

One life to live, one life to give ...

Connect, Learn and Discover
Your Purpose

David Kuehnel



This collection of stories is dedicated to my wife, Ellen Rose, the one who supported my travels far and wide in my work over the years, who raised our family while I was gone, and whose faith in both me and God has always been an inspiration to me. She introduced me to the concept of angels being around us, and that opening of my mind allows me to appreciate every encounter with one.



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the Philippines.



One Life to live, one life to give...

Back to 1983...

Through all the excitement and trials of the early '80's – transitioning from school back to the farm, business challenges on the farm, facing down a cancer diagnosis, meeting Ellen, starting a new career, I had the fun of singing in a



barbershop choir and learning a specific song that had a great positive impact on me: Fun In Just One Lifetime, a song taught to our chorus by Joe Liles and Frank Marzocco, the songwriters. The melody, words and inspiration have never faded for me, even after 35+ years. When it came time for our wedding, Ellen agreed that we could have the best of my barbershopper buddies sing two songs at our wedding service, this one and The Lord's Prayer. The banner with this theme

hung above us, and the words have not lost their power for me to this day. We have just *"one life to live, one life to give"*. We dare not waste it, not a day of it.

Lyrics:

One life to live, one life to give...
I wanna have fun in just one lifetime,
I wanna have fun before it's done.
I'll find some friends that I can trust,
and on my way, I know I must
find love with just one person,
to share with me a family,
And let me write a song for the world to sing,
and I'll have fun in just one lifetime!

A Moment of Grace.

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God wink

[God wink](#) (plural [God winks](#))

"An event or personal experience, often identified as coincidence, so astonishing that it is seen as a sign of [divine intervention](#), especially when perceived as the answer to a [prayer](#)."

Grace as Webster defines it: unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration - a state of sanctification through divine **grace**. In other words, that **moment** when God's presence is experienced and it makes magic happen.

"Take things that are light enough to carry and heavy enough to remember."

Quoted from a speaker at the Kaufmann School Graduation, May, 2019

Martin Luther King, Jr., Harry and Bertha Holt, Pearl Buck, each other, people too numerous to count. We as their children had them, Skip and Becky, mom and dad, to challenge us, to inspire us, throughout our lives with them, and even after they've gone. They saw their purpose as way beyond their beginnings, and I believe they challenge us all to continue that tradition, to spread our wings and make the most of the time we have with each other, at home, and in the world around us, and to be grateful every day for the wonderful experiences we are able to enjoy. It is the core of the table prayer we all learned and prayed together: "GIVE US THANKFUL HEARTS, AND KEEP US EVER MINDFUL OF THE NEEDS OF OTHERS."

I don't think that it was by chance that they taught us that.



How My Mother Inspired Me

My dad did, too, but that's another story. My mother was what you would call an extremely hard-working, high-achieving champion of her beliefs and her family. I am the 3rd son born to my parents, and after I was born, my parents started adopting. They didn't stop until they had adopted 13 more



— 5 from Korea, 3 from the Philippines, and 5 mixed-race from the U.S. All considered “hard-to-place” kids. Both of my parents were highly involved in the equal rights movement of the '60's in Milwaukee, taking us to picket for our first time when I was only 5 years old, protesting the prohibition of black membership in social clubs like the Elks. She took us all along as kids while she taught English to migrant worker families (some of whom ended up lifelong friends), but most of all, our parents taught us to appreciate other cultures, foods, music, people who didn't look like us or talk like us. It shaped us all, and I didn't really appreciate that for many years. She also taught us to live thankfully, with gratefulness simmered into our sauce, and with a song on our hearts and a smile on our face.

Our family gathered recently and we buried the ashes of our parents, together in the same container, after they had both donated their bodies for medical research. It had been 6 years since our dad's passing, and 2 years for our mother's ashes to come back to us.

One of my favorite sayings is that “Children are a message we send to a time we will not see.” If that's true, well, they sent a whopper of a message. Our parents were inspired by so many people in their lives: Dr.

Angels and Life Scares

My experiences have guided me to believe very deeply and personally that there are forces around us, angels, if you will, who watch out for us, nudge us, teach us, and occasionally humble us. Some come from my early childhood years; others are very recent. I have felt the effects at home and while traveling the globe. I don't feel controlled by them; the feeling is one of love and caring, connectedness. The experiences became numerous enough that I felt compelled to start writing them down. I don't yet know how, when, where or with whom these will be shared. There are so many that I started a list and keep adding to it, to help me remember the angels and [Moments of Grace](#).

Once my wife pointed out the first example to me (I can be a little obtuse sometimes), I realize now that I regularly meet what I believe are angels, and have infrequent, but consistent, "God moments," moments where I am certain that the Holy Spirit has quite literally, with physical sensation, reached out and either touched me or spoken to me. Is that the story I'm feeling so strongly that I'm being asked to share?

**How close to death must we come
before we realize that we are here for a reason?**

The Jewel Tea Truck

In the subdivision where I spent my earliest years growing up, there were several dozen kids within five years of my age, and we all spent summers outside of our houses, often cruising the neighborhood in large groups on our bikes. Simple riding could turn into races once in a while, and my first summer with my new "racer" was an exciting one. It was a rebuilt older single-speed bike, but one that had the skinnier 26" tires than some of my counterparts who had fatter tires on their bikes. Amongst all the kids, only my oldest brother had a 3-speed. So, we started a round-the-block race, which in our case were not city blocks - the subdivision had a cross street only about every 12-15 homes. At the first intersection, we came to a "T" in the road, and the group headed right while I turned left at full throttle. I was looking backward over my shoulder, yelling at my brothers that they were going the wrong way (while I must have been the one going the wrong way, as everyone else turned right). The next thing I knew, I was on my back, looking into the face of a truck driver who had a terrified look on his face and tenor to his voice. As I had turned left, I had ridden my bike full-tilt right into the grille of a moving Jewel Tea truck. At that time, Jewel Tea trucks delivered small quantities of household goods, consumables, etc. to homes in the neighborhood. Sort of a low-tech Amazon delivery service. I had hit the truck and sailed over the hood, across the entire street, and landed on my back on soft grass in the ditch on the opposite side. The panicked driver was offering me, then all the kids, candy, gum, anything he had that kids might like. He kept saying, "You rode right into me! You rode right into me!" I think that he wanted to confirm to all of us kids that he hadn't driven into me, that I had ridden into him. Funny, I realize now that we never got his name, license info, or anything. I had to limp my "new" bike home, frame bent and unable to roll the back wheel. The much greater injury for me was that when my dad got home from work, I got punished in the worst possible way - he refused to fix my bike until I had learned my lesson. Six weeks with no bike in the summer.

Someone was watching out for me that day.



Daisies were our mother's favorite flower, and I can see how the plant gives everything it has to produce such a bloom, and if we were to pick one and put it on the shelf, I can see how it would muster up all of its beauty, share it with all of us, and then in sacrifice, give no more. That's how their love for all of us was - they gave us all they possibly had and could, and now we honor and thank them for that sacrifice, that love.

Neither of our parents really wanted what we're doing today, to be recognized, to be remembered in this way, but we also know how important family was to them, for us to help each other to have connections, to find connections, to make connections. Generations of relatives and their memories surround us today [at the Oak Grove Cemetery]. Please take time to walk and talk with Aunt Doris, with Joel - they know so much about our more distant cousins, our aunts and uncles, our ancestors around us. Johnsons, Pedersons, Kittelsons, Rauks, maybe a Lunde or two.

Thank you for coming and joining together in honoring Becky and Skip's lives.

From Becky's fridge:

*You are braver than you believe,
stronger than you seem, smarter
than you think, and loved more
than you know. But the most
important thing is, even if we're
apart...I'll always be with you.*

A.A. Milne, [Winnie the Pooh Library](#)



The Sacrifice Flower

From the interment service in Fergus Falls, MN - May 18, 2019

I'd like to share a little story with you today. A few weeks ago, one of our granddaughters received her first Holy Communion, the body and blood of our Lord. The priest told a story that day of how communion was really about sacrifice, and the love that sacrifice is born from. He related a story about something called "The Sacrifice Flower." "The Sacrifice Flower" is a ritual he learned about from Sister Jose Hobday, a Native American and Franciscan nun. Hobday's mother adapted the ritual from the traditions of her people, the Seneca Iroquois. She encouraged her daughter to use it to lift her burdens and give them to God. Hobday would go out and find a flower that was special to her and then lovingly bring it home. She would tell the flower what burden she wanted lifted and taken to God. "How was the flower to do this? Remember, this was a Sacrifice Flower, one that was going to die," Sister Hobday writes. "The idea was that as life went out of the flower, it would carry my prayer to God.

"This meant, of course, the flower was not to be placed in water. I had a shelf in my room that I liked to use for my Sacrifice Flower because it was sort of private, and yet I could see it as I went in and out.

"Every time I saw the flower, I could see it giving its life for me, and I could imagine my prayer being carried to the Lord.... Sometimes it took a few days, sometimes a couple of weeks. When the flower finally died, I would take it outside, say good-bye to it, and thank it for giving its life for me and for delivering my prayer. Then I would bury it so it would have a chance at a new life, and I always hoped it would come back as an even nicer flower."

I liked the story a lot, but I was pretty astonished when I researched more about that story and it turns out that other people use this story to deal with adoptions, of all things. Imagine my surprise! Adoption can be one of life's most joyous occasions, particularly for the new adoptive parents. But adoption can have a wistful and even sad side as well. Birth parents may grieve for the child they have given up, and older adoptive children may miss their birth family or home country. *Adoption is a miracle that is born out of loss.* I recently read Dr. David Kim's book. He was the Korean counterpart for Harry Holt, and David's stories of the anguish of mothers having to give up their children bears this out.

Harvestore Hang Up

I was 16 and had gotten a summer-long job working for a very busy local dairyman. My official job was to cut hay, and in between that do whatever was needed on the dairy. He had a really nice new self-propelled John Deere swather and being able to spank down huge fields at pretty high speeds, spinning 180° at the ends of the rows, was a huge treat after only using a pull-behind Hesston mower-conditioner. It was sweet, and typically occupied me for 6-7 days straight of 12-15 hour days to knock down about 400 acres of alfalfa, then do it again 28 days later. Other jobs in between included hauling chopped alfalfa to the silo blowers, or even baling or stacking small bales if they needed some baled hay in the barn for winter feeding. "Grandma" always made sure I had a good breakfast (including fried blood sausage every day) before I hit the fields. I worked alone nearly all the time, and one day I was blowing alfalfa

haylage up one of the three blue 24'X80' Harvestore structures. I knew that first unit was nearly full, so I started the electric blower, set the wagon to unload at a reasonable pace, and headed up the 80' silo to check how it was filling. It was about 6' from the center hole, and you shouldn't fill a Harvestore tight full to the top. There are two holes on the top of a



Harvestore, one in the center where the product fills, and one nearer the edge that functions both as a ventilation air release and is an access option if you fill tight up to the hole in the center. It was getting close to being filled, and if the flow was stopped even momentarily, the pipe would have plugged immediately, all the way to the ground, and with the blower and wagon running without supervision, there would have been no way for me to have scrambled 80' down before VERY significant damage was caused to the blower and unloading wagon below. I started in the center with my pitchfork, tossing haylage out toward the sides while the blower kept blowing it in fast, first from outside, on top of the structure, then I scurried down the outside hatch and furiously pulled haylage toward the outside while the blower poured it in the center. There is always the possibility of either running out of oxygen in a silo, and fermentation gases have killed more than a few people who have entered silos. I was 16, ok? Anyway, it was fast and furious work, but in the end, the load finally ran out and I was ok.

So, then what happened?

So, I dragged myself out the side hole, back up onto the roof of the Harvestore, and as we were definitely done filling that one, the top needed cleaning off. During filling, dust and chaff and leaves blow and build up on the roof of the unit, and we kept a small push broom up on top just to be able to push the stuff off and clean up a bit. No one ever intended that it would be used while standing outside the protective railings which parallel and encircle the access areas. Yes, let that sink in a minute. Outside the railings. The roof of a Harvestore structure is like the sides - shiny glass fused to steel panels, held together with bolts that have a round-headed cap nut on each one. I know the design down to the threads. So I started out pushing just a little further with each broom push, keeping one hand on the railing and pushing the broom one-handed with the other. Keep in mind that these structures are 24' in diameter. And I was trying to reach the edges with a standard little push broom. So my 16-year-old brain (having survived the filling scare) let me let go of the railing and put one foot each on the rows of bolt heads proceeding out from the center like radiating wedges. Sweeping ahead of myself worked great for a few minutes. I was proud of my fine cleaning efforts. Until a foot hit a patch of the chaff and my body flipped 90° instantly and made me think I had broken my tailbone. But only for an instant, as I was sliding at breakneck speed toward the edge of the 80' tall structure, only to have my jeans snagged by a bolt head with both legs hanging over the side. Yes, hanging over the side. Both legs. All by myself. Tractor and blower still running below me.

I just sort of hung there for a minute, contemplating my mortality, then gradually started inching my way backward, creeping back using the row of bolts for traction until I reached the access platform and railing. I went back down the silo, moved the blower to the next unit, and went for the next load, saying nothing to my boss.

Thirty-plus years later, I shared this story privately with my dad when we were talking one day. He stopped me and made me promise that I would NEVER tell this story to my mother. Dad passed away a few years later, and then mom four years after that. I never told her.

Someone was watching out for me that day.

plan. I have seen similar systems employed in India and China. Watching this young man breaking soil with a sharp tool to prepare for planting another crop was encouraging to see the potential for what soil, water and sunlight could grow, but watching him do it in bare feet was on the scary side, swinging the sharp tool into the ground only inches from his toes over and over and over. No steel-toed safety shoes here. Not even used tennis shoes.

Gratefulness

Each of these producers of food approached their work with the tools they had available to them. Each one worked hard to make the most of their land and their situation. Each inspired me to be thankful. To them for their work to produce food for the rest of the world around them, and for the incredible gifts with which I feel I've been blessed – things as simple as a cordless drill or chainsaw or tractor, but also shoes. Yes, shoes.

Moments of Grace watching these barefoot farmers.

Barefoot farming

When it comes to producing food, there are many tools that those of us who work in modern American agriculture can easily take for granted. Tractors, electrical- or gas-powered tools, whether they are pumps or string trimmers, etc. All sorts of conveniences that we scarcely give a second thought about and will even junk when we think they are not worth fixing. Take shoes, for example. “Shoes, you say? Shoes aren’t a tool.” Oh, but what if you didn’t have any?

Pumping water to raised beds

In my travel to Tanzania, I watched with curiosity as a fellow pumped water to irrigate his green plots which were for vegetable raising. He didn’t plug in an electric pump or fire up a gas engine or turn on the PTO on his tractor. No, HE pumped the water to his co-worker who directed the water to the raised beds. For hours, every day. With a pump that looked like a stair-stepper machine, with humid air in the low 80’s. With water that was most likely from the open “drains” that ran through the streets of Mwanza. Organic fertilizer included. Shoes were not included with his employment benefit package.



Double-cropping

In another instance, I watched intently as a smallholder farmer (a farmer with a very small piece of land, only an acre or two perhaps) tilled the ground below banana trees with a multi-tined hoe tool that was used like you would an adze. On the second tier, some of his land had coffee growing, and other parts had corn or other crops, including fresh vegetables. Intensely managed, every square inch with a

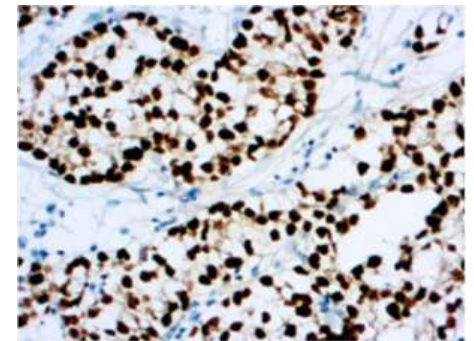


My Cancer Story

I graduated from college early and went home to farm. A year and half later, I found a lump on my right testicle. It kept getting larger and I saw a urologist, who assured me it was epididymitis, certainly not cancerous. What I needed to do was soak in a hot bath for an hour a day and take heavy duty antibiotics. We had one bathroom at the farm, and dedicating an hour a day to one person was another lesson in sharing. I come from a family of 16 children. So I did my soaking and medicating, and the lump continued to grow. I decided to seek another opinion after a couple months. I found another urologist in Green Bay and in less than a minute of palpating my lump said flatly, “you have testicular cancer and that needs to come out. Can you be back here at 7 am for surgery?” I was pretty much in shock, especially after having the other urologist reassure me that there was no way it could be cancer. I needed a little time. And for me, a third opinion. My 16-year old sister had just finished 6 months of chemo for Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and she also had had a negative local medical experience and had moved her medical work 6 hours away to Mayo. I called for an appointment and her doctor shepherded me through to a great team, who did blood work and an ultrasound and still couldn’t be sure of what I had until they did the surgery. They did the pathology while I was in surgery, and I ended up having a radical orchiectomy and the cancer was Stage 3 seminoma.

“A good type to have”

They said it was “A good type to have”. Really? I was 23 and dating a wonderful woman, but I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. They sent me home to the farm with orders to start radiation to the pelvis and abdominal spine in a month. The cancer had metastasized into a number of lymph nodes along my spine, and they thought the radiation would keep it from progressing any further. Ellen never showed that she doubted that I would survive this, and was my source of strength and faith throughout. I truly believe that she carried me



spiritually the whole time. I had started working off the farm, and I was able to work things out with my boss to leave work at 1:30 every day and drive 90 minutes each way to Milwaukee, 5 days a week, from mid-May to mid-September. It was the worst four months of my life. Nausea, terrible constant diarrhea, and the worst repeated skin burning I would ever experience. I had to change burn bandages daily front and back. They warned me beforehand that I might never have children, and that I should consider setting up a sperm bank. Ellen and I weren't to the point of talking about our life plans in those terms yet, but she had a 6-year-old son, and I figured that would be enough family for me if that was the way things turned out. Never mind that I didn't have the money for a sperm bank. Three months after the radiation was done, I asked her to marry me.

"Why am I so positive?"

Throughout my life, people have asked me why I am so positive and optimistic. I have been blessed in many ways, but that comes in hindsight. At the time, I had no way of knowing if I had a couple months or a couple years left ahead of me or what. I do know that my girlfriend never showed me anything but hope and faith. I suspect there was fear in her like there was in me, but she lit candles at church and prayed every day for us to have a long life together. They told me that we shouldn't have kids for at least two years after the radiation, and tests after two years showed that I had normal sperm as far as they could tell. Our first child came along very quickly, and our second took a little longer three years later, and, for a long time now, the feeling of being immensely blessed has greatly outweighed the fear of my life being cut short. Every child is a miracle, but these two seem like very personal miracles to me, and they have grown into such wonderful people that I really can't understand why I was the one chosen to receive such beautiful gifts. From the first time I looked into each of their little trusting eyes, I see nothing but wonder and hope and opportunity for them. Since the diagnosis over 35 years ago, I have always felt a little urgency about every new day, a special appreciation of every beautiful landscape or flaming sunset, and a great deal of thankfulness for my wife's prayers.

Someone was watching over me, and I am grateful.

office or on a team yet? I can't say whether female dogs necessarily made the best leaders, but they happened to be in that position for all of our sleds. I was a bit surprised that the physically largest dog was not placed in the lead position. I guess I had always assumed the biggest dog would be the one in the lead position. The biggest dog's name was Bear, of course, and he had an interesting personality. Having worked with and trained herding dogs, for a long time I've felt that the dogs with their tails straight up in the air and their heads up in the air are trying to show themselves as a little bigger than they really are, that they're actually displaying fear. So this big fellow, Bear, from the moment he was snapped into his harness, his head was up, his tail was up, he had a happy, fun personality, but to get him to really lean into the harness, you had to regularly give him the command to pick up the pace: "hike, hike". Bear needed pretty consistent prodding to keep him pulling in the harness. His more natural tendency was to let the harness hang slack around him, keeping pace with the team, but his head would be up, his tail would be up, and he would be looking around wanting to make sure that everyone saw him and he could see everyone else. It is absolutely not true that the biggest dog does the most work in a dogsled team. On the other hand, the small female in the lead position (I just can't bring myself to use the proper word for a dog of her gender in this case), was consistently throwing her small but entire body into the harness from the moment of the first "Hike, hike!" command to get everyone to move ahead. She knew her commands better than any of the other dogs, of course, but she was in the lead position because she had earned the respect of the other dogs and certainly of the owner.

The Lessons

Beautiful lessons for the day were:

- Some pairs don't necessarily work well together, but in the right roles and the right positions, were wonderful contributors to the successful effort in completion of our mission.
- Trust the lead dog to know and understand the commands and at the same time always be on the lookout to avoid obstructions or dangers along the trail.
- The one who makes himself most known, most seen and most visible is not necessarily the one who is throwing himself into his harness and pulling the sled the hardest, even if he's the biggest dog on the team.

Learning from a team of sled dogs

Life lessons can come from the most unusual of places, and for many of us the destinations are not as important as the memories created in the journey along the way. I had the opportunity to gain insights while hosting customer groups in activities that were connected to our annual business planning. One year we chose a sled dog excursion outside of Ely, Minnesota, almost to the Canadian border.

The Preparation

We met our professional dogsledder after having visited the National Wolf Center in Ely, where we learned a great deal about pack behavior and community. It was an eye-opener, recognizing how a wolf pack functions, works together, recognizes authority, and succeeds due to everyone understanding their positions in the pack. When we got to the dogsledder's place, we were coached on safety, winter survival skills (it was well below zero), all the dogs names, how to help the dogs by standing on a sled runner with one foot while kicking with the other in the snow, and the life or death importance of digging in your ice hook as an anchor if you were to completely get off for any reason. (If the dogs take off, they will run until they can't, not hearing a command to stop). It was a lesson to me just to learn that the dogs don't do all the work when dogsledding.

The Run

As our guide hooked up the dogs for the first stretch of the trail, he seemed to know who needed to go next to Aleu or Akita, which dog liked to be paired up with another, etc. The old saying that the scenery doesn't change much unless you're the lead dog is absolutely confirmed at this point. This is pretty graphic when you're standing behind a team of five or seven dogs. As the day went on, crossing lakes and through silent forests, periodically we had to stop and switch who was next to who, which dog was in front of a certain other one, and one interesting observation was that several times two dogs would in fact break into a flat-out fight when they were placed side by side, but if they were placed in different positions, they were excellent members of the team. Certain dogs just didn't seem to like certain other ones. Do you see the parallels to people in the



So, why am I here?

It's hard to put a finger on it, but for a long time I have had the feeling that I have a significant expectation not yet completed, that something even more wonderful is just ahead. Not an unhappiness at all, more like I'm expected to do or complete something. Perhaps a story yet to be told, a song that needs singing. My personal mission to provide food to improve people's lives and the people I meet from all around the world lift me up and bring me back for more, more. The really good people that I meet in China, Ireland, Spain, the Philippines, Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Tanzania, all over.

When I had my cancer scare and treatments, there was no internet to consult, no social media to latch onto, no fellow travelers to share my story and fears with. I wished many times that there were more resources than the bifold brochure I found at the urologist's office. I tried volunteering shortly after with a major cancer society, offering to meet or talk with young guys in my area who were going through what I had just gone through. I was told by them that they were "mainly focused on the big cancers, and really only needed people to help with fundraising." So I withdrew. Told very few people what had happened to me. Several years ago, I saw Jonny Imerman's story and service which pairs Fighters with Survivors that they call Mentor Angels. I thought, "That's exactly how I was wanting to help people, and now I can." So I signed up to be an Imerman Mentor Angel. I don't think I am an angel, because I think I may have actually met some during my years of travel, but I am happy to offer anything I can to help anyone going through what I did, just so no one faces cancer alone.

"Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny." – C.S. Lewis

Angels

Sometimes you need an angel, other times you need to be brought back down to earth.

Most of my angel moments have been amazingly uplifting and soul-filling. A couple others have fulfilled their purpose, but in a more humbling way.

1. I was on a business trip to St. Louis that required me to be in town on a Sunday morning, and I decided to attend church service at the cathedral. I was there early, and the organist/choir director was there setting up and prepping his music. I sat and listened and then got up enough nerve to mention to the director that I sang with my choir back home and read music pretty well, and that I'd love to sit in and sing with the choir that morning. He smiled, pointed to a spot in the pews right in front of the choir (but not in the choir), and suggested "Why don't you sit down right there and just sing your little heart out?" Check. Message received. 😊



2. Stopping at a small diner/old root beer stand for lunch, Ellen and I looked over the menus, asked what the soup was for the day, ordered our drinks... pretty usual routine. Our server was busy, as it appeared to be peak lunchtime for the little place. When she got back with the drinks and asked if we had decided on our lunch choices, we ordered, Ellen first, then my own, and then I offered the server the menus. Apparently, I forgot that we had picked them up from one of those slotted holders on the wall end of the booth. They left their menus there, rather than collecting and handing them out for each patron. There was just something about the timing of the way she coached me where to return the menus: "Sir, you can take those menus and shove 'em..... right back there." Check. Message received. 😊

the others enough time to even catch their breath. We continued to string out longer and longer and longer from front to back of our party with one member of our party particularly struggling under the weight of the pack and the lack of oxygen. Finally, at one of our rest breaks, our guide laid it out straight with us - we would not make it to the top, and he threatened to turn around and go straight back down if we didn't change our approach. He took the heavy pack off the struggling member of our team and placed it as a front-mounted second pack on the fastest member of our team, and then went about balancing loads throughout the rest of the climbers' loads. For the next several hours, we actually had conversations with each other, really enjoying our journey together and we crested all together at the same time. I'm sure you've already figured out the lesson, but it really was in not only sharing the load between us but in recognizing that if we didn't, our teams had a good chance of falling apart or someone not even making the journey.

It's a lesson I'll never forget.

Learning while climbing a mountain

Life lessons can come from the most unusual of places, and for many of us the destinations are not as important as the memories created in the journey along the way. I had the good fortune to host



customer groups several times in activities that were connected to our annual business planning. One year we chose to climb Mount Elbert, the second highest point in the 48 lower United States.

Our mountain climbing expedition taught numerous lessons along the way. One was realizing that getting accustomed to higher altitudes takes time. Do not go straight to altitude and expect great results. Headaches, nausea, muscle weakness, dizziness. All symptoms of rushing to inadequate oxygen levels. There were about 10 of us that climbed that day, led by a fellow who was a resident of the Breckenridge area, acclimated to the altitude (about 11,000 ft), and had been up Mount Elbert many times during his time living out west. The rest of us were in various states of conditioning, some having run and walked for months prior, but the rest of us trained almost not at all. We started up the mountain in the predawn darkness of early morning, planning that it would take us probably six hours to peak, and three hours to come back down. We were all instructed on what to bring, how much to carry, and most of us had more than we needed, but not necessarily the right things. Water was critical, as there would be nowhere to get more, and whatever we packed we would have to carry up and down the mountain side. The Mt. Elbert trail is hardscrabble, steep, but not a technical climb. Thousands of people summit Mount Elbert every year. Our guide advised us at the start that we should stick together and that we would stop every half an hour or so for a rest break. As we hit the trail it became obvious that the ones who had trained so much in advance were going to be well ahead of us in no time, which they were, and at each rest break we discovered the high-speed crew would rest briefly, and when the rest of us caught up, they would spring up saying, "All right, we're all rested. Let's go!," not allowing

Snowblind

Driving on Hwy 29 east after a meeting in Minneapolis, I had the unusual situation of having three other fellows in the car with me for the trip. Normally I traveled alone. This had been an unusual meeting, as the whole Midwest staff was summoned to Minneapolis for a meeting where they announced not only the merger of two former competitors' feed divisions, but also shared that about 700 people were being let go in the process. Some were being offered the opportunity to interview for positions in the new organization, and I ended up being rehired later into a different territory, but that's a different story. The drive home was a pretty somber one for all of us, and it was accentuated by the heavy snow coming down and blowing. I did not have an AWD vehicle, just a standard Chevy sedan, wrangling snow building up on the two-lane highway. Every vehicle that went by in the oncoming lane left you awash in blowing snow and made seeing and driving very treacherous, leaving you in a whiteout for a few seconds. Semis could be seen as they approached, but the back parts of each vehicle were invisible.



Explosion of glass

Hidden in the backwash of one, a jacked-up pickup or utility-type truck was following way too close for good visibility of their own, but maybe being up pretty high helped them. I cleared the semi OK, but suddenly in the swirling snow behind it I saw the bumper and front tire of another vehicle, way too close to my front quarter-panel, and as it went by, the second truck clipped my mirror. That sedan had a mirror that was integral to the window, and the force of the mirror being hit exploded my driver's side window into thousands of tiny glass cubes, leaving me with glass peppered into my face and hands, my lap full of small glass pieces, and everyone in the car with glass in their laps.

The truck kept going, and I was able to keep my car under control somehow and pull over after a bit. Traffic was steady in both directions, and the snowdrifts prevented me from immediately heading for the shoulder. When we were finally able to stop, I slowly swung out of my seat and shook the glass bits out of my clothes, and we wondered how we were going to complete four more hours driving with a blown-out window in a snowstorm. I dug in the trunk and took a corduroy sportcoat out of my suitcase, positioned it inside the broken window, and slammed the door to cover the opening. After picking the bigger glass bits out of my face in the mirror, we took off for the rest of the drive east. I think all four of us were thinking that if the truck had been even two inches further into our lane, we would have been in much worse shape. I never even wanted to think how much worse it easily could have been; I just accepted that we either got lucky or were blessed.

Someone was watching out for me that day.

of her new bulletin board along with a few other photos, letting us know that she was settling in. As parents, we were misty-eyed, thinking of how one sibling was so lifted up by the hard work and habits of another that they would use their example in this way, in this setting, trying to instill habits of coming at each day with a positive mindset, and encouraging every person along the way to do the same.

Ellen came up with an idea: *take her lettering and get a local t-shirt company to put it on shirts for all the kids in her class.* We sent the photo to one of Meghan's friends who happened to be a graphic artist, had her wrap the text so it fit on a shirt better, and the product is shown here. We had 40+ shirts made - one for every kid in her class (neon green and neon pink), one each for us adults, for Meghan and her aide, and we made enough so that it became a group present for each of our other grown kids and all the grandkids. Meghan's classroom aide was in tears, the kids were ecstatic, we were thrilled, and the elementary school principal asked if we could do it for every kid in school. Her aide confided that this was probably the first completely new article of clothing that a number of the kids would have ever had. We did our family Christmas photos in the shirts, and son Nick wore his to work at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago so much that he pretty much wore it out.



Although Meghan moved on to teach 5th and 6th grade science as she had wanted, Ellen and I visited her former elementary school the next year. We just wanted to go back and say hi to her wonderful classroom aide, the woman who had helped Meghan in so many ways during her first year in the classroom. Sure enough, several kids had on their Make It A Great Day shirts in the hallway, headed for lunch.

Make a difference.

How our daughter, Meghan, used the theme

Our daughter finished a great college run, marching in the band, doing well in her classes, double majoring, working all the way through, and graduated mid-year. She realized that she had neglected to plan her next phase, as in, "what was her job or career going to be?" She applied for Teach for America, a highly selective teaching program where you agree to teach in a disadvantaged school setting somewhere in the U.S. for two years, paid the starting wage for a teacher in that area, but placed in whatever geographic location and subject that had the greatest need. Some placements are inner city urban, some rural, but all are in dire need of energy and passion to help underserved communities and kids. Her major was not in education, but she had prepared for her TFA experience by training and student teaching in a 5th grade science experience in Los Angeles. Then she got surprised by being assigned to little kids, not the middle school math or science that she had requested. Her first placement was in an inner city Pre-K, 3-4 year old Early Childhood program in a pretty rough neighborhood in Kansas City, MO. Kansas City's school district had recently been completely decertified by the state as a functioning school system. Schools were being closed and some re-opened as charter schools, but the district was basically a wreck. She came at it with a healthy mix of fear and a burning desire to make a difference in her classroom.

Onward and upward to KC...

So, Meghan arrived to her classroom a few days before the start of school, and looking at the bare room, she decided to immediately dress up the bulletin boards, and on one she was going to take inspiration from her big brother and use the board to present progress and successes, and she used hand-drawn, block, balloony letters to spell out "Make It A Great Day" across the top. In the first few weeks, she explained to her young charges that if they also worked to make every day a great day, that they could start to overcome and reposition some of the hardships they experienced, that it was a great habit and way to encourage others and sometimes even convince yourself when you weren't having a great day. Keep in mind that 6 of her 26 little people were learning English as a second language, and 3 of her kids would spend the entire academic year with their family living in a homeless shelter, i.e., no permanent home setting. She had shared photos

Hand on my shoulder – up north

I went to our place up north to work by myself on several projects, and one of the chores to finish before I went back home was to mow the lawn. Simple enough, and normally goes pretty quick if all the equipment runs well. Some of the grass is out in the open, and some is under some good-sized trees, and there are a couple of acres to take care of. On this occasion, I was in a bit of a hurry for some reason, but just going about my business.

Mowing one of the paths between trees, and with trees overhead also, I was cruising forward when suddenly I felt pulled backward physically, like a hand had been placed on my chest and pulled me backward while my head echoed with a voice yelling "BACK UP!" I instinctively stomped on the hydro drive pedal in reverse, and narrowly, I mean by a couple inches, missed being slammed by a long log the diameter of my head, now lying in the path in front of me. Shaking, I got off the tractor and wrangled it back off the path and into the woods. It was heavy, and unexplainable. I hadn't seen it when it was in the air above, and I couldn't really tell even where it came from. All I know is that I was pulled back, physically helped, that day.



Someone was watching out for me that day.

Hand on my shoulder – staying safe

A few times each year I need to take big junk to our local recycling center. Metal stuff - old fencing, pipe, or a tank or the like. Either in the truck, or on this occasion, I needed my large trailer to haul the stuff. Going to the recycling center is always a great chance to catch up on the most local of news - what's going on in our township. The exit heading out of the recycling center is wide open from a visibility standpoint, level, two driveways, allowing for entering and exiting vehicles to each have a space, and you can see way up and down the road in front easily. Ideal, really. I pulled up to the stop sign at the exit, looked left, looked right, and was putting my foot on the gas to pull out when I felt a hand on my shoulder again, urgently pulling me back, and this time I heard a loud "Look left again!" I slammed on my brakes at the sound and the feeling, and there on my left was a big Harley or GoldWing, full speed just a few car-lengths from my truck and trailer.

Someone was watching out for me that day. And the motorcycle driver.



How "Make It A Great Day!" Came to Life

Son Nick had his heart set on becoming a doctor way back into his high school years. On a college tour in a biology lab, he had held a preserved human brain in his hands, and said later that that was his visual as he set about preparing for med school, a palpable memory set in his mind. Nick had to work his tail off in both college and med school, studying and reading for countless hours, studying with flashcards and every tool he had ever picked up on to burn all the myriad details into his memory. There are tiny woven wire cages in UW-Madison's Memorial Library upper levels, placed there for extreme private studying in the stacks of books. Nick would cleverly unscrew the single light bulb in one of them, virtually guaranteeing that his cage would be empty when he needed it.

Somewhere along the way, he had heard the story that when you greet people with "Have a nice day," or "Have a great day," that there was nothing there that nudged you to take any action or take responsibility to make it happen, so he had taken to saying "Make it a great day!" whenever he ended a conversation, voice mail, or email message. It became his trademark, and he would occasionally get ribbed about it in college or at med school. He just knew that if you said "Make it a great day," there was an implied action step there for the recipient, and a reminder to himself to turn setbacks into comebacks, trials and tests into celebrations, even turning bad news into appreciating having just one more day. No matter what the medical situation was that he had to share with a patient or concerned family members, he had committed to himself that he was going to make it be an optimistic or positive journey.



The three questions that the soldier halted me to ask

Create a picture in your mind of an eastern bloc soldier during the Cold War, rifle up, challenging you with the wind swirling about the two of you. He's in your face, his wool coat steaming in the snow and sleet. You want to cross the bridge, and he blocks you, demanding:

Who are you?!?

Where are you going?!?

What are you doing?!?

Can you even answer him truthfully? Do you know who you are, truly? And can you convince him of where you're going? Really? What's your evidence? "Show me your papers!", he demands. And what are you doing to progress toward your real destination? You know, the one you haven't shared with anyone except maybe those closest to you, in your circle of trust. What steps have you taken to prepare yourself and commit? What evidence can you show if called upon to produce it? What have you done today to reinforce your answers?

Think of that soldier from time to time - the mental picture will help you remember the questions much better than trying to write the questions down and remember them:

Who are you?!?

Where are you going?!?

What are you doing?!?

"When your PURPOSE, TALENTS and HAPPINESS intersect, you'll give like you never thought you would, and no matter how big or small, you will change the world." [Author unknown] Who are you? What makes you happy? Answer these simple questions and your world, the world changes.



Hand on my shoulder - comforting

My cousin's wife contracted pancreatic cancer in her 30's. They had 3 beautiful young daughters, and the fight was gallant, but in the end, she lost the battle. Seeing her at home in a hospital gown, IV's wheeling around, trying to go about her day, was a hard thing for everyone to experience. She never gave up, and my cousin, Andy, was so full of faith and grace and hope all during the year she was undergoing treatment. He is a great inspiration to me and many others, as his faith is so solid.

Connecting

Andy drives semi on a route system at night and has for years, and through the years, when I've been traveling late at night, I would call him and we'd talk about everything from the weather to the traffic, or family catch-up, or even

what our hopes and goals and fears were. Having gone through cancer treatments myself, I talk about the process more openly than some people might, so we have become very closely connected over the years. One night we were talking, both of us hands-free, of course, and after a few minutes I asked where he was tonight, and he said he was off his normal route (from Madison to either Chicago or Milwaukee) and had been asked to cover another driver's route from Madison to LaCrosse and back. "No kidding!", I said. "I'm on my way to Mankato and I'm on I-90 between Madison and LaCrosse right now!" "Get out of here! What mile marker are you at?", he asked. I gave him the mile marker, and as it turned out, we passed each other going opposite directions less than a minute later, blinking lights to each other. Great coincidence. :-)

His dad, my uncle, pulled me aside at a family function once and said, "Hey, you know how you call Andy once in a while?" I didn't know that anyone else knew about our chats, but I answered "Yes?" "Keep doing that, OK?", he said. And here I thought I was the one



getting the benefit of our talks as I always felt better after our calls. My uncle passed away the next year.

The funeral...

Andy asked me to sing a very special song at his wife's funeral when it came time. It was a song that they had especially enjoyed listening to together, one that meant a great deal to both of them. *There Will Be A Day* tells the story that one day, the tears will stop, the day when we see Jesus face to face. It would be the toughest song I ever sang, both from knowing the family and the situation, and the amazing story the song tells. It also is a song that has a wonderful presence of emotion built right into it, the mechanics and delivery can be powerful. I practiced it relentlessly, and I was determined to deliver it in my professional best way possible, detaching myself as best I could, to bring the power and grace to Andy and his girls that day. As the introduction to the song built up, I could feel at first a sweat coming over me, a great lump building in my throat, just feeling the emotion of their loss overwhelming me. At precisely the right moment, I had a feeling of peace on my neck and shoulders, a gentle touch relaxing me, a breath of air even, like a small fan had just turned on somewhere, but of course there was none. I delivered what is quite probably the best song delivery I have ever done, voice full, every emotion full and then drained from me by the end.

I told my wife about the experience afterward, and she calmly shared that she could see the emotion building in me, overcoming me, and that she had prayed right then that the Holy Spirit would comfort me, calm me, bring me peace and let me do the song for Andy and his girls.

Someone was watching over and helping me that day, and I am grateful.

Looking for the goodness

Here's a lesson we can all learn from a child's point of view. Recently, we were helping for a weekend with a couple of our grandkids. Our grandson, Emerson, 5, had a pretty great thought.

Here goes the exchange with his dad:

Em: Holding one up, Em asks, "Dad, can I have a Fruit Roll-up?"

Son Nick: "How about we wait until after lunch, Em, ok?"

Em: Takes the Fruit Roll-up back to the pantry, comes back a couple minutes later with the Fruit Roll-up unwrapped and unfurled. Holding it up so Dad can see the whole thing, he says ***"Look, Dad, see? There's all kinds of goodness in there!"***

I almost snorted my coffee out my nose. Can't argue with that, now can you? Apparently, all you have to do is look for the goodness in things and everything suddenly becomes clear and obvious.

Grandkids are great. Make it a great day!

Gather and hold on to your moments of Grace.



woman cannot produce enough breastmilk, they bring their child to the baby home, leaving their baby with the home until they can eat solid food. I must have looked a little shocked by this, so she explained to me that baby formula costs at least \$60 per month, and the average wage for a worker in Tanzania is only about \$40, hence there is no way for most to purchase formula, plus the water is unhealthy for mixing formula. Other babies were from unplanned pregnancies or women who lived in the streets, and they would bring them to the baby home hoping they would be adopted, but also might return when they or the mother's family could cope with them as an older child. On the day I was there, several children had just returned from being seen by doctors at Bugando Medical Center, perhaps by my son. ***Here is the heart of my story:*** I have 13 adopted siblings, 8 from countries outside the U.S. As I stood in the midst of at least 30 cribs, and then knelt in the playground and was mobbed by dozens of smiling, chattering toddlers in the playground, I could only feel the tears well up inside me and my throat choking closed, realizing that any one of my adopted siblings could have started in a place like this, and likely one not nearly as nice and clean and loving as this place was. Every single smiling child wanted to touch me, and I couldn't hug them all at once, but I tried!

Truly this place was filled with the Grace of God. It was palpable. I will never forget the experience and the feeling. Lessons from Mwanza. Moments of Grace.

Early morning fog bank

October 11, 2002. Early that morning, Ellen and I packed up our things and we were headed for the airport in Milwaukee. We left before breakfast, but thought that we would eat once we got to the airport. Ellen likes to be at the airport well ahead of what I normally do, but there are several times that has worked to our benefit. Just before we got on the interstate, I insisted that I just needed a quick donut from the convenience store, even though she didn't want me to delay us. As we got on the interstate, there was more low fog, as I-43 runs along Lake Michigan's coastline pretty tight in some areas. A few miles south of Sheboygan, the fog really started getting heavy, we slowed down a lot, and I had to hit my brakes hard as I saw a vehicle in front of me pull over and the driver jumped out and frantically waved us to get off the highway at the exit ramp. I rolled down the window to ask what was up and they just screamed "Get off the highway! There's a huge pileup just ahead! Get off now!"

We took a meandering parallel way on back roads south and got back on I-43 a few miles later. One of the kids called us, as they knew our morning schedule, and they wanted to know if we had seen the big pile-up. We had not. They said it was all over the news, that there was a



big pileup in the fog near Oostburg. People who experienced it said it was suddenly a "wall of fog", and we can attest to that. In the end, there were 50 vehicles involved, 10 deaths, and 39 injured. The first responder who waved us off the highway turned out to be our lifesaver that day, but the donut played a part, too. Had I not stopped for the donut, we would have been at that spot 2-3 minutes sooner, and never have seen the first responder.

Days and weeks later, I would learn that a fellow I used to work with was driving an LP delivery truck that exploded at the scene, leaving him burned over 75% of his body, but miraculously alive, and a high school classmate of mine narrowly avoided the vehicles, but found himself way up the hill alongside the scene, having gone through a barbed wire fence into the plowed field.

Someone was watching out for us that day.

Did you have a good day?

"This is my little dog, Angel. He helps me on my walks. I live nearby." The old man sent a wave of calm over me as I started my conversation with him, window rolled down, furiously trying to turn around midway in the intersection he was crossing. I was so angry, lost, late for something, van full of family in my rearview mirror. Pre-GPS, I was trying to get to the interstate to head north, and somehow I had gotten screwed up in a neighborhood and couldn't find the street that would take me there. I was fuming, and everyone in the car knew it.



I snapped at him, "Can you tell me how to get to the interstate going north?" His calmness continued as he asked me, "Did you have a good day?" I continued pressing him, demanding, just wanting him to tell how to get to the interstate, and fast. "But did you have a good day?", he asked again. Aargh, what difference does it make?? "I don't really drive anymore, so I don't know very well. Did I tell you about my son, David?" I guess it's a common enough name, but a little strange to me that this calm soul in front of me decided now was the time to share his family details, and his son's name was the same as mine. "No, you didn't tell me about your son, David," I responded. "He works at a big grocery store two blocks up, then you turn left, and just past it is the interstate," he shared, then continued, "so, did you have a good day?"

I thanked him, finished turning around and headed the direction he had directed. Sure enough, there was the grocery store, there was the ramp onto the interstate. For much of the way home, my wife and family kept talking about the little old man. How strange it was that his dog happened to be named "Angel". How strange that his son was named "David." How strange that he said he didn't really know the way, and then he did. But strangest of all was the way he calmed me, asking "But did you have a good

diagnostic tool at hand. The birthing room was a large open room with at least 10-12 women in various stages of labor on gurneys, all going through their deliveries in the company of each other and the medical personnel moving about. I helped a new young mother in the hallway as she struggled to get her twin babies situated for the first time in her kanga, the sling/wrap used by Tanzanian mothers to carry their babies. Struggling, yet smiling. Like so many people I met in Tanzania.



While enjoying a hot breakfast and wonderful coffee at my hotel, I noticed that the fellow who maintained the fresh fruit on the buffet and smiled so warmly to every guest had what I thought were the exact same Merrell trail runners that I really enjoyed. I complimented his choice of footwear. He was so proud to show them off to me, and I noticed that his were slightly different than mine – they were retreaded with actual tire treads. He took the cast-off, worn-out shoes from some American or European and put entirely new treads on them! As the trip went on, I realized that virtually all the people I saw wore what was sold by street vendors – used clothing that arrived in huge bales from overseas and got taken apart and sorted for sale by different specialized vendors – baby clothes, shoes, jeans, everything we only buy new or perhaps in a resale shop.

I checked with my hotel to see if I could visit an orphanage near the city, and I located a place that actually specialized in only babies, a "baby home" as they called it. They only kept kids up to 5 years of age. If they were still there at 5, they were transferred to a different orphanage. It was started and run by a woman from England, and she explained to me that if a Tanzanian



Life Lessons

Lessons from Mwanza

A few years ago, I had the incredibly fortunate opportunity to “follow” one of my sons to Tanzania. He was a new young doctor in the midst of his pediatric residency, and his resident program included a 6-week rotation at the Bugando Children’s Medical Center in Mwanza, Tanzania. My wife encouraged me to follow him to Africa and join him for some time together when his rotation experience was done. He had recently married and she said, “You may never get a chance like this again to spend some time with him. He’ll be incredibly busy when he returns and so will you. Do it!”

So I did. The entire experience was one of our best times ever together, and filled me with admiration for him and his commitment to pediatric medicine. It also gave me the opportunity for me to learn first-hand about more of our world. When I first arrived, I set up at a hotel in a different part of Mwanza than where my son was, as the hospital had the 3 residents staying in a very spartan, downtown building operated more like a hostel than a hotel. His residency program rotated 2-3 residents every 6 weeks to Tanzania, and several times each year would send a medical student to Chicago for an exchange experience. The small hotel I chose was extremely reasonable, comfortable and immaculate, situated 50 yards from beautiful Lake Victoria. An amazing blessing in itself.

We had tried several Skype calls with him prior to my arrival, and the cultural differences began to show when we had to adjust to the fact that our son’s calls could only be made from one spot in a hallway of the hospital because the internet was so poor. Medical records were on yellow legal pads. There often there wasn’t enough oxygen for the kids who needed it, or they had to make decisions about which antibiotic to use in place of the one they preferred. Sometimes parents had to take their children back home and wait to be contacted when the parts came in for the broken CT scanner, even if they had walked to the clinic, carrying their child for perhaps days. The residents did learn lessons in how to provide medical treatment and comfort even when they didn’t have every treatment or

day?” I did, in fact, but it took a change of heart for me to realize that I had. We did have a good day that day - we had been to Irish Fest as a family, enjoyed the music and the chance to be together. We had a very good day, in fact.

But maybe it took a little old man and his dog, Angel, to make me realize and remind me of that. Again and again. Thanks, Angel.

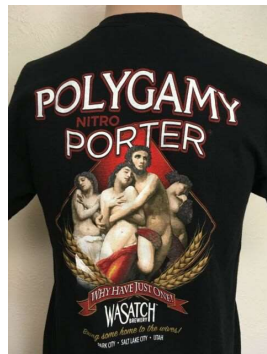
Did you have a good day?

Pub Cabin Music and Beer Therapy

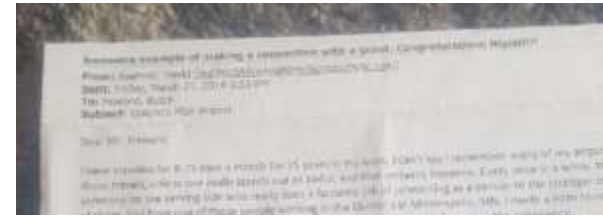
Having just come back from Utah, my brother-in-law brought a 6-pack of Wasatch Brewing's Polygamy Porter to a big music jam that we held in our backyard. It's apparently a very dark beer, and uses the catchphrase "Why have just one?" I thought it was kind of unusual (the beer name, I mean), and no, I had not had it nor heard of it before (the beer). Our Pub Cabin Music Jam was publicized via invite over a couple months, and I worked to get local musicians to join us just for some good food, drink, and making music. Over 100 people attended.



One fellow I invited had played mandolin over the years, but said he had really stopped playing. After a pretty substantial amount of coaxing, said that he would come, but probably not play. At the party, after having been there for half an hour or so, he walked up and said to me that he had been in a pretty dark place for the past few years, and really had pretty much given up on life, but that he appreciated the invitation. In fact, he was so glad that he had come, because there was something about the day that made him feel like he had reached a significant turning point right there, right at our Music Jam. He could feel that life was turning around for him, and he could feel so much positive energy that he felt rejuvenated, uplifted. You know what was stranger? He came to the party wearing a Polygamy Porter t-shirt, and said that he had never been to Wasatch Brewing, but his nephews liked to bring funky t-shirts back from their travels for his collection. Strange coincidence. Huh.



Strange coincidence, or a moment of Grace?



After I sent the note, Nigisti left me a voicemail that I really appreciated. In the voicemail, she thanked me for the note, and let

me know that she had been singled out in front of the entire airport staff for the highest honor her company gives each year. She lifted me up that evening while making my sandwich, I thanked her, and she lifted me up again. Who benefits more? You? Or the person receiving the lift? Take time to say thanks, even to the most unlikely of people you might meet.

"How R U doing?"

She continues to send me text messages every few months just to check how I'm doing. When I wanted to chronicle our encounter to share the story and the lesson I learned, I asked her, "By chance did she still have the note that I had sent?" It had long ago been purged from my emails by our automated corporate document management system. She did have it, though, five years later. I guess I shouldn't doubt that we can have an impact on people we meet, just as they make an impact on us.

"How R U doing?"

She recently sent me a very short text: **"How R U doing?"** That's all it said. "How R U doing?" It came on my birthday. I do not share my birthday on any social media or the like. How could she have known the date? The sandwich maker who made my supper back in 2014. I answered her back, "I'm doing OK, Nigisti." I'm doing ok. And thank you.

A Moment of Grace? Without a doubt.

“How R U doing?”

In March of 2014, I went and found the contact information for the Hospitality Manager at Minneapolis-St. Paul airport and sent him the note (shown below) after an experience I had with a late night sandwich maker. Her nametag just said “Nigisti”.

Mr. Butch Howard, HMSHost Sr. Director of Operations, Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul Area

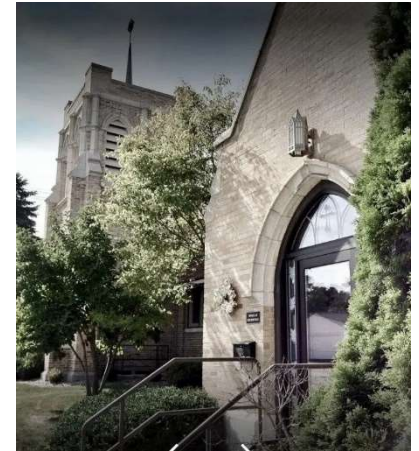
I have traveled for 8-15 days a month for 25 years in my work. I can't say I remember many of my airport meals during those travels, unless one really stands out as awful, and that certainly happens. Every once in awhile, though, you meet someone on the serving side who really does a fantastic job of connecting as a person to the stranger standing in front of them. You have one of those people working in the Quizno's in Minneapolis, MN. I made a note to myself to let you know, and I almost forgot to send you the note, but I certainly have not forgotten the experience.

On February 28th, I had the good fortune to meet a woman named Nigisti who works there. It was very slow when I came through pretty late that evening, and I got chatting a little with her. I learned that she was originally from an area not far from a place [in eastern Africa] that I will be traveling to in May, and she gave me some tips on traveling there, along with a peek inside her native culture that led to her name. I learned that she had lost her father not too long ago, just as I did a little over a year ago. I am certainly still carrying that loss, while at the same appreciating how much he did for me as I grew up, even though I'm 55 now. She seemed to sense that in me – Nigisti possesses an amazing ability to connect quickly on a very special level, and I wanted you to know that you have someone very special on your staff. She does not just make sandwiches – she touches peoples' hearts.

Please thank her for me, and know that she does way more than make sandwiches every day at Quizno's.

Palm Sunday Miracle

Our little St. Peter's Church had beautiful stained-glass windows. It had a small organ, small choir, but we made good music. Our pastor always believed that we could do big things, even if our congregation was small. Even though it was a task that should be performed by a deacon, he taught me how to sing (chant) the Great Litany during Lent, and it remains one of my favorite service elements of the church year. The significance of The Great Litany is deep: It is the oldest original English language rite, dating to 5th century Romans, it is all-encompassing and focuses prayers for ourselves and for the world, and it is the strongest way to begin “keeping a Holy Lent.”



After the service on Palm Sunday, one of our traditions was to strip all the vestments from the altar, and cover all the icons in the entire nave and sanctuary with purple drapes, to be lifted off on Easter. Our parish was very "Catholic" in a sense - they had a very visible Mary shrine, with many votive candles below her. It is believed that sometime the night of Palm Sunday, one of the purple cotton drapes fell from Mary, and onto the burning candles below. It smoldered and smoked, filling the sanctuary with smoke and keeping the fire as a slow burn. Eventually, the fire slowly spread to the floor and first pews near Mary, but continued as a slow fire, almost like coals or embers, they would say later. The heat within, though was so great as to have melted and distorted the brass candelabras standing on the altar nearby. Late that night, a person who lived nearby was passing by the church and noticed what they thought were some low lights on in the church, and when they peered in a window, saw that there flames near the floor in the corner. They called 911, and the firefighters described the blaze as amazing that it was so hot, yet so muffled by the smoke itself, and they were able to contain it with mostly foam, avoiding lots of water damage, but they had to break out a single stained-glass window by the Mary shrine to get at the source. Opening a main door would likely have caused a huge backdraft and immediate spontaneous combustion explosion. In the end,

there was lots of smoke damage, several pews and the floor caved into the basement near the Mary shrine, but a lot less structural damage than the firemen expected to find.

The Mary statue hung on a standard plaster and lath wall, not a brick wall, and immediately on the back side of that plaster wall was the sacristy, a small anteroom where some of the nicest ones of the pastor's vestments were kept in big, flat drawers, and on top of those drawers, just lying on the top of the table, were the candles set up in preparation for the upcoming Easter services following Holy Week, basically directly behind Mary. Remember that the sanctuary was hot enough to have distorted and melted brass candelabras. Behind a simple wood door and plaster wall, the Paschal Candle lay unblemished. Not melted, not marked, not damaged in any way. We held our Easter Vigil and Easter weekend services at a neighboring church down the street, and we used the Paschal Candle that had been prepped the week before.

Thank you, angels.

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Share a Compliment-General Feedback-Other General Feedback
I met a wonderful young man today, and I just wanted to share my experience. I don't know if he is a full-fledged Delta employee or a contractor, but he connects very well with people and deserves to be recognized as a sincere and positive contributor in the airport there in Atlanta. He was in the B terminal I believe between B24 and B32 perhaps, promoting the Delta credit cards today. His name is Mikel (not sure of spelling), and while I usually brush these folks off after years of frequent travel, he seemed really sincere and pleasant, so I talked with him a bit. He really did want to know more about me, and in just a few minutes, I really felt lifted up by just having had the chance to meet him. He is a really decent guy, and I thank him for being there today. Nice job, Mikel. The world can be a thankless place sometimes, but you are making a difference just by showing interest in people you meet.

Hello David,

RE: Case 02059332

Thank you for writing us regarding your experience with Mikel, one of our American Express vendors in the Atlanta airport. While our American Express vendor team work hard every day, I was very pleased that Mikel left such an impression on you. This is the impact we want our employees to make on our passengers.

We are glad that your experience exceeded your expectations. I have forwarded your kind words to our Airport Customer Service Leadership team so they can commend Mikel for his exemplary customer service and also use him as an example for others to follow.

Regards,

Curtis C. Speziale Jr
Customer Care

Mikel

Mikel had a very slight build, I guessed 25-ish, with an engaging smile and an earnestness about him that I found difficult to ignore. While I usually quickly say "No, thank you..." to the credit card promoters in the airport terminal, or just try and avoid making eye contact, Mikel was serious about wanting to engage people. After I spoke with him a bit, his seriousness might also be able to be seen as unusual drive to make his day happen. I suspected that he had come from a state of very deep poverty, and I was correct as I learned more about him. He asked what I did, and when I said that I was in my own business as a consultant, he right away asked how I might help him be more successful in his own quest to be a global consultant, that he was trying to get started. I tried to share that my own network of contacts that made up my initial business came from 35+ years of work in a somewhat specialized field, and that you can't create that experience any other way than by a lot of years doing something, but that he should believe in his own success as very possible if he keeps engaging people the way he did me.

After we talked about his goals and ambitions, he asked me how I stayed so positive and optimistic while starting a new business. I explained that much of it for me comes from having faced threats to my life and survived, and that those experiences make me value the people and relationships I'm allowed to enjoy and develop, even some as short as the one I shared with him, that his perseverance was infectious. He then shared that he had grown up in a war-torn place in eastern Africa, and I expect that one of the reasons he was so small was due to really poor nutrition for many of his early years. He had seen horrible things happen around him, had lost the sight in one eye, and he felt really lucky to be able to pursue his dreams in America, that many people he knew when he was young would never have the opportunities he now had.

Thank you, Mikel, for lifting me up that day. I sent him a note to say thanks.



Adoration of the Eucharist

Catholics have a type of service where the celebrant places the Eucharist (aka "host") in a gold stand (aka monstrance) on the altar for viewing and prayer. The monstrance has a circle of glass in the center to hold and display the host. The timing and frequency of these varies from one parish to another. I converted as an adult, and it was my first time attending a service which included a time of Eucharistic Adoration. While I don't recall the event which triggered this period of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at our church, I recall the following observations with exact clarity:

I like to sing in the choir. Our choir is located at the back of our church, on risers up high in the balcony where our pipe organ dominates the upper level. The drawback is that you are 100+ feet away from the altar. I love singing in the choir, but it does disconnect me from both my family attending below, and also from an up close and personal view of the activities going on at the altar.

Trying to figure out the light...

As I looked down at the altar throughout the service, I was intrigued and my eyes kept returning to how the stand holding the Eucharist had a light emanating from the center. It had what I thought was an LED level of yellow-gold brightness, and I assumed that there was a very bright little bulb in the center, illuminating the stand and host for all to be able to pick out amongst the candles, chalice and other items on the altar and in the sanctuary. I wondered if it possibly had a tightly focused spotlight from the side, reflecting off a polished gold plate in the center. My mind worked throughout the service to try and explain the brightness. When I went downstairs after the service, I asked our priest to show me the stand, and I explained what I had been seeing from up in the choir loft. He showed me the somewhat dull brass holder with its little glass host-sized center window which was empty now. No light. No brightness. Explain it however you or I might try afterward, but I know what I saw.



Thank you, angels. A Moment of Grace.

Easter weekend in Shenyang

On one of my China trips, I finished my China business in Shenyang, and had the weekend before I continued on to Japan on Monday. Easter weekend as it turned out. Easter is not a big holiday across China, but this one was an especially reflective and spiritual one for me as it turned out. I took a short train ride from Changchun to Shenyang, and I had read ahead about a very special museum located there. It is the home of the 9.18 Museum, a chilling museum which tells such an important story, commemorating September 18, 1935, the day Japanese forces invaded China and subsequently occupied Shenyang and the surrounding peninsula. It displays disturbing photos depicting the carnage of war. The exhibition is cruel, but it tells the critically important history of the early-mid 20th century between Japan and China and how important the peace is. I visited the museum on Saturday, and it was a somber learning experience with my Chinese guide. I now can completely understand why the Chinese are distrustful still of Japanese people.

Shenyang is also the home of the largest Catholic cathedral in China, the Sacred Heart or NanGuan Cathedral. It turned out that it was only two or three blocks from the hotel I had chosen in the heart of the city. Friday was Good Friday, and I walked over to the cathedral to

check it out and say a quiet prayer. When I got back to my room, it was just coming up on sunset, and through the incredibly dirty windows, I looked out on the silhouette of three construction cranes that instantly had me thinking of the three crosses, outlined at dusk. Easter Sunday service was the absolute most packed, standing-room only service I have ever experienced, the organ music was great, and I stood out like an albino moose in a herd of reindeer, head and shoulders taller than any other person there, and easily the whitest. They were kind, but that is most certainly not the way to just "blend in" with the local population. All in all, a tremendously spiritual and introspective Easter weekend.



had 15 siblings, so I immediately connected with this gentle man). He came to Vegas I believe in 1963, and I learned about his having done the shoes and boots for Sammy Davis, Jr., Frank Sinatra and others. We shared our mutual appreciation for taking good care of nice shoes if you are able to own them, and how the values of taking good care of, and connecting to people can really help him appreciate his work. He did an absolutely terrific job making my shoes presentable, but he did an even greater good by putting a little polish and shine on my day, just as I was getting started for doing some business.

If you can figure out who the man was with the great talent of taking good care of both shoes and people, please pass along my thanks and let him know he does make a difference for people. Not just with their shoes – I have had my shoes shined hundreds of times in 25 years of travel, but never have I remembered the day, the person, and the learning afterward.

Thank you.

A moment of Grace.

Shoeshine, sir?

"Shine 'em up? How are you doing today?"

In my travels for work, I experienced numerous moments where I was pretty sure there was a helper by my side. It was a huge comfort and yet always ended up being a surprise for me when those events happened. Whenever I have the chance, I really enjoy complimenting the people along the way who help me or I can see make an impact on people day in and day out. If I can pass the compliment along via their boss or their spouse, so much the better! This gentleman was doing his daily work in Las Vegas, inside a casino, yet he took advantage of his spot to positively impact people again and again. I let his manager know in the letter that follows:

*Letter to the General
Manager – Mirage Hotel and
Casino, Las Vegas, NV*

*I just spent the past 36 hours
in Las Vegas for an industry
meeting, and I only had one
night at The Mirage, but it
was very pleasant and I
thought I'd let you know. I'm*

*the president of a small manufacturing company in Wisconsin. We employ
65 people in the organization and serve the dairy farming industry.*

*I'd like to tell you about a wonderful member of your staff whom I met
yesterday. Due to the schedule I laid out for myself, I had to head for the
airport in Milwaukee at 4 am and I planned to shave, change, and generally
feel human after I arrived at The Mirage. After I checked in and changed, I
noticed that my shoes were just completely gruffy and not ready for two
days of industry meetings. I asked downstairs, and one of your staff pointed
toward a shiny-tiled men's room on the main floor as they thought there was
a shoeshine stand there. I am mad at myself that I did not ask his name
when I met the gentleman manning the stand. Perhaps if I describe him, you
will be able to recognize him. He is probably in his 60's, and I learned that he
grew up on a farm with 9 kids in his family. (I was also raised on a farm and*



Fly-in Visitor

In 2019, I had the chance to finally meet Rocky Elton, a former classmate of my late uncle Darell (who also happened to be a classmate of my mother's). Rocky also was Darell's college classmate at the University of Minnesota, both of whom were on the Varsity football team as freshmen. Darell enlisted in the Air Force in 1953. He was killed in Georgia during a test flight of a new Air Force jet design. Rocky and I were scheduled to meet, and as we arrived and stepped out of the car at his home, Rocky looked down and saw a gray pigeon sitting on the grass near us. "Well, will you look at that! I used to raise homing pigeons, and I haven't had any in over 5 years! This one showed up just a few minutes ago, and it's one that I raised - it has my band on its leg. I think it's Darell come to visit."



Angels. Moments of Grace.

Our dad's last week

After a year of enduring a multitude of procedures, chemo, and radiation for his bladder cancer, Dad was sent home from the hospital with hospice support after his ureters became blocked in the end. Doctors estimated he had a week as his kidneys backed up, but he had decided, with a great deal of discussion and forethought, that if this happened, he did not want any more surgeries or the rest of his time to be spent in a nursing home. His call.

He had been our mom's caregiver for several years as her Alzheimer's progressed, and she really didn't process what all was happening, but she still had smiles for all her children who came to spend some final time with Dad. He appreciated the visit from his next younger brother at the hospital to say final goodbyes, and you could see that there was peace between them, washing away whatever it was that had caused a rift in their family for decades. He was extremely relaxed and thankful, almost blissful, when I shaved him at the hospital and he could just enjoy the warm washcloth on his face afterward. Funny how it's the simplest things that can produce joy in these times.

Hospice helped set up a hospital-type bed in their living room, and we settled in with the fire crackling, and Dad was able to switch easily from family memories in one direction and gazing out on the pond they had come to enjoy so much in their retirement years. The days went by quickly together, catching up with siblings, preparing meals together, with Dad having less and less interest in food as the days went by. In the final hours, we sang songs together, held his hand, told him one more time about our favorite memories together and how much we loved him. He came from that greatest generation, the generation that grew up immersed in the Depression, graduating high school only to go straight into military service, then raising a family through the turbulent '60's, and his case, working to help put a man on the moon. He had survived two decades of farming, and kept learning new skills his entire life - sewing and becoming a paramedic were two he added during retirement.

The day he would pass away, there had been a steady, beautiful snowfall, building up over a foot of new snow - the thick, fluffy snow that hangs and piles up on every spruce bough and twig. His breathing continued to

Hotte tumbide

I had the wonderful opportunity to visit India in 2019. My first stop was in Tiptur, Karnataka, about 3 hours' drive west of Bengaluru. They speak a language called Kannada there. *Hotte tumbide* (sounds like "otay toomiday") is a Kannada phrase that means "Full stomach". When I learned the phrase, I had just finished a very filling lunch meal with 5-6 Karnatakan fellows, and while I indeed had a full stomach from the fantastic lunch presentation and meal, they helped me understand that *hotte tumbide* had a second meaning or connotation, that one's life was full, a feeling encompassing gratefulness and peaceful satisfaction, one which transcended the fullness from the meal itself. I found myself feeling that *hotte tumbide* feeling, along with a desire to help others experience that feeling. It lent itself well to using it as a general greeting. The locals certainly found it engaging and positive.

The day we were there was an Indian holiday, and many families and children were everywhere, all dressed up and enjoying the gorgeous day together. As we were leaving the restaurant, I saw a couple getting themselves situated on a scooter with their little girl. No, it did not look safe



to me, having been schooled on car seats as we are in the U.S. As I walked by them, I couldn't help but lean over, smile, and tell them very quietly, "You have a beautiful daughter." The little girl seemed to leap straight out of her mother's arms and into mine - I was completely surprised by her move and really just caught her and scooped her up, glad that I didn't drop her! I was even more surprised when she just put her little head on my shoulder. One of my business associates was quick with his camera, as you can see. What a darling girl and the parents were as proud as could be. In the part of rural India where I was, white folks were not a big chunk of the people I saw, and I thought she might be more scared than welcoming, but I felt like one of the family. *Hotte tumbide. Gratefulness.*

I am grateful for that moment of Grace.

Are our lives planned or random?

I think from time to time that we all need to ponder whether our life is or was planned, our experiences through childhood considered by our parents, what God's plan is for us, and how much we've taken the best advantage of the gifts of all kinds that we've been granted. We are all left to wonder whether our circumstances and experiences were random? Fate or destiny? Planned?



From my earliest childhood memories, I recall positive experiences being with people from widely different backgrounds. From meeting and playing with families of different races in the inner city of Milwaukee, even during the race protests of the early '60's, having numerous international college students eating with us and spending time at our house, learning songs from Korea, Nigeria and Ghana, words and foods from Japan, having real Mexican tamales become a lifelong favorite taste after hanging out in the onion sheds with kids in the migrant camps. Then there were the regular new family arrivals, with five Korean and three Filipino siblings each bringing new words, tastes, and music.

*Traveling – it leaves
you speechless, then
it turns you into a
storyteller*

– Ibn Battuta

I believe that our parents planned for us to be open and comfortable with cultures and people who didn't look or sound like us. It was conscious and proactive on their part, and I don't think I fully appreciated the blessing wrapped into it until I was offered the opportunity to write my own job description and take on an international business development challenge for 6+ years late in my career. The people I was working with had observed how freely and positively I interacted with international visitors, trying to learn a few phrases (pronounced correctly!) with each one. I guess that I had always taken that ease or ability for granted. In fact, I believe that it was taught and nurtured from very young on.

I am grateful for all of those life experiences. For me, they are a lifelong collection of moments of Grace.

become more labored, and even the morphine seemed unable to keep him comfortable. Time seems to stand still when your emotions are wrapped up this deeply, but the first strange element was that just as Dad's breathing wavered, then restarted, for just a minute or two, the power flickered on and off, on and off, then went completely off. We had the light of the fire still, and we lit candles quickly. Everyone had their last chance to give Dad a kiss, a hug, a hand squeeze, a whispered goodbye and "I love you, Dad." As we heard his last breath, a rich, deep voice behind me, with love and a feeling of deepest admiration, said simply, **"A mighty oak has fallen."** It took a moment to sink in, but I turned to my siblings and asked through my tears, "Who just said that? Who said that?" "Said what?" they asked. "Said that 'A mighty oak has fallen'." That was so beautiful." They didn't know what I was talking about, except for my sister, who heard the exact same thing, and sensed it with the same tone. We remain convinced that it was Dad's younger brother Darell's voice, the same Darell whom Dad had felt such great loss for since he died in an Air Force training accident in 1955. That he always felt was the most senseless loss of potential. A classmate of our mom's, Darell was the epitome of everything fun and good that could be blessed upon a person. Leadership, athleticism, a warm smile and loved by everyone who ever had the good fortune to meet him.

We sang Amazing Grace together in the candlelight. A couple hours earlier, Ellen and Meghan had gone back to the little motel up the road where we were staying, and I had to go tell them that Dad had passed. As I drove out the driveway into the absolute darkness, huge snowflakes still softly falling in my headlights, I noticed that up and down the highway as I drove, no other homes were without power, as they had lights on in the yards, and the power was on at the motel. I recounted the final moments with them, and they quickly got dressed and jumped in the car with me. By the time we got back to the house, the power had come back on, just as mysteriously as it had gone off earlier.

Over the next few hours, I finished calling the siblings who weren't there. Fernando shared that not long after he had come to the farm and our family, Dad had explained that the boys were now in their forever family, that there would be no more moves or rejections for them. Dad then proceeded to give him a hug. As Fernando explained through his tears, he

said that he had stood there and cried like a baby while Dad hugged him, and he told Dad that he could not remember when the last time was that he had been hugged. By anyone. He was 16.

The next morning, Fernando texted me and shared that he kept a poem and picture of an oak tree above his own two boys' beds:

The strongest oak of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun.

It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.

He told me how that poem always reminded him of Dad, sheltering him, Adriano and Roberto as new arrivals, despite the winds that blew, and encouraging them to face the winds of life head-on. So I called him and shared the events of the night before, this time including the "Mighty Oak" part.

Fast forward

In the spring of 2019, we came together with extended family to inter the ashes of our parents in a cemetery in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Mom's hometown. Two of our mother's classmates attended. After talking



with one of them for a while, the conversation turned to things serious and spiritual, so I decided to share the story above, about Dad's final night. The classmate shared with me the following sincere advice: "You were visited, David. Don't ever doubt it."

Connections

I see both the human need for connection, and the blessing of making and having good connections, in different cultures and locations all around the world. I do acknowledge that for some people, this takes effort to get past fears and out of your comfort zone, and for others of us, it's as normal as breathing, something you actually seek out at every opportunity.

When we think about connections is it just the people that we know? Or is it the people that know us? How do we get to know them, to truly connect with them and know what is important to them? By asking questions and then listening. Truly listening. People tell me that I have a lot of connections. I do. But not in the sense that I have strings that I can pull to take advantage somehow. I cherish my connections with people who have trusted me enough to share something important, like the source of their wisdom, or

concerns they have about serious things. Heartfelt losses, health scares, tragic events that happened to them or childhoods best left as a distant memory.



Nelson Mandela used the word "ubuntu". Ubuntu is a Zulu word that means "I am, because of you." People are people because of people. We need each other. We make each other what we are. We are connected to people because

we were meant to be. Some as a result of our families; other connections are from encounters which we have the privilege to experience. We call some of them "lucky" and others are the result of years of planning and preparation. I recently told a good friend that I was a "collector of stories". He gently corrected me by observing that I was "a collector of experiences which have become stories". I appreciate them all.

I appreciate every connection as a Moment of Grace.