current boyfriend!

Jenna Please Don't

By Jenna Iszauk

Family vacation is the highlight of most young children's year, especially when it is in the summertime. Every year since I can remember, my family has been going on vacation in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Although I dreaded the nine-hour car ride from Pittsburgh to the Outer Banks each year of vacation, I could not wait to sit on the sandy, sunny, and warm beaches of the Outer Banks. In addition, I could not wait to build my sandcastles, search for the most beautiful seashells, take late night walks on the beach and go crabbing on the sound with my dad. The Outer Banks is a place where I knew I could always escape from playing with the same friends on my swing set and sand box at home and relax and meet exciting new friends to bond and build sandcastles with. My family and I always found it refreshing to get out of the fast-paced environment in Pittsburgh and spend a week in the

easy-going, carefree environment of the Outer Banks.

It was the summer of 1991 and I was three, going on four, years old. I could not believe that school was out and it was already time to go on vacation with my mom and dad. Six in the morning finally came along and the sun was starting to rise. This meant that we were getting close to the Outer Banks and the nine-hour restless car ride was almost over. With anticipation and excitement in my voice, I kept asking my dad, "Are we there yet?" It was so obvious by the tone of my dad's voice after the first couple times of me asking that question that he was annoyed. All he wanted every year was a peaceful drive that consisted of my mom and me sleeping while my dad drove, drank lots of coffee, and jammed to all his favorite bands. This meant I was expected to either sleep the whole time or stay awake and keep my mouth shut.

I remember pulling into the parking lot of Jolly Rogers, the restaurant that we always ate breakfast at

on our first day in the Outer Banks. After an amazing breakfast of eggs, grits, toast, and coffee, we made our journey into the next town over called Duck to pick up the keys to our beach house for the week. A long fifteen minutes passed by, and I was so excited to finally make it to the rental office!

"Dad, it's time to get the keys, and this time I want to do it!" I shouted.

"Eh, honey, I don't know about that one," Dad said.

"Oh, come on, Alan! Just let her run up the four stairs to get them. We'll be right in the car watching her," Mom said.

"Debbie, I still don't know if that's a good idea," Dad replied.

"I promise that everything will be all right," my Mom said ever so calmly.

"Daddy, please!" I said.

"All right, but be careful!" my Dad said, finally giving in.

I felt like such a big girl after finally getting my dad's permission to run up the four steps and get the keys to our beach house. And you know what that means? Since I had the keys in my possession, I was able to jump out of the car as soon as we got to the beach house, run up the stairs, open the door all by myself, and be the first one to set foot in the house. I was so excited to do this. Needless to say, our beach house was amazing. I had a room with bunk beds, a television, and a great view of the ocean. What more could I ask for?

We made it out the beach in less than an hour. I ran around in the sand for a bit while my mom and dad put down the blankets and set up the chairs and the umbrella. After they were done, I plopped down on the blanket and started filling my buckets with sand so I could make my sandcastles, one of the things that I looked forward to the most when I went to the beach with my family. And as I looked to the left of me, I saw a boy my age with his mother playing in the sand. I told my mom and she looked

over and they made eye contact back with us. I noticed the boy and his mother walking over to us, and I got very excited. I remember thinking that I had found myself a new playmate to pass the time and make it more fun on the beach.

As soon as the two made it over to our beach area, the moms of course started chatting away. My mom came to find out that this mother, Donna Rae Newby, and her son, Taylor, were from the southern state of Virginia. Donna Rae also mentioned that she had a husband and was expecting another child in a few months. Donna Rae had a thick southern accent and was the definition of what is known as a southern belle with her southern hospitality and her charming beauty, among other things.

After my mom and Donna Rae finished getting to know one another for a few minutes, Donna Rae turned to me and asked in her thick southern accent, "Hunny, what is your name?" Immediately I replied, "Jenna." She gave me a funny look and said, "No, darlin', your full name," and I giggled. I remember

wondering to myself why she wanted to know my full name. Couldn't Jenna suffice? So I decided to just tell her my full name. "Jenna Iszauk," I replied back to her. Now, I could tell by the look on her face that I still had not answered the question the way she wanted me to. So Donna Rae said, "No dar-lin', your full name. I mean your first name, middle name, and last name." Immediately a light bulb went off in my head. I remembered that every time my parents would get angry or frustrated with me, that they would call me by all three of my names; or at least I thought they did. So I said to Donna Rae, "Jenna Please-Don't Iszauk!" with a huge grin on my face. My parents, Donna Rae, and Taylor all started laughing because they knew that my middle name really was not Please-Don't; however, my parents had used that phrase with me so much when they got angry and frustrated with me that I had forgotten my real full name was Jenna Ariel Iszauk. To this day, my parents still tell the story to family, friends, and most embarrassingly, my boyfriends.

Running for a Purpose

By William Johnson

I am not ashamed to admit it. I love getting free T-shirts: T-shirts for joining a club, T-shirts for winning at a track meet. It doesn't matter where they are from—free T-shirts are awesome. Unfortunately, "free" is not exactly the best word to describe the price of getting one. Sometimes there are fees for joining the club (not the shirt, mind you, but joining the club), other times you have to work for it, but in the worst cases you have to pay for the opportunity to get the coveted item with both money and physical work.

March 22, 2007, is a day that I decided I needed a new T-shirt. Not just any T-shirt, mind you, but rather an Athens half-marathon, long-sleeved, mock-turtleneck shirt.

"I'm going to run the half-marathon in two weeks," I calmly explained to my roommate, Alan.

"Fat chance," he said sarcastically. "You want to know why you won't? Because you are fat." This un-

fortunately was true, and there was no way to deny it. At the beginning of my freshman year, I weighed roughly 145 pounds, but on March 22, 2007, I weighed 175 pounds. Forget the freshman fifteen—in two years I doubled it.

"Screw you," was all I could come up with. "I bet you, you couldn't do it."

"You know what, I can and I will," he said smugly. That was it, I was pissed—I was not going to let my 6'4", 150-pound roommate who could snap if the wind blew too strongly beat me in a race. I was going to win.

March 23, 2007, I laced up my Asisc running shoes, put on my Ipod, and headed out the front doors of Bromley Hall. It was a nice day; a short jog was what I needed to get back to running shape. Considering that I had only two weeks to prepare for running 13.1 miles, I needed to get in gear. A nice light jog to Wal-Mart on the bike path was all that I had in store for the day. The first part was easy, and I was feeling confident. Maybe it was because I

hadn't run in such a long time, but I actually enjoyed running. That sensation lasted for all of about fifteen minutes. This corresponded to about two and a half miles, and I was winded. When I say winded, I don't mean sucking hard for air—I mean keeling-over-and-about-to-puke winded. As I slowly walked home with my hands over my head, I realized I could be in trouble.

The next morning I set my alarm for 6:30 so I could run to Ping, bike for 30 minutes and run home. When the alarm went off, I sat up with fire burning in my heart, but lactic acid build-up in my muscles. Not having worked out in three months, my body felt like I had been used as a sled dummy for the football team. Because of soreness, I could not work out that day, or the next two days, and I was on the road to not only losing to my friend, but also not being able to finish the race.

The days that followed the soreness were filled with class, work, and running. I was able to quickly rebuild the endurance I once had in high school, and

I was easily able to run six miles without trouble. I figured I would run the last six miles on "runner's high" and motivation.

The night before the race, my roommate and I had a huge pasta dinner that was made by my girlfriend. This "carbo-loading" was done to ensure energy for the big race. Together we engulfed a whole pound of pasta along with salad and bread sticks. We were ready for this race to happen.

As the alarm clock rang, I jumped out of bed, cooked some very-pasty-and-not-at-all-delicious oatmeal and drank some Gatorade. The race began at 9:00, so we walked outside to the starting line at about 8:40. Everyone seemed nervous and excited at the same time. It's an odd feeling knowing that you are about to voluntarily subject your body to so much pain. (I can't even imagine how the full-marathon runners must feel.) The weather was in the low forties and raining: miserable conditions for running.

BOOM! The starting cannon goes off and the race begins. So many people are running that I lose track of my roommate in the pack, but luckily find someone I know so I have a running partner. The first three miles go off without a hitch; the raining stops, the sun comes out, and I am feeling good. Every one and a half miles there is a station where runners can grab water, Gatorade, oranges, or bananas. As I approach the station, people yell out what they have and where to go. I opt for the Gatorade, grab it in stride and drink it down. I now have no idea what to do with the cup. I look around, and people are just tossing them to the side of the road. I stupidly decide that I have plenty of energy to spare so I drop kick my cup to the amusement of the people around me and continue running.

Mile marker six approaches and I am still feeling confident that I can finish this race without too much pain. At the water station, I grab a Gatorade cup out of a worker's hand, put it to my lips, and realize it is empty. I have no idea how this happened,

but there is nothing I can do now, but run for another mile and a half to get more Gatorade.

Mile seven and a half approaches and my throat becomes dry as the chilly air burns in my lungs. At the water station I grab a cup making sure that it is full and put it to my face. The act of putting the drink to my face causes me to slow down just enough for the guy behind me to run into me. The Gatorade misses my mouth and goes directly into my eyes. I have no idea why Gatorade hurts so much when it gets into my eyes, but it is excruciating. For the next five minutes, I run with one eye open at a time trying to clear my vision.

Mile ten, I see that I have only three more miles to go and I know it is almost over. For the next three miles, which are the worst three miles I have ever run in my life, I seem to run only on the thought of lying down and sleeping for the next two days. My energy is gone and every joint in my body feels like it is going to give out, yet I push on. Finally, I see the finish line. As I near the finish line, a

crowd of people is cheering for all of the runners, and I become reinvigorated and run as fast as my abused legs will take me over the finish line.

As I cross the finish line, I see people vomiting in the grass. All I can think about is getting some Gatorade and food. I find some bottles of Gatorade and greedily drink them down. I meekly walk over to the Papa John's station and grab some pizza. After the first bite, I know why I saw people puking earlier. I start gagging, throw my pizza away, and quickly drink more Gatorade. I locate my buddy in the stands who is in worse shape than I am, and he tells me that he beat me but I don't really care at that point. I was just glad to be finished.

The next day I could barely walk, I hadn't eaten a single bite of food since the pizza, and I had drunk two gallons of Gatorade in the past 24 hours. When lunchtime came around, I proudly put on my new free T-shirt and hobbled down to lunch.

My Favorite Brother

By Katie Kramer

"MOM! Stop, that hurts," I screamed as two of my brothers tortured me on the living room floor.

"Pink belly, pink belly," Eric hollered with laughter while he sat on me and smacked my bare stomach with his hands. Kevin chanted, "Rudolph, Rudolph the red-nose reindeer!" as he twisted the tip of my nose with his fingers.

This is how a typical Saturday morning would start until my mom ran into the room swinging either a large metal kitchen spoon or plastic coat hanger threatening to smack someone on the ass if they wouldn't stop.

Being the only girl with two older brothers and one younger brother can be tough at times. Usually, it was two against one and I was always by myself. Ben is my oldest brother. He is six years older than me and for the most part didn't really pay much attention to me. He was too much into himself and girls to waste his time picking on me. Eric is three

years older than me. Growing up, Eric and I hated each other like it was our job. I think Eric had a case of middle-child syndrome. He never thought he got enough attention and always believed he got the short end in every situation. And since I was the only girl, he obviously thought I was spoiled to no end. Finally, even though Kevin was my little brother, he was bigger and stronger than me. Most of the time Kevin and I got along, except when he thought it would be cool to imitate Eric.

My brothers, especially Eric, really liked playing jokes on me when I was younger. Sometimes these jokes were funny and other times someone ended up getting hurt. One of the earliest memories that I can recollect is about my First Communion.

On the Thursday before my First Communion Sunday, Eric and I were playing one-on-one basketball in his bedroom. The basketball hoop was a miniature plastic rim that hung on the back of his closet door and we used a small Nerf ball as the bas-

ketball. As usual, it was a pretty intense game with a lot of roughhousing.

"Come on, try to steal it from me," Eric blurted out in an instigating way.

This of course prompted me to lunge forward at him and the ball. We both ended up falling onto the bed while wrestling for the loose ball. Somehow Eric landed on top of me and I had him in a bear hug. Eric thought the best way to get me off of him was to slam his head backwards into my face.

"OUCH!" I screamed while running downstairs to mom.

Sure enough, Eric was right behind my saying, "It was an accident, I swear."

Mom took one look at my face and immediately went to the freezer to retrieve an icepack. My eye socket was already swollen and turning black and blue.

"Eric, what did you do to your sister?" mom said angrily.

"It was an accident. I didn't mean to hurt her."

Needless to say I was the only first-grader with a black eye at our First Communion. To this day Eric claims it was an accident, but I'm positive he would have done anything to hang onto the basketball.

Another past incident that I recall involved Eric once again. I was about 13, so Eric must have been 16. This time Eric and I started out having some sort of petty argument which quickly escalated into something much more. For some reason I decided to walk away from the conversation and design a game plan of my own. I knew if I went back into the living room and started arguing with Eric again he would get mad and chase me down so he could beat me up. I thought it would be a good idea to take a cup of water and pour a small amount onto the kitchen floor near the entryway of the living room. I went back into the living room and picked up our argument right where it was left. All too soon Eric was up out of his seat chasing me through the living room into the kitchen. My plan worked just the way

it played out in my head; however, I didn't think of the consequences.

"DAMN YOU!" were the exact words Eric used as he slipped in the puddle of water that I so perfectly placed on the floor. I thought the incident was hilarious until I saw Eric's enraged face. I quickly knew I needed to get out of his sight.

Slam, click. This was the sound of me quickly shutting the bathroom door and locking it.

"I'm going to beat the shit out of you. You can stay in there as long as you want, but I will get my hands on you!"

"I'm not scared. Mom and dad will be home soon," I replied hesitantly.

"Go ahead and wait; you're going to be the one to get in trouble," Eric chuckled.

"Yeah, right, you know they'll believe me. They think you're always the instigator."

After about a half an hour, mom and dad still weren't home and Eric kind of lost interest in beating me up. He went back to watching TV while I

waited timidly in the bathroom for my parents to come home. I waited another twenty minutes in the bathroom when I heard a knock at the door.

"Katie, give me the bag of Doritos out of the pantry," Eric requested, using his "nice voice." We have a large bathroom, so my mom stores some canned foods and unopened bags of chips in the bathroom closet.

"Not a chance, Eric. You just want me to open the door so you can get in here and pound on me!"

"No, I just really want some Doritos. I'll even walk back into the living room and you can just leave them outside the door. Okay?"

"Go away and maybe I'll do it." I decided to take this opportunity to pay back Eric for all the mean things he had done to me. I knew Eric wouldn't leave me alone until he got his chips and I also knew that Eric has a phobia of tampons. I gave him what he wanted and a little more. I reached into the pantry and pulled out the new bag of Doritos. I then went into a different cupboard and pulled out a brand-

new tampon. Next, I got out some medical tape and Halloween paint. I coated the tampon in red Halloween paint and then used the medical tape to tape it to the Doritos bag.

"Eric! Here are your Doritos!" I said slyly as I placed the bag of Doritos outside the bathroom door.

"Thanks," Eric shouted at the closed bathroom door. Eric grabbed a soda from the refrigerator and carried the Doritos into the living where he continued to watch TV. About 30 seconds after he left the kitchen, I heard a horrendous scream coming from the living room.

"Katie, I'm going to kill you! Let me in there now! This is the most disgusting thing I've ever seen!"

"Hahaha! It's just red Halloween paint. Don't be such a baby."

"When you come out, you're dead."

A few moments later, I heard the garage door shut. Finally, mom and dad were home! I could now come out of the bathroom without fear for my life.

"Hi, mom. How was your night?" I asked as Eric came busting into the kitchen.

"Look what she did! This is disgusting!" Eric complained.

Mom took one look at the bag and immediately burst into laughter. She didn't have to ask; she pretty much knew what had happened. Eric tried as hard as he could to get me into trouble for the tampon prank, but it didn't work. My parents both knew the situation. They knew that Eric and I always fought and that Eric usually ended up making me cry or actually hurting me. They knew this was only a small form of revenge. They knew.

Growing up with three brothers was tough at times, but I wouldn't want it any other way. I think they molded me into the person I am today, and I'm proud of that fact. Since I'm now in college and Eric has his own house, we get along a lot better. We

have actually become friends. He calls me for girl advice sometimes, and when I come home on the weekend we get together for a drink.

Excursion Down the Hocking River

By Christina Lindeman

Growing up, I was fortunate enough to take lots of vacations and go camping multiple weekends every year, but my parents having three girls with an age range of ten years didn't lead to many adventurous outings. Annie was always too little, and Stephanie was always afraid of everything (one time she even asked my parents for a pet dog, but when we went to the animal shelter she wouldn't get close to any of the cages because she thought they all were going to bite her). I, the oldest, was by no means Evel Knievel, but now 13 and finally a teenager, I was at least a little more adventurous than Stephanie.

One day Dad suggested, "What if we went whitewater rafting on vacation this year?" I was all for it, but Stephanie, of course, was completely against the idea. "I don't know how to row a boat. What if the boat tips over? What if I hit a rock and the boat starts to fill up with water 'cause there's a

hole in it? I can't swim very well. What if the water takes me away?"

As usual, her fears outweighed my excitement, but at least we got to compromise. We decided to try canoeing.

We went to the Hocking Hills Canoe Livery just outside Logan, Ohio. It was a hot summer day with hardly any wind, so the Hocking River was completely smooth, no rapids. I was excited, so Dad, Annie, and I hopped right in our canoe and shoved off. Stephanie and Mom, however, took a little longer. The canoe was wobbly, and Stephanie, who was wearing a new pair of shoes for the outing, thought it was going to tip. Then the boat slid away, and, in typical Stephanie fashion, she screamed, "Hey, bring the boat closer. I don't want to get my *new water shoes* wet!" Finally, Mom got her in the boat and seated. We were off.

Unfortunately, my excitement did not equal my skill level. I'd never been on a canoe before, and, much to my dad's annoyance, I didn't quite under-

stand when, how hard, or on which side to paddle. My incompetence led to lots of extra work on my dad's part. The more I'd try to help, the more we would head in the wrong direction.

At one point, we were so off track, thanks to me, we were headed straight for the bank. With some deft maneuvering, Dad was able to turn the boat to barely miss the head-on collision. However, we still slid along the side of the bank where there was lots of overhanging brush, with only enough space for the canoe to fit through between the branches and water. I screamed and lay completely backward with my butt still on the seat and the back of my head against the bottom of the canoe. Dad had to lean forward to protect Annie in the middle seat who was enjoying all the commotion. She just clapped her hands and giggled, not realizing she was close to potentially having her eyes poked out. When we came out from under the brush on the other side, we were covered with dirt, mud, and hundreds of big, black spiders. Surprisingly, I wasn't scared. Everyone just

sat there laughing at the entire series of events. Soon, Dad and I began debugging ourselves and Annie. From the other canoe, Mom and Stephanie would point out spiders that we had missed. They were not paying attention to their own boat, and they ran nose-first right into a big stump in the middle of the river. The unexpected jolt knocked them both out of their seats into the bottom of the canoe, and everyone roared with even more laughter.

This hectic, crazy, unexpected five minutes completely changed the rest of the trip. Stephanie finally realized there weren't any rapids and she wasn't going to fall out and drown, so the rest of the trip was much more carefree.

Since the craziness lightened the mood, we were able to play little games along the rest of our journey. It started with using our oars to splash each other. Unfortunately, I wasn't very coordinated at this, but Stephanie was. So, I became drenched and Stephanie stayed quite dry. Since I couldn't retaliate with water, I decided to take a different approach. I made up a

little game, which I dubbed "bumper boats." I'm surprised no one fell in with the constant jostling of boats. It was very back-and-forth. One canoe would break away, and the other would try to catch it and ram into the side. This game led to a race.

Toward the end of our journey, we made a non-verbal challenge to see who could make it to the shore first. We implemented all the strategies we had learned on the trip. At this point, I was better at steering and was able to cut the other boat off and slide past. Stephanie was better at splashing for distraction, but at the last moment, Dad and I hit Mom and Stephanie's boat just right. It glanced off the side of our boat, pushing us to shore and them into the middle of the river. When they finally made it to shore, Stephanie hopped out of her boat, seemingly unconcerned about submerging her *new water shoes* in the cool Hocking River, and said, "That was fun!" This led my dad to ask, "Does that mean we get to go whitewater rafting next year?"

Better Than Catnip

By Lisa Pizzurro

There I was, three years old looking at something that would melt my heart for years to come. It all started when my parents brought home this furry little creature named Max. It wasn't a little brother. It was something even better—it was our first kitten. Right then and there I was hooked. No animal stood a chance—wild or domestic, I wanted it. Not long after we "adopted" Max, we also "adopted" my other favorite cat, Frosty. Over the course of my childhood, I tried to make all sorts of animals household pets. My love for animals is my weakness.

Some of my most adventurous memories were spent with Sammy the snake, which I picked out for my thirteenth birthday. My mom despised the fact that my dad allowed me to pick out something such as a snake for a birthday present. He was a little thing who liked to soak up the light from his heating lamp and eat goldfish. Occasionally I would take him

out and let him move all around my room just for fun.

One afternoon as I went in my bedroom after school, I noticed something funny about his cage—it was empty! "Mom! Mom, come here!" I screamed. I raced down the stairs to find her and tell her the news. She screamed, "Lisa, you better find that thing!" So we headed back upstairs to begin the search. We looked all around his cage, under my bed, and everywhere in the bedroom. He was nowhere to be found. When dinnertime rolled around and my dad got home from work, he too joined in the search party. As the hours passed, I began to lose more and more hope that we would find Sammy.

I saw my worst fear when I walked upstairs. I had found Sammy, but he was cornered against the wall by my two cats! They were standing over him hitting and playing with him. I yelled, "Max! Frosty! Get away!" Max grabbed Sammy in his mouth and took off! The chase was on. He ran down the stairs, around our living room, then back up the stairs. All

the time, Sammy was flopping around like a little rag doll. Just as Max was approaching the top of the staircase, Sammy slipped away and slithered off as fast as he could in the opposite direction. My parents and I immediately grabbed the cats and put them in the basement. We were back where we started, though: Sammy was lost.

We continued the search for a few more hours before calling it quits, then we opened the basement door to let the cats out and there he was again! Only this time Sammy was cornered on the top step of the basement stairs. My dad shouted, "Unbelievable! The cats have him again!" My mom and I raced over to rescue Sammy. We were too slow and Max was too fast because he took off running with him in his mouth again. It was like a game to him just to see if we could catch him. Sammy must have been hard to hold on to because he slipped out of Max's mouth halfway through the chase for a second time. We put the cats back down in the basement, hoping Sammy would be smart enough not to go down there. Yet

again we were without the snake. My parents finally gave up and told me it was time for bed.

As night fell I was coming to the realization that he may be gone forever. I got in bed, said my prayers, and just as I began to drift off to sleep I heard a blood-curdling scream. "AHHHH" came bellowing down the hall from my parents' bedroom. "Did you find him? Did you find him?" I yelled as I ran down the hallway. When I busted through their door, my mom was standing on the top of her bed screaming and pointing to look down. When my mom snuggled into bed and began to fall asleep, she felt something touch her head. She opened her eyes only to see Sammy and his slithering tongue right there staring back at her. I happily picked up Sammy and took him back to his cage. I slept better that night knowing he was safe from the cats, and my mom slept better that night knowing he wasn't in her bed.

Max's assistant, Frosty, has a story of her own. She was a pretty, pure white, stray cat my sisters and

I found outside in the wintertime. Since it was very cold and snowing, I asked my parents if she could sleep in the garage. "Yes, Lisa, but that's it—she's not coming in this house," they said very reluctantly. So, Frosty slept in the garage for about three nights before I was back asking my parents, "Can she pleeease sleep in the laundry room? It's getting too cold in the garage." After an hour of my begging, they finally let her sleep in the laundry room. She was so pretty and the sweetest little cat that my sisters and I couldn't help but bring her into the house to play with her when my parents weren't looking. She soon won over my mom's heart with her calm, lovable personality. It wasn't long before we all talked my dad in to letting us keep Frosty as an indoor cat. He can't say no and melts when he knows all three of his girls really want something.

After a month or so, we started to notice Frosty was gaining a lot of weight. It was very apparent she was pregnant! My sisters and I were scared to tell our dad that the one little cat we brought in the house

was pregnant with who knows how many kittens. After another month went by, it was time for her to have the kittens—she gave birth to six in one afternoon! Unfortunately, she gave birth to a kitten the next day as well—it was not alive. Since the kitten had stayed inside of her, she got an infection, so she couldn't feed her kittens and she required surgery. My family had to bottle feed all six kittens every three hours for about a week until we could find another nursing cat for them. We all got an eye opener because it was like having six kids! When the kittens were old enough to eat on their own, we gave them away to families we knew would give them a good home. After all that and Frosty having surgery, my dad said, "I just spent about a thousand dollars on this stupid stray cat—we are never getting rid of her!"

An Unexpected Lesson

By Julianne Shasteen

When someone walks down the halls of a typical high school, they usually expect to see students talking and laughing together amongst rows of lockers and wall plaques picturing past graduates. They would never expect to see hundreds of cut-out pictures of a faculty member's face taped all over the walls and students crowded against the lockers to make room for Thomas Ramsay, an awkward Frankenstein-sized student, with his two backpacks to come lumbering down the hallway. The latter description depicts the normal chaos that I experienced daily when I attended McDonald High School. Not a day went by without the occurrence of some kind of oddity.

McDonald High School is right smack in the middle of McDonald, Ohio, a one-square-mile steel mill town south of Youngstown. Because it is such a small town, most of its citizens are somehow related and most certainly know far too much of each

other's business. Only fifty-three students were in my graduating class, which ensured that all the students knew each other. A situation like this makes it inevitable that a great many students know their teachers on a highly personal level, which might explain some of the unorthodox occurrences at the high school.

Every morning, all the students would settle into their first-period classes to watch the morning announcements, which were put together by John Skufca, a creative and hilarious boy who was known as my partner in crime during my days at MHS. The videos usually featured popular music, student news, and something inappropriate. One time, John recorded an interview with the school chemistry teacher, Mrs. Diane Krumpak, who was also his aunt, about student study habits. To Mrs. Krumpak's surprise, John edited the interview to make her appear to have said things like, "Studying is foolish" and "I hate books."

The morning announcements usually took ten to fifteen minutes, and since classes were only forty minutes, this wasted about a third of our first period every day. Thankfully, this meant that I got out of learning calculus. Calculus was my least favorite subject, so I would try desperately to get out of doing work as often as I could. The teacher was Mr. Gary Carkido, an ex-military man with a little bit of a meat-headed demeanor. Unlike some of my other teachers, it was quite a challenge to distract Mr. Carkido, and for some reason, I was always the one elected to distract him. I would usually start by posing some kind of athletic feat, which he couldn't seem to turn down. One of my favorites was to ask him to see if he could jump up high enough to touch the clock. This usually took some persuading, but eventually he would give in. After that, I would say, "That looks easy. See if you can jump and touch the top of the projector screen." It was also possible to get him off topic by asking questions about his military days. One of his favorite stories to tell was the

time he hit a camel with a tank during Desert Storm. Then, the bell would ring and the misery that was calculus would be over.

Second period, I had study hall. Study hall was usually held in the school "commons" since we were allowed to go home for lunch and didn't have a cafeteria, but I hated spending time in there. No one was allowed to talk in the commons, and the study hall monitor was somewhat of a Nazi when it came to enforcing this rule. Not talking for a whole period was an impossible feat for me, so I acted as an aide for one of my teachers. The teacher was Mrs. Renee Ifft, a smart woman who looked shockingly like Reese Witherspoon. Mrs. Ifft had been good friends with my mom for years because they used to teach together at Niles McKinley High School. When I first entered McDonald High School, I had a very hard time not calling Mrs. Ifft by her first name, "Renee." Being her aide didn't really mean that I had to do a lot for her. Occasionally, I would staple papers, clean transparencies or grade tests. Mostly, I

would spend my time listening to her gossip. She loved to gossip, especially about Mr. Carkido, her archenemy at the school. There was always constant drama between the two teachers, but I never really knew why. I think it had to do with the fact that their sons played for competing positions on the same baseball team. I would just listen to her ramble and complain while I worked my way through homework from the previous night.

When study hall was over, I had to go to Spanish class on the second floor. This was my first class of the day with John Skufca and my main group of friends. Senora Karen Crissan was always in a terrible mood when we would come in because Paul Logar, the little brother of one of my friends, was always causing trouble. The odd thing was, we seemed to do the same kinds of things in her class, but I guess she didn't like him as much as she liked us. Paul used to do things like write "redrum" and "death," words well-known to fans of *The Shining*, all over the room in chalk or sit at his desk with an um-

brella over his head as if it was raining inside. Once, he even put a white strip of paper in his black button-down shirt one day to look like a priest while he read the Bible in the back of the room. We had to calm Senora down by telling her personal funny stories for the first few minutes of class. Senora was a terrible Spanish teacher. Sometimes, at the end of the semester, she wouldn't even have one grade for us because we didn't do anything in the class, so she would quickly make us do a worksheet just to have something to put on our report cards. Needless to say, we all passed the class. Out of all of our teachers, Senora was probably the closest to us. We would complain about our other teachers to her and she would complain about her husband and reminisce about her love affair with a man named Glen, whom she met while studying abroad in Spain.

Senora also loved to hang out with us outside of school. She always brought her chubby little spoiled daughter, Emily, whom we all didn't like. Sometimes we would go out to eat together or she would have

us over her house for dinner. It was all fun and games at the time, but now that I am specializing in Spanish, I wish we had learned more of the language.

Next was chemistry. Our chemistry teacher was Mrs. Krumpak, the favorite brunt of our jokes. Since Mrs. Krumpak was John Skufca's aunt, we all used to call her "Aunt Diane." She was a very proper woman with a neat bob haircut and a hatred for foul language. Her classroom was always perfectly neat and covered with posters with cute sayings like, "When in doubt…ask a question!" Once, we made that same poster say, "When in doubt…taste the chemicals!" Needless to say, Aunt Diane was not too happy with us after that. We also used to tape leaves to the end of her pointer stick, so in class when she would point to something on the chalkboard, it would get covered with the mixture of tape and leaves. It's a wonder she never had a nervous breakdown after those four years with us. One girl, in particular, teased her relentlessly. Her name was Jasmine, and she was one of the only two African-

American students at McDonald. Some days, when Aunt Diane would walk into the classroom, Jasmine would yell in her best Ebonics accent, "Girl, why your pants so short? There ain't no *flood* comin'!"

Our last but not least class of the day was physics with Mrs. Angie Sanson. Mrs. Sanson was the youngest teacher in our school, and she tried to be as hip as possible. Once, she even asked me to take her shopping to help her buy younger-looking clothes. In class one day she announced, "Today we are going to make mousetrap racers." This object of this project was to create a mousetrap-powered pulley device on wheels that would travel across the gymnasium. This might have been the worst decision of Mrs. Sanson's career. What started as a clever assignment soon turned into an all-out battle of who can snap the most mousetraps on another classmate's body. I was particularly proud of my excellent aim at snapping one on my friend Anthony Puntel's nipple. All in all, it was a nice way to round out our school days, despite the bruises.

I always laugh when I look back on these days, thinking of how many silly things we got away with. It's a wonder that I managed to walk away from McDonald High School with even a shred of knowledge that would prepare me for life at college. My experiences did, however, prepare me for life. The lesson? Life's too short to take most things very seriously.

Everybody Loves Mel

By Amanda Sidoti

Have you ever watched the hit TV show *Everybody Loves Raymond?* That is basically my family in a TV sitcom. Marie and Frank are two characters who can easily represent my grandma and grandpa! My grandma Theresa reminds me of Marie because my grandma is an amazing Italian cook and always keeps her house very clean. My grandpa Mel reminds me of Frank because of his funny, sarcastic personality. Because my family is 100% Italian, we are all very close! When something goes wrong, everybody comes together and is very supportive and caring.

I received a phone call from my dad one Monday afternoon on my way to class. He told me that my grandma was admitted into the hospital and gave me all the details on how she was doing. Since we did not have class the next Monday, I decided to go home for the long weekend to visit my grandma. I arrived home Thursday night and went straight to

the hospital. My grandma had been in the hospital for four days and was looking pretty good.

My grandpa, being the amazing person that he is, drove back and forth every day to visit my grandma. He would wake up, call to check on my grandma, go into work for a few hours, go home and shower, then drive to the hospital. He usually arrived at the hospital around one in the afternoon and stayed until about seven at night. When I saw my grandpa that night, I could tell that he was exhausted from all the driving he was doing. I told him to go home and get some sleep and that I would stay with my grandma while he got some rest. But because my grandpa is stubborn, he said that he was okay. The next couple of days, I went back and forth to visit my grandma, and every time my grandpa was sitting with her keeping her company. I told my grandpa that he should meet all of us for breakfast Sunday morning after we went to church. He said he was going to take my advice and catch up on his sleep.

Sunday morning came around, and my family did the usual church and breakfast. After breakfast we all got in the car to go visit grandma. The doctors told us that her kidney had stabilized and that she should be going home in a couple of days. We stayed for a few hours, and as we were getting ready to leave, in walked my grandpa. We asked how he was feeling, and he said he felt refreshed from his good night's sleep.

Now is when the scary, but fun, series of event rolls in! Monday morning I was in a deep sleep when my mom and dad ran into my room at 9:15 in the morning. "Amanda, get up and get dressed—we are heading to grandpa's now!" I was still half asleep when they came in the second time. I glanced up and saw a panicked look on my dad's face.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Well, we haven't been able to get a hold of grandpa. We tried calling the rec center (where he works), his cell phone, the house, and he isn't answering. He hasn't even called to check up on your

grandma yet!" exclaimed my dad. "Aunt Sandy is on her way there right now to check and see if his car is still there."

For as long as I have known my grandpa, he has never been late to work. He had to be at work at 8:30 and it was now 9:30. I got out of bed and started getting dressed. I was really worried that something bad had happened to my grandpa. Then my dad got another phone call. It was my Aunt Sandy hysterically crying. She told my dad that his car was still in the garage and that the newspaper was still in the driveway. This wasn't a good sign. My aunt said that there was no way she was going to go into the house because she was afraid of what she could possibly find.

"All right, just call 9-1-1 and explain the situation to them." I heard my dad say into the phone. By this time everyone was awake and dressed and we were piling up in the car. Nobody had any words. All I kept thinking was, my grandpa is dead.

My mom, being the calm person she is, just kept saying, "Everything is going to be okay. This could all just be a big mistake." Those were the words we all wanted to hear, but nobody knew if they could believe them.

We were halfway to my grandpa's house when my dad got another phone call, this time from my cousin Lisa.

"Uhh huh, okay… we will be there soon," my dad said quietly.

"WHAT IS WRONG!" I yelled.

"Well," my dad said, "it looks like everything is okay after all."

After a huge sigh of relief from everyone and a couple of tears, we arrived at my grandpa's house. What a sight it was. A fire truck, an ambulance, and a police car were all outside of the house. We walked in to find my aunt still crying, but on her hands and knees cleaning up the mud from the shoes of the EMS. When we saw my grandpa, alive and okay, we all ran up to him and gave him hugs and kisses. We

sat down around the table while he told us what had happened. He said that every night before he would go to bed, he would put the phone next to his ear just in case my grandma called. The phone had died in the middle of the night, which is why nobody could get a hold of him on the house phone. His cell phone was in the basement being charged, which was why he didn't answer that either. He went on by saying that he thought that my grandma would be coming home from the hospital so he decided that he wasn't going to go in to work. Now here is the best part.

"I had just woken up and was making my bed when I heard the door open," told my grandpa. "I heard someone yell 'hello!' It sounded just like Larry. So I just continued to make my bed. The next thing I know is that there was a man standing in my bedroom asking if I was okay. Since I just woke up, I didn't have time to put in my teeth yet, so I covered my mouth and said 'Yes, sir, I'm fine. What, did they think I was dead?'" He went on by explaining that

the man told him what was going on. "I went to the front door and saw Sandy standing on the sidewalk with a handkerchief in her hand and tears streaming down her face. All I could do was laugh and wave." Everyone went back and forth for a while just saying how scared they were. When it was time for us to go, my grandpa left us by saying, "I completely understand why everyone was scared, but this just showed me how much everyone cares about me and it really touches my heart."

As I look back upon the series of events that occurred that day, all I can do is laugh and think to myself, if the *Everybody Loves Raymond* series is ever revived, then this should definitely be an episode. At the time it was a very scary feeling and I hope that I never have to feel like that again. But I did gain something good from the experience. I learned that not every day is guaranteed and that you should cherish the time you have with everyone in your life. I did tell my family, though, if I don't answer my

phone, don't send the rescue squad out to look for me!

Tribe Fever

By Amanda Sidoti

Hot dogs, peanuts, French fries, pretzels, cotton candy, Cracker Jacks, hamburgers, beer, soda, onion rings, ice cream, popcorn. All those things bring a smile to my face, especially because they remind me of the warm, sunny, summer nights down at Jacobs Field. For the past three summers, my dad has purchased season tickets for the Cleveland Indians. We have a half-season package, which consists of forty games, and we are lucky enough to have six club seat tickets for each game. I have always been a baseball fan, but ever since my dad bought the season tickets, I have become an even greater fan!

I woke up on August 12, 2007, with a smile on my face! It was a Sunday morning, so I went to church with my family, came back and got ready to head downtown for just another normal afternoon game. Who was I kidding? This was going to be one of the best days ever! Today was going to be the day that I met the Cleveland Indians. We arrived down-

town for the game, parked the car and headed to the Club Lounge to eat. Attending the game was my mom, dad and older sister, Vanessa, along with my friend Mikey and my sister's boyfriend, Mike. After we finished our brunch, we headed down to our seats. It was a beautiful day! The sun was shining and a slight breeze was coming in off the lake. Today was just the perfect day. We watched the Indians warm up along with the dreaded Yankees. Once the game was on its way, I started getting more and more pumped for what was about to happen after the game.

Sadly, the Indians lost to the Yankees 3-5, but I didn't care. In less than 3 hours I was going to have one of the best nights ever! We had some time in between the game and the event I was looking forward to, so we said goodbye to my parents, and then my sister, Mike, Mikey, and I went over to the Panini's Bar and Grill next door to kill time. That might have been the longest 3 hours of waiting in my life.

You are probably wondering what we were waiting for or how this was about to be the best night ever. My dad had surprised my sister and me with two VIP tickets each to a charity event put on by the Cleveland Indians Charity Foundation. This was a formal event that consisted of dinner and autographs with the entire 2007 Indians roster. Because we had VIP tickets, we would be able to go in an hour early to take pictures and "mingle" with the players. At around 5:45 we left Panini's to head back to the car to change into our dressy attire. I was so excited! I was actually going to be in the same place as the Cleveland Indians without a game of baseball being played! Once we were all dressed and ready to go, we headed back down to Jacobs Field. We checked in with the people at the doors and were admitted into the stadium again. We were greeted with hors d'oeuvre and wine. I was walking to our table when I turned the corner and was standing face-to-face with Kenny Lofton. I immediately grabbed Mikey and headed toward Kenny.

"Hi, Kenny, my name is Amanda and I am a HUGE fan!" I exclaimed to him. He shook my hand.

"Thanks! I'm really glad to be back here for the remainder of the year," he responded.

"Well, I am happy to have you back here! You were my favorite player on the '96 team!" I said. I felt like a little kid in a candy store. He thanked me and I wished him luck with the rest of the season. I couldn't believe it! I just met Kenny Lofton! Little did I know, but my night was about to get better.

I walked back to the table to tell Vanessa and Mike about my encounter. I put down my purse and made sure I kept my camera with me. This was something that I needed memories and proof of! We strolled around for a bit reading about the famous inductees into the Hall of Fame when we had another encounter, this time with about 25 other players. They just came out of nowhere. I looked one way and saw Victor Martinez, Johnny Peralta, Kelley Shoppach, Franklin Gutierrez, and Paul Byrd, all just

hanging out with nobody around them. I introduced myself to all of them, got my pictures and continued my journey around the event. I walked down some steps to find Josh Barfield, Travis Hafner, and C.C. Sabathia. We made our way around introducing ourselves and taking pictures. I was very impressed with Josh Barfield, though. He was a very down-to-earth guy and talked with us for about ten minutes about things other than baseball.

"So what do you like to do when you aren't playing baseball?" I asked Josh.

"I love video games. When I'm not on the field practicing or playing in the game, I'm playing my PSP," he responded. "Ask my roommate, Garko, when you meet him. He will tell you that is all I do when we're home!" Of all the things he could say, he said that he loved video games. Here I was with the two biggest video gamers out there! Mike and Mikey were like little kids. While they continued their video game talk, my sister and I decided to walk around and meet some more players!

I was so happy I was able to meet all of the players that I had so far, but one player in particular I just couldn't wait to meet: Grady Sizemore. Not only did I think he was an amazing baseball player, but he was so cute, too. We didn't have much time until the people with regular tickets would be let in, so I had to get my picture fast. While we were looking for Grady, I was distracted by my other favorite player: Ryan Garko. I couldn't let this opportunity pass me by; I had to meet Ryan, too. I went up to him, got my picture and shared some small talk.

"So how do you like Cleveland so far?" I asked him.

"I love it!" he exclaimed. "I'm from Orange County, California, so to be in a city like Cleveland is awesome. The food is amazing, the city is awesome, and the sports fans in this city are great!"

"Well, I must say we love our sports!" I replied. I thanked him for the picture and went back on my quest to find Grady. I turned the corner, and there he was, with nobody around him! So I made my way

up to him and introduced myself and we began talking. I was star struck, I didn't know what to say or do. Just when things were going good, my sister had to ruin it.

"Grady, can you take a picture with my sister? She absolutely LOVES you!" Vanessa yelled.

"Of course," he said. I felt my face turning red. She would say that! I was acting all nonchalant and everything, and then she had to go and ruin it.

"I am a pretty big fan!" I said. Wow! Did I really just say that? I felt like an idiot.

"Thanks!" he said with a smile that made me melt.

I took my picture with him, thanked him and walked away. It was perfect timing, though, because as soon as I walked away the meet and greet was done and everyone with a regular ticket was let in. As we walked back to our table, I glanced around to realize how lucky I just was. I had met almost every player from the team already and I still had another autograph session where I could meet the players I

missed earlier. After we finished our wonderful dinner, we were called to go and get the autographs. There were about eight tables each with five or six players at each table. As I walked from table to table getting the autographs and shaking hands with each of the players, I realized that they were all just every-day people whom we watch for entertainment. One of the questions I would ask some of the players was 'what is your favorite part about being a baseball player.' I expected to hear 'the attention you get from people' or 'the money you make,' but most of them responded by saying that it is their job to go out there and play the game they love to play and it can't get any better than that.

It is really awesome to say that I was able to meet the 2007 Central Division Champion Cleveland Indians. It is an experience that I am going to keep with me forever.

The Nightshift

By Breanne Smith

I began my short-lived library career at Ohio University as a young college freshman, new on campus and intimidated by the rows and rows of books written in languages I'd never master (I was assigned to work in the Alden Library Center for International Collections). Working there seemed to be a task straight out of Dante's Inferno—I was surrounded by thousands of books, and reading was my favorite pastime; however, reading Malay or Thai, which don't even use the Roman alphabet, was out of the question.

It was at Alden, in my own personal hell, that I volunteered three years later to work the latest (or earliest, depending on how you look at it) hours during the week most dreaded by library personnel, the week that sick leave was seen as chickening out and during which vacation days were rarely, if ever, granted—finals week. During this week, the library featured five to seven days of absolute chaos. Stu-

dents who had spent all ten weeks of the quarter hitting the bars, goofing off with friends or even skipping class suddenly descended upon the library like a panicked drove of worker bees suddenly aware of the imminent frost. These slackers-turned-workaholics were wild-eyed, usually quivering from over-caffeination, and irate beyond belief when librarians could not automatically produce all of the research the students should have been accumulating over the previous two and a half months.

So why did I volunteer to work the hours of midnight to 2 a.m. during this insane week? Simple. For those 120 minutes each day, my hourly wage was increased from the usual $5.25 to $10. Apparently, the library administration felt the need to generously reward or bribe student employees who felt they could brave the melee. I like to imagine, though, full-time employees donating their wages to a student-employee pay pool in order to avoid having to come to work themselves in the early morning hours. Ei-

ther way, I was willing to take on the pandemonium for a few extra bucks.

It was with this reassurance of compensation that at midnight the first day of finals week I trudged into the library and down the stairs to the basement (actually dubbed the "first floor" as if to somehow make full-time employees forget that they worked eight-hour days without having a window to glance through or the possibility of sunlight ever hitting their work space). I careened in and out of hordes of crazed students, bobbing and weaving like a trained boxer. As I threw myself behind the desk, convinced that I was at last safe from the brutish students, two people slammed into me from behind. After regaining my wind, I turned to find the department's student workers, who looked every bit as frenzied as our patrons.

"We've b-b-b-been waiting for you," one managed to stammer out.

Her partner's eyes darted from side to side as though expecting someone to pounce on him at any

second. I stepped to the side and watched them flee past me and through the counter's gate in their dash for the stairs, not taking the time to wait for the elevators.

No sooner had I plopped into my chair, wondering where the coworker who would be sharing my shift could be, than a slew of patrons crowded the wide counter, all fighting to be heard over each other.

"We had signed up for a study room…"

"Where can I find this book: H-S-three-oh-six-point-Z-two…"

"Stapler! I need a stapler!"

"Tell them their time is up in the study room! I *swear* it's our turn!"

"The microfilm… or is it fiche?... Well, whatever the machine is called, I think it's broken. This part just came off all by itself. Really!"

And so the night began.

After 15 minutes of calming them down enough for me to listen to their problems, I had the comfort

of knowing that I was an eighth of the way through my shift. Meanwhile, my fellow coworker, an international graduate student whose name I never did learn to properly pronounce, showed up and started fielding some of the patrons' questions. This held them off for a few minutes. Inevitably, though, I would end up assisting these customers anyway, as they were unable to decipher my coworker's thick accent when she answered their inquiries.

The first person I assisted bounced up and down with the rhythm of her gum-chomping and rolled her eyes at least a dozen times in the ten seconds it took her to explain her problem.

"I, umm, need, umm a book," she said around her wad of gum.

"Okay, what one are you looking for?"

"I dunno."

At this point I could only raise one eyebrow and bite my tongue. Before I walked away to help someone who actually knew what they needed, she grabbed my attention again by mentioning that she

had a list of books from which her professor told her to choose one for her project. I started running every book on the list through our computer system, and the results were consistent: unavailable, unavailable, unavailable, unavailable. Apparently everyone else in her class had beaten her to the library, perhaps five weeks earlier when the project was assigned.

"Can't I request these or something from another library?" she asked.

"Well, you can," I told her, a little surprised that this girl who seemed repulsed by books even knew about the share program, "but they'll take 24 hours to a week to arrive. When is your project due?"

"Tomorrow."

Well, that option was out. I continued down the list, inputting each book into the computer. Finally there was a new result. "AVAILABLE" seemed to jump off the monitor. I jotted down the call number and passed it to her.

"Here you go. The book will be on that side of the floor," I said, pointing.

She looked at the paper, then at me, then at the paper again.

"Umm… so is this the title?"

I resisted the urge to smack my palm to my forehead and instead plastered on a smile and started to explain the concept of call numbers. Her blank stare and the line of people waiting for help finally made me give up and grab the paper back. I led her around the corner to the stacks, which are what we call the shelves, and started down the rows of books. After convincing her that H did, indeed, come after G, we finally found the available book. As I pulled it from the shelf, the girl ripped the book from my hands and took off back to the desk to check it out.

"Wait!" I called after her. "I'm not sure that's exactly what you want!"

She flipped her hair over her shoulder and pretended not to hear me as she rushed away. I groaned and, picking up her habit, rolled my eyes. More pa-

trons stopped me for assistance, and by the time I made it back to the desk, the girl was gone. I had a feeling I hadn't seen the last of her, though.

Twenty minutes and as many patrons later, the girl was back in front of me, and she looked more than mildly ticked.

"There's something wrong with this book!" she said, slamming it down on the counter.

I paused a few seconds trying not to laugh.

"What? You can't read Indonesian?" I asked sweetly.

Her face scrunched up and turned an odd purple-red. Before she exploded all over the counter (I'd probably have to clean that up), I offered to continue through her list of books to see if we could find another one… in English.

We went through each title, both of us urging one to work—she because her time was running out, I because time wasn't moving fast enough. I couldn't wait for the girl to leave or for my shift to end. Finally, we found success with the very last title. Be-

fore I could even bother to write down the call number, my coworker walked over with the book.

"I hear you say book's name," she said, her accent as thick as ever. "It on return cart. You need?"

I wanted to hug her. Now I didn't have to take gum-chomper back through the stacks again. I couldn't check the book out for her fast enough.

Finally she was on her way, and I returned to helping patrons who were a bit more knowledgeable about the library and made my job easier. Some, however, were not so informed. I fixed the microfilm machines for an older conspiracy-theorist who *insisted* that aliens had crawled into the machine to "steal our technology." I didn't bother to point out that they would be sadly disappointed when they realized that all they could do was peruse old newspapers and magazines. They would've been much better off crawling into, well, just about any other machine in the building.

A few patrons later, I heard the sound for which every librarian on the late shift during finals week

yearns: "Attention. Attention. Alden Library will be closing in fifteen minutes, with the exception of the Learning Commons on the second floor. If you wish to remain in the building, please collect your belongings and move to the second floor at this time." I thought I saw my coworker tearing up as she looked adoringly at the loudspeaker.

Now was the time to start kicking patrons out. We moved from table to table, telling people nicely to pick up and move upstairs, shoving in chairs and picking up trash and discarded books as we went. Before long, the next announcement was made that the majority of the library was officially closed. I scanned the tables one last time and was disappointed to see someone at a far table, still huddled over his books. Great.

"Sir!" I called out. "Sir? We're closed. You need to leave."

The guy, who looked as though he might be a linebacker for the football team, ignored me and

continued writing, pencil flying over paper. I heaved a sigh and started back toward him.

"Sir? It's time to go."

"Just a minute!" he snapped at me.

Any patience I had left drained out of me.

"Fine!" I snapped back at him. "Just so you know, these lights? Well, they shut off in about thirty seconds, and I have ab-so-lutely no control to turn them back on. So if you want to sit here, in the basement, in the dark, go right ahead. It's always fun to gather belongings in the pitch black, anyway. It makes it a little, I don't know, like the game Blind Man's Bluff. So have fun."

I turned on my heel and stalked off. In less than 15 seconds he was flying up the stairs, his arms full and his jacket trailing behind him.

Finally my night was over. I was almost humming a happy tune, and a huge smile spread across my face.

"See you tomorrow night!" my coworker said.

And my smile was gone.

Flying Solo

By Jack Stitak

The day started out like any other day: sunny, blue skies, little to no wind. I got ready and headed out to the airport. It usually takes about 15 minutes to get to Ohio University airport, but it feels like an hour. Excitement and joy ran through my body in anticipation to get up in the air. As the airport nears, I start to see planes flying around. I know I'm close and think how I am going to be flying in just a few minutes. As I pull up to the airport, planes are everywhere: taking off, landing, and circling in the traffic pattern. Occasionally, if I'm lucky, a private jet or two will also be parked on the ramp. What a beautiful sight it is to see all the different types of aircraft.

The routine is the same each time I come to the airport: walk in saying hello to my fellow aviators and watch as a look of anticipation and bliss appears on everyone's face, knowing they will be flying very soon. First I check the weather to make sure it is safe for flying. The weather checks out to be perfect,

clear skies, just the right conditions for a great day of flying. I brief with my instructor, Tom "Iceman" Kazanski. They call him Iceman because when he flies his maneuvers are as smooth as ice. I can now say he is by far the best pilot that I have ever flown with. What he can do with an aircraft is absolutely amazing. When he is in control, it is like watching a work of art. He can make the aircraft do exactly what he wants with little or no effort; he makes it look almost too easy. After briefing with Iceman about what we will be doing today, it's time to prepare the plane for flight.

As I walk out to the ramp, I see seven planes lined up, and I wonder which one is mine. I feel like a little kid searching for Easter eggs; I can't wait to see what beauty I will be flying today. There she is, tail number N23OU. She looks better and better every time I see her. After I give her a thorough inspection, she is now ready to take off. We climb in and buckle up, and now it's time to fly. This is now my 10th flight and each time I'm just as excited. It's

time to take control of that excitement and get serious. When it comes to flying, it's no joking matter; one slip up could end your life. This puts a huge twist on the subject. No matter how excited you are, you need to have a little bit of fear in you to keep you on your toes.

Now I'm staring down the runway, hand on the throttle ready to take off. "Full Throttle. Release Brakes. Little Right Rudder. Now slowly pull back on the yoke," Iceman recites to me. And we're off. The feeling of weightlessness just after take off is amazing. My stomach drops just like I'm riding a roller coaster. Once you're up, there's nothing to it. Today's flight is going to be a simple one. We aren't going far; we will stay around the airport and do some takeoffs and landings. Now airborne, I take a second to look around and enjoy the scenery. It's a little reminder of why I love flying. After three landings and takeoffs, we are taxiing towards the ramp when my instructor says, "Ok, stop right here and let me out. It's time for you to do this by yourself." I

replied, "Shut up, get back in here, you're not going anywhere." He just told me to do three takeoffs and landings and that I would be fine, and that there's nothing to worry about.

So there I am all alone for the first time. I have never felt more nervous. But I knew that I couldn't let it overwhelm me. I had to do this, and I had to calm myself down. The takeoffs aren't what I'm worried about it; it's the landings that are a little more difficult. I think to myself, "F**K It, here goes nothing," and I slam in the throttle and start to take off. I'm up in the air setting myself up to land. I'm on my final approach. I'm grabbing the yoke so hard that my knuckles are pure white and I feel like I'm going to snap the thing right off. Besides my grip being so tight, I am sweating profusely. I'm coming in 500ft to go, 300ft to go, 100ft to go, centered up on the runway, wheels getting closer and closer to the ground, then touchdown. The plane lands a little harder than usual; there I am swerving back and forth on the runway trying to get control of this

beast on the ground. I finally get control of her, I did it, I successfully landed a plane by myself, and I'm still alive. What a huge relief it is to get the first one out of the way. Now I'm even more pumped and ready to get back up there and do it again. The second one was a lot easier than the first. And finally the third—on this landing I felt like a true pilot. Everyone knows the saying, "Third time's a charm." I know it's a big cliché, but for this particular situation, it held very true. It was one of the greatest landings that I have ever had. The plane felt like a well-oiled working machine. I was centered up on the runway and the wheels hit so smooth barely making a noise.

The rest is just history from there. I finally became a true pilot that day. To man an aircraft like that all alone was quite an accomplishment. To have control over such a powerful piece of equipment is a great feeling. The sense of freedom and relaxation you get when flying can only be experienced for yourself. It is amazing to say that my classroom is

5,000ft in the air. Day after day I get to see the world from a different angle than most people. I see things that some people will never see in a lifetime. This is why I love flying and think it is one of the greatest things in the world.

The Unspeakable Prank

By Colby Tisdale

Sneaking out is a mystical right of passage that every generation must attempt in order to ascend into adulthood, or at least high school. It had become a tradition in my church youth group that every year at the summer camp retreat the eighth-grade boys would sneak out of their cabins at night. Sometimes they would get caught and sometimes they wouldn't. Nothing was accomplished, no one was hurt. It was simply one last display of dominance before you moved on to senior high as fresh meat. Most of the counselors knew it went on and normally let the manly attempt at courage and bravery slide by unpunished. When it came to my attempt at the harmless prank, however, things did not go so smoothly.

It was my class' turn to partake in the daring sneak out and claim it as our own. I had known about the tradition, but was not very concerned. I thought it was kind of lame to leave the cabin, run

around, and then come back in like you just did the most daring thing imaginable. I had considered blowing the prank off until we started to discuss it in our cabin.

Zack and Chris were whispering to one another about something. Intrigued, Tommy and I began to eavesdrop, wondering what was so important. Chris, noticing our attention, looked over at us.

"What are you guys talking about?" I said. "You two are pretty close. Do you guys need a room or something?"

After punching my arm and then looking around to make sure there wasn't a counselor within earshot, Chris replied in a hushed tone, "We're deciding how we're going to sneak out tonight."

I tried to express my lack of enthusiasm for the played-out ritual, but Chris was quick to change my mind. He had a brother named John, who was two grades ahead of us. John and two of his friends had snuck out when they were eighth-graders. They managed to get out of their cabins and light off a

bottle-rocket, waking everyone in the camp with a loud SCREECH and a BANG! They sprinted back to their rooms and jumped into their beds seconds before the counselors opened the door to check on them. They got away scot-free because the counselors assumed that the bottle-rocket had been set off by someone from the neighboring farm.

Under the shadow of the great bottle-rocket sneak out, Chris had to top his older brother with an even more daring stunt. It sounded like a bad idea, but I didn't want to be the only one sitting out so I decided to join in the fun. We weren't sure what we were going to do to make our sneak out great, but we knew it was going to be a good time.

The rest of the day's activities dragged on forever until finally it was time to go to bed. We had a room to ourselves at the front of the building with one window at about waist high, perfect for climbing out of. As we sat in our beds waiting for time to pass, we began to whisper our ideas to one another.

"I think we should go out and put some underwear on the flag pole," Zack said.

"That would be stupid; they would know we snuck out and then make fun of us for using our own underwear," Tommy replied.

"Let's get some of the girls' underwear—wait, that's a bad idea; we don't want to risk going into the girls' cabin," Chris thought out loud. We all knew that was way too risky and continued to think of other options.

"Didn't the girls have their bathing suits hanging out to dry in front of their cabin?" I asked. "Yes, that's perfect, let's wait a few more minutes and then we will climb out of the window and meet behind the girls' cabin."

When we thought that the counselors had finally fallen asleep, we climbed out of the window one by one, quietly and with great skill, not one of us making a sound. We made it to the girls' cabin and to our horror their bathing suits had been taken inside. Not knowing what to do, we met behind their cabin in

the shadows and began to discuss our options. Tommy and I wanted to go back and cut our losses, but Chris and Zack wanted to stay out and fulfill our destinies. As we began to argue over what to do, we became louder and louder in order to talk over one another. I knew we were getting too loud and tried to quiet everyone down, but it was too late. In an instant, we were all silenced as we hear a voice from the girls' cabin.

"Who's out there?"

Nobody breathed.

"Get back to your cabin. You're all in a lot of trouble."

We sat there motionless, staring at each other, hoping that some miracle would save us. Finally my fight-or-flight response kicked in and I chose the later. Abandoning all regard for stealth, I bolted as fast as I could back to our cabin. Breathing heavily and trying to regain some composure, I stopped in front of the window and opened it slowly. I looked back one last time to make sure the guys were with

me. Seeing that they all had followed my lead, I turned back around to the window and was face to face with Mr. Richardson, one of our counselors. It was all over—we had been caught.

Normally it would not have been a big deal. We would have been scolded and forced to do some extra chores, but it wouldn't have ruined the weekend. Unfortunately, we had made the fatal mistake of not factoring in the new counselors we had that year. Our old counselors, to our dismay, forgot to fill in the new guys about our little ritual and how they should have let it slide by. Mr. and Mrs. Richardson and Mr. and Mrs. Jones, two new young couples from our church, were our brand-new counselors for the year. They were not ready to have any kids act out in any way and did not know how to handle it when it happened. We completely underestimated them.

I was awoken the next morning by Mr. Richardson and Mr. Jones standing over our bunks. "You boys will stay in your room and miss breakfast," Mr.

Richardson commanded with the look of a hardened executioner. "You will sit here in silence, without a word, and think about what you did last night. When breakfast is over, we will come and get you."

We sat in shock in our beds. By the fiery looks in the counselors' eyes, we knew we were done for. We were all imagining a slap on the wrist, something more of the counselors being ashamed that we had let them catch us than the all-out silence and seclusion treatment. I felt like a caged dog that had snapped at his owner and was waiting at the kennel to be put down.

After what felt like an eternity, the door cracked open. "Will you come out here, Tommy," Mr. Richardson boomed more as a command than a request. Tommy looked at each of us, hoping somehow we would save him. Before he walked out the door, he gave me a look that still haunts me to this day when I think about it. He looked as if he truly believed it was going to be the last time he ever saw me. After a few more agonizing minutes, the door

cracked open for the second time and Zack was called out. I looked out the window and caught a glimpse of Tommy walking to the mess hall with tears streaming down his face. Chris was next to go out, and then finally it was my turn.

When I walked out of our bunkroom, all four counselors stared me down. They had set up a table and were sitting behind it. They instructed me to sit in a small solitary chair that was positioned directly in front of the table. I felt exposed. I felt as if they could see right through me, as if they could read my thoughts just by staring hard enough.

Mrs. Richardson broke the silence by saying, "We are very disappointed in you boys." The magic word "disappointment" was always the worst thing to hear. "We're not mad, just very disappointed. What were you boys thinking? You could have hurt yourselves."

"I thought you guys were better than this," Mr. Jones added. I was feeling tremendous guilt for what I had done, but was also bewildered. We had done

only what every class before us had done and yet we were being treated like mass murderers. For fear of one of the counselors lashing out, I kept quiet, not daring to try and defend myself.

"Even though we are very disappointed, we still love you," Mrs. Freeman said as all of the counselors rose up and began to walk toward me. "We hope that you will learn from this event and never do something like this again," she added. Then the meeting ended with all of the counselors grabbing on to me and giving me the most awkward bear hug I have ever received.

Our punishment was to complete all of the cleaning duties that the whole camp usually shared equally. Even though we cleaned for the rest of the day, the worst punishment was the change in the atmosphere of the camp. The fun, carefree attitude of the other campers had died. No one spoke louder than a whisper. No one laughed or even smiled. The fun had been sucked right out of the camp and it had been our fault. Everyone was lifeless the whole

ride home from camp as well. When we got back to the church, I quickly went to my car and jumped in, eager to talk to my mom before the counselors convinced her to send me to military school.

My mother could see the dull mood everyone was in and asked me what was wrong.

I answered, "I got in trouble."

"What did you do?" she replied with a very concerned look.

"We snuck out and got caught."

"Is that all?" my mother asked. "Everyone is this gloomy because you guys were caught sneaking out?"

With my mother's carefree response, I came back to reality. I was beginning to believe I had truly done something unspeakable and that I was going to rot in hell for eternity, but the way my mother, the beacon of all things right, reacted to my misbehavior broke me out of my trance and reminded that I wasn't a horrible person. I was relieved to know that the

counselors had in fact over-reacted and that I was not going to end up a teenage jailbird.

Shamu—A Real "Killer" Whale

By Jenny Troutman

Family outings were always such an adventure, from as early as I can remember. They tended to happen often and when they did, we went all out. One trip I vividly recall is when we planned a trip to Sea World for a day and I was so excited to see Shamu, the entertaining killer whale herself. We had been planning to go for a long time now, and I couldn't wait to see the depth of the ocean live before my eyes in the tanks and pools. I would soon find out that I was not ready for the entertainment that Shamu was going to provide.

Prior to the trip, my mom and I went to Meijer to get a new outfit to wear on the exciting journey to the aquatic park. I was very fashionable for a five-year-old during the summer of 1991. Walking through the store, I remember thinking that the outfit had to stand out, but most importantly it had to go with my new pair of laced-up saddle shoes. While mom was suggesting different tops and breezy bot-

toms to keep me cool in the heat, I found it: jean jumper shorts with pink, blue, yellow, and purple buttons. It was perfect for the trip and would look magnificent with the shoes! Mom agreed and bought it for me to wear.

When the day arrived, I could hardly control myself. I was dressed in my favorite new outfit, had on my new pair of saddle shoes, and had my hair in two long flowing pigtails. The car ride there was torture, probably the longest two hours of my life. I couldn't sleep like I usually did in the car because I was afraid to miss something important. When we pulled into the parking lot, I saw a big, blue, glowing sign with Shamu pictured across the title.

"Mama! Mama! Mama! What does that say?" I yelled in excitement pointing to the sign. "It says SEA WORLD," my mom explained, "That means we're here."

We walked through the people-filled park, and there was so much to see! Between the random fish tanks, the displays of sea otters and eels, and the

climbing structures for us to play on, this was the coolest place I had ever been. The sounds of the shows as we passed the stadiums were overwhelming, and I couldn't wait until 1:00 p.m. rolled around—it was time to see Shamu!

Just before 1:00 p.m., I walked with my mom, hand-in-hand, into the show. I wanted to sit as close to the pool as I could. I wanted the animals to see me and my new outfit, as well as all of the audience that was sitting above me. I looked great…end of story. All of the animals were warming up, and this was the closest I had been to a fish since feeding the aquatic animals in my own tank that morning. The excitement was so overwhelming that I was not paying attention to the seating arrangements. I cried to my mom as we weaved through the people, "Mama! We have to sit close to the tank so I can see! I have to be close to the animals, Mama!" After much nagging and dragging my five-year-old body, I had my wish and we sat in the fifth row of that stadium as the music began and Shamu made her first appear-

ance…little did I know that Shamu had something more to give me than merely her entertainment.

The trainers came onto the stage and with the music playing, their training whistles in hand, and people shouting with joy as the show was underway. My eyes were locked on the thousand-pound Orca as she performed a series of tricks and the trainers shared information about these fascinating creatures. My smile was beaming as the show continued with audience members coming to the pool to meet and greet with Shamu, but I sat back and watched all of this occur. Not forgetting that I looked fabulous, I stood up any chance I had to see more of the pool and show off my exciting new outfit. As the music started to escalate, I waited in anticipation for what was to come next. Shamu had already performed such amazing tricks that I couldn't wait to see what she had in store for the finale. She went under the water. I stood up to see if I could find her, when all of the sudden…the trainer's whistle went off…the water began to ripple…and out jumped Shamu

twenty feet in the air with a spin and smack on her back with all of her might…SPLASHING ME AND MY NEW OUTFIT! Terrified that my new clothing was ruined by this smelly, large, "killer" whale, I belted out a bloody scream and could not control the tears that started pouring out of my eyes. How could she have done this to ME! This was by far the worst thing that could have happened! Frustrated and soaked from the pool water and my eyes, I started to leave the stadium immediately. I grabbed my mom's hand to escort her out, leaving my sister and dad behind to finish watching the show. I noticed everyone else in the stadium laughing and shouting for Shamu to splash them more! They didn't appreciate the value of a new outfit like I did, and now I had water all over it! My mom dabbed my clothing with a few napkins in hope of making me feel better, but it didn't work. I was not going to forgive Shamu for what she had done.

When the show let out, we met the rest of my family near the exit gate and I was in the back of the

stroller calming myself with my thumb in my mouth and ready for a nap. This was too much for me to handle. When I woke up, I noticed that my outfit had dried and thankfully was not ruined from the water. I finally decided that I was ready to see the rest of the animals the park had to offer. Thankfully, they wouldn't have to see me all wet, and I established one rule for the rest of the day…I would visit only the animals that resided behind glass.

Freshman Year

By Mike Voorhees

Looking back on all my years as a college student, I'd have to say without a doubt the best year I had was freshman year. Everyone is fresh out of high school, away from home for the first time, and most importantly, ready to get into shenanigans for the sake of a good time. This was our goal on the 4th floor of Pickering Hall, or as we all remember it now, Pick 4.

Pick 4 wasn't where my freshman year started. For me things started off a bit rocky on the 1st floor of Pickering. Fortunately, I quickly realized that this quad and these three roommates were not going to make for a fun freshman year, so I began looking for open rooms. That's when I found a quad with an opening on the 4th floor and asked if they would mind if I moved in. They agreed, even though I'm sure at the time they were thinking, "So much for the extra space." From the first night I spent in my

new room, I knew we were going to have a great year.

It didn't take long for fun times to begin. A huge hurricane had swept up the eastern coast and somehow managed to extend a good portion of itself out into southeastern Ohio. This storm brought the rain down on Athens, turning the streets into rivers. The open space in front of the Front Four coined "South Beach" was turned into a massive mud pit. In addition, the extensive amount of rain had managed to exploit a weakness in Pickering's roof, blowing a transformer and leaving Pickering powerless for days! Boy, did this power outage make for a good time! At night the stairwells would be pitch black, allowing for all sorts of scares. The RA's did their best to keep flashlights on in the stairwells. That didn't stop us from going around and turning them all off, leaving people with only their cell phones to light their way. This gave everyone just enough light to get a false sense of security. Some people saw us before we could scare them, but plenty were not so

lucky and endured the scares of their life, or at least that's what we'd like to think.

Our floor was co-ed and consisted of roughly 30 guys and 30 girls. It was set up with guys on one side and girls on the other with a common area in between. With the exception of a few guys and half of the girls, we all became good friends. On one occasion, the guys down the hall from me, in room 406, were launching water balloons out of their room, through the bathroom and slamming them into the door of room 410. After a few shots, one of the guys, Keith, opened the door. As the door opened, the next balloon rocketed through the bathroom door and slammed into Keith's chest, drenching him. Letting out a cuss-laden yell, he franticly slammed the door shut, just before the next balloon hit. There was a reprieve from the guys in 406, but it would not end there. An hour later I found Keith up to no good in the bathroom, filling up a trashcan with water. I asked, "What do you plan on doing with that, Keith?" He replied, "Waterfalling 406." At

the time I didn't quite know what that meant, but I figured it involved returning the favor for the water balloons. I stuck around and watched, hoping to be amused as he gently set the trash can at a 45 degree angle against the door of room 406. I could see where this was going now and started laughing in anticipation as Keith knocked on the door and ran out of sight of the peek hole. Brody opened the door, causing the trashcan to fall, pouring gallons of water into the room. I, along with four other people who had shown up in time for the stunt, began laughing uncontrollably. I don't remember Brody and the other guys of 406 finding it funny at the time, but they acknowledged they had asked for it.

While the ballooning and waterfalling were hilarious moments, I'd like to think that their creativity, organization, and execution were inferior to the duct taping. With cold weather approaching, our floor moved the cornhole matches inside. It just so happens that 'inside' was the Pick 4 lobby and one day some of the girls decided they finally had enough of

the constant banging and yelling cornhole brought with it. During one of our breaks between games, we made the unfortunate mistake of leaving our cornhole boards unattended. The girls didn't hesitate to take their chance and hide the boards in the girls' bathroom. This was a well-thought-out spot since the girls had established a double standard where it was okay for girls to walk through and use the guys' bathroom, but we were restricted from entering theirs. When we returned to find our boards missing, we quickly began investigating the matter. Since the guys were all so tight, we knew it had to have been the girls and we quickly found out where the boards were and more importantly which girls had participated in these shenanigans. Recovery of the boards was simple: To us, hiding the boards in their bathroom was abuse of the privilege to have the double standard, so we waltzed right in, making our presence known, and retrieved the boards.

With the boards found, cornhole resumed, and the games were even louder than ever. Nick, Marty,

and I, however, wanted more and decided that a prank was in order. After a few less than perfect ideas, we were struck by brilliance and came up with the ultimate prank; we would duct tape over the entire outside of the door where the guilty girls lived. Without hesitation, we headed out to gather the supplies: three giant rolls of duct tape. In order to pull off the taping without being seen, we would need to do it late at night and execute quickly. At college, 3am is a normal bedtime for some, so delaying until 5am would provide a small window of opportunity before morning alarms would ring. Since duct taping an entire door is not a quick task, to speed the job up, we prepped premeasured sheets and hung them all over our room. When 5am came around, Operation Duct Taping began. We carefully slung the sheets of duct tape over our arms and headed down the hall toward the girls' room. The taping went down in under five minutes, without a hitch. We even had time to pose for photos. Due to the nature of the prank, we were never able to see

the reaction on their faces when they opened their door that morning; but some of the best pranks never get to be enjoyed by those who initiate them!

The college experience has certainly added many memorable moments to my life. I have had many laugh-worthy encounters during my college career, with freshman year containing some of the best.

About the Editor

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy—me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name—David—ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, is the guy who gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At OU, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas in 1980, then I added a master's degree in English in 1984 and a master's degree in Philosophy in 1985. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled "Wise Up!" for *The Athens NEWS* and I am an English instructor at OU.

To see my "Wise Up!" column, go to www.athensnews.com—then perform a search for "David Bruce."

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