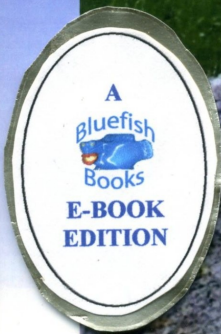


A Dirty Old Man Goes Bad



John Cowart's 2005 Blog

A DIRTY OLD MAN GOES BAD
John Cowart's 2005 Diary

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Glog
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www.bluefishbooks.info

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John Cowart's 2005 Diary

John W. Cowart

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John Cowart's 2005 Blog

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This book is dedicated
to

VIRGINIA

Whose Faith & Faithfulness Ever Impresses Me

— jwc



A DIRTY OLD MAN GOES BAD
JOHN COWART'S 2005 BLOG



John putting a ship in a bottle

A DIRTY OLD MAN GOES BAD

JOHN COWART'S 2005 Diary

A Brief Introduction:

I want to be invisible.

That's an odd ambition for a man who posts a daily, on-line diary entry called a blog, for all the world to see.

Well, maybe not all the world, but over 13,000 readers examined my blog this year, and over 100,000 readers from 82 countries have spent at least ten minutes each reading my website.

But I want to be invisible, or if not invisible, at least transparent. I want to be a window glass so readers see through me, see beyond me. I hope readers first will see their own reflection in the glass, then see beyond that to Reality.

The blog's title is *Rabid Fun* at www.cowart.info/blog/ and its heading reads: "A befuddled ordinary Christian looks for spiritual realities in day to day living."

Reading these entries you may get a few laughs. You'll find a lot of befuddlement and foolishness. You'll see a few tears and much joy. You'll read about temptation, failure, frustration — and deep satisfaction.

In all that, I hope you see far beyond me to find Something Better.

--John

Saturday, January 08, 2005

Just Getting Started, Hi Everybody,

Just getting started with my blog. Watch this space for my up coming book on Moments in Jacksonville Florida's History. -JWC

Sunday, January 09, 2005

Hi Again

After much fussin', fummin', prayin' and cussin' over phf conversion and such, I finally posted an e-book version of my Jacksonville history today.

Now I'll begin to get the stuff ready for the paperback version... Think good thoughts for me please... Are you sure Stephen King got started this way?



P.S. The beautiful work of art, bluefish, decorating my storefront was a Christmas gift from my youngest daughter and I used its picture because it's almost as pretty as I am.- jwc

Monday, January 10, 2005

Help for Indonesia

I've spent the day running around trying to drum up long-distance help for ~~tusumi~~, ~~Tuskummi~~, ~~Tsuskumi~~ — Flood — victims in Indonesia and begging folks to buy my books.

Tuesday, January 11, 2005

Florida Winter

This being January 11th, I felt I could either shovel snow like the poor yankees or spend the day cleaning the pool. So, like a true Florida boy, to unwind from the tension of the final push for my Jacksonville history book, I've dabbled in the pool all day.

Wednesday, January 12, 2005

Why Do I Bother?

Just when you think you are done and can move on to the next book (I started formatting a sci/fi thriller today) the first project rises from the grave of printing and needs to be reformatted all over again.

Story of my life.

Sometimes I wonder why I bother.

Tuesday, January 18, 2005

Another Try At Posting The Jax History Book

Well, it seems that I goofed on my first try at posting my Jacksonville history book on the Lulu Press site. According to the message I got, I had 15 embedded fonts in the pdf.

That can't be right.

Honest, I've never embedded a font in my life. Anyhow, my son — bless him — managed to straighten out the mess and the book is available again. Thanks be to God.

Saturday, January 22, 2005

Working Hard

I'm working hard preparing a new science fiction novel for posting on Lulu. Hope to have it done by next week.

Monday, January 24, 2005

Lost In a Blog

This afternoon I found that I have been making entries in someone else's blog and they have made entries in mine. I had not been paying attention to the dropdown box at the top.

Sorry for the confusion.

If you really want to make a comment in my blog, be sure the box says John Cowart's Blog; I'll watch out for that in the future.

Today I've been fighting forms as I blundered through the process of applying for ISBN and Library of Congress numbers. Just as I'd almost get a form ready, the computer would time me out. Frustrating but I won; I finally got it done. Look for my first two Bluefish books in early February.

Thursday, January 27, 2005

Lazarus Is Finally Posted

Last night, after months of writing, editing, re-writing and revision, my son and I posted my sci/fi novel, *The Lazarus Projects*, on my Lulu press, Bluefish Books, storefront. Even with the easy way Lulu provides as an outlet for writers, it's still a lot of work.

Makes me appreciate what those guys with the goose quill pens went through to produce a book.

Trying to make a pdf file drove me nuts because the program I was using kept changing the format of the ms. I wanted to keep control but finally gave up and let the Lulu software program make the pdf file, and it did in minutes what I've been working on for days...

Sometimes it pays to let the experts do the hard stuff.

From now on, I'll stick to something easy like Brain Surgery While You Wait.

Saturday, January 29, 2005

Jax History Book About Ready

My long-delayed history of Jacksonville, Fla., is about ready for posting. Thank God!

I'd tried posting it once before but I had trouble with pdf conversion files and embedded fonts (whatever those things are), but my son, a computer whiz, is correcting my mistakes and he tells me that the book should be printer-ready in a few days. I'm looking forward to it.

Sunday, January 30, 2005**Life's Not Fair!**

Here I've struggled for ages with computer stuff and I stay lost; and here today Donald posted a brand new website and blog in just a few hours. Phooy! Makes me feel inferior.

Monday, January 31, 2005**Busy Day Sitting Still**

It may not have been a storm, but during the Florida hurricanes last summer the server carrying my website, www.cowart.info, suffered severe disruption. So, since 4 a.m. today, I've been restoring file after file after file, one at a time. I'm about a fourth done.

O well, it keeps me off the streets.

Tuesday, February 01, 2005**Working During Superbowl Week**

While TV in Jacksonville, my hometown, goes crazy with Superbowl hype, I personally have seen no sign that there will be a game here of any more statue than our annual Florida/Georgia game. Why all the fuss?

Promoters claim that the game will pump millions into the local economy; yet, I do not know of a single person in my circle who expects to earn a penny because of Superbowl. I think it's all a carpetbagger scam... Locals remember Off-Shore Power, Harbor Masters, The Shipyards, and a slew of other schemes which ripped off Jacksonville taxpayers. Our city slogan should be: Jacksonville, Suckers Of The South.

Anyhow, enough of that. Today I've been using a trial version of *Contribute 3*, a website management software, to fix the hurricane damage to my website.. And I'm very pleased with the way *Contribute* works; it's geared for those of us who can't understand those complex Dummies books.

Friday, February 04, 2005**February 4th**

Superbowl hype continues. TV reporters wet themselves over *celebrities* I've never heard of.

Meanwhile, I have almost finished repairing the damage my website sustained during the hurricanes last summer. For some reason when lightening or whatever struck the server, it turned a lot of my text into Greek; that is, the words were English but spelled out in the Greek alphabet. So I had to reload about 200 files from scratch.

These website files include samples of my diary entries (I've kept a journal for about 20 years) and I would have hated to loose them.

My first Lulu Pressbook, *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, arrived at a friend's yesterday. The printer did a beautiful job producing it. I can hardly wait for my own copies so I can preen over them.

Saturday, February 05, 2005**I Feel Like A Webmaster**

I feel like a webmaster today — as opposed to a bug trapped in the web — because I finally finished repairing my website from the damage it suffered during last summer's hurricanes. The damage had resulted in much of my text appearing in Greek — not the Greek language — but English words spelled in the Greek alphabet. Thus my site made no sense to either Greek or English speaking people.

However, today I fixed the last of 227 files — which involved eight or ten steps to each one — and they all (well, actually most of them) appear on the web in pure, pristine, articulate prose that would make Shakespeare weep.

Doing this work, I've sat typing at this computer, sat and sat and sat so much that I've developed calluses on my ... er. fingers.

Sunday, February 06, 2005**My New View of Superbowl**

I recant.

I was wrong.

I have viewed the Superbowl hype with more than a tad of cynicism but today my wife and I drove downtown and strolled Bay Street and the Northbank Riverwalk to expose ourselves to what is actually going on in Jacksonville. It was magnificent.

Event planners seemed to have allowed for everything. Traffic flow. Hundreds of Portopotties. Boat docking. Access to water. Security barriers. They did not miss a trick.

Back in the 1960s I went to the World's Fair in New York but the crowds of people there paled in comparison with the number of people out enjoying the Superbowl festivities here in Jacksonville today. Pedestrians of every race and age flowed through the streets, orderly, courteous, happy. Blimps, helicopters and small airplanes pulling advertising banners filled the sky, while on the St. Johns River hundreds of boats of every imaginable type filled the water.

I wrote a history of Bay Street that's included in my Jax history book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*; I have a good idea of what went on at the Sub-Tropical Exposition, at V-J Day, at Florida/Georgia games over the years... But today's spectacle topped anything this city has seen before.

Then this evening the city put on a fireworks display featuring pyrotechnics fired from three barges in the river, from the tops of seven downtown buildings on both sides of the river — and this display outdid the 1976 National Bicentennial displays I saw in D.C. in front of the Washington Monument and on the White House grounds.

Jacksonville, I have underestimated your class. My mindset has been too provincial. I apologize. Never have I been more proud of my hometown. You are more wonderful than I thought.

Monday, February 07, 2005

An Unusual Day

I did something unique yesterday; in fact, I'm probably the only guy in America to do this. All day I lay around in my underwear munching goodies and watching Superbowl coverage on tv. I'm sure nobody else spent the day so productively.

Tuesday, February 08, 2005

Great Civil War Reading

Recently I've been reading *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant-Stephens Families of North Florida* (University Press of Florida, 1998). It's the best history book on any time period that I've ever read.

This book contains excerpts from 33 diaries and over 800 letters which members of the Bryant-Stephens family kept from the 1850s on.

Many of these papers record the life, love and exploits of Winston and Octavia Stephens, a young, recently married couple separated by the war, and their relatives during the Civil War. These people were educated, articulate, and observant.

But their most outstanding quality is that they are **real**. Their triumphs and aggravations and worries become real to me as I read.

I felt so caught up in their lives as I was reading these letters and diaries that – although I knew the outcome from other sources, and although I know these people have been dead for a hundred years — I worried about them and I felt strongly tempted to pray about their troubles and for their safety.

The depth of my caring about these people amazed me.

Then as I read further, I began to transpose the concern these pages generated in me to American Soldiers fighting in Iraq and their families who remain in the States. I never expected a history book to give rise to such intense emotion in my own heart.

And with historian Arch Fredric Blakey's comments and footnotes putting all in context, this is one of the finest history books I have ever read on any geographical area or time period.

Friday, February 11, 2005

How Do I Get So Much Done?

My work ethic: I start slow, then I taper off.

Sunday, February 13, 2005

It's New To Me

After Church this morning, my wife & I discovered a beauty of Jacksonville I'd never seen before. We strolled the recently opened Northbank Riverwalk to the west of Jacksonville Landing. Although I've lived here most of my life, the stroll exposed me to views of the city completely new to me.

Breathtaking

And we saw an osprey and two other species of hawk — right in downtown Jacksonville. Great fun.

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Does It Have A Prayer?

Several things about prayer trouble me. I feel that I'm the World's Foremost Authority on unanswered prayer. I've prayed for more things and didn't get them than anybody else I know. My prayers hardly ever "work" the way I think they should — That's the theme of the book I've been working on this week, *Why Doesn't God Answer Me?* Essentially, I've turned a problem that bothers me into a book affirming my own shaky faith in God's goodness. Question is: does this book have a prayer?

Friday, February 18, 2005

Elk Horn Pipe

Donald came over bringing two exquisite gifts: First, he'd ordered, special made for me, a coffee mug featuring my Bluefish Books logo on one side and a reproduction of the *Crackers & Carpetbaggers* book cover on the other. I was flabbergasted! The other gift he'd picked up at the Waldo Flea Market. It is a tobacco pipe made from a huge elk antler; the craftsman has drilled in several places at odd angles to connect the bore with the bowl through the length and curvature of the antler. It is an astounding artifact.

However, when I loaded the bowl with tobacco and tried to smoke the thing, I choked on a distinct taste like burning hair! I'm not sure if an antler is an outgrowth of bone (the texture of the pipe looks like ossified tissue) or if it is a specialized hair follicle like a rhinoceros horn. Judging from appearance I'd say bone; judging from taste I'd say burning hair.

Nevertheless, regardless of the taste, this huge pipe is a treasure worthy of *Antiques Roadshow*. It's so grotesque, it's beautiful. I don't know for sure, but I imagine that I'm the first on my block to own one.

Donald guided me through computer intricacies related to the three Lulu books we're about ready to offer via the website. I'd made a list of things I wanted to learn before he came over and we covered about half of them... Incidentally, Donald has developed a Task Juggler application software to keep track of what's needed to finish various jobs. It sounds very helpful as

I'm involved with a number of book projects simultaneously and he said he'd post it on his website so anyone who needs such a thing can pick it up.

Sunday, February 20, 2005

Old Cemetery Photos & my book on prayer is like a Clipper Ship

Ginny & I took Donald to Jacksonville's Old City Cemetery where he took magnificent photos which he has already posted on the web (www.kernelnews.org/photos/)

We three knocked around all day and when we got to work on the cover for the book on prayer we decided that the cover art which Donald has worked on just don't fit this book, and we decided that neither the title I gave the book nor the two back covers I designed fit the book either.

Exasperating for all concerned.

Rather than settle for what we'd already worked on, we went for quality and brainstormed a new title (I'm Confused About Prayer) and Donald began work on the cover art again.

I worked up a new back cover text. And, because we changed the title, I had to go through the ms again and re-do all headers and footers + notify the Library of Congress about the title change – this book is like an old clipper ship in that when you change the tension on one line, you have to adjust the tension on all the lines all over the ship.

There's a lot to be said for sticking with your first choice.

Tuesday, February 22, 2005

The Heron & The Squirrel

My wife & I saw the most amazing thing yesterday morning.

A great blue heron roosted in our neighbor's sweet-gum tree. For longest time it diligently tried to catch a squirrel! The squirrel wanted something at the end of the branch. The giant bird lurked and lunged time and again, but each time it speared at the squirrel, the squirrel ducked to the underside of the branch. This contest went on for at least 45 minutes. Although we've seen many herons, we've never seen one trying to catch a mammal before.

Inspired by this incident, we got out the forms, bird books and binoculars and registered today's sightings for *Cornell University's Great Backyard Bird Count* for this weekend – something we participate in practically every year. We'd decided to pass on it this year, but with that heron's actions we just couldn't. Among the species we counted were red-winged blackbirds, purple finches, a red-bellied woodpecker, and a yellow warbler – as well as the usual blue jays, robin, Eurasian ring-necked doves, seagulls, red-tailed hawks, etc.

Wednesday, February 23, 2005

Manuscript Preparation — Cowart Style

A few years ago I found a sheath of old letters stuffed in the back of a wooden file drawer I bought at a yard sale somewhere in Riverside. After a glance I put them aside as something interesting to be looked at later.

A few months ago I came across them again and I found them so fascinating that I've decided to publish them on Bluefish... They ought to be preserved both for their charming style and for their historic content.

Slight problem: some had been crumpled and all had been folded and refolded so many times that my scanner will not pick up the full text.

So, first I spent a few hours removing rusty staples being careful to keep the pages in order because they are not numbered.

Then, I spent hours and hours flat ironing dozens and dozens and dozens of these letters one page at a time.

Does Stephen King prepare his manuscripts this way?

Anyhow, if my career as a writer ever goes belly up, I have a trade to fall back on – I can take in ironing.

Thursday, February 24, 2005

Computer Frustration, God's Nature, New Book, and A Run-away Photo of My Pipe

I attempted to scan in the letters I ironed yesterday. HA!

I tried and tried and tried but nothing I tried worked; the scanner would overwrite all previously scanned pages and save only the last page. Drove me nuts.

I called Donald who came over and did something or another to the machine and taught me how to do it right. Thank God for him.

We (meaning Donald while I sat in my easy chair and watched) also designed and posted the book cover for my latest Lulu book, *I'm Confused About Prayer*. Now that book is available to the non-praying public also. It addresses questions which bother me about my own faith. Questions about the existence and nature of God, about his word and world.

Donald & I discussed the appropriateness of questioning God.

Questions do not destroy faith; questions focus faith.

Of course we should question God.

That's prayer at its purest in that it acknowledges him as supreme. If you want to know something, you don't ask someone dumber than you are, you ask someone smarter.

We don't question inanimate or non-existent objects. We never question a brick wall. We only question a Person – a Person we can reasonably expect to answer.

That's prayer.

Anyhow, I'm very happy this book is out of my hands and in the storefront so I can move on with the *Stacy Letters*.

I rearranged the Bluefish Books storefront too (Donald helped a little) so now the book covers are large enough to be seen. And the storefront has a lime-green background. And each blog entry now starts with an avantar (Avantar, I think, is a Latin word meaning "little ugly picture")



I tried to paste in a picture of me with my Elkhorn Pipe but the picture escaped and ran off down the block spilling over onto two pages of text and blotting out everything else on the storefront. That sucker wanted to be a bigger than poster-sized picture.

It turned into the Chicken-Heart-That-Ate-Cleveland. So I had to use desktop Gamma Rays to select and delete it – once more making the world safe for democracy.

Thus endeth today's lesson in computer science.

Oh, one other thing: Wes sent me this note:

A visiting minister waxed eloquent during the offering. "Dear Lord," he began, with arms extended toward heaven and a rapturous look on his upturned face. "Without you we are but dust... "

He would have continued but at that moment my very obedient daughter (who was listening!) leaned over to me and asked quite audibly in her shrill little girl voice, "Mom, what is butt dust?"

Friday, February 25, 2005

The Adventure & Romance of a Writer's Life

Click. Click. Click. Swish. Swish. Swish. Whirrr. Whirrr. Whirrr. Click. Click. Click. Swish. Swish. Swish. Whirr. Whirr

That's been my day. John Cowart, human document feeder as I fed 200+ pages of Stacy's letters through the scanner from 3:30 a.m. till 3:30 p.m.

Ah, the excitement and romance of a writer's life. Gives me an adrenaline high.

Then Ginny came home from work and things really picked up after dinner as we sat and read our individual books for hours without speaking in quite intimacy.

Hey, the life of a contented, happy couple does not make for much of a story to interest other people; but we wouldn't trade it for anything else this world has to offer.

Now, Here is another try at the highway billboard sized photo that got away from me the other day; I'm using the html code Donald taught me, so if anything goes wrong blame him. Here is my beautiful photo:

Well, what did you really expect? Is there something simpler than a Dummies book to teach me how to do stuff like this?

Keep watching this space.

No computer code will master me. I'll win the next match.

All your bases are belong to us!

Monday, February 28, 2005

Moving Eve

A typical winter day in Florida, overcast and windy.

After breakfast at Dave's we did life maintenance chores: gas station, grocery store, pharmacy, library, etc.

Seven of us gathered at Eve's apartment to move her to a new place. What with Jennifer's lame arm, Pat's low-vision and my arthritis, we could have filmed a Keystone Cops' movie.

Nevertheless we moved the furniture in about three hours. It was not nearly the Chinese fire drill I expected it to be.

Eve's new place features a fireplace with a tile surround and the center tile has a sailing ship molded in bas relief. Beautiful!

Wednesday, March 02, 2005

Polishing a Manuscript

Wes took me to breakfast at Whiteway Delicatessen, a hangout for Jacksonville's Movers and Shakers. Although I number among the moved and shook, I enjoyed the breakfast anyhow.

Wes, a master printer, has been proofreading my book *The Lazarus Projects* and has been invaluable in catching typos. Apparently I can not spell the word **BUILT**; I get it wrong just about every time I use it.

Wes also critiqued the plot of the novel bringing into play his extensive knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. He says he's going to write a review of *The Lazarus Projects* for the Lulu/Bluefish Books site.

After we corrected the proofs, we spent a couple of hours talking about free will and various sections of Scripture which puzzle me.

When he left, I worked updating www.cowart.info adding a sampling of Donald's photos of Jacksonville's Old City Cemetery. I need to go out there again to gather more information for the captions.

I also outlined a *Rabid Fundamentalist* column for March; I'm basing this one on that Elkhorn Pipe that I still haven't managed to get a picture of in this blog. It should be ready for the website in a day or two.

Thursday, March 03, 2005

Meaning

If what Jesus Christ says is false, then nothing matters; if what Jesus Christ says is true, then nothing *else* matters.

Friday, March 4, 2005

A Typical Weekend

After breakfast at Dave's (where I left a poster and some flyers promoting my Jax history book) Ginny & I went to the Jacksonville Fairgrounds to the Friend's Of The Library Book Sale.

We browsed for hours amid over 100, 000 books culled from Jacksonville Libraries or donated for the sale.

Three observations:

1. Before going, I prayed that the Lord would deliver me from acquisitiveness, that I not just buy things which strike my fancy but truly useful books: We bought only eight books between us.

2. The age of the people shopping; gray-hair definitely predominated. Younger readers were definitely not in evidence – Makes me wonder about the future of writing.

3. The material the Library has culled; They are giving Jacksonville a systematic lobotomy by removing from the shelves traditional classics. Yes, I can see removing out-of-date materials but when will they get more up-to-date copies of Beowulf. Poe, Kipling, Browning, Yates? Literature was being thrown out by the barrel full. History and biography discarded by the ton as though the information in these books might change.

And, there were tons of discarded books about World War II. How are younger readers to learn about these battles? There was a reason we A-Bombed Japan and sent Americans to die fighting Nazis. But the memories of people who actually did the fighting are being discarded to be pulped unless someone buys the culled books.

Such books sales make me feel very sad.

I know how much energy, thought, work and life-force goes into producing a book – and here are thousands of examples of such human endeavor essentially consigned to the trash. Tragic.

O well, as King Solomon observed, “Of the making of many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

Saturday, March 5, 2005

Ginny & I devoted this day to cleaning up our garden – by which I mean we sat outside and talked about all the work to be done with this flower bed or that. We did not actually do any work, but daydreamed about how nice the garden will look once we get it straight from the ravages of winter.

Eve came over to pick up her mail and bring me some pamphlets discarded from the Friends of the Library culling. She took us out for a nice lunch at Dave’s then Gin & I went to the library to stock up on books for next week.

Sunday, March 6, 2005

Ginny & I chose to skip church this morning and go bird watching along a section of the Jacksonville to Baldwin Rails To Trails path.

Organizers of this project revamp abandoned railroad tracks to make long hiking trails. The section we strolled was paved about eight feet wide with cleared right of way to either side of the path. We strolled past farmland and ponds and pinewoods.

The number of cyclists and walkers using the trail surprised me. I thought the path would be little known but a lot of people were on the trail enjoying a beautiful day.

Next time I’ll bring a camera.

The only untoward incident was that Ginny stumbled, spraining and bruising her ankle (especially worrisome because she is diabetic and a foot injury can be serious).

But once I got her home I filled a Ziploc freezer bag with ice and kept her foot elevated and warped for the rest of the day as we watched library videos.

Our friend Rick, A Neighborhood Watch Block Captain, came over to tell us that a new neighbor, a young man , father of an eight-month-old baby, died suddenly yesterday. The family just recently moved into the neighborhood.

Rick and Judy, another block captain, are organizing a collection to help out the widow and children.

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

Recharging Batteries

I've spent most of today reading St. Patrick's *Confession* and a biography of Mary Slessor, a Scottish missionary to Africa. I have previously written profiles of each but I was not doing research for an article today.

No, I feel the need to recharge my own batteries and nothing helps my spiritual slumps more than reading Christian biographies. They help me see what real Christians went through for their love of Christ.

Wednesday, March 09, 2005

Free The Flashing Twelve!

Today I've learned that I number among the Flashing Twelve.

Donald came over excited about establishing a podcasting website designed to help Flashing Twelves podcast. What is a Flashing Twelve? What is a podcast?

Well, when a computer geek walks into someone's house and sees the clock radio, VCR and the microwave all flashing twelve on the LCD screen, he knows the homeowner does not know how to set the time on any of these appliances; in other words, someone as technologically illiterate as I am. Therefore, the Geek pitches in to help bring the victim out of the stone age.

That's what Donald wants to do for me and other Flashing Twelves.

Podcasting apparently is a sort of radio program on demand wherein anyone can produce their own program and make it available to the world via a Blog (which is a sort of online daily journal, I think).

Why anyone would want to either broadcast or listen to such programs is beyond me, but Donald says Podcasting is the coming thing in computer communications.

Could be.

Personally, for years I've kept three radios tuned to three different stations and when I want one kind of music, I turn on that radio; or, if I want another kind of music, I just turn on a different radio. That way I never have to fiddle with tuning dials.

Donald says this practice makes me a quintessential Flashing Twelve.

Hey, my system works.

In other news today, two great things happened:

The UPS man delivered copies of one of my books which, this month, was published in the Philippines. My book *People Whose Faith Got Them Into Trouble* has been re-issued by a company called Church Strengthening Ministry Of The Foreign Mission Board, SBC, Inc. Their website is www.csm-publishing.net out of Manila .

I'm pleased that the book is available to folks in the Far East; but I'm also a bit disappointed because I thought it was being translated into Talog and I expected to see my name in squiggly exotic oriental letters (I've never seen Talog printing) just to feed my vanity.

The other great thing is that I finally managed to update my website for March. I've finished my Rabid Fundamentalist column, *Horns, Antlers & Haloes* and it actually includes that photograph of my Elk Horn Pipe that I've never been able to include in my Blog – We Flashing Twelves managed to muddle through somehow – so if you want to finally see that photo you've been so anxious to see in this Blog, then check out my website. I also added a few new tasteful jokes for you more refined readers.

Thursday, March 10, 2005

The Daily Struggle

In a recurring fit of scruples, from which I periodically suffer, I erased some naked internet lady's photos from my computer. I'm a pure-hearted Christian so she will never again appear on my screen... Want'a bet?

Up this morning at my usual 4 a.m. and spent hours entangled in the Web trying to get the *Antler's, Horns & Haloes* article straightened out. I finally managed it by 11 a.m. but my methods resemble using a hammer and chisel on stone to shape the computer site into what I wanted.

Afterwards I walked to the Post Office Substation to mail their copies of my Lulu Press books to the Library of Congress registry office.

As I walked I ran into a guy I know who hangs around the local library. Although he is the next thing to homeless, has no computer, and no electricity in his house, yet he knew all about podcasting! It seems that he knows a garage band which podcasts their music. And he's up on the phenomena — I'd never heard the word before yesterday!

Donald called and we simultaneously browsed blog sites from Jacksonville as he guided me through the mysterious world of blogs.

To me it appears that there are a lot of technologically advanced people out there whose sites reek of computer sophistication but have nothing to say. My overall feeling is that these folks should grow up and get a life.

Careful there, Cowart, Judge not that ye be not judged — what's so special about the stuff you're recording right here, right now? This isn't exactly Pepy's Journal!.

Friday, March 11, 2005

Writing, Reading and Story Telling

Up at my usual 4 a.m. to start the day in a my usual stupor.

I worked, sort of, doing foundational stuff on the *Stacy Letters*, but there are so many decisions I have to make regarding the formatting that I gave up,

spent some time staring into space, then read a murder mystery instead of working.

I should not be so hard on myself... There is an old Shoe cartoon in which he is sitting at his typewriter staring out the window when another bird comes by and says, "Why aren't you pounding that keyboard?"

To which Shoe replies, "Typists pound keyboards; writers stare out windows."

Our daughter Eve came over this evening for a delightful supper with us. I was too lazy to cook so I called Ginny who brought in a rotisserie chicken. Lemon pepper. Delicious!

After supper, the three of us tried to get the tape recorder working to make a podcast program for Donald to air. The program is to be Miss Eve's Story Hour. I set up the recorder and Eve began telling one of the stories she relates to kids at her library.

I was so impressed!

She assumes a professional stance and demeanor, her voice changes. And with her very first sentence I realized that I was no longer listening to "my little girl" but I was in the presence of a professional story teller. Enthralling.

She told two great stories.

Of course the tape machine didn't work! Ginny and I figured it out that we bought it at a yard sale, maybe six years ago and we have not used it for maybe three years... Practically brand new. Why wouldn't it work? Cheap piece of crap.

We got to talking about old Florida Cracker tales and I remembered one of my favorites:

Jessie had this pit bull that he'd take to the dog fights. And ol' Cubie would just tear up any other dog in the pit. Jessie was right fierce proud of that dog.

So one day he goes awalkin' in the park and meets up with this fellow with a little low-squat ugly yellar dog on a lease. So Jessie sets his pit bull on this little yellow dog just to show off. And that little dog opens its mouth wide and just eats the pit bull up in one bite.

Dumbfounded, Jessie says "What the hell kind of dawg is that?"

The fellow says, "Well, before I cut his tail short and painted him yellow, he was an alligator."

Thus endeth today's reading. Amen.

Saturday, March 12, 2005

A Red Letter Day

Ran across a great bumper sticker: ALL MEN ARE IDIOTS; AND I MARRIED THEIR KING! — Do I detect a hint of bitterness there?

Went out to breakfast with Wes. We do this every week or two. He has finished proofreading *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*. We worked at correcting the proof copy and it's ready for posting in a final version. We also discussed recording some of our conversations for podcasting; Wes is particularly interested in making a recording of an organ concert by Jacob.

Today's conversation ranged wide covering subjects as varied as labor relations at his job, printing, bioethics, Ginny's fall (yes, she had a fall the other day), scientific frauds, human misery, family relationships and the strong and weak points of Cambridge Bibles as opposed to Oxford Bibles.

Wes, a master printer, told the story of a radio preacher who railed against Bibles which are printed only in black ink and do not have the words of Jesus printed in red ink. The preacher denounced imagined liberals who "Are taking the Words Of Jesus out of the Bible!"

I think Heaven is going to seem a very strange place to this preacher when he gets there.

Jesus may save us from our sin, but He doesn't seem to save us from our own ignorance.

Monday, March 14, 2005

A Bag Full Of Money

Ginny & I devoted Saturday to yard work — By which I mean that I fixed up a nest for her with cushions, pillows, icepack, coffee, ashtray and blanket so she could rest and watch me while I mowed the yards.

Her foot was bothering her and she fell into a deep, deep sleep. So deep in fact was my Sweetheart's sleep that even when the power mower passed within ten feet of her, she never stirred.

The yard was full of birds this morning and they chirped and flitted all around Ginny as she napped. It was like something out of Disney's Cinderella movie, but Beauty never woke. She napped almost five hours!

About 3 in the afternoon, I kissed her awake and took her to lunch at Denny's. Then we went to the library to check out some videos and spent the evening watching a Tom Hanks movie marathon starting with *Terminal*. We both agree that Tom Hanks is the greatest actor ever.

Sunday, March 13, 2005

Skipped church again today. After breakfast at Famous Amos — where we ate their pan-fry breakfast, one of the greatest, most memorable meals I've ever tasted — we went to WalMart to buy birdseed for our feeders and to

look at digital cameras and tape recorders for various Cowart Communications projects.

At Ginny's job Friday some person dumped a huge bag of money on her desk — all in change. So we took that heavy bag to Winn-Dixie where they have a change sorting and counting machine.

I stood guard while for 45 minutes, Ginny stood there feeding coins — nickels, dimes, pennies and quarters — into this machine. For this she went to college earning a Banking & Finance degree with a minor in accounting!

The total came to \$335 of which the machine kept over \$30 as a processing fee.

All pennies that fell on the floor, I picked up and put in my own pocket as a finders fee. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn."

I bitched to Ginny that she should never again accept loose change from anyone at work but should reject sacks of coins until they are wrapped and counted. And she should never cut into our weekend time together to do stupid chores for the commission without being paid overtime... Lot of good my complaint did. Both she and I know that she's so conscientious that she does that sort of thing all the time and .is likely to keep doing it; it's in her nature....

In the evening we continued our Tom Hanks marathon with *Road To Perdition*. The man's versatility amazes us.

Typing on air — This the entry for Monday which I erased by mistake

Headers and footers and section breaks that don't break drive me nuts! A pox on all their houses!

Up at the ungodly hour of 4 a.m. as usual and worked formatting the *Stacy Letters*, a collection of old letters related to Jacksonville history which I found in a wooden file drawer I bought at a yard sale a few years ago.

I'm trying to make these into a book for Bluefish Books. Thus my frustration with headers & footers.

While looking for some clip art for Stacy's Letters, I again ran across a website I've visited before. But this time I noticed more about it and renewed my fascination. It's called Whole Wheat Radio out of a 12 by 12 cabin in Talkeetna, Alaska. Their web address is <http://www.wholewheatradio.org/> .

I'm not much for radio listening, but I really enjoyed their unique style and left the thing on my computer in the background all day. The thing that attracted my attention — besides the clip art in their drawing board section — was the mention that they do podcasting — the thing, whatever it is, that Donald wants to start. I really liked what these Alaskans are doing with it.

One odd thing, the announcer said, “We’re having a warming spell; the temperature is up to 36 degrees this morning.” I laughed because today for the first time this season here in Florida, I had to turn on the air conditioner!

My reading today included finishing Eric Garcia's great book about con artists, *Matchstick Men*, and I started Patrick O'Brian's *Master And Commander*. I found this sea story so enthralling that, God willing I intend to read all 20 books in the series.

This evening Ginny & I attended a MED Neighborhood Watch meeting. The group had the usual discussion of problems in the area.

My website e-mail brought a letter from a family in New York who asked for information about the Whale Watch Motel where we stayed last August and for tips about travel in Florida. I got carried away and told them waaaay more than they’d ever want to know.

But I felt very happy to get this feedback. Sometimes I feel as though I work in a vacuum. The February site statistics in Webalizer tell me that over 6,000 readers from all over the world stayed on my site at least ten minutes each. But people seldom make comments so I daily question whether what I’m doing is really useful or just a vanity.

Just like this Blog thing – I wonder if I’m typing on air.

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Progress

My work today consisted of undoing the work I did yesterday. Thus, by diligently applying myself, I have progressed to exactly the same place I was at 4 a.m. Monday.

Heard a great physics joke:

A neutron walks into a bar and orders a beer. When the barmaid serves it, he asks, “How much will that cost?” The barmaid replies, “For neutrons, there is no charge.”

O those physicists! 🤪

Two Fat Guys Talking Theology

We bought me breakfast at Dave’s then—to produce a sample tape recording for Donald’s podcasting project—for a couple of hours we sat smoking our pipes and talking about practical applications of Christianity in real-life situations:

We discussed the sorrow of a teenager whose dad had to put his grandfather into a nursing facility and then had to sell the family home to keep the old man there.

We discussed the plight of a lady whose husband deserted her taking all the proceeds of a business they owned and she's fallen in with some preacher who says all her troubles are the result of a generational curse.

We discussed the dilemma of couple and their adopted sons this week when yesterday the husband was discovered to have been screwing another woman for the past five or six years—and the wife has a shotgun in the kitchen.

What do Christians have to offer folks suffering in such horrendous situations?

The tape we ended up with runs about an hour and a half. It contains lots of questions and few answers. And we used a lot of airtime laughing our heads off at inane jokes (Wes's) and cultured, refined jokes (mine).

For years now, every week or ten days, Wes comes over to buy me breakfast, after which we smoke our pipes and talk about theology and practical Christian living. Donald asked us to record some of these conversations for podcasting; this was our first try at it.

At first, the conversation felt stilted but soon we forgot about the tape machine so I think the end result is fairly typical of our normal conversations – but with less profanity because of the tape machine.

Ginny went for her job interview today. We'll see.

Thursday, March 17, 2005

St. Patrick's Day Musings

About 20 years ago a magazine commissioned me on a tight deadline to write a brief biography of St. Patrick. This as my Father lay dying of cancer in St. Luke's Hospital, and my beloved wife expected to give birth in days.

Desperate for the writing commission money, I went to afterburners studying and writing.

I discovered that Patrick of Ireland had written a book, his *Confessions*. The man's honesty and dedication to Christ enthralled me. Seldom have I been touched so deeply by another spiritual writing.

Ginny read St. Patrick's *Confessions* also and it touched her so that we decided to name our baby after Patrick.

As the magazine deadline approached, Daddy grew worse; it fell out as my duty to stay with him in his hospital room all night every night. Yet, for grocery money, I had to finish that article. The room was too small for a desk so I wrote my biographical sketch of St. Patrick longhand on a yellow legal pad while lying on my stomach on the floor half under Daddy's bed.

I made the deadline.

I was with Daddy when he died... and in the delivery room with Ginny just days afterwards as she gave birth to our youngest daughter.

We named the beautiful little girl Patricia, a feminine form of Patrick. The Latin name means "noble."

If anybody is interested in reading the sketch of St. Patrick, which quotes liberally from his *Confessions*, you'll find it among my religious humor essays on my website.

Good thing for Patricia that I was not writing about Polycarp at the time of her birth or she'd have ended up with some perfectly ghastly name.

Incidentally, I understand that this particular article was translated into a dozen or so foreign languages and has circulated around the world.

Sunday, March 20, 2005, Palm Sunday

An odd thing at church this morning: Because of my macular degeneration my mind sometimes supplies meaning to the blurred things my eyes think they see. So, when I saw this large yellow bowl of white things on the altar, my brain concluded that the church was serving popcorn as part of the communion service!

Maybe this is not such an odd mental leap; no telling what innovation our madcap Episcopal bishops will come up with next.

Turns out that I was seeing a floral display of knotted white palm fronds on the altar. But my mind/eyes remained convinced that I was actually seeing a large bowl of popcorn.

After church Gin & I drove downtown and walked around a construction site where during the Civil War the enemy had a camp and fortifications, but the construction workers have just scraped surface dirt and have not dug deep enough to uncover any artifacts.

Then Ginny took me to a unique home she'd seen the other day and we walked around the block admiring it. The owner has renovated an old brick store keeping the display windows and decorating the building with an array of old bottles, a grind stone, a train wheel, statues, bed springs, stained glass, driftwood and a host of other elements which form a delightful, pleasing collage. The place intrigued me. The most wonderful home in Jacksonville. What a happy place. I called Eve asking to borrow her camera so I can take photos of this delightful dwelling and post them on my website next month.

Eve & Patricia came over and we talked about odd homes, websites, books and so forth. Later Gin & I ate a late lunch at Salty's Seafood then home to watch *Cold Case*.

Monday, March 21, 2005**My computer's been down so I'm playing catch up**

Saturday Eve hosted a housewarming party at her new apartment. About 15 or 20 people attended to eat goodies, talk and play with her cats. Most of the folks there were librarians from various branches, very nice folks. It was great fun.

Eve & Patricia had been to a yard sale this morning and bought me an old button (circa 1960?) with a Jacksonville City Slogan on it: "Tomorrow's City Today." I'd never seen one of these before and it makes a nice addition to my collection of Jacksonville ephemera.

Gin & I came home to tv—Charleton Heston in *The Ten Commandments*. About 1956, I saw this great movie in it's first run in the Florida Theatre. Moving. Now, it runs on tv just about every Easter season.

Tuesday, March 22, 2005**Unidentified Bird**

Saw a species of bird that's new to me as I did yard work: between a bluejay and a cardinal in size, this bird has a streamlined gray body with a cream breast and a pronounced black mask or head. It's apparently a bug-eater with a unique flight pattern; the bird perches on our rooftop, swoops down in a parabolic loop to snap up something within inches of the lawn surface. At times it seemed to hover at the limit of it's arc before returning to a spot only a few feet away from it's launch point. Fascinating to watch.

I broke out my bird books and studied, but I could not identify it.

Wednesday, March 23, 2005**Jennifer hypnotized**

Yesterday Jennifer was hypnotized to help alleviate the pain she suffers in her arm. Two years ago she underwent an operation for carpal tunnel and something went wrong paralyzing her arm and causing her great pain.

Her arm has swollen up like a hotdog left too long on the grill so that the skin has split resulting in open sores.

Of course the insurance company says it's all her fault and the doctors (a dozen or so of them) say that if the insurance company had authorized proper treatment in the first place then her condition would not have happened.

Jennifer is frantic with pain, physician/insurance company hassles, and financial woes from not being able to work. She and Pat may lose their home because they are so far behind with payments.

And in addition to that, Jennifer is stressed out, not only with her limitations but also with having to be constantly on tap for daily visiting nurses, aids, phone contacts with Medicaid, Workman's Compensation, attorneys and Social Security., I imagine she's also tired of Dad's advise. — Even so, come Lord Jesus!

I went with her and Pat for lunch at Bar-B-Que Junction. They had never been there before and we all really enjoyed it.

Thursday, March 24, 2005

Alien Space Craft Lands in my backyard

As I worked in our backyard I heard a strange swishing noise in the sky above our house. Looking up I saw an alien spacecraft descending. No, not a flying saucer but a full-rigged Viking ship propelled through the air by oars.

As it settled out by our double tree, I saw the dragon figurehead, the red-striped sail painted with a design resembling a cross between the face on the shroud of Turin and the Kon Tiki face. Dozens of metal shields lined the sides. Each shield bore an advertising logo or slogan: Preparation H, Coke Zero, Watson Reality, Jesus Saves, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Carter's Little Liver Pills, Viagra, Ralston Purina Dog Food, Vote For Jake Godbold, etc.

Beside the single mast stood a nine-foot-tall naked Lady waving a battle ax, apparently she is captain of the craft. As soon as the ship grounded on our lawn, she and 30 horn-hat-wearing Vikings jumped over the gunnels and ran straight to our birdfeeder where they scooped up handfuls of seeds and ate them as fast as they could stuff them in, as though they'd traveled for light-years without food and were starving.

Once the birdfeed was empty, they turned to the metal can where we store birdseed. Not having a can opener, the giant lady swung her battleax splitting the storage can, and again she and the crew gorged themselves on birdseed.

I approached and offered to give them some real food. "We have some pork chops in the freezer," I said.

The Lady turned indignantly and informed me, "All True Vikings are vegetarians! We only eat birdseed or tofu. Got any tofu in the house?"

I explained that I'm a Christian and that real Christians never eat tofu.

"Curious religion," she said. "Know where we can get some tofu?"

"Yes, Mam," I said directing her to Whiteway Delicatessen, a yuppie place over on King Street .

Hearing that tofu was available only blocks away, the Lady and her crew piled back aboard their ship, manned the oars, and began to row across my lawn. Faster and faster they pulled, the oar tips digging divots of dirt and grass out of the lawn. The ship rose higher into the air with each stroke till the oar strokes brushed tree tops as the ship headed East toward Whiteway.

"Hey," I yelled as they cleared the trees, "Who's going to pay for my birdseed and to fix the divots in my lawn?"

"Charge it to my Discover Card," the Naked Lady called as the ship pulled out of sight over my neighbor's housetop.

I quit yardwork and came back inside to make my blog entry for today wondering if anybody ever reads these things?

Friday, March 25, 2005

Good Friday

Good Friday: Many Christians esteem today, in fact this whole weekend, as a special time to commemorate the crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

In my book, *The Lazarus Projects*, I follow the traditional chronology, yet, in my own faith, I number among those who regard all days the same.

Jesus Christ was my savior and Lord and deserved my worship and adoration last Tuesday as much as He will be savior and Lord and deserve worship next Wednesday.

But if observing days helps some people grow closer to God, blessings on them.

We Saw A Loggerhead Shrike

A stormy day but during a break Ginny & I strolled a way along Jacksonville's Northbank Riverwalk where we saw a loggerhead shrike, the first time we've ever encountered one of these unusual birds.

A shrike will capture smaller birds, mammals and insects then impale the prey on a sharp thorn to kill it.

We spent the morning dabbling at yardwork. Eve came over and helped me transplant a dozen flowering trees.

Sunday, March 27, 2005

A Thought for Easter

Jesus Christ either rose or rotted.

There is no other alternative...

Which do you think is true?

Monday, March 28, 2005

Missed the train, got soaking wet, and I'm the very picture of happiness

I missed a train today through sheer stupidity 😞.

Ginny & I spent a wonderful day together snapping photos along half the length of Jacksonville's Northbank Riverwalk so that we can post the pictures on my website when we've finished our survey.

The riverwalk passes over the railroad tracks right where the trains cross the St. Johns River next to the new Acosta Bridge. I heard the siren alerting boaters that the drawbridge was going down. I heard a train coming. I rushed up the ramp and positioned my borrowed camera so the train would pass directly beneath my feet. I snapped dramatic photo after photo as the engine approached head-on. Two guys in the engine waved to me as I snapped close-ups of the engine.

Greatest train photos ever taken—Except, as I realized later, I had not turned on the digital camera! 😞

I only got one lousy picture of the tail end of the train on the bridge. 😞

Not only did I miss the train, but I got soaking wet as I tried to get a picture of a fountain. Now I know what the zoom lenses is for. 💡

So much for disasters.

Now for the good stuff:

I did get lovely photos of the Riverwalk, the loggerhead shrike's nest, Jacksonville's skyline, and Ginny's long hair blowing in the wind.

We visited a unique home downtown and took photos of this beautiful dwelling for posting on my website in April. I think it's Jacksonville's most charming home.

Then we drove out to Silver Star, our favorite Chinese restaurant, where we chanced to meet Peggy, a friend we have not seen since long before Christmas, and we enjoyed playing catch-up and I snapped a picture of her against a background of Chinese decorations.

Next, we drove to a swamp where we took photos of marshlands and waterways to make the book cover for my novel, *Glog*, a tale about a sentient dinosaur who eats muskrats, illuminates manuscripts and prays to his Creator—mostly about catching more muskrats 😊.

While we were in the marsh, we saw a pair of swallows, a bird we have seldom seen in Florida. And we saw the dorsal fin of a large fish breaking the water as it chased a school of smaller fish for close 50 yards right on the surface 😊.

A thrilling happy day in which we accomplished a lot and enjoyed being together 😊

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

Old Letters, computers & streetcar tracks

My friend K. drives a Rolls Royce which he keeps in pristine condition; he also keeps a Cadillac to use as a dingy when his Rolls is in the shop. It's often in the shop because if a bird so much as craps on the windshield, K. takes it to the garage.

Anyhow, today as I helped him shuffle cars, he treated me to lunch at Whiteway Delicatessen. As we enjoyed our scrumptious sandwiches, I told him about my progress editing the *Stacy Letters*, those old letters which I found in a wooden file drawer I bought at a yard sale. They touch on Jacksonville history.

In turn, K., scion of one of Jacksonville's oldest families, told me he has letters, diaries and papers from his own forbearers. Some of these date back into the 1880s and all relate to Jacksonville History!

What a treasure!

But, unfortunately, K. is seriously considering destroying the lot because he feels that private papers should stay private.

I choked on my sandwich.

I can see his point to a certain extent and I sympathize with it. While I have no secrets, certain things in my own journal are private and I would not want the world in general to read them—yet. I've asked my children not to read my journals until after Ginny and I are both dead; to never read less than 50 pages at a time; and to wait 20 years or so before even thinking of publishing them. (As though anybody 20 years from now will be interested in my life and petty affairs – what vanity).

So, I suggested that K. gather his family's letters and diaries; pack them in a plastic bin, the sort you can buy at Big Lots or K-Mart for a couple of dollars; seal the bins; Label them **“Not to be opened before the year 2050”**; and donate them to the Jacksonville Historical Society.

I'm confident that the society would respect the private nature of the correspondence and would preserve them until all immediately concerned are long gone. Then the details of daily life in a former age would become invaluable to future historians.

K. was not too keen on my idea—but he's got it in the hopper.

Future historians, I wish you luck.

On a different historical note: last week road crews resurfacing San Marco Blvd. ran into a problem – streetcar tracks buried three feet under the present day road surface. The last trolley car ran Jacksonville streets in 1936 so these have been underground for quite a while.

In order to refurbish the street, hundreds of massively heavy, water-logged, heart-pine cross ties had to be dug up and disposed of. Many were consigned to the trash.

But Donald, God bless him, salvaged several for me. He must be as strong as Samson to lift these things into the back of his van. But last night he brought some for me to use to line my bromeliad bed in the garden. For close to 50 years I've collected assorted junk related to Jacksonville history. And while railroad ties are not your typical collector's item, I'm delighted.

After we placed the streetcar ties, Donald gutted my computer and did things to it. Esoteric, technical things with wires and cables and chips. He replaced the carburetor and screwed in new spark plugs and a spleen. My computer survived the operation and is resting comfortably.

Among the new guts, is a multidirectional microphone. If I ever learn to work it, I can cut and paste e-sounds – like my words of wisdom (known among my children as tirades) and post them on my website. Thus is ushered in a new era of boring things on cowart.info .

Donald also used Gimp software to design a book cover for *Letters From Stacy*. Now the only delay is me; I hope to post the letters on Lulu Press next week—D.V— both as an e-book and a real book.

Donald would have done more web stuff for me but he wanted to rush home to his own computer to e-talk with this virtual e-girl he's met online through an e-dating service. They plan a f2f meet soon. Such e-courtship rituals seem bizarre to me but I wish them joy— Or should that be e-joy?

Thursday, March 31, 2005

Uncle John's Tales for Kiddies

Spent the day working on three gory Bible stories for bloodthirsty kiddies to add to cowart.info for my April update. When my own kids were little they loved “meaty” Bible stories—which in today's wimp world would be considered too intense for younger viewers.

I've noticed that the aforementioned younger viewers relish such stories, the same tales the mind-censors deem too strong for them. Kids are smarter and have better judgment than their caregivers give them credit for. Has any under-aged person in the history of the world ever tried to sneak into see Mr. Smith Goes To Washington?

It's happened again: another of Ginny's bosses approached her about a better job. That's the second one this month. I'm married to a lady who is in great demand. We'll see what happens.

Friday, April 01, 2005

Web Work & Dishes

While searching for free clip art yesterday, I encountered a website devoted to erotic wall murals from ancient Pompeii. It shocked my Christian sensibilities and after only an hour or so of browsing, I managed to escape the offensive site. (Boy, those ancient Romans sure knew how to party!)

Up at 3 a.m. today, to begin updating www.cowart.info for April. I started with a refresher tutorial in *Contribute 3* software, got entangled in the world wide web. I spent 3 hours avoiding the mandibles of the web's giant spider.

But by the time Ginny woke up at 6:30, I'd solved the preliminary problem and began to actually get down to work.

It took me till 7 p.m. to finish the update. All I have left to do on the site now is post the April MED Watch crime statistics and I'll be done for this month and can start back editing the *Stacy Letters*.

Since it is the end of March and we drank coffee out of the Christmas mugs this morning, I decided it was time for me to wash dishes. I'll be glad when Martha Stewart, now that she's out of prison, gets free from house arrest so she can come take care of things like that.

I have not heard from my friend in Indonesia since the earthquake Monday. We've e-mailed her and I'm concerned that she has not responded.

Ginny taught a class at the commission after work today so she was late getting home – amid a gully-washer thunderstorm.

What A Happy, Happy Day!

I finished my goals in computer work (e-mails, tweaking website, etc) by 6:30 a.m., and, although I still have tons of editing to do on the *Stacy Letters*, I said to hell with it and went outside for yard work.

The grass was too wet to mow, so I spent the day dabbling in my neighbors swimming pool doing the preliminary cleaning for Spring. Then, because of the extra classes she's been teaching, Ginny came home early. I was so happy to see her! We drove up to Dave's for a late lunch together.

We found the dinner aswarm with activity. The waiters, Homer, Chris, Mark & Eddie, were already hyper about getting off by 3 o'clock, but a well-dressed, classy, young woman appeared just before closing and talked with Eddie, who owns the place (I think) a bit and when she left, the guys told us that she'd brought contracts for him to sign: Dave's is to be used as a set for some movie being filmed in Jacksonville!

The guys were exuberant. They are all convinced that the movie director will notice their obvious talent and sign them on as movie stars. They were singing and dancing and cutting the fool, and acting giddy over the prospects.

They plan to refurbish Dave's for the movie. They will close a few days next week to paint the outside and ceiling and to mop and wax the floors. I teased that to really spiff the place up good they might even go so far as to wash the dishes; all too often the lipstick on the coffee cup is not my shade.

It was such a delight for us to see them all so happy.

To get to my handkerchief, I'd put the tin matchbox I'd made for this week on the table and Mark noticed the bear picture on the cover. (For my pipe I use wooden matches and make a new box for them every week or so.)

Mark admired this one because he collects bears and such. So—after checking to see that the bikini girl on the inside lid was suitable for someone of his tender years (She was modestly covered)—I gave it to him.

This made him even happier, but he was concerned that Ginny might see the bikini girl. She got tickled and assured him that she certainly knows she's been married to a dirty old man for 37 years.

Jeanette, a very elderly regular at Dave's, came in and was glad to see us as usual. Poor thing can hardly hobble. But the guys were heart set on closing up shop on time and fussed at her for coming in so late.

Ginny & I went outside to sit on the brick wall to smoke and we resumed the same running conversation we've been having for 37 years:

Today we talked about books, children, gardening, car repairs, sex, websites, history, television, FAMUS, SAMUS, summer camps, a seminar she's attending next week, the pope's dying, weather reports, restaurants, Bible stories, matchboxes, grocery shopping, weekend plans, Ted Koppel's leaving *Nightline* – and on and on. All the things we've been too busy to talk about during the week.

It was wonderful.

Back home, she went in her office to pay bills while I answered e-mail. Another super thunderstorm with house-shaking lightening came up so we had to turn off computers.

We went to Woody's BBQ for our usual Friday Night Date and kept talking. We'd intended to rent a couple of Blockbuster movies but we had so much fun talking and it got so late that we decided to come home and watch a *West Wing* video of our own and fell asleep holding hands on the sofa – end of a great and happy day.

Saturday, April 02, 2005

Scripture & Media

This Scripture cropped up in my devotional reading today:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables. — II Tim. 4:2-4

All day Ginny & I drove around town photographing statues for a future website special. We'd planned to go to a gardening class, but ran too late for it so we came home and watched tv coverage of the pope's death.

Media does not know how to handle religion. In an hour-long special only one person said the word, "Jesus" — so what exactly was the news?

Monday, April 04, 2005

Time & Resurrection

Daylight Savings Time began today and Ginny had to set the microwave, VCR, car radio and all the clocks ahead one hour. We had a little trouble setting the sundial in the garden, because the sun does not like to be moved, but I called my friend Joshua and he nudged it ahead.

So now all the timepieces read right. Well, all of them except for one wristwatch in the dresser drawer.

Remember a few days ago when I discovered the term “Flashing 12?” For years now, I have kept two wristwatches one set to Daylight Savings Time and the other to real time. When the appropriate Sunday of the season arrives, I simply put one watch in the dresser drawer and take out the other watch so I never have to fiddle with those little un-pushable buttons on the side, yet I always have the right time. Thus do we Flashing 12s confound the devil’s technology.

In church this morning the pastor preached on Christ’s resurrection, the account of Doubting Thomas from John’s Gospel, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

The Scripture reading from Acts struck me as particularly appropriate as I see the extended, inaccurate and befuddled tv coverage about the dead pope (I question whether any tv reporter has ever read any history book ever!).

Anyhow, this morning’s Bible reading was from St. Peter’s speech when he said, *“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

“But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For(King David)... foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”

Still no word from Indonesia. Nine Australian aid workers died there in a rescue attempt yesterday when their helicopter crashed.

Ginny & I bought fertilizer and stuff and worked in the garden most of the afternoon.

Tuesday, April 05, 2005

Happy Birthday Dolly

Our friend Rick dropped by with a birthday card for Dolly he asked me to sign.

Dolly & her husband, Bubba, have lived around here for ages. They have scads of children and grandchildren who are always in the neighborhood.

A couple of years ago Dolly invited Ginny and me to a family cookout for her birthday and we had a blast. Bubba rigged an old galvanized washtub over a roaring fire and boiled up a mixture of crabs, pigtails, potatoes, and corn-on-the-cob – a real Florida luau of the old school. And Dolly cooked up a mess of the best greens I’ve ever tasted anywhere.

Rick and I also chatted about a lot of things going on in the world and our own neighborhood.

Rick recommends that I watch a tv preacher, Rev. Miller, who broadcasts at 5 a.m. Since I'm usually at work by then, I think I'll give the program a try some morning. I need all the help I can get.

Wednesday, April 06, 2005

My Day In The Wild Kingdom

I spent Tuesday at World Golf Village. Not golfing but bird watching... I counted 31 cormorants in a single Cyprus tree. I also saw scads of heron, crane, red-winged blackbirds, a thrasher and (maybe) a pine warbler.

I also encountered a cotton mouth moccasin between three and five feet long (I did not stretch it out to measure it, you understand).

When Ginny got off work, we drove back via State Road 16 and stopped in Green Cove Springs for a delightful seafood supper.

We strolled in the park adjacent to the spring, chatted with fishermen on the public pier and sat on a park bench reminiscing about the year when the children were tiny and the six of us spent a week's vacation in a Green Cove Spring whore house.

No, that's not a typo.

We'd made reservations by phone and paid in advance not knowing what kind of place it was. So we stayed anyhow and the girls fawned over our children and treated us—and we them—with utmost courtesy. It was one of our happiest family vacations ever.

Rick came over this evening telling us more about that young mother on the block whose husband died suddenly last month: Her parked car was totaled by a hit-and-run driver of a stolen truck. She and the baby had just got out of the car moments before it was hit. Rick's not sure about her insurance situation.

No sooner had Rick left than Wanda, our friend from Savannah, dropped by with a burning theological question that's bothering her.

She lives in a ritzy, gated community up there and here's what she asked:

How should decent people handle it when one person's cat tracks footprints all over another person's just-washed car?

Wanda, a natural born mother hen, finds herself in the middle of this because she likes both parties and wants them to like each other.

Wanda leaves for home tomorrow. She casts herself in the role of peacemaker and is upset about the situation there.

The cat-lover and the car-lover, both decent folk, are adamant in their obsessions.

Emotional buttons have been pushed.

By-standers are taking sides.

Cops have been called.

Nuclear war threatens.

Savannah may be destroyed.

The pope is dead.

Billy Graham is not in town.

So Wanda, asks me for advise.

Duhh!

I can't think of a single Scripture passage that might relate.

If King Solomon, world's wisest man, counseled these people he'd take a sword and cut the cat in half and give each... No, Solomon's solution only worked with babies.

Maybe if you tied the adversaries' left hands together, then placed a meat cleaver in their right hands....

No. No, that's not a Christian solution.

Of course, after my friend was well on her way up I-95— then, too little, too late, as usual when I try to think of answers to problems— I had an idea:

Perhaps Wanda—who, for some reason beyond me, finds herself involved in trying to reconcile the parties—might ask each of these adversarial parties this question:

“Is your neighbor's eternal soul, health, well-being and good will more important than your car/cat?”

“Really?”

Thursday, April 07, 2005

Yard Work

Because of all the recent rains, the weeds in our backyard grew so high you could have filmed a Tarzan movie back there.

So I spent all Wednesday pushing a mower through the weeds.

As I worked, I saw the first hummingbird of the season.

Friday, April 08, 2005

Another Country heard from

Heard from our friend in Indonesia. She and her family came through the earthquake safely. She says that the Indonesian language translation of my book on prayer is being printed now and should be available soon.

Today's Webalizer stats for my website, show that so far this month 3,077 readers from more than 30 countries have spent more than 10 minutes each reading stuff on www.cowart.info.

The number of folks who visit my site continues to amaze me; I never suspected it would reach so many people.

Yesterday for the first time someone from Fiji visited the site.

Saturday, April 09, 2005

On being a cheerful, happy, glowing Christian — Damn it!

Sometimes I hate being a Christian.

Today was one of those times.

Earlier this week someone brought to my attention that one of my neighbors has been pissed over something I did.

Well, my first reaction is to say, "To Hell with 'em!" I didn't do anything wrong, in fact what I did was right and she has no reason to get her ass on her shoulders. It didn't involve her and it's none of her damn business."

Then I went through all sorts of mental gymnastics justifying what I'd done and why she has no business being offended. She really needs to grow up and move on.

I decided to withdraw and that the best thing to do was simply to avoid contact with her from now on.

But, being a Christian of sorts, I could not help remembering the Scripture from Matthew 5:23-24, where Jesus said,

"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift."

In other words, when there are hard feelings, even if they are not my fault then I need to be the one to make the initial move and take the first step in straightening them out.

What a pain in the ass!

I'm not in the wrong about this.

Why should I be the one to apologize?

Jesus has all these dumb rules that make me belly-crawl even when I do the right thing. I'm the good guy here. Now, I can see going to another person who has offended me and trying to get things straight, but I'm not the tender, delicate offended party here.

Nevertheless, the Scripture stands.

It boils down to whether or not I intend to follow Jesus. He is my Lord, or He's not.

So, I've avoided meeting the person all week long. But this morning I called to be sure she was at home and I drove over there and apologized.

I went with much mumbling and grumbling and vexation of spirit – but I went. (NOTE: if you obey but gripe about it, you lose all your spiritual brownie points 😞)

Turns out, she says, that the original report was wrong. She was not pissed at me at all but at somebody else altogether. But I would have assumed animosity from now on if I had not marched over there and straightened out things between us.

The words of Jesus are often a pain, but sometimes they make sense.

But I could do without all this anguish of spirit and bitterness I've been feeling. I really truly did not want to go talk with this woman. But I felt I had to make that first move.

I've got to stop reading all that Scripture, it messes up my head when I take it seriously.

Enjoyed breakfast at Dave's with my friend Barbara. We talked about her family. In relation to them, she reminds me of some tragic character from Greek mythology, sort of Sisyphus, Prometheus, and Cassandra all rolled into one.

Barbara is reading my Lulu book *I'm Confused About Prayer* and says she will write a brief review for my Lulu storefront at www.bluefishbooks.info.

Worked on the *Stacy Letters* for a short time this afternoon.

This week, four people have asked me about doing yard work for them. How can I get another book written behind a lawnmower? Of course, judging from my book sales, I make one hell of a good yard trash man.

Sunday, April 10, 2005

Yard Work

Yard work all day.

Ginny & I helped friends from MED Neighborhood Crime Watch clean up our section of roadway. Came home to do yardwork in our own backyard. Lunch at Dave's. Home to start more yard work. Eve came to visit. And we did more yardwork as we chatted.

Monday, April 11, 2005

Sunday, April 10th

Because I was supposed to drive Donald to the airport and we had a lot of yard work we wanted to catch up on, Ginny & I skipped church today to work on our flower beds.

Unfortunately, due to a timing glitch, Donald missed his flight and I'll drive him tomorrow. I was so tired that I crashed and got virtually nothing done today.

Wednesday, April 13, 2005

Typical Day—Broken Schedule, Yard Work, Sex Offender, Train Wreck, Volcanic Eruption & Writing

Catching up from last Monday: **Monday, April 11, 2005**

Up at 3 a.m. and did a few chores before dressing to drive Donald to the airport at 10 a.m.— as the louse had arranged for me to do yesterday.

Fortunately I checked his blog before I finished getting ready to go. There, I discovered that he had already left for the airport without telling me!!!

And here I'd planned my whole week around having his van and feeding his cats. Therefore, I found myself with no schedule for this week. I decided to hell with it and dabbled in the yard, first climbing on the roof, cleaning gutters, and removing winter debris; then beginning a thorough cleaning of the pool.

A short MED Neighborhood Crime Watch meeting tonight; there's to be a group yard sale next weekend but Gin & I want to pass on this one. Afterwards we drove to Barbeque Junction where we munched while reading our books, ignoring each other in warm, comfortable, happy intimacy.

Tuesday, April 12, 2005

Up at 3 a.m. and worked on *Stacy Letters* till Gin got up at 6:15. After she left for work, I continued edging the yard till the battery-operated string trimmer ran out of power. I clipped and rooted a batch of collangeas to back the impatiens along the east fence.

This afternoon C. called quite upset because police computer records reveal that E.H., a registered sex offender and rapist, has moved in just a few doors down the street from us. She is contacting everyone in MED Neighborhood Crime Watch to discuss what, if anything, should be done.

Railroad tracks run just behind our house and this morning a train squished a guy just down the street near a Chinese restaurant where we often eat. Cops question whether he may have already been dead and his body placed on the tracks for the train to mulch.

Evening tv brings more news from Indonesia: following the Christmas tidal wave, and the Easter earthquake, today a volcano erupted killing yet more people... When Donald gets back, we'll talk about sending more aid...

A Petty, Self-centered Thought: If the Indonesian translation of my book on prayer ever does get printed, will there be anybode left to read it?

Thursday, April 14, 2005**Without A Vine**

If I ever finish this yard work, Tarzan won't have a vine to swing on.

After working on the *Stacy Letters* from 3 to 6:30 a.m. and packing Ginny's lunch, I again devoted the day to cleaning our yard and pool. Normally, edging and mowing the yard takes me about six hours. But having let things go all winter, I now find the job overwhelming. However, once this initial cleanup is done, it will just be a matter of maintaining things.

Of course, the more I do, the more I see needs doing.

I have to know when to say "good enough." Stephen King once remarked that it's possible for a writer to spend his whole life doing his laundry!

I finds the compulsion to get things "just right" is a satanic obsession to avoid writing.

Talked with C., et al, again this afternoon about our new neighbor. We'll see what develops. Even sexual predators need to live somewhere. But this guy is likely to find himself in a goldfish bowl. Several neighbors have already made sure the police are aware of his presence.

While Ginny washed her beautiful hair this evening, I browsed through blogs linked to Donald's site. I blundered into an aspiring writer's entries and composed an encouraging comment for her, but afterwards I found that you have to register with the web server to post a comment. I wish they'd told me that before I wrote the letter.

Barbara called in a panic this afternoon because of a computer problem. I talked her through it even though I feel I know nothing about computers (you punch the key and sometimes something happens — Maybe).

She's contacted a master gardener to help her with her flowers; I'm relieved. It's such a grueling trip over to that side of town. Of course, if the master gardener does not work out for her, I'll go over with my weed eater.

Friday, April 15, 2005**Titanic Anniversary**

On April 14, 1912, the *Titanic* sank. 1,502 people died.

Among them was Dr. Robert J. Bateman, founder of a rescue mission for men and a home for wayward women in Jacksonville, Florida. Newspapers of the day hailed Bateman as a hero both for his actions aboard the *Titanic* and his life beforehand.

President Theodore Roosevelt consulted Bateman regarding social issues; and a letter from a prostitute led the minister to be on the *Titanic*.

"Jacksonville's *Titanic* Hero", a chapter of my book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, is available at bluefishbooks.info if anyone is interested.

Monday, April 18, 2005: A day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our times. And you were there...

As of this morning, according to the Webalizer stats for my website, 8,373 readers from 68 countries have spent at least 10 minutes each on my site so far this month.

I know this is not a huge number in the computer world, but it amazes me that so many people show such interest in the work of a quiet man from such a backwater as Jacksonville.

I try to offer readers something honestly worth their time, but let's face it, the life and thoughts of a happy man are not all that interesting to somebody else.

I mean, take this blog for instance.

How often do readers want to know I worked in the yard, or I love my wife, or I saw a bird, or I prayed, or I'm pissed about something?

How interesting is that?

Yet, such mundane things are the substance of my life and thoughts.

So while life is rich for me, there's not much drama in it for other people.

Maybe I'm a sort of Mr. Rogers for adults.

Tuesday, April 19, 2005

One Great Movie!!!

"Seriously, around these parts we're serious about taking horrible mutilations seriously."

This quote from Ranger Brad comes from a seriously great movie called *The Lost Skeleton Of Cadavra*, which my wife, Ginny, & I watched last night as my wife and I watched this tv video last night – which gives you some idea of how the dialogue in this delightfully camp film goes.

I highly recommend this video as pure entertainment although it is rated PG for "Brief Mild Language."

This film makes the early *Godzilla* movies look like cinema!

Beware of those aliens; they carry a painter's caulking gun as a space weapon! So you'd just better watch out.

Hard to remember when we had so much fun with a library video.

I had lunch with my friend Barbara at Far East Buffet. She told me she's having trouble with her printer. When she tried to print a hard copy of her resignation from her volunteer job as secretary of her condo board, the printer refused to print. Barbara said that she'd try to print it one more time and if it would not print she'd take it as a sign from God that she is not supposed to resign from this onerous job...

I told her that if it would not print, then that is a sign from God that she's to take a hammer and chisel and engrave her resignation in stone!

Wednesday, April 20, 2005

Flashing Twelve Ingenuity

Big plans for the weekend. Patricia will be home from college and Johnny will be down from D.C. For the first time in ages five of my six children (Fred has to work) will be together at once. I've been trying to clean house and yard so they won't know that I live like a slob...

Donald is always after me to vacuum behind the computer. Dust, tobacco crumbs and my pipe's ashes accumulate around my desk.

In fact, ashes get in my keyboard and cause the letter `iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii` to stick now and then.

Donald bought me one of those little cans of compressed air to blow off the keyboard but it just drives the dust deeper inside. However, being a Flashing Twelve, I have solved the problem; I keep a large pair of tweezers in my pencil cup and when `iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii` sticks, I just use the tweezers to pull it up then backspace the extra letters.

Thus once again a Flashing Twelve conquers a high-tech problem thru skill and `iiiiiiiiingenuiiiiiiity`.

Thursday, April 21, 2005

Rex Gave Me A WWI Artillery Shell

I added something wonderful to our garden yesterday – a World War I artillery shell.

My friend Rex works at a site that was once used for artillery practice and his workmen occasionally uncover practice shells when they're digging so he brought one home for me.

I'm delighted.

Even though it's hollowed out—no explosive, of course—the thing weighs over 40 pounds.

Cool!

What a macho thing to display among the flowers along with the statue of Aphrodite and that Aborigine carving.

(I'll borrow Eve's camera this weekend and try to post some pictures if I can figure out how to make the computer do that). (Another thought, Donald did post some pictures of our 2002 garden on my website but it's time for some new ones).

Really, I like the yard-art stuff I've accumulated over the years as much as I like the garden's flowers per se. You don't have to weed artillery shells.

Ginny, of course, tolerates my predilection for yard art. When I bought a carving at a yard sale once, she said, "O well, one man's trash is another man's trash."

God, but I love her!

We sat out by the fountain yesterday evening trying to identify an odd bird we'd never seen before. None of our bird books even give us a hint.

I've spent an inordinate amount of time this week reading other people's blogs and I find them fascinating. It seems the more unhappy people are over life and relationships, the more they write. I feel such pity and often pray for many of the folks I read about.

The computer system skips from blog to blog at random so it's hard to return when I find one that appeals to me or a person I come to care about.

I'm really happy to see so many people keeping track of their lives. For over 20 years I've kept a daily journal and I've found it invaluable, probably the most important thing I've ever written, so I view blogging as a fine thing for people to do. (Excerpts from some of my old journals are on my website, www.cowart.info if anybody cares)

My life is so happy on so many levels, but joy does not make for the high drama that drives writers. Many of my days can be blogged with ditto marks.

I actually made a comment on a blog this morning. The first time ever I think. I've started to a couple of times but I feel uncomfortable, maybe even intrusive when I really have some insight or comfort to offer. I'm not sure about the rules of courtesy when it comes to internet blogs. But the one I was reading today, *Funky Bug*, is by a vivacious, clever lady who apparently lives downstate and who had eight other comments going about a computer problem—Donald was complaining about the same site/server problems last night—I just joined the line of comments.

Ongoing conversation with Wes

Breakfast at Dave's with Wes. We spent about 4 hours talking about life, charity, frustration, reality and Christianity. We didn't arrive at any specific conclusions but determined to hang in there.

After Wes left, I spent some time watering the flowers I'd transplanted last week.

Among the birds in the yard today were an eastern bluebird, a white-throated sparrow and a Brewer's blackbird.

Friday, April 22, 2005

Fireworks & Celebration!!!

Fireworks & Celebration.

Waved banners. Dance in the streets. Scatter flowers. Kiss strangers. Light bonfires.

This morning for the first time ever the Webalizer statistics for my website, show that over Ten Thousand readers from 72 countries have spent at least 10 minutes each on the site so far this month.

Blows my mind!

I can't imagine why or how so many people would be interested in my writing. I'm just a plain 'ol garden variety Christian and it scares me a bit to think that maybe my life touches so many others in this little way.

Hey people, read Brother Lawrence, David Brainerd, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, St. Patrick or somebody important. John Cowart is about the most wobbly Christian on the vine... But, thank you for reading my site. I'm honored.... But I'm also tickled pink to break 10,000 readers. Awesome!

Sunday, April 24, 2005

Torture Aboard An Amtrak Train & Our Family Cookout

Saturday morning I went to meet my son John at the Amtrak Station; his train was over five hours late.

When it pulled in the station, I witnessed an odd phenomena: No sooner had the train stopped than the doors sprang open and people began urgently pouring out of the cars as though they were running in panic.

From the way they rushed out I thought they were evacuating the train because of some terrorist bomb threat or something.

But, no.

These passengers clustered immediately outside the train doors and began to light up; poor bastards had been stuck in a No Smoking environment for over 12 hours!

Their craving for tobacco fostered a sense of urgency in getting free of those damn metal boxes so they could smoke.

I said to a man standing there, an old retired Railroad guy, "The way those folks rushed out I thought maybe terrorists had taken over the train."

He said, "Son, terrorists took over Amtrak years ago – and they've been running it ever since!"

How happy I was to see John for the first time in years. We'd arranged for a family and friends cookout in the backyard to welcome him. Ginny set up an elaborate spread featuring every goody just short of a genuine fatted calf.

For herself Patricia brought some straw—or whatever it is that vegetarians eat. As a treat for everyone, she grilled fresh ears of corn still in the husks. Once they're cooked over the charcoal, you peel back the husk, butter the corn, and eat it like a Popsicle using the husk as the stick. I've never seen corn cooked like this before.

Scrumptious!

The other night Ginny'd run across a song sheet with all the words to "*Oh My Darling, Clementine*" on it and Johnny and all us guys serenaded the ladies with all ten or 12 verses. The girls nearly fell out of their chairs laughing.

While I'm grateful to the Lord for all the material blessings in my life, when the faith really hits the fan, people are the only thing that really count. Nothing other than people will last forever. I am so privileged and thankful to be a part of this wonderful group.

Four digital cameras were present at the cookout so they got lots of pictures of family, friends and garden—I plan to post some of these on cowart.info in a few days (I never have learned how to put a picture on this blog; it utterly defeats me).

A Talk With My Youngest Daughter

Friday I sprayed the yard for mosquitoes while waiting for Patricia, our youngest daughter, to arrive home from college.

She and I ate breakfast at Dave's then drove to Goodyear because one of her tires had picked up a razor blade; she's been driving without a spare.

We then drove to the unique home featured on my website because she wanted to see the place in person. We returned home and talked and talked and talked, she sitting on the deck while I vacuumed Rex's pool.

This was the first one-on-one in depth conversation we've had in years.

Her maturity and insights amaze me. I'm so accustomed to thinking of her and my other children as *kids*; then, suddenly I see them as adults and I wonder where these wonderful people have come from.

Patricia told me about adventures with her apartment, college, car and friends. She is coping so well with the vicissitudes of life. She's managing things on her own that would have overwhelmed me at her age. I admire her.

And she is so appreciative. She expressed again and again her gratitude for me and Ginny and for the way we raised her. And I thought it was all water off a duck's back.

When she was a teenager, I despaired of ever seeing her grown. Some of the friends, ideas and habits she embraced terrified me and I lived those years in frustration, fear and dread.

She took a different path from one I would have chosen for her, but her own inner strength and character (with a little — to me almost imperceptible — help from God) has caused her to really land on her feet.

Back then, Ginny & I didn't think we could survive her; now she is such a joy to us.

Another thing that pleases me so much is how well our children get along together. They really like each other, plan things together and help each other out in individual troubles. That relationship gives me so much pleasure.

Monday, April 25, 2005

On The Beach

A flock of Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) surrounded us at the Talbot Island State Park beach as Patricia tossed them bread scraps. That, of course, reminded us all of a funny/horrible incident:

Once when Patricia was 13 or 14 she encountered a poor family on her way home from school. Neither Ginny nor I were home at the time so Patricia decided to make up a food basket from canned goods and food from our kitchen. She packed a couple of grocery bags with cans of Spam, tuna, beans, powdered milk, etc. Also in her food basket for the poor, she placed a loaf of bread from the freezer..

Now for ages, Ginny has saved all bread scraps from family meals (crusts, moldy slices, half-eaten toast, broken cookie crumbs, etc) so that when we go to a park we'd have something to feed the ducks, pigeons, or gulls or whatever. It was her custom to store these in an old bread wrapper in the freezer until she accumulated a bagful. Also, she'd buy several loafs of real fresh bread at a time and freeze it till she was ready to use it.

You guessed it.

Patricia inadvertently gave the poor, starving family the duck food in the bread wrapper when she carried her two food packets to their house.

It wasn't till Ginny got home that evening that the error was discovered!

Ever since then the whole family has teased Patricia about being cruel to poor starving wretches by making them eat duck food.

Today was no exception. As Patricia tossed bread crusts to the gulls, we all teased her about needing to save those scraps to feed the poor.

Today the eight of us walked for miles along the beach gathering treasures of shell, feathers, drift wood to show each other. We picked a poor day to go the seashore; it was really too windy and chilly—I was disappointed not to see a single bikini on the beach. Nevertheless, we persevered and walked beaches in both the Talbot Island parks.

We discovered a nest on Big Talbot – no, not a bird nest, but a lean-to shelter patched together by some homeless man in the woods. In the past, when we were more active in helping the homeless, we've run across many such nests, usually just a simple sheet of plastic on the ground. But this one was more elaborate made by propping sheets of plywood and driftwood planks around the forks of a fallen tree to make a hidden dwelling—not permanent but at least long term.

(Long story, but sometime I'll have to write about the time Johnny brought Norman, a nest-dweller too crazy to be inside a building, home to live at our house—all my children are NUTS!!!)

When the eight of us rested at two picnic tables, Ginny broke out cokes and snacks; and Patricia, a vegetarian, broke out a pack of green soy beans to share. Of course, the way we shared the beans was to play seagull and for everyone to try to toss beans for Jennifer at the other table to catch in her mouth. Eve proved NBA Champion by scoring two consecutive baskets down Jennifer's cleavage!

Then we all howled and laughed like idiots as Jennifer, who only has the use of one arm, tried to dig beans out of her bra.

Johnny remarked, "Some people come to Florida on vacation and spend hundreds of dollars at Disney World without laughing as much as we do just tossing beans at my sister."

After our trek on the beach, Donald led us all across the Mayport Ferry to a seafood restaurant he knew about, Captain Singleton's Seafood Shack & Model Ship Museum. We gorged on shrimp, clams, oysters, fish, scallops, and what-have-you. Then we browsed in the museum. The models delighted me. When my sight was better I dabbled at building ship models, but nothing on the scale of these.

After supper, the girls fed a herd of cats that infest the restaurant parking lot. Then we walked a block to see Mayport's historic lighthouse and watch the moon rise over the ocean. Then drove home exhausted...

I feel hesitant, reluctant to mention this next thing. It's almost as though I'm transgressing...

All my life the sight of the island salt marshes has touched a cord in my heart. The stretches of sawgrass cut by tidal runs and dotted by distant hammocks of gnarled trees generate a haunted feeling in my soul. I feel a yearning, a longing, a good fear—like when you see a person in the distance and you think it might be Someone you love but you're not sure.

When I look closer, yes, I can see that the marsh is mud and weeds and dead shells and bird droppings... Yet, Something is there. Some Presence. Some yearned-for-Someone. I gaze at the marsh and think there's Someone behind me and I almost expect to feel a nail-scared hand come to rest on my shoulder.

Pipe dreams?

Maybe.

My brain knows that theologically God is omnipresent, He is in all places at all times. Where could He not be? In Him we live and move and have our very being...

Yet, when I see what I know is a swamp --, I think I'm reminded of Home ... a Home I've never been to -- yet.

Tuesday, April 26, 2005

Educational trip to the Museum

Yesterday most of the family took me to Jacksonville's Museum of Science and History. It was very educational.

I learned that my feet hurt less if I let everybody else tour the museum while I sit outside on a park bench!

The museum features an excellent display on Jacksonville history. It was like walking through the pages of my book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, a Jax history. I kept seeing so much I recognized and enjoyed.

In the evening, Johnny & I enjoyed a great meal at Bar-B-Q Junction on San Juan Ave. We talked with two very nice sweet young ladies, the manager and the cashier (who said I look like the movie star played a lost boy in *Hook*). They posted a flyer about my jax history book by the cash register.

My own good looks are my best advertisement. (I haven't seen *Hook*; that actor does look good, doesn't he? Well, doesn't he?)

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Great News, A Gracious Lady, An Odd Store, And Geeks In Heaven

Great News: I received word today that the Public Library System plans to order sixteen copies of *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, my history of Jacksonville, Florida. They are also considering buying some copies of my science fiction novel, *The Lazarus Projects*.

Thank God!

My sales are increasing.

Watch out Stephen King.

I kept the car today and picked Johnny up early. We went for a leisurely breakfast at Whiteway Delicatessen. Sammy, the owner, said I can put up flyers for my Jax history book.

I've been preparing a photo album on statues in Jacksonville for the May update of www.cowart.info, so I took Johnny to a lovely private garden that I've before only seen while driving past. He owns a digital camera and was taking pictures of a deer statue at a fountain in the garden.

The owner of the home, Janice, saw us taking photos from the sidewalk and came out to talk with us.

She could not have been more gracious.

She explained she and her husband dedicated this garden to their daughter Sandy who died tragically five years ago. Sandy was a tv news writer.

Sandy's Garden is one of the loveliest spots in Jacksonville and Janice invited us inside so Johnny could take more pictures.

I don't know how to insert photos in this blog yet, but I plan to post some of the photos in the statue album on cowart.info next week.

Next Johnny & I visited Eve at work and meet some of her co-workers. Johnny goes back to Maryland tomorrow and wanted to say good bye to her. He's leaving early because his Amtrak experience coming down was so unpleasant that he plans to rent a car and drive himself back then turn in his train ticket for a refund.

After visiting Eve, we walked for hours around Shep's, a unique discount store which sells everything from pianos to motor scooters. There, for the first time, I saw a skateboard engraved with Bible verses!

Johnny bought a shopping cart full of souvenirs for folks back home.

Donald came by for supper. He and John entered Geek Haven, networking laptops with my computer and intensely solving some picture transfer problems, or something. Afterwards they took off to Shep's again and spent the night at Donald's apartment doing computer stuff.

At her work today Ginny led a meeting involving accounting procedures and she feels good about it. It should smooth out some glitches in the flow of money in some of the children's programs. It seems as though in the midst of staff changes some jobs were not passed on and fell through the cracks.

Friday, April 29, 2005

Week's Summary:

Jennifer & Pat put their house up for sale.

Fred wasn't able to make the trip.

Patricia is back in Gainesville.

Johnny is back in Maryland.

Ginny is back at her job.

Donald is familiated out.

Eve's tooth is pulled.

God's in His Heaven.

Vacation's over.

I'm exhausted.

ZZZZZ....

Saturday, April 30, 2005

I don't just write history; I'm old enough to BE history

After family vacation last week, I work in a stupor preparing the May update to cowart.info. God only knows if the new additions make sense. I've boasted that I could write in my sleep; now, I'm doing it.

When Ginny & I visited the library to return our books this morning, two librarians asked if I'd give a talk on Jacksonville history in June. I'm flattered.

They asked if I'm an historian; I explained that I'm just a guy who is interested in Jax history and write about it out of that interest. I'm no expert. But they want me to give the talk for their history month program anyhow. The prospect scares me a little. They talk of inviting other librarians and folks from the Main Library's Florida History Collection—real local history experts—to this talk.

I fear being exposed as an amateur fraud... O well, I'll never learn humility without being humiliated. Besides, what kind of utter wimp gets intimidated by librarians for Heaven's sake? Librarians hardly ever attack....Do they?

Monday, May 02, 2005

Some Days You're The Pigeon; And Some Days You're The Statue...

“Some days you’re the pigeon; and some days you’re the statue.”

That’s what my favorite radio announcer, Dave Scott, used to say before station owners tried to introduce New Coke to the Jacksonville airways and canceled the Dave & Heather Show and I stopped listening.

Today was a statue day for me.

I have promised readers that I’ll always try to update www.cowart.info on the first of the month. So I woke up at 2:30 a.m. and began the final push to prepare the new files to add to the site.

I wrote and polished a new Rabid Fundamentalist column. I added to my selection of tasteful, refined jokes. I updated Neighborhood Watch crime statistics. I laid out changes for the home page. I made thumbnails of family vacation photos.

And among the other tasks, I put together a photo essay about the statues of Jacksonville.

Last month Donald took a photograph of the Sailor Statue on the Southbank Riverwalk to use as the cover art for my book *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*. That got me interested in other statues around Jacksonville so Ginny & I have been going to various locations all month long to take pictures of the Statues of Jacksonville for today’s site update.

Anyhow, I went to afterburners to prepare all this stuff to add to the site. I made arrangements with Donald to come over this afternoon to guide me through the update process.

With little sleep for days and none at all for the last 24 hours I began the update process — **Access Denied!**

Our server in Atlanta is down.

I can not touch my own website until tech support does whatever they do...

Some days you're the pigeon; some days you're the statue.

Tuesday, May 03, 2005

Sludge — Spiritual & Physical

My website server was still down Monday. But that's OK.

Here in the web I have at my finger tips the most effective communications system the world has ever known and here I have less constructive to say than ever before. Essentially I feel like a spiritual paraplegic. And when I can move, it's to do something wrong.

But enough of that whining.

I spent the day at my daughter's house clearing rain gutters and giving her pool its spring cleaning. Between the two projects I filled about eight trash bags and a garbage can with assorted decomposing bugs, sticks leaves and other tidbits of scum and sludge....My, but I'm in a cheerful optimistic mood, aren't I?

Then, tonight Donald rewound the rubber band or whatever it is he does with the server's computer and I was able to post the May updates to www.cowart.info So there you can find many of the photographs I talked about in earlier blogs.

Wednesday, May 04, 2005

79 Trombones Are Too Many...

The server for my website only serves a band 76 trombones in width.

Last night posting all those photos, I tried to squeeze 78 or 79 trombones into the parade.

The cruel server strangled several of my trombonists so that the band's width was back to below 76 and some of my pages would not post.

That, after I fought the thing all night, is the way I understand what happened.

However, Donald, who is a computer person, did something or another to adjust the band's width and now all my files march along just fine.

It would have been so much easier if the Dummies books had just explained about the number of trombonists allowed to live on a website.

Anyhow, now that that problem is solved I'm ready to take a nap.

Read a Florida crime novel, *Virgin Heat*, by Laurence Shames (Hyperion, 1997). It's about the daughter of a crime boss and her father. Shames touches on a feeling I often have about my own children but I've never been able to articulate. Here's a quote:

"Then Paul Amaro said, 'Whatever I did, Angelina, I tried to do the best for you.'

"Even to himself it sounded lame, and no less because it happened to be true. But it was what every parent felt when looking at his child and seeing the wounds, the disappointment; when looking at the world and knowing that one had done nothing to make it any less unkind, any less fickle or grudging in its comforts. Paul Amaro looked at his daughter and understood that for every pain he thought he'd spared her, another had been heedlessly inflicted; for every opportunity he'd yearned to give her, some other path had been closed off. Suddenly he felt very sorry. Not for her exactly. Not for himself. Not even for anything he'd done. Just sorry, like regret was taking him over the way spores and lichen take over the fibers of a tree that's dying from the inside out... Yet the loss he felt was tempered by the memory of their talk at Flagler House. She loved him for what he'd tried to do; forgave him for what he'd done. How many fathers could expect more?"

What a beautiful passage!

While I wish I did not often feel that way, I wish I could write so well.

Thursday, May 05, 2005

Boy, Are They Gonna Get It!

This morning my friend Wes told me something appalling.

Wes took me out for our weekly breakfast at Dave's and instead of talking about spiritual matters and theology as we usually do, we got to talking about church stuff.

Wes said that a while back he'd been witnessing to a wino in the park and encouraged the man to come to church with him.

When they got there and were seated before the service, the ushers came and asked the man to leave because he was smelly and not dressed appropriately for the church service!

How ghastly!

What will be the appropriate dress code on Judgment Day?

I can't think of a Scripture verse to back it up, but my impression is that we will all stand before Almighty God stark naked.

He will listen as we answer for the way we live, the people we hurt, the indifference we show, the words we say, the good we do not do, the attitudes we hold.

Will Christ know us?

Or will we be strangers?

It's easy for me to get indignant about the church people who put the bum out. But do I do the same sort of thing? How many people do I brush off because they don't fit my criteria for being members of my set? Because their presence is inconvenient at the moment?... Why, sometimes I push away my own wife and children because at that particular moment I'm involved in something more important to me than they are.

I'd qualify as an usher!

Lord, please be merciful to John Cowart, a sinner through and through.

AGHHHHHHHHH!

My website server is down again this morning!!! It was down all weekend. It was up Monday. It was down Monday night. It was up Tuesday afternoon... And now it's down again...

Do I detect demonic influence here? Or is it a technical malfunction — and is there a difference?

I think Bill Gates hates me. He sits in his office somewhere browsing my site every day and pushing little gray buttons to screw it up. He does not do this to anybody else's website, but he puts my server up or down like he's playing a computer game....

You know, I think I've been up way to late and I'm getting flaky... I'd go get some icecream but my wife says I'm not to go near the refrigerator when I've been working all night.

She says that sleep deprivation impairs my judgment and makes me groggy; and that when you're groggy you are not supposed to drive or operate heavy equipment... And as everybody knows, refrigerators are heavy...

So I'm to stay away from it.

Good night, Everybody.... You too Mr. Gates, no hard feelings.

Friday, May 06, 2005

John's Bag With Holes In It

Today I'm all too aware of the words of Haggai, the prophet who said, "You earn money only to put it into a bag with holes in it!"

Well, this internet website thing is certainly proving to be a bag full of holes.

For most of the week the server hosting my website has been down. No one can get to it.

Donald called last night saying that it may be better if we go to a dedicated server which will cost another \$50 a month more than the money we are already putting into this bag with holes in it.

Holes such as the host server, domain names, ISBNs, DSLs, proof copies of my books, DVD discs, tapes & recorder for podcasting, ink cartridges for business cards and flyers, scanner, site management software – and a whole bunch of other holes.

All this to support my hobby of writing.

Maybe I should take up something cheaper.

Hey, there are golfers who spend less on their hobby than I do on mine.

They have fewer holes too.

But, in for a penny, in for a pound.

Ginny, Donald & I consulted and decided that perhaps my hobby also contains an element of Christian ministry and maybe it has the potential of helping someone, so we decided to pour the money into yet another hole (I feel like we're buying air) and go for the dedicated server.

So, if you can't get to my website again today, please try again tomorrow. Within a couple of days we'll have the new server and the site will be up and running again – unless, of course, we fall into another hole.

Saturday, May 07, 2005

Our Highwire Act In Springfield

When they make the next Spiderman or Jackie Chan movie, tell the director that Ginny and I are qualified to play the starring roles because of our agile, graceful acrobatic ability.

Today we proved it by climbing up and down from great heights, 4 to 6 feet, while wielding a shovel and digging out old flower planters and one-handedly lifting 185 pound bags of new potting soil to that great height to plant new lantana bushes.

Considering that I weigh almost 280 pounds, am just this side of 70, and that the only climbing I've done for years is to climb out of bed in the morning, I think I did great...

Almost.

At one point I almost fell in the creek as Ginny tried to hoist my clumsy ass up on the bridge rail; but a wino in the park, God bless him, saw our distress and rushed over to help her lift me.

We all three fell to giggling. Poor bum looked as though it was the first time he'd laughed in ages and he seemed really pleased to be the one helping.

I could hardly balance on the highwire railing of the bridge to prance, gracefully from the pillion to the planter on the narrow railing which could not have been more than 18 inches wide. But, Wallenda, eat your heart out, I made it.

Yes, Ginny & I had great fun this morning planting lantana with a group of nice folks from SPAR (Springfield Preservation And Restoration). They were painting and sprucing up three bridges, designed by Jacksonville architect Henry Klutho in 1929, across Hogan Creek. They have undertaken this project to beautify their neighborhood.

Their website is <http://www.downtownparks.com/> and they have a photo of one of the bridges on it. (My own website is still down! A pox on wavepath, grumble, grumble, grumble!)

We took turns as to which one risk his or her life climbing; one advantage of having a young wife is that, if need be, she can climb better.

We saw two delightful things as we played aerialist:

About noon a yellow bus pulled up beside Confederate Park, a hangout for many of Jacksonville's homeless, herds of young people descended and began handing out sandwiches and soda's to the insane, the drunk, the addicted, the AIDS sick, the depressed, and the destitute, the Lord's poor, who often rest in the park. I was pleased to see these teenagers acting so decently. I'm proud of them.

If I knew the name of the church I'd tell you. I did call out to one of the adult leaders asking the name of the church, but he ignored me.

Considering how shabby I was dressed and how filthy from the digging and from handling the treasures we found in the planters – I didn't even know they made canary yellow condoms and I'm glad to see that Mad Dog 20-20 is still the wine of preference in Springfield — and that I was balanced on a bridge rail with sharp tools in my hand, the leader probably thought I belonged on the other side of the fence.... But anyhow, I'm delighted that this church is doing the right thing.

The other delightful thing we saw were ducklings. About 30 tiny bits of yellow fuzz herded by Mrs. Duck, came right up to us at the Hubbard Bridge. Ginny Oh'ed over them. She looked so beautiful as she made over the little things.

I attempted to catch one for her to hold, but alas, there must be kryptonite in the potting soil because the ducks could run faster than I can waddle and they got away.

Dumb ducks!

Nevertheless, Ginny kissed me on the bridge so I had a wonderful day.

Later we went to Dave's for lunch. Mark and Mary, waiters, had just come back from taking lunch to Jeanette who is too feeble to get out today. I was delighted that they'd take such care of the old lady who sometimes is a trial to them. I've resolved to start leaving bigger tips. They deserve it.

Then we went to the library and while Ginny got books, I looked over the meeting room where I'm supposed to give that lecture on Jax history so I could plan the layout for visuals...

O' I don't think I've mentioned it but a second library called the other day wanting another lecture.... Ummm, I wonder what Stephen King charges for personal appearances?

Home to nap after a happy day in the play park.... Wonder what she'd have done if I had actually caught one of those ducks???

Canary Yellow?

Really?

Monday, May 09, 2005

Mother's Day

Ginny & I skipped church this morning. Instead, we lounged in our garden, dabbling with the birdfeeders and rooting impatiens until Donald came over announcing that our websites appear to be back up. Thank God.

For Mother's Day lunch the kids took us out to Harpoon Louie's where we munched on the best onion rings I've ever tasted.

Eve was already there waiting for us; she'd been to church expecting to meet us there. Jennifer and Pat arrived soon after.

Donald & Eve came to our house after lunch and we sat in the garden talking about computers, the trials in Kansas (a distraction of Christians from real issues), and censorship in libraries.

Eve explained her criteria for buying books at her library. It is based more on financial considerations than book content. If you only have \$500 to spend, that means you can buy this book or that book — but not both.

So a primary factor is the need various readers have made known to the library's buyer.

For instance, if a school class is studying *Hamlet*, then it behooves the library to have Shakespearian materials on hand. If 50 library users show an

interest in raising blue tic hounds, then the librarian is likely to buy dog books.

After Eve & Donald left, Gin & I went in to watch tv, a quintessential Mother's Day movie, *Field of Dreams*, and I fell asleep on the recliner for hour and hours.

Tuesday, May 10, 2005**The Romance & Excitement of a Typical Writer's Day**

I sat at the keyboard typing from 4 a.m. till 4 p.m. Got nine pages written.

In the evening we attended a MED Neighborhood Crime Watch meeting where the group discussed the usual things.

Wednesday, May 11, 2005**Rewriting *The Scarlet Letter***

A registered sex offender recently moved into our neighborhood. In the light of the murder of two Florida children by registered sex offenders in the past few weeks, his presence created a stir among Neighborhood Watch members last night.

Checking out flyers on the FDLE (Florida Department of Law Enforcement) some members found that five registered sex offenders live within a half mile of where we were meeting; 72 live within our zip code.

J. made printouts of FDLE flyers on each of the five offenders; M has distributed the flyer on the closest one to affected homes in the neighborhood. I volunteered to post these flyers, copied directly from the FDLE website, on my own site. (As a service to the group I donate a small section of www.cowart.info to Neighborhood Watch affairs).

So, this morning I spent a considerable amount of time copying pages from the FDLE site and pasting them into a Word document for posting but for some reason the photos would not show up on the server. I asked Donald to come over and help me straighten out the problem.

He was able to repair my work in short order.

I was very glad that he was also able to repair my "Dog Stuck In Tree" photo.

Then he and I discussed the morality of my re-publishing the names, addresses and photos of these criminals especially since this information is readily available on the FDLE site and since I've had a link to that site in MED Watch stuff for over a year.

Shades of *The Scarlet Letter*!

We concluded that parents in the community have been adequately notified to keep close watch on their children and that the inclusion of such photos and information again would be immoral on my part.

Warning parents of danger is one thing; that's a moral, responsible thing to do. Hassling former prison inmates is another thing altogether; that's being an immoral busybody meddling in other people's lives.

Life is hard and the very essence of sin is to make it harder for somebody else than it really needs to be.

We decided that what I was doing was immoral, so we deleted all the work I'd already done and did not post the men's photos for the umpteenth time.

Sometimes it's hard to know the moral thing to do.

P.S: cowart.info is up again, and the new server should kick in this week.

Thursday, May 12, 2005

New Server is up; I am down

The new server for is up and running. Good bye server and computer problems forever!

It is a brave new world without error messages or downtime of blank screens, or "file not found" notices. No more frustrations. No more anguish. No more issuing apologies or answering questions about why readers could not find whatever...

Dream world!

We'll see.

While Donald, thank God for him, has the new server up, I'm a tiny bit down as reflected in today's journal entry:

Addendum to Wednesday, May 11, 2005

Another wasted day in a wasted life.

Resumed work on the *Stacy Letters*.

Lunch with Jennifer & Pat. Jennifer talked about how hard it will be for the family when I die.

I doubt that.

I doubt that my death will be anything more than an inconvenience for a week or so, then everyone will perk right on along, maybe stopping to curse now and then about all the crap I've left lying around and the mess I made of things.

I have not lived; I've dribbled away days and days and days.

O the joy of the Christian life!

Friday, May 13, 2005

A Virgin's Dilemma

Sorry, I started to write today's entry titled "A Virgin's Dilemma" and it got longer and longer and longer till it reached six pages so I decided that rather than post it here, I will polish it and use it as a Rabied Fundamentalist column in my June 1st update.

I'll try to do better tomorrow.

Saturday, May 14, 2005

I Had Other Plans

As a Christian, I want to be 100% at the disposal of Jesus Christ.

That's a general religious sentiment which sounds perfectly reasonable and, I think, rather commendable. The problem is that when it comes to specifics, I balk.

For instance, yesterday my wife and I took the day off to spend some quality time together. And we did. After leisurely enjoying morning coffee in our garden watching birds building a nest; after lingering over breakfast at a favorite restaurant; after browsing in an antique store looking at beautiful artifacts we neither need nor can afford; after snuggling for an afternoon nap which we hoped would escalate – the phone rang.

Whenever the phone rings, Ginny says, "There's someone with plans for our life."

My plans were interrupted.

All week long my plans have been interrupted. Then the interruptions got interrupted. If, as the church folk constantly say, God has a wonderful plan for your life, why all these interruptions?

100% at the disposal of Jesus Christ, remember?

The mental picture I have is that of an arrow in smooth, powerful flight from bow to bull's-eye following the plan of God. On the other hand, the experience I have is that of a sputtering balloon when you let it go without knotting off the end.

I thought following God's will meant goal setting, walking the straight and narrow path with steadfast purpose and determination.

Could it be that it's not a march that we're on, but a dance that we're in?

One step right, three steps left, twirl and bow and move forward and bend backward then step right again, circle left, move straight ahead – all following the One who leads the dance in a pattern which we on the floor barely perceive.

Perhaps the interruptions in my life are not interruptions at all, but steps in the great dance.

Sounds like a pretty picture?

Nevertheless, dance or no, somebody just stepped on my foot!

Sunday, May 15, 2005

Another Good Day

Why are happy days much more difficult to write about than crappy ones?

Saturday turned out great, filled with simple chores and joys and pleasures. The day left me with a feeling of profound gratitude. Yet I'm not aware of any unusual specific thing to be grateful for. I'm pleased with the way our grown children have turned out. I'm giddy in love with Ginny. We enjoyed morning coffee in the garden watching birds at the feeders and listening to the fountain. Thanks be to God for simple pleasures.

On a somber note, there's been another earthquake in Indonesia. I feel bad in that Ginny, Donald & I have been talking now and then for months about sending more relief to the lady we e-know there, but we have not actually gotten around to earmarking the funds and doing it.

Monday, May 16, 2005

Nothing To Say

Another happy day hanging out with Ginny reading, talking and watching birds in our garden yesterday.

Today, I have nothing to say. So I won't say anything... Except here's a great joke:

Q: How many paranoids does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Who wants to know?

Tuesday, May 17, 2005

Yet Another Happy Day — Ginny was off work

Another pleasant day in the garden with Ginny. We devoted our time to non-essential gardening fun: adjusting a wind chime, leveling flagstones, repotting plants – little niceties we don't usually have time to get around to.

Mostly we just sat drinking coffee, enjoying each other, talking and watching birds come and go. We saw the first redstart of the season as well as bluejays, cardinals, cow birds, grackles, a red-bellied woodpecker, wrens, a red-winged blackbird, and three species of dove. Our big topic of conversation was whether they were Carolina wrens or marsh wrens – as though we'd know the difference even if they wore name badges!

And our garter snake is back; it shows up about the same spot every year. Glad to see this old friend again.

I feel a great sense of gratitude and thankfulness that God has given us such a pleasant place to rest and talk and love and pray. We've done nothing to deserve such enormous pleasures.

While such days do not make for exciting blog reading, they certainly do make for great living.

Here's a quote from this morning's devotional reading; it's from a sermon by 18th Century preacher Charles Spurgeon:

"The wings of our hours are covered with the silver of His kindness, and with the yellow gold of His affection. The river of time bears from the mountains of eternity the golden sands of His favour. The countless stars are but as the standard bearers of a more innumerable host of blessings. Who can count the dust of the benefits which He bestows ... or tell the number of the fourth part of His mercies ... How shall my soul extol Him who daily loadeth us with benefits, and who crowneth us with loving-kindness? O that my praise could be as ceaseless as His bounty!"

A bit flowery but right on target. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Wednesday, May 18, 2005

A Nice Lady's Blog Question

Every morning I check out a couple of blogs that have caught my interest. Among these is one written by a refreshing young lady who is seeking an A in a psychology class and posed this question about one of her assignments:

"Do you think people believe things because they are true, or are things true because people believe them."

Although I enjoy reading other blogs, I usually don't comment. I'm not used to this internet thing and feel I'm intruding if I'm tempted to comment. But her question intrigued me, got me thinking. I wrote the following reply:

Pirates buried their treasure under the old oak tree. If we believe the old map and dig, it's ours. If we do not believe, it stays buried right where it is.

Here in my home state of Florida, the hurricanes come whether or not anyone believes the meteorologist's warning and evacuates.

I love my wife even when I've acted like such an ass that she finds it hard to believe at the moment.

The AIDS virus swims upstream, even if I believe my partner's claim to be clean.

Your Lotto number may be a winner even if you tear up what you believe to be a useless ticket.

That big gaudy brooch in Grandma's bottom dresser drawer really is a diamond cluster even if you believe its only 1940s costume jewelry worth a quarter.

Truth is truth.

Our belief— or lack of it— marks us as believers or unbelievers. Our belief— or lack of it— has no bearing on the truth of the matter.

Incidentally, last week in changing servers (a pox on all their houses) my e-mail address (john@cowart.info) disappeared for the moment. Donald is working to restore. Please be patient. I'm not ignoring you.

Thursday, May 19, 2005

What We Really Need Is Another Coffee Mug

Here it is May 18th and we're drinking coffee out of the Christmas mugs again this morning; that's the way I know its time to wash dishes.

Perhaps it's a commentary on our long happy weekend but I washed two bowls, three glasses and 19 coffee mugs!

Except for drug dealers, Ginny & I single handedly support the entire economy of Columbia.

My friend Wes took me out to breakfast at a Golden Oldie's Diner. We were the only customers in the place and we got to talking theology as usual and laughed so hard I thought the manager might put us out.

Later we drove to that antique store where Ginny & I went over the weekend because I'd seen an electric fan there that I thought might interest Wes. (He collects antique electric fans; he's weird). But the fan I saw did not meet his criteria as a collectable. How was I to know?

Anyhow I bought a surprise for Ginny. I wrapped it and I'll put it in her bag when I pack her lunch tomorrow. I wrote on the package, "You Are My"

Inside is a coffee mug featuring **Wonder Woman!**

I hope it pleases her.

Friday, May 20, 2005

Thoughts on a phone call in the night

My brother called last night from downstate to tell me that Aunt Ann is dying of cancer.

I'm not sure how to react.

Although my mother's very large family of sisters and brothers were very close, for some reason I was always excluded from that group and since the day of her funeral in 1986 I have not received so much as a Christmas card or a phone call from any of them.

I've always suspected that they were all afraid that I'd be a pest and ask one of them for help because, back then, in '86, we were impoverished, living in HUD housing on Food Stamps

In fact, because one HUD unit was closing, we had to move the day after Mama's funeral and we had no place to move to! We'd located a new unit

but HUD inspectors refused to pass it. I thought our furniture would be piled at the curb while Ginny & I and the four kids would be living in our car.

To find a place to live, the morning of Mama's funeral I went to Congressman Charles Bennett's office and asked him to intercede with the HUD officials who were involved in an internal office power struggle which kept them from qualifying the house I'd found.

Oddly enough, Congressman Bennett and I had been phone friends for a long time.

He'd once read an article I wrote about Jacksonville history and called me to talk about it. He was also interested in local history and on Sunday afternoons we often talked about history. Of course, he had no idea of my financial status, or I of his, because it just never came up in conversation.

Anyhow, when I went to his office, he called the HUD officials and miraculously HUD inspectors found that the house suddenly qualified.

So I went to Mama's funeral knowing that we'd be able to move the very next day.

Incidentally, over the years the Lord has prospered us so we now own our own home, garden and swimming pool. So we landed on our feet though it was tough going for a while there.

But at the time of the funeral the extended family acted so afraid that I might ask one of them for help that they practically shunned me.

I understand that they took up a collection to give to one of the aunts to help with funeral expenses, but I'm not sure if they did or not. I made all the funeral arrangements and paid all funeral expenses from a \$ 1,500 burial policy Mama had taken out.

Several years before her death my mother had me drive her to an attorney's office where she made out a will stipulating that on her death I was to be responsible for all her bills and expenses, and that her house and all her belongings without exception were to go to her sister, Clara.

When she died, I did ask Clara for my two bookcases which my father had given me as a birthday present when I turned 14. Aunt Clara was not too happy that I wanted my bookcases; she felt that since they were still in Mama's house, they also should also be her's. But she did let me have them.

After I paid all the expenses, the funeral home refunded me \$32; as far as I know, no one else ever spent a penny on the funeral and I never heard a word from any of them again.

Oddly enough, Daddy's cousin kept in touch with me for years until the time of her death.

Anyhow, I feel no animosity toward any of these folks. They are just not part of my life.

I wish them well. But their lives and affairs have not touched mine for 20 years; the death of one touches me no more than the death of any stranger.

Yet, my brother, who reestablished contact with me about ten years ago after a silent absence of about ten years seems to think I ought to be broken up or something over Aunt Ann's impending death.

I pray she has an easy passage and finds eternal peace. But I wonder why anyone bothered to notify me.

I can't imagine that Ginny would call any of them when I die. None have shown the slightest bit of interest while I was alive. Yes, they are extended family but they do not form any part of our life, nor I of theirs.

So, I do not know how or react or what my duty is under the circumstances.

For whom the bell tolls?

I think it's just another damn bell.

Saturday, May 21, 2005

Saw an eagle

On our walk in Ortega this evening Ginny & I saw a variety of sparrows taking a dust bath. We think there were several species; an ornithologist would know. Expert bird watchers like us identify them as LGBs.

Doesn't that sound professional? It means *little general birds*.

At the Ortega River Bridge park we saw an American Bald Eagle. We have seen them before, but never in such a populated area.

The other day my friend Ginger, a nurse, told me about one of her patients, a stroke victim who spoke only Spanish. The stroke created some mental disorientation and robbed the man of speech and much of his ability to eat. In order to give him his pills, Ginger crushes them up in applesauce and spoon feeds him, urging him to swallow his medicine.

Ginger speaks a little Spanish but did not know the word for "swallow" so she looked it up in an on-line Spanish/English dictionary.

The patient exhibited even more signs of mental confusion.

At the end of the shift a co-worker who speaks Spanish came on duty and laughed when she realized that Ginger had been using the Spanish word "swallow", the well-known bird, instead of "swallow", the eating action verb.

She'd been telling the patient something like, "There's a bird in your medicine."

No wonder there was mental disorientation.

Monday, May 23, 2005

John Cowart, Male Fashion Model

If *Esquire* or *Gentleman's Quarterly* need a male fashion model, I now qualify.

Yes, this weekend I have become a clothes horse.

You see, it's like this.

For years and years now, Friday nights my wife and I celebrate a date together. Back when we were poor, dates consisted of walking to the river to watch the sunset, share a *Three Musketeers* candy bar, and talk all evening. Now that we're affluent, we often visit the library, then go to a restaurant to drink tea, munch on fries, and read our books, or talk all evening.

Well, she once commented that she liked the way a certain red-plaid shirt looks on me; so, ever since, I have consistently worn that shirt for our Friday Night Dates and on other special occasions.

Thing is that she made her comment on my red-plaid shirt back in 1968.

The shirt is not red anymore.

Besides, being a careless pipe smoker, I manage to get hot ash on my clothes and burn all these little holes here and there.

For years Ginny & I have collected clothes for a rescue mission (see my article "Brassier Hunt" in the right-hand column of www.cowart.info for odd details) so literally tons of cloth have passed through our house.

Occasionally I'm tempted to snag newer shirts and pass one of my old shirts along to the poor instead; but Ginny says that my old shirts are too shabby to give the poor. She says the poor deserve better. And since I don't see any sense in throwing perfectly good shirts in the trash, I send on the newer cloth on to the mission and keep wearing my same old shirts myself.

So I had a closet full of shirts dating to the 1960s and '70s, though some of them (Ginny says all) are getting a tad frayed and faded—like me..

But who cares diddle about what a writer wears?

Well, on our date last Friday night Ginny mentioned that my red-plaid shirt is not quite as attractive on me as it was back in 1968. The lower buttons now stretch to meet the buttonholes... So I decided to spend money on new cloth.

I went to a mission thrift store and in a frenzy of self indulgence bought myself NINE new/previously-owned shirts including some bearing the *Ralph Lauren* label. I squandered a total of \$27 cash money on such cloth stuff to make myself fashionable.

I feel positively decadent.

But Wow! do I look natty.

Dressed good enough to bury.

While I was on this cloth-buying spree I also bought a couple of dainties from *Victoria's Secret* and *Frederick's of Hollywood* for my beautiful Ginny

But that's another story.

Tuesday, May 24, 2005

Washday

Unless you'd like a sock by sock description of how I did laundry yesterday, I have nothing to blog about today.

Wednesday, May 25, 2005

Feeding Potato Chips To The Bears

A few years ago my friend, Anda, inherited close to a million dollars. Since then she's been feeding potato chips to bears.

I'm outraged but I'll try to talk about this objectively.

I meet Miranda (Aunt Anda, our kids called her when they were little and the name stuck) about 25 years ago when we both worked for a local magazine. She was the editor; I was a clerk. She read an article I wrote about my family and became interested; I invited her home for dinner and we've remained friends ever since.

Sometimes she comes to our house to hide.

Several times over the years Anda has suffered broken arms or legs. She was alone with one of her two grown children, Nancy or Marty (both now in their 40s), each time.

I once called the Elder Abuse Hotline voicing my suspicions but they would do nothing unless Anda herself would press charges.

She would not.

She always says her injuries were an accident.

Anda was forced to take early retirement from the magazine because at times each of her kids came to the office creating a disturbance. Management called security guards to put them out of the building and ban them from ever returning – so they began calling her at work demanding money dozens of times a day.

I think I can say objectively that Nancy is a drunken slut noted for picking up abusive guys in bars at a whim; Marty is a crack addict who has traded several new cars which Anda bought him for drugs. Each of them has had children of their own which were taken away by the state at various times.

A few years ago when Anda's brother, a timber company executive, died, he left her an estate of close to a million dollars.

First thing, she paid the down payment on a home for Nancy.

Nancy and a male friend got drunk, tore the central heat & air-conditioning unit out of the wall and sold it for more drinking money. They defaulted on payments and abandoned the trashed house.

Once Nancy and a male friend made the tv news.

They went to the beach bar hopping and got so drunk they forgot where the car was parked. They waded into the surf and came out with dripping clothes to at a lifeguard station where they said that they were survivors from a boat that sank off shore – and that other people were still out in the ocean.

The Coast Guard mounted an air-sea rescue mission to search for more survivors.

When the truth came out, officials threatened to jail Nancy if the expenses for that mission were not re-paid... Guess who paid that bill.

And Marty... well, he would make a Jerry Springer Show all by himself.

Anda let him live in her freshly refurbished home temporarily between jobs. He nested there about six years, brought in drug buddies, and ripped the plumbing out of the walls. As I recall, once a SWAT team was called by neighbors for a drug bust.

Heartsick over such behavior, Anda decided to sell her (formerly) lovely home, to move, and not tell her children her new condo's address.

They found her.

Anda is a Christian lady who feels that the blood of Christ was shed for all us sinners and that no person is beyond God's love and redemption; she prays daily for her children, who curse her to her face and call her a stupid old bitch. I also am a Christian but I'm skeptic enough, and judgmental enough, and pissed enough, to feel that Hell exists for a reason.

Anda's heart of hope keeps her trying to help her children.

Against my strong advice.

The pestering of these grown children influenced her to sell the condo and move to a very nice old folks' home and not tell them where she'd moved. I again helped her move to a lovely garden apartment overlooking the river.

Again those kids found her and resumed pestering and demanding money under various pretexts of needing serious help.

Anda kept feeding the bears potato chips.

Ginny & I saw her at church Sunday and we all went out for lunch.

She's broke.

Next month, to stretch her resources, she is moving from her beautiful garden apartment overlooking the river to an efficiency overlooking a kitchen dumpster.

She needs four prescription drugs daily for heart problems but she can't afford them; she's stretches her medicines by taking two every other day.

She's given up internet access and cable tv to save money.

During lunch one or the other of her kids called six times.

My friend has been feeding the bears potato chips...

What happens when the chip bag is empty?

Ginny paid for lunch.

Thursday, May 26, 2005

Mengapa Doaku Tidak Dikabulkan

"Mengapa Doaku Tidak Dikabulkan."

Isn't that a cool title!

Wonderful news:

This morning's e-mail tells me that an Indonesian translation of a book I wrote on prayer has finally been published.

The title in Indonesian is: "Mengapa Doaku Tidak Dikabulkan"; in English that's "I'm Confused About Prayer" or "Why Don't I Get What I Pray For?." English copies are available on-line at www.bluefishbooks.info.

The book takes a humorous approach to problems I myself have with praying. I really hope it contributes a modicum of peace to readers who have just about given up on God.

My book's appearance in Indonesia comes four days after false news reports about American handling of the Koran. These false news reports have sparked riots in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation.

This morning's CNN reports:

The U.S. Embassy in Jakarta has closed until further notice. "Citing terror threats, the United States closed down Consulate General offices and other government facilities, the agency said"The Embassy reminds all Americans that the terrorist threat in Indonesia remains high," according to a State Department statement." Attacks could occur at any time and could be directed against any location, including those frequented by foreigners, and identifiably American and other Western facilities or businesses in Indonesia."...Among the possible targets are neighborhoods where Westerners live, hotels, restaurants, churches, schools and recreational event....Indonesia has had three major bomb attacks in the past two years:

Bombings at a Bali nightclub killed 202 people in 2002, a bombing outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in September killed nine people, and a blast at the Marriott Hotel in the capital in October left a dozen people dead. All three attacks were blamed on the regional Jemaah Islamiah militant group agitating for a Southeast Asian Islamic state. The United States considers the organization to be a terrorist group that is an arm of al Qaeda...The agency advised Americans in Indonesia to keep a low profile...

Makes me wonder if this is a great time for my book to appear...God knows.

If you're inclined to pray, please ask the Lord to help my little book honor Him in this troubled place and time.

The Indonesian publisher's site is www.perkantas.org/literatur_nasional/

Friday, May 27, 2005**John as a Modern Times movie critic**

While everyone else seems to be caught up in the *Star Wars* craze, Ginny & I discovered an even greater movie last night.

At the library we checked out a DVD of *Modern Times*, a 1930s silent film written, directed, starred in and with a musical score by Charlie Chaplin.

I have seldom been so gripped by a movie. At times I'd laugh till I cried and at times I was horrified, and at times I pitied the characters' plight.

Oddly enough, this is the first full-length Charlie Chaplin film I've ever seen. For ages I've seen tiny excerpts here and there of this and that; and I've been told that Charlie Chaplin was a forerunner of modern comedians.

Ho Hum.

But on a whim we checked this out of the library, expecting the jerky silliness excerpts led me to expect. Instead, we ended up viewing one of the greatest films I've ever seen. It enthralled me.

Forerunner, hell! The guy outstrips anyone making movies today!

Saturday, May 28, 2005**Troubles, There — and Here**

Last Wednesday I received word that a book on prayer which I wrote has been translated and published in Indonesia. (see my May 25th blog).

Here is a copy of an LA Times report this morning:

19 Slain as Two Bombs Explode in an Indonesian Market

THE BLASTS ON SULAWESI ISLAND ALSO INJURE 32. FIGHTING BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS IN THE REGION HAS TAKEN HUNDREDS OF LIVES.

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Two bombs ripped through a busy market Saturday on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, killing at least 19 people and injuring 32, including two police officers, authorities said.

The bombs exploded in the largely Christian town of Tentena, which has been torn by violence between Muslims and Christians that has taken hundreds of lives in the area since 2000.

The two blasts hit the crowded outdoor market about 15 minutes apart, authorities said. El Shinta radio station reported that the second explosion was more powerful than the first. "The market was packed," an unidentified caller told the station. "It lies in the heart of the town. Victims have been taken to the hospital."

Tentena is about 30 miles from the city of Poso, which has been at the center of violence between Muslims and Christians on Sulawesi, a sprawling island northeast of Java. Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, but central Sulawesi is equally divided between Muslims and Christians.

Over the last five years, Indonesia has seen numerous outbreaks of religious violence and dozens of bombings targeting civilians. Such militant Muslim groups as Jemaah Islamiah and Laskar Jihad sent fighters to Sulawesi and other parts of the country to foment violence. Jemaah Islamiah, which was responsible for dozens of bombings, including the 2002 Bali nightclub attack, set up a combat training camp in Poso.

For the most part, the country has been calm since the election of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in September. But fears of renewed conflict arose after May 16, when attackers assaulted a police station on the island of Seram in the Moluccas chain, killing five police officers and a civilian.

The Moluccas, to the east of Sulawesi, has also been torn by fighting between Muslims and Christians that killed thousands and forced many more to flee their homes.

On Thursday, while Yudhoyono was visiting President Bush in Washington, the United States closed its embassy in Jakarta as well as other diplomatic missions around the country, citing a security threat.

The closure occurred after an Islamic militant group posted on its website a diagram of the embassy floor plan and the location of security devices. It also offered suggestions on the best way to attack the installation.

Please pray that my little book will honor Christ and bring a bit of comfort to readers living in this horrible situation.

After our Friday Night Date (fun gardening, a swim, dinner out, and watching an action/adventure video) Ginny & I had one of our rare arguments.

About 11:30 I started to bed thinking she would be right with me. I heard noises from the kitchen, went out to see what was going on and found that she had decided that 11:30 at night was a great time to start washing dishes.

We had words and went to bed angry.

I asked her to check her blood sugar and we found she had the highest reading of the past five years. Troubling and scary.

Sunday, May 29, 2005

Interrupted Plans

I had plans for Saturday morning.

Definite, specific plans.

An old joke says, “What to hear God laugh? Make plans.”

I had plans, but Ginny wanted to go to a store we frequent about once every two or three months, and since she’s limited as to which days she’s free, I put my plans on a back burner and accompanied her to this store.

I understood her reasons for wanting to go today but nevertheless I was not thrilled at the prospect of spending a gorgeous morning inside a store.

Now, for years I’ve started many mornings with a sort of prayer of dedication that goes something like this:

“Dear Lord, please help me to spend this day wisely. Help me be where I’m supposed to be, meet who I’m supposed to meet, learn what I’m supposed to learn, say what I’m supposed to say. I want to be 100 per cent at Your disposal. Help me to be Your man today.”

Neat, pious little prayer – if I meant it.

But I usually don’t.

I have my own plans and my own intentions and what I really want is for God to make them go smooth. I hate for my plans and anticipations to be interrupted by anything or anyone.

But, today instead of being where I wanted and doing what I wanted, I was in this boring store with Ginny as she examined shelves.

Ginny, whom I love with all my heart, is a comparison shopper. Drives me nuts. I hate shopping with her. In her accountant’s head she figures whether the better buy is three 18 ounce cans for \$2.07 or four 10 ounce cans for \$1.34!!! And, recently she’s also begun to figure in how many grams of dietary fiber fit into her equations.

Me, if it’s got a picture of a girl on the label, I put it in the cart. And I’m sure that FDA tests prove that things with green labels have more fiber than things with red labels.

Anyhow after a grueling time of pushing the cart around the store and standing while she calculates all this stuff in her head, I gave up and said, “Honey, I’m going outside to smoke my pipe. You take all the time you need. I’ll meet you outside.”

An odd thing happened as I left the crowded store:

The owner buttonholed me.

Now I've had a nodding acquaintance with this man for years but we've never actually spoken. In fact Ginny and I have remarked on how he holds himself aloof. All business, no chit-chat. Brisk. Impersonal. Distant.

But today this man, who barely acknowledged my existence before, drew me aside out of the stream of customers.

He said, "Men our age need to watch out for our health, don't we."

Ding.

Something told me that this was not a casual remark.

"Yes, we do," I said. "Has your doctor told you something to watch out for?"

Last week he had a test. Something may be wrong with his pancreas – or it may be nothing serious at all. They gave him the test Wednesday but he has to wait over this long holiday weekend to learn the lab results.

He may be dying.

We talked for a bit as customers swirled around us.

We made arrangements to meet and talk outside store hours next week.

Could it be that God interrupted my plans for today for a reason?

Monday, May 30, 2005

Haircut, blog & prayers

I'm to speak to a civic group Wednesday and I'm getting a bit shaggy so I cut my hair today. No, I did not go to a barber shop, I cut it myself.

I have such an aversion to being touched that ever since I became an adult I have cut my own hair to avoid it. I go out in the backyard to use scissors and this little comb/razorblade thing – just one of my little idiosyncrasies.

Ginny & I skipped church this morning; we chose to enjoy breakfast out and talk. Then home for pleasure gardening, bird watching and more talk.

Among the subjects we discussed were blogs. I have encouraged her to start one herself but she keeps so many records related to her job, that keeping a journal just seems like more work to her, while I find it great fun and an important element of my spiritual life.

As a kid I chanced to read Bram Stoker's great book *Dracula* and was fascinated with the journal/diary format. I began to read published diaries and was enchanted by the real life record of what people actually experience – especially as momentous events in history take place around them.

I was greatly influenced by journals such as David Brainerd's, John Wesley's, Samuel Pepys, George Fox, and a host of lesser known journalists. I began to make daily entries in a journal of my own over 25 years ago, so making blog entries naturally follows.

My youngest son introduced me to blogging back in December. I started with his blog on Blogger (<http://slackv.blogspot.com/>), then clicked the “Next Blog” button to see what caught my interest. Reading the blog postings of other people really helps me in my prayer life.

There are eight or ten writers I check on daily because something or the other they experienced appeals to me. And I find it natural to pray about the private things these folks are going through.

One blog site I visit daily is a prayer list posted by some church in another state <http://www.twinland.blogspot.com> I know nothing about this church or it’s members, I am not even familiar with the denomination, and I’m not too keen on “church stuff” even here in Jacksonville; but these folks face reality instead of church stuff: A kid killed in an auto accident on Prom Night, cancer, an old lady who fell, job hunting, husband in Iraq, work-place shooting, new babies... all sorts of things that touch my heart for these people. Their blog means so much to me; it’s such a help.

Their blog and others I read push me out of my own petty concerns and urge me to pray God’s blessing on things and people outside my narrow focus, my wife, my children, my garden, my speech, my haircut...

God’s world is bigger than me...

BUT, Speaking of ME and the big world, this morning the Webalizer statistics for cowart.info show that this month over 9,000 readers from 72 countries have each spent at least ten minutes on my site.

That’s scary.

Anyhow, I got carried away writing when I’d started to say that Ginny & I enjoyed a wonderful day together playing in our garden where the high hedges keep the world outside. We potted and edged and pruned and rested and talked as though the rest of the world did not exist.

Then one of the kids called saying they are bringing strangers to tomorrow’s cookout. And, of course, in a grand Cowart holiday tradition whenever company is coming, the bathroom plumbing stopped up – From Blog to Clog, the story of my life.

Monday, May 30, 2005 (again)

New Home for my blog

Hi,

Today I moved my blog from www.lulu.com/bluefish to this new Blogger site. I did this because my son, who keeps his blog on Blogger, finds it easier to fix the places I screw up if I’m using the same program that he uses.

We moved the last few bluefish postings over here so this site won't look so empty.

I also write a religious humor webpage called the Rabid Fundamentalist, hence the title of this blog, Rabid Fun.

Wednesday, June 01, 2005

Off the hook?, a history talk, & outrage

The most important thing I did today was go to meet the store owner dying of pancreatic cancer, the man I mentioned in last Saturday's posting.

Deliberately going back to meet him was very hard for me; I had to steel myself to do it. Christian witnessing does not come easy for me. I really lack boldness and I loath intruding on people with my personal religious beliefs.

It is much easier for me to write about Christianity than to actually live for Christ.

I think we can follow God's will in two ways:

Passive, that is we respond to something God is already doing, we react to something or someone that God brings into our path. I think that's what I did Saturday, just react to the man's fear and pain. In this type of following Jesus, God initiates the situation and we respond.

Or not.

Active, that is when we initiate the action. We decide to do something for the love of God. This is the tough one for me. Today I was not responding to an existing situation. I'd deliberately made an appointment with this man specifically to talk with him about preparing his soul for Eternity.

Thank God, when I got to the meeting place, the guy was not there; he'd gone off to another meeting and would not be back for hours.

I felt so relieved.

Obviously God does not want me to talk with this dying man about Jesus rising from the dead and the guy's soul salvation. I'm obviously not qualified to deal with such deep matters...

Or, damn it! Do I need to make another appointment and try again?

I hope not, but I think I know I know the answer to that one.

The other thing I did today was speak on Jacksonville history to a group of 47 people at the Westbrook Library. It was a show-and-tell thing in that I took in Indian arrowheads, a pioneer ax, an ox shoe and Great-great-great Grandfather Barr's shotgun which he bought new ten days after the 1901 Great Fire of Jacksonville. Folks were gracious about listening to my talk.

Jacksonville City Councilman Reggie Fullwood gave the opening address talking about the importance of books in his own life, and especially about biographies have influenced his career.

The library made quite a to-do over the affair. There were balloons decorating the place, face-painting for the kids, lavish cakes and cookies, door prizes — they really went all out.

Ginny's discouraged.

At her work, they just hired another new boss over her (I think this is the ninth one in the past two years) instead of promoting her. Yet the administration keeps wanting her to train the new people. I suspect that Ginny's age and deafness block her chance at promotion. They keep giving her superior efficiency ratings, yet no promotion.

God knows about this too. But I'm outraged to see her neglected so..

Thursday, June 02, 2005

Everything I know about prayer, I learned from my dog.

For some reason today I've been thinking a lot about what my dog taught me about prayer and understanding God's will.

Sheba, our black lab, lived with us for 17 years; she's been dead for four years now. After her initial shots, we never took her to the vet again, and, in spite of common knowledge to the contrary, we usually fed her table scraps, and on rare occasions a can of dog food..

One day as I was driving in heavy rain the rubber blade on my windshield wiper gave out. A nuisance. The next Saturday I bought some replacement blades and took them home to mount on the car.

Here I am parked in our drive on a bright sunny day trying to squeeze those rubber refills into the metal fixture. And Sheba sat alertly watching what interesting thing I was doing.

She whined and pawed the ground but she never took her eyes off me. She could not have watched more intently if I'd have been opening a can of Alpo. She cocked her head from one side to the other and gave every indication of yearning to help me accomplish whatever it was that I was doing. She seemed distressed that I was having trouble getting the task done.

I laughed.

And I just loved that stupid old dog for wanting to help.

That night at my prayers I puzzled over some situation I just could not understand; why had God let such-and-such happen?

Why didn't He listen to my fervent prayer and advice about how to remedy the situation?

How can I follow the will of God when I don't even understand what it is He's trying to do?

Why does God want us to pray when most of the time we don't even have an inkling of what to pray for?

As I struggled with such questions, the image of Sheba sitting in the drive staring intensely at me as I worked burst back into my mind.

I realized that I can no more understand the actions of God than Sheba could understand why I was changing the windshield wiper blades!

And I thought that maybe our Father may just enjoy our company, attention and good will—even when He has no need of our advice.

Saturday, June 04, 2005

A Writer's Life: Adventure, Passion, Thrills & Romance

I sat in front of the computer all day editing the manuscript of *Letters From Stacy*; up to page 100 now.

When Ginny got home, for our Friday Night Date we drove to the library to check out pleasure reading. Then we drove to Bar-B-Q Junction on San Juan Avenue where we read our books, ate great BBQ, and watched the rain hardly speaking to each other.

Back home we put on some music, sat in our rockers and read our books all evening.

Can you stand the excitement?

Sunday, June 05, 2005

No good deed...

Ginny claims that when I go out of the house a huge neon sign floats in the air above my head flashing the word "SUCKER."

Bums, winos and street people see this flashing sign and home in on me knowing instinctively that they've spotted the world's softest touch who will swallow any sob story.

Well, I was out mowing a neighbor's huge back yard (long story) in heat pushing 90 degrees. As I worked in the thick grass I was thinking that I'm too old and feeble to do such heavy work. I looked up from my work and there in front of me stood a stranger, an elderly gentleman older and more feeble than I am. He asked me if he could mow the yard to earn a couple of dollars because he is hungry.

Now, obviously I could not turn a total stranger loose in my neighbor's back yard, so I told him that I had to finish this work myself, but that maybe I could find a bit of help for him. Since I was working in my swimsuit and tee-

shirt, I had no cash on me, so I left him sitting in the shade while I walked back to our house and to get a bit of change to give him.

Had to scrounge around in pants, billfold and dresser drawer to scrape together some cash. Then I walked back to the neighbor's and handed the old guy enough to buy a burger.

I was feeling pretty virtuous about how kind I am to God's poor and how righteous I am to go to all this trouble to get the old man a few dollars, and how that I am a shining example of Christian charity in action.

The Good Lord in Heaven looked down on the scene and said, "*John Cowart, you smug, self-righteous prick! I'm going to have to take the wind out of your sails.*"

So I handed the stranger his money, graciously received his thanks, waved bye as he left, and immediately stepped back into a nest of fireants.

God's tiny little creatures responded.

They climbed upward and began stinging at my knees and proceeded to work their way north.

It's difficult to feel smug and self-righteous with fireants conducting war games in your pubic hair. I think I could swear that I heard tiny helicopters and music playing "Flight of the Valkyries" from *Apocalypse Now*.

Unregenerate cynics sneer saying that no good deed goes unpunished.

Even though I'm a Christian, today I'm inclined to agree with them.

Monday, June 06, 2005

Our Daughter, the television star!

Sunday evening our middle daughter appeared on television.

She looked lovely.

Star of the show.

Our local PBS tv station held one of their interminable fund raising drives and our daughter was a volunteer phone operator. She constantly volunteers for this sort of thing. Whenever they hold a walk for muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, cancer, AIDS, whatever, you can always look for her in the crowd. She spent her day off Saturday helping in a learn to read campaign.

I'm delighted that she has such a caring heart.

Blogging and lunch consume my day

I'm beginning to think blogging is addictive.

This morning in reading the various blogs I follow, I read an account of one person's spiritual struggle to feel forgiven for past sins. There are ten or 12 blogs I follow daily and I often pray for the people whose paths cross mine in this manner. I really care about these folks.

All morning long I pondered about whether to reply and what I should say if I did. I ended up writing a comment that was wayyy to long.

It felt intrusive to comment at length like that and I'm not at all sure whether or not I was being helpful or just being pedantic and paternalistic. God knows.

Barbara had to drive her grandkids on an errand and came over for lunch between dropping them and picking them up again. She brought two nice coats for Ginny and three boxes of books for me (which I haven't even opened yet). She ended up staying at our house about three hours talking about some book (I've forgotten the title) which she finds helpful. I enjoyed our lunch but the visit took a large bite right out of the middle of my day so I hardly got any work done..

Between commenting on blogs and lunch, I felt too exhausted to do much of anything else today. *Stacy* awaits me; he'll just have to wait.

Ginny & I went for a walk and exercise in Memorial Park (appropriate, today being the anniversary of the Normandy Invasion). I felt too bad to walk much. My idea of exercise is to sit on a park bench smoking my pipe and watching other guys fish.

Tuesday, June 07, 2005

Bank Robbery

One verse of Scripture I consistently live by more than any other.

It is Matthew 6:3 where Jesus talked about the right hand not knowing what the right hand is doing — or something like that.

For several months now thoughts of a costly project have bugged me off and on. Ginny & I have talked about this several times but felt we could not afford it and she has not had strong feelings about doing it.

We have often prayed about this endeavor and get zilch for an answer. I told Ginny that I can't tell if I'm being prompted by the Holy Spirit or if it's just that I have a bug in my ass to get this project done.

Ginny, ever the practical Christian, replied, "Love, sometimes a bug in your ass IS the prompting of the Holy Spirit."

Yesterday we realized that we have the ability and the opportunity for this project so we decided to transfer some money into an overseas account.

Since I would not have the car today, last night I called my friend Wes to bum a ride to the bank and this morning he abandoned working on his roof to take me to breakfast, to The Lord's Store Mission, and to the bank.

For an inexperienced person like me making an international funds transfer is a daunting affair. When Gin & I tried it once before, both our credit union and Western Union refused to do it, we were unable to do it online, and our bank insisted that I personally come in to their office, hand

them cash, and sign all the papers – and our bank took $\frac{1}{4}$ of the money as a transfer fee! This is one of the same great banks that lost the credit records of 300,000 customers last week, but boy were they minding security with my request today!

The financial institution overseas takes another $\frac{1}{4}$ of our money as their fee for allowing us to deposit money in their bank!!!

So between them, the two banks stole one half of the money we transferred— and the transaction will take Five business days to complete— Haven't these banks ever heard of computers?

Bank robbers and robber banks have a lot in common.

But anyhow, for good or ill, I got it done.

Wes & I talked for a couple of hours (everything from abortion rights to cooking on a wood stove to roof repairs) so again the middle of my day was gone and I did not edit a single page of the *Stacy Letters*.

By definition a writer is a person who writes; by definition an unemployed, sorry bum is a guy who says he's a writer but is not actually writing....

I think I'll take a nap.

Wednesday, June 08, 2005

Rant, rant, rant: I'm pissed over tv news!

The tv news last night reported on a growing trend among companies to fire all smokers. Many companies already have a policy in place not to hire smokers in new positions.

The reason cited for these policies is the health risks to employees who smoke increases the cost of medical insurance, and that smokers may take more sick days than non smokers.

Employer smoking bans apply not only to smoking on the job site but during off-duty hours at home. And some companies actually give employees random breathalyzer tests to hunt for tobacco intake during the past 48 hours; employees who test positive twice are fired immediately.

All in the guise of controlling health costs.

This is an inconsistent, unreasonable invasion of individual rights to privacy!

Now, any employer has the right to dictate what happens on the job—but what happens when off the clock in your own car or in your own home?

Inconsistent and unreasonable?

What about fat people?

Obesity can lead to all sorts of health problems. In fact, the tv news said that some companies are already dictating exercise and diet policies, another invasion of individual rights, in the name of lower healthcare costs.

When will they fire, or refuse to hire, black employees?

The tragedy of Sickle Cell Anemia makes many blacks in danger of health risks.

What about diabetics?

Should they ever be hired?

Of course, employers should never hire any female of child bearing age because it costs so much to have a baby.

They should never hire homosexuals who may be at risk for AIDS. In fact they should never even hire sexually mature heterosexuals who may also contract AIDS or a venereal disease.

So, who does that leave?

To be consistent in guarding the health of employees, these companies should only employ elderly, white, non-smoking, non-diabetic, scrawny, males who could not benefit from even a double dose of Viagra.

And, judging from the appearance of the old guy on tv who acted so proud to be his company's spokesman about the smoking policy, that's just exactly what they've done.

Thursday, June 09, 2005

Bug Zapped!

Wow!

This morning my blog/website has been bug zapped by Funky Bug (<http://funkybug.blogspot.com/>)! I think this is the equivalent of winning a Pulitzer on the web. I'm tickled. This is the nicest thing to happen to me all morning! Wow!

Friday, June 10, 2005

When the faith hits the fan

Sometimes I forget I'm a Christian.

Theoretically, when I'm feeling pious, I acknowledge that Jesus Christ is my lord and that 100% of my time, money and energy are at His disposal. That's not too hard to do when I'm at prayer.

However, when the faith hits the fan, unexpected demands on my time, money or energy outrage me. I forget all those flowery dedicated feelings, and I want to kick ass.

Case in point: the banks and my international transfer of funds.

Yes, the banks screwed up the transfer I made Tuesday.

But did my bank notify me about it? NO! I learned of it from an e-mail from overseas Thursday.

Somehow between here and there, the bank's printer, a dot matrix apparently, changed the letter "Y" in a person's name to an "F!" And although the account numbers and all other information on the form were correct, the overseas bank refuses to release the money until I personally make another trip to our local bank and sign a transfer amendment saying that the form they filled out on Tuesday is correct.

Therefore, today (Friday) I must cancel planned tasks, bum a ride to the local bank, tell them exactly what I told them before, then wait till over the weekend before the cash transfer is in place. And since I'd scheduled rather pressing duties for today, this unnecessary bite out of my time, energy, and money outrages me

I want to kick and scream and cuss and throw things and call names and act as though*My time, money and energy are 100 % at the disposal of Jesus Christ to do with as He wishes.*

It is His money and it will get to where it's supposed to be in His good time. Did I think it wouldn't? He is the source of all power; do I really think He won't give me what energy is needed to do my duty today?

I am a Christian for maybe ten minutes at a time, then, when the faith hits the fan, I revert to my natural grouchy state and forget the whole thing.

Well OK, Lord, if You insist...

But if I were God, things would be a lot different around here!

There's a lot of perfectly good lightening just going to waste.

Now for happier news:

First, today I finished the initial editing of another 40 pages of the Stacy ms; only another 150 pages left.

Webalizer software reveals that over 3,000 readers from 74 countries have spent at least ten minutes each on my website, I'm tickled.

Then, today's mail brought a notice from the publisher in the Philippines that last month they sold 336 copies of the book I wrote on prayer! Wow! I'm hot on the heels of Stephen King now. Also, I received notice from the publisher in Indonesia that, after many delays, their translation of that same book on prayer came off the press last week!

Thanks be to God.

And, a librarian called telling me that the Jacksonville Public Library plans to place a bulk order for both my history of Jacksonville, *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, and for copies of my science fiction novel, *The Lazarus Projects* .

All three of these books can be ordered online from my Bluefish Books Storefront, www.bluefishbooks.info .

Good news on all fronts— but that bank mess still peeves me.

Lord, please show mercy to John Cowart, a sinner.

Saturday, June 11, 2005

Unnecessary upset

Turns out that yesterday I got all upset over nothing.

That happens all too often.

Returning to the bank did not consume all of my day or cost me extra money. When I went in, the banker immediately saw the mistake the bank had made and fired off an e-mail correcting it.

Problem solved.

Took three minutes.

All my fussing and fuming and worry were all over a trifle.

Do you know how often that happens?

Just about every time I get upset.

You'd think I'd have learned by now. But, No. I rave and rant and cuss and fuss and make myself and everyone around me miserable, while God just sits there in Heaven watching, calm as can be, not excited at all, apparently not realizing that we have a 4-alarm panic situation down here!!!

And you know what?

Turns out He's right every time.

Sunday, June 12, 2005

I've Learned How To Post Photos!



A tasteful statue chosen by John to decorate our garden.

I am just learning how to put photos in this blog so I decided to show off our garden so you'll know what I mean when my posting just says, "Spent the day doing yard work."



A Secret Place in our garden



Queen of the Night.
Each huge blossom lasts only a single night.
We've had as many as 20 bloom at once.



John's Choice of A Garden Statue



? Flower from our garden



I come to the garden alone...
Have to, can't get my kids to mow.



Ginny In The Park

Here's another test: Now, isn't this a better photo? For some reason the text is shouted (Huge & Bold) at me in super large print when I type it, but is reduced when published. I need to work on this a lot.



My Elkhorn Pipe

This is another test. Although I've tried many times, this is the first time ever I've got a photo to actually appear (maybe). The pipe is a gift from Donald; it's made of an elk antler. Notice the lovely bluefish statue in the clock; this gift from my youngest daughter inspired the Bluefish Books logo.

A Beautiful Day

Bands from tropical storm Arlene brought day-long soaking rain, a perfect gray day to snuggle, cuddle, sip tea, read, nap and talk – which is how Ginny & I spent the day.

After breakfast at Dave's, we drove to the library to look over the meeting room where I'm to speak next week. We found that the librarian who invited me to lecture on Jax history was transferred. The librarian in charge now had not noticed the meeting on her schedule so we quickly planned the program.

Back home to read, edit a few more Stacy letters, chat, and just be together while the rain sealed us in and the world out.

In the evening we watched a video of *The Adams Family*. Delightful! It may be odd, but we identify with the love affair of Morticia and Gomez, the most wholesome couple in Hollywood movies. We are so blessed!

Monday, June 13, 2005

John Cowart: King Of Geriatric Geeks

I've finally managed to post photos on my Blog!

Wow!

I've been trying to do this since January! I could never figure out how to do it.

But I subscribe to the TU-Dogs Newsletter (a site which evaluates free software at <http://www.tudogs.com/>) and downloaded a free program.

In only a few short hours, with many starts and re-tries, I posted my first photo: Me (naturally) with my famous elkhorn pipe.

Wow! I'm so tickled.

This morning I feel like such a master of the web that I think I'll eat flies for breakfast!

Tuesday, June 14, 2005

Bad Night

Bad night last night

After going to bed at 11 p.m., I dreamed that I was in some government office, (Department of Motor Vehicles, I.R.S., Electric Authority, something of the sort) where I filled out some long form with tiny print.

Had to fill the thing out while standing at a tall counter with poor lighting. I could not understand the form and couldn't see to read what all those little boxes said. All the while, some officious clerk rushed me to hurry.

This dream disturbed me. Feeling pressured, I woke up at 11:45.

Got up. Pissed. Ate two bowls of Cheerios. Since I was wide awake anyhow, I worked for a couple of hours editing the *Stacy Letters*.

I wanted to be fresh and alert for my lecture on Jax history tonight— but all the people will get is me mumbling in a stupor. At least, I'll have the Civil War sword, the paleo-Indian blade, the Titanic newspaper, the WWI artillery shell, and such to show them. My speeches are always extensions of kindergarten "Show & Tell" exercises.

As Ginny got in the car to drive to work this morning she told me, "God's in His Heaven – He knows where He's not wanted – and all's screwed up in the world."

Wednesday, June 15, 2005

Crabs In a Bucket

My friend Wes came over and drove me all over on various odd errands. We enjoyed a long conversation with topics ranging from roofing problems to the translation of Hebrew words for various metals such as bronze, brass,

iron & steel. I can't imagine having such a conversation with anyone else I know.

Wes, who lives better than he believes, is quite a theologian and scholar; he places great store in biblical scholarship. He said that Bible-believing scientists, theologians, and researchers tend to be more accurate and honest because they have an ethical imperative giving them an edge on honesty.

On the other hand, I think all academics have deceitful hearts just like the rest of humanity and they can not be relied on for diddle squat. Being smart does not make one honest. Computer virus attacks are not launched by dummy dorks but by really bright, knowledgeable geeks — whose minds, while smart, are corrupt.

I suspect liberal scientists, scholars and theologians lie and cheat and steal to enhance their own reputation and garner grant money. They falsify lab test results, plagiarize, and distort facts. — I see no difference when it comes to Bible-believing scholars. I suspect that they too have a theory to support and they too will distort facts, manipulate dates, and do whatever to enhance reputation, earn grant money, and justify their own theories.

Peas in a pod.

Crabs in a bucket; when one starts up the side, others pull him back down.

I think there is little honesty among researchers, doctors, scholars, scientists, theologians or (speak for yourself, John) historians — especially historians. Don't believe me? Try reading an account of a Civil War battle written by a Confederate general and an account of that same battle by a damnyankee general.

When I voiced my cheerful, optomistic, crabs-in-a-bucket world-view, Wes asked me what then do I actually believe?

I believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, that He rose from death, and that He'd kinda like for us to behave till He comes back; everything else is peripheral intellectual froth.



My friend Wes

As Wes and I drove around town on errands, one stop included Chamblin's Bookmine (The store long featured a window sign declaring they sold: "Rare, Out-of-Print & Non-existent Books!")... Ron Chamblin, owner of the store, said he plans to carry copies of my Jacksonville history book,

Crackers & Carpetbaggers. So, this evening I told the group at the library they could buy copies at Chamblin's.

I think my lecture on Jacksonville history went well. The audience listened with intensity and paid rapt attention to my show & tell demonstrations.

But I am basically a shy person so public speaking leaves me utterly drained, practically quivering.

Well, Lord, what's next?

Thursday, June 16, 2005

Long convoluted posting about... life?

Bluejays have decided that the figs on our luscious fig tree are ripe enough to plunder.

Whenever I look at this tree beside our fountain, I remember Sheba, our black lab who lived to be 17 years old. Sheba loved to eat figs from that tree and when the fruit was ripe that stupid dog would stand up and walk around and around the tree on her hind legs browsing figs off the lower branches like a deer. It was the funniest thing to see.

I miss her.

All the recent rains cause our grass to flourish so I decided to mow early before the temperature reached 98 degrees. The mower would not start.

I cleaned the air filter. It still wouldn't start.

I cleaned the spark plug. It still wouldn't start.

I sharpened the blade and drained the fuel line. It still wouldn't start.

Driving around town I see bumper stickers saying WWJD? Meaning What Would Jesus Do? I think the idea is for people to ask that question, then do the same thing they imagine Jesus doing in the same situation.

Doesn't work for me.

I mean can you imagine Jesus working on a lawnmower that won't start?. Pulling the cord? Cleaning the filter? Pulling the cord? Draining the fuel line? Pulling the cord? In 98 degree heat?

I imagine He would regard the thing as a mechanical fig tree and "wither it to the roots." That's biblical.

But I'm not able to do that. Bumper sticker religion doesn't work for me. So I'll ask my friend Rex, who is mechanical, to look at the mower.

Way back when, to support our family I worked as the night janitor in a building where, among other things, I cleaned a dozen or so toilets and urinals. I remember complaining long and loud in prayer about how this menial task was so below my dignity. "I'm a writer for Heaven's sake and,

Lord, would you just look at this filthy mess! Can you imagine Jesus cleaning urinals?”

Apparently God is not too impressed with my dignity.

In fact, He thinks I can do without it. I realized that I should clean each urinal as though Jesus Christ Himself would be the next guy to use it.

Actually, there is a biblical parallel to that situation.

Remember when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper? Why did He do that? Well, these guys walked everywhere. Hundreds of horses, camels, donkeys, and such plied the streets of Jerusalem.

None was equipped with emission control devices.

His foot washing was not an esoteric religious ceremony or quaint sample of pious humility. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples because their feet were dirty.

He demonstrated that Almighty God come in the flesh is willing to clean up the shit we get into.

Speaking of getting into bad shit, Ginny goes to a new doctor for the first time tomorrow. Last night while she was ironing dresses for work, I sat in with her smoking my pipe and we talked for a long time about how her diabetes is changing so many areas of our life.

The disease influences everything from our eating habits to the rhythms of our sex life (Hey, after 37 years of foreplay, we're beginning to get really good at this sex thing) and how we drive the car, and what shoes she can wear, and our sleep patterns, and how we pray and our conversations, and even what library books we check out.

None of the really super bad-nasties of diabetes have hit us yet, but we live each day walking on eggs with the sword hanging over us.

It's a bitch but we plan to cope with whatever comes whenever it comes.

It is scary.

God, but I love her so.

This afternoon since I couldn't mow, I pruned dead palm fronds from a couple of trees.

Now, God's tiny little creatures called wasps nest among the palm fronds where they buzz happily, humming their way through the day, nestled among the dry leaves, going about their business of leading productive lives.

So I climbed the ladder, pruning shears in hand, believing in a life of harmony with nature, co-existing with fellow creatures in peace, love and brotherhood.

Wasps will not sting me.

I am a Christian..... ---

Damn heathen bugs!

Hand me the Raid!

Friday, June 17, 2005

This was not our best day.

The new doctor gave Ginny more tests than an eighth-grade English teacher. Then he arranged for additional tests. We will not learn results from any of this for four or five weeks.

Aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?

The high point of our day: we watched a huge pileated woodpecker tap its way around the oak tree beside our home. This was the first we've seen in ages.

Here's a copy of an Audubon print of a pileated woodpecker:

**Saturday, June 18, 2005****Blast from the Past — June 18, 2000**

Nothing to enter today(June 18, 2005) ; I sat at my desk all day editing the Stacy ms. I've kept a daily journal for ages so, just for fun, I decided to see what I was doing five years ago today. Here's a copy of my posting for June 18, 2000 :

This morning we met Coconut, a huge white talking bird that lives on Forbes Street. As we walked from the bus stop to church we saw this enormous bird perched on a house gate and we thought it was a ceramic figure until it raised a ruff of feathers on its neck and said, "Hello." The bird's owner — a beautiful, stacked young woman in a halter top with no bra and a significant set of raised nipples — came out and introduced us telling us that

Coconut is a macaw. She lifted the bird from the gate and let me hold it and it walked along my arm up to my shoulder. What a nice surprise to find on the way to church.

Since the sanctuary is being restored, service was held in Craig Lounge where the pastor preached on the Trinity. In the Roman's class the teacher, expounded his view of what happens to unsaved people after death; but I feel suspicious of any doctrine you have to know Greek to believe.

Gin & I enjoyed a pleasant walk home and spent an hour reading the newspaper and browsing through the comics. We spent another hour cleaning the sidewalls of the pool, playing and splashing around. Then Ginny went inside to spend a little alone time in her office.

Last time we went to the library I checked out a book on topiary, the shaping and training of plants into geometric figures or statues. I have long wanted to try this, ever since I read *The Children of Green Knowe* and Stephen King's *The Shining*. We have a waist-high cedar tree over near the tool shed and I decided to shape it into a spiral form I saw in the book. Following the step by step instructions in the book — didn't work. So I reversed the process, and using a stuff copper wire I'd found along the railroad tracks and my clippers, I turned out a charming cedar spiral! It looks even better than I envisioned it. I am delighted. What fun!

We are already training a climbing rose around a vertical hulla-hoop and, of course, we have our 12-foot tall Confederate jasmine cross; now, with this cedar spiral, we plan to take on a giant figure of a green man next. I'm excited about that project and spend hours daydreaming about how to do it and what it will look like.

When Ginny came out the spiral delighted her.

We sat a few hours on the deck reading our separate books. I studied Burns' TIC-TOC technique — that means task-interfering-cognitions/ task-oriented-cognitions. After my appointment with Ray tomorrow I plan to work on the will of God book beginning at 1 p.m.

When it began to rain, we came in and ate Salty's leftovers for supper then read till bedtime. Patricia called to wish me a happy fathers day and set up a picnic with us for next Saturday.

That was today five years ago.

Comments: Note from John:

If anyone is interested in reading other bits of my journals, look in the right hand column of my web site (www.cowart.info) under the heading "Journal Extracts."

If you'd like to read about a single date over a span of years, look in the same right hand column under the heading "Today In Former Years."

If you want to read about my writing career, same column under “Resume”

If you want an overview of my life, same column toward the bottom under the heading “Guts, Feathers & All.”

If anyone wants to read an unexpurgated account of steamy sex, unbridled lust, and bodice-ripping romance ... well, Ginny’d whomp me if I published those entries.

Sunday, June 19, 2005

Something My Daddy Did

I am already older than my father was when he died.

Before his death in 1979, my father, Zade Maxwell Cowart Jr., a Jacksonville native and a master molder, worked at NAS-JAX. There he crafted parts for some of NASA's 1971 Lunar Rover equipment, the golf-cart like vehicle astronauts used to drive around on the moon's surface and abandoned when they left.

Yes, astronauts took my Daddy's work from Jacksonville to the moon. --It's still up there.



Lunar Rover (far right) was abandoned on the surface of the moon.

Monday, June 20, 2005

Backtracking and Playing Catch up for A Happy, Happy Weekend

Friday, June 17, 2005

Worked on Stacy Letters.

Lunch with Barbara at Silver Star.

For our Friday Night Date, Gin & I ate a quite supper at Tad’s then went for a long stroll through Memorial Park.

Actually we did not so much stroll as drift from park bench to park bench listening to soft mood music floating from a party or such across the way as we watched the sunset and a group of young people frolicking around the fountain. Our conversation's topics ranged from health and living wills, to gardening, vacation plans, church, AIDS, friends, diaries, agency policies, branding, sex, charities, fishing, and Nute Gringrich.

It was so good to enjoy an uninterrupted, 4-hour conversation.

Saturday, June 18, 2005

Worked on *Stacy Letters*.

For some reason the kids wanted to observe Fathers' Day today so we met them for lunch at Blue Boy's Sandwich Shop in Arlington.

Gin & I both ordered Western Steak. They construct these sandwiches by grilling strips of beef with shredded onion and scrambled eggs with mushrooms, and hot peppers. Then, I suspect, they liberally sprinkle the huge home-baked loaves of bread with opium to make the sandwich addictive!

We have been going to Blue Boys again and again since the kids were little enough to need booster seats. The cooks and waitresses know to run when they see the Cowarts coming because we've celebrated innumerable birthdays and graduation get togethers there.

Actually, today's get-together resembled a country fair swap meet as the kids all exchanged stuff they'd borrowed from each other and then borrowed new stuff. Cameras, I-pods, clocks, books, clothes and even a tea pot changed hands!

And everybody caught up on news of everybody else as though it had been months, instead of days, since they last met. Eve has been contacted about that job in the South Seas. Pat & Jennifer are gaining a sidewalk and their disgruntled neighbor is brandishing a gun, Patricia is taking chemistry next semester and Donald spent the night talking on the phone with an e-girl he's never actually seen.

This last bit of news brought on a flurry of sisterly relationship advise – it was like being in the middle of a Dr.Phil-Oprah-Dear Abby-Ann Launders-Jerry Springer Convention.

When it came out that the e-girl studies belly dancing, Patricia revealed that she too studies belly dancing. Jennifer thought belly dancing was a martial art like aikido or karate and asked if the e-girl has “a black belt in belly dancing!”

At that remark we all got to laughing so hard I thought they'd put us out of Blue Boy's. Great fun. I'm sorry Fred & John missed this one.

Few things please me more that know our children get along so well together. They really like each other and enjoy getting together often without us old folks.

Apparently the night before, they'd gone to a nightclub specializing in improv comedy, and tonight they were either going to a baseball game or, if it rains, meeting at Jennifer's house to watch Japanese enema movies (Can that be right? Some kind of jap cartoons, although, knowing our kids???)

After lunch Gin & I drove to the Angel Aid Thrift Store – a charity raising funds for kids with terminal illnesses – where she bought some books and dresses and I bought a new desk chair. A very profitable stop.

The family decided to meet again at Dave's for breakfast tomorrow. (they gave me a Dave's tee-shirt to wear)..

Sunday, June 19, 2005



After church we met the kids at Dave's. I wore my tee-shirt and the cooks and waiters seemed delighted. Said I had to come behind the counter and cook. Great fun.

Now, I know nothing about anybody else's sex life, but I'm told that if Dave's sold liquor it would be considered a gay bar and judging only from the appearance of some customers, that may be right. In fact, I have religious friends who refuse to eat there. Their loss. Gin & I love Dave's and go at every opportunity....

Unto the pure all things are pure, everybody else thinks like I do.

We had a wonderful time.

After breakfast, as a special Father's Day treat, Jennifer & Pat led us all to a park to show us tall pine tree with an osprey nest! We could actually see three squawking fledglings in the nest. while Mama Osprey soared far above.

Investigating the foot of the tree below the nest we discovered the ground littered with fish bones and scraps dropped from above.

I'd never seen such before!

Quite a thrill!



Osprey Nest with Fledglings

Back home I found that Rex had not only repaired the lawnmower but had come over and mowed my front yard. Nice surprise.

After a swim, Ginny & I sacked out in front of the tv watching a B-movie called *The Body*. Derrick Jacoby (sp), Star of *I, Claudius* and the *Brother Cadfael* series and one of our favorite actors, played a bit part.

It was about a bunch of silly twerps in Jerusalem who found the body of a crucified man in a tomb and immediately assumed that they'd found the bones of Jesus. So they got all aflutter.

Apparently the film writers and directors have never read a history book. As best I recall the ancient historian Josephus mentions the Romans

crucifying as many as 700 men a day during the siege of Jerusalem by Tiberius. Of course, there are crucified men buried all over the place. They've been found before and the finding of another one, while a curiosity, has no bearing on the truth Christ rising from death.

I find the Alexamenos graffito, the earliest known picture of Christ, much more significant. I keep a copy of that above my desk and wrote an article, called [The Ugliest Picture In The World](#), about it once (center column, cowart.info).

I think it is hauntingly precious.

But anyhow, in the movie, cars blew up, cute children got kidnapped, the hero made the bad guy swallow a hand grenade, one priest got the girl while the other committed suicide by jumping off a bell tower—and great fun was had by all.

After the movie we both fell asleep on the sofa while the tv droned on unheeded into the night. A great Fathers' Day.

Tuesday, June 21, 2005

I'm Gloating & Preening for an hour

Monday's mail brought a package from Indonesia, the most populous Muslim nation on earth.

Wow, was I tickled! I've been expecting this package .knowing it would contain the Indonesian translation of a little book on prayer that I wrote years ago. I wanted to rip it open to see my work in this exotic language...

Really strokes my vanity to have my work translated into another tongue.

However, given the state of the world and what's been happening in Indonesia recently, I decided it prudent to take the package outside, away from the house, before gently opening it. There have been some white powder mailings between Indonesia and Australia in the news.

But, nothing suspicious in this package, just two copies of my book in a language I can't read— Except for my own name on the cover.

I'm as pleased as a kitten catching its very first mouse and I gave myself permission to preen and gloat for one hour.

In English, the title of the book is: *Why Don't I Get What I Pray For?* Or, in a more recent edition, *I'm Confused About Prayer*. It is a frivolous religious humor book with hardly any redeeming social value.

Yet the translators and folks who produced the book over there have been through Hell to bring this bit of froth into print.

In January the tsunami struck killing 200,000 people in Indonesia. February, an earthquake killed another 9,000. Since then, several humanitarian relief workers have been shot as they tried to help. Unsanitary

conditions have spawned a polio epidemic killing over 50 children and crippling scores of others. A car bomb set off in a Christian market place killed 25 and mangled many others. Churches have been burned and Christians live in daily jeopardy. And yesterday's Google news said avian flu has spread to Indonesia...

And here what I have to offer this troubled nation is a flippant bit of religious humor in a book which proclaims me as the World's Foremost Authority on Unanswered Prayer because I've prayed for more things and didn't get them than anyone else I know of.

Is that the sort of thing these readers need?

Maybe so.

Maybe no.

I couldn't swear to it, but it could be that God's hand is in the timing. I'd like to think so, but I just don't know.

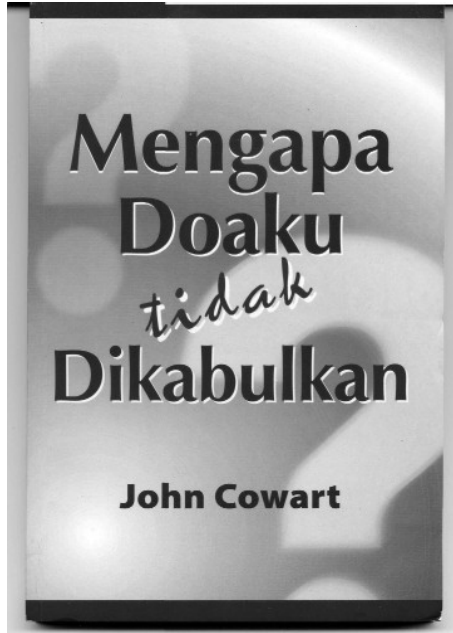
Anyhow, if you are inclined to pray for this troubled land, please ask the Lord to use this little book to honor Himself and to help troubled folks in pain.

I've scanned in a picture of the book cover (below); I have no idea of how to pronounce the title.

If anyone wants to buy a copy of the English edition of this book, *I'm Confused About Prayer*, go to www.lulu.com/bluefish ;-- **If you can't afford to buy a copy**, look in the left-hand column of my website, <http://www.cowart.info/> under the title *Why Don't I Get What I Pray For?* And you can read it on line for free. --- Same book, different editions.

Anyhow, I gave myself permission to preen and gloat over my beautiful book for an hour and that hour is over so it's time to get back to work, there's a filter to clean, trash to take out, and a customer service (HA!) representative to butt heads with.

Real life goes on..



John's book on prayer in Indonesian

Wednesday, June 22, 2005

Some Days...

Another wasted day in a wasted life.

I spent Tuesday rushing to get to places I didn't really want to go, listening to news I didn't want to hear, and running errands I didn't want to run, all of no consequence.

Some days are like that.

I posted the above about 4 a.m. (yes I get up that early, courtesy of age and prostate) before I scanned the blogs I usually check each morning. Imagine my surprise to find a glowing review of my site on Wilke World (<http://wilkeworld.blogspot.com/>).

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Valuable things

The most blessed and useful word in the English language, I learned watching *Antiques Roadshow*, the tv program where people bring in worthless old stuff and have antique experts tell them that they have worthless old stuff.

That word is *Patina*.

I had never heard that word till I watched the *Roadshow*; now I use it all the time.

When Ginny wants me to dust my eleven bookcases, I can say, “But, Honey, that would destroy the patina.”

I love that word. “The refrigerator is developing a rich green patina” sounds so much nicer than saying, accumulated glop, grease, dirt and grime.

I spent much of the day putting away the WWI artillery shell, Civil War sword, the 1818 One-cent coin, and other debris left over from my history lecture at the library the other night. I’d just dumped this stuff in the corner of the living room anticipating needing them again this week. But today I’m on a clutter reduction kick so I packed it all away.

For a guy who is not a materialist, I accumulate so much STUFF!

Like a squirrel squirreling nuts away for the winter, I accumulate things I may need someday. I have bottled water for the next hurricane. I have parts for a clock I’ll repair when I can get to it; books I eventually plan to read, clippings for an article I may someday write. I have a box of toys in case we ever have a grandchild. Until this morning, when I packed them up for the mission, I even had a dozen shirts to wear again in case I ever loose six inches around my waist!

Someone in our family fell into a spot of trouble recently and our kids gathered at our house tonight to talk things over and develop a plan for helping. The problem is too big for any one of us the handle alone, so they planned a group effort to get the stupid ox out of the ditch, to rescue the distressed, and to comfort the troubled one – while unmercifully teasing the hell out of her for getting into the situation in the first place.

The kids have tickets to *Antiques Roadshow* in Tampa next weekend; so after supper they looted our house looking for stuff to take to have evaluated: ... this 1829 engraving of King Charles II, that old Hall’s bowl we use to feed the raccoons, Ginny’s grandmother’s teapot, 45 records, the 1920s statue of the dancing girl – old stuff.

Ginny & I watch amused as they plunder the house searching for treasures — They don’t realize that the most precious thing in this house is them.

Friday, June 24, 2005

About Trash & Beauty

Trash men control the ebb and flow of my life.

Used to be that all garbage was collected Monday; now, the regular garbage men still come on Monday, but the guys who pick up yard trash and recycle stuff do not show up till 6 a.m. Friday.

Therefore, unless you want yard trash piled in front of the house for a week, you have to get it out to the curb by Thursday evening.

All that by way of saying that instead of waiting for the weekend to do yard work, Thursday I cleared the fence line so that the debris could go to the curb for pick up today.

Not that I wanted to spend a weekday this way, but garbage men rule; they dictate the patterns of my life.

And here Bush thinks he runs the country. Ha!

During our prayer time this evening, in the *Living Bible* translation, Ginny & I ran across a beautiful verse I'd never noticed before:

Ask where the good road is,
The godly paths you used to walk in,
In the days of long ago.
Travel there,
And you will find rest for your souls.

Saturday, June 25, 2005

I Was A Crusade Reject

This weekend in New York, 86-year-old Billy Graham conducts his last crusade.

Back in the year 2000, I was rejected when I volunteered as a councilor at the Jacksonville, Florida, Billy Graham Crusade.

A local newspaper published an article I wrote about the experience .
Click here if you'd like to read "Confessions of a Crusade Reject" .(right-hand column, cowart.info).

I'm a guy who has kept a daily journal for ages. Some of these journal entries are posted on my website under the heading *Today In Former Years*. So, if you're interested in reading my actual journal entry about how I drove a gaggle of ladies, (including one who screamed, shook her fist and threatened to punch the cop) to the Billy Graham Crusade, click on November 2nd and scroll down to the year 2000.

Ah, fond memories — I still cringe.

Monday, June 27, 2005

A Rainy Weekend

A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, a James Bond video, a Whitman's Sampler, and thee.

Like two bushy tailed squirrels in their nest, Ginny & I curled up in our nest for the whole rainy weekend talking, cuddling, reading, napping, cheering James Bond, and sampling chocolates. Heavenly.

Eve called saying she and Patricia had a blast at *Antiques Roadshow*.in Tampa. Turns out the appraiser determined that the most valuable thing we own is the old bowl we use to feed the raccoons. At auction, if the right

collectors are present, it might bring between \$30 and \$50. I hope the coons appreciate that bit of refinement.

Donald skipped the Antiques Roadshow trip with his sisters. Instead, he drove north to meet f2f (that's geek jargon for a live, in person meeting) with the "black-belt in belly dancing" girl.

At least I hope it's a real girl, you never know when talking with a person online.

I think he (and she) took prudent precautions for their f2f: you know, first meeting in a public place, letting someone knowing where you are going and when to expect you back, etc.

When I began on the web Donald, himself, taught me a saying about internet security:

The World Wide Web,
Where the men are men,
And the women are men,
And the children are FBI agents!

Actually, I'm teasing. He's proudly shown the family photos of her and (if the photos are not really those of some Hollywood starlet) she's really a beautiful young woman and from everything he says about her, she's charming, gracious and intelligent. A real prize. I wish them both joy.

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Getting Ready for the 4th of July

Eve passed a competitive exam and has been promoted to branch manager. Hurrah for her! She begins her new duties on July 5th

Ginny's agency moves into new construction on July 5th. She serves on the moving committee planning the office relocation while keeping the services operating without disruption during the move.

Jennifer & Pat continue to show off their house hoping and praying it will sell before the 4th of July weekend.

Patricia's new semester at college starts with a heavy chemistry course.

Donald called last night and rhapsodized for an hour about the e-girl he met f2f; the guy is smitten. He enjoyed dinner with her family and plans to drive up there again soon. Then, he's invited her to come here for a cookout with our family. If she does not run screaming into the bushes on meeting our gang, we'll see what develops.

As for me, I'm still deep in the *Stacy Letters*. But, since I'd hoped to have them ready to publish in January, I doubt that I'll have them ready by the 4th. The task proved more difficult than I thought.

For readability I'm converting his passive voice into active and I'm correcting his redundancies in which he continually repeats the same thing again and again thus duplicating the same information to create redundancies more than one or two times which I'm correcting

To get in the spirit for the 4th of July, you may enjoy reading a little bit of history I wrote, [The Shelling Of Fort McHenry](#) (left-hand column, cowart.info). It tells the background of our National Anthem. I hope you like it.

Wednesday, June 29, 2005

I Was Mad At God

Tuesday, I edited 52 pages of the *Stacy Letters*.

Nothing much more to say about the day.

I've visited blogs of several young men and women raising small children recently; Once I wrote about an odd thing that happened when our kids were little, [The Mattress In The Middle Of The Bridge](#) (Left-hand column, cowart.info) Hope you find a bit of encouragement there.

Thursday, June 30, 2005

Weekend plans, stats, Thanks, & A Favorite Joke

Ginny & I plan to take a long weekend so I doubt that I'll make another blog posting till next week. However, I do have a few things for you to enjoy while I'm gone:

Over the past few days I've transferred all my blog entries from the old Lulu storefront where I sell my books, www.bluefishbooks.info, to this blog. Sorry, but I could not figure out how to bring your comments over with the postings. If you care to follow this blog since my first posting in January, it's all there under archives now.

Donald has set up a Webalizer counter for my work.

The June stats for my website (Right-hand column, www.cowart.info) show 116,249 hits (That's folks who clicked on the site, saw my photo, and ran screaming into the bushes). Of those there were 8,331 readers from 82 countries who spent at least ten minutes on the site.

The June stats for my blog show 3,744 hits. Of those, 917 readers from 23 countries spent at least ten minutes on this blog.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your interest. I hope my words give you a lift. The main thing I always want to say in my stuff is that THERE IS HOPE.

So, while I'm goofing off the next few days, here's a favorite joke from my stash:

Bible Quiz

Three ladies died and appeared at the Pearly Gates. The Recording Angel greeted them saying, “Welcome to Heaven. But before I can let you inside, you have to pass a quiz on your knowledge of the Bible. It’s easy, only one question for each of you. Ready?”

The ladies nodded so the Angel asked the first woman, “What was the name of the first man?”

“Oh, that’s an easy one,” she said, “His name was Adam.”

And the trumpets blew, and the angels sang, and the saints cheered, and the gates swung open, and she marched into Heaven.

The Angel asked the second woman, “Ready for your question? What was the name of the first woman?”

“Oh, that’s easy; her name was Eve,” she said.

And the trumpets blew, and the angels sang, and the saints cheered, and the gates swung open, and she marched into Heaven.

The last lady felt apprehensive, “I wish I’d have paid more attention in Sunday School,” she said. “But go ahead and ask your question.”

The Angel said, “What were the first words Eve said when she saw Adam?”

The woman wrung her hands and said, “Oh my goodness. That’s a hard one.”

And the trumpets blew, and the angels sang, and the saints cheered, and the gates swung open,

Wednesday, July 06, 2005**Holiday's Over, Back to work**

Ginny & I enjoyed a long 4th of July weekend dabbling in our garden. For the past two weeks rain each day measured over an inch and a half in our rain gauge. The flowers thrived. We have especially enjoyed watching hummingbirds among the impatiens.

Thursday, July 07, 2005**Random Thoughts on Dependability**

Today I’m up to page 123 in editing the *Stacy Letters*. The work goes faster now because this is the fifth or sixth time I’ve been over the ms.

Lunch with Wes. Among other things, we talked about long distance driving, health care issues, the U.S. Constitution (Wes says he reads it at least once a year; I think I read it once back in highschool), yard sales, and dependability.

Here are a few of my random thoughts on dependability:

If you say you will do something — Do It!

You are not required to say anything but once you do, then you have created the very will of God for your self.

If you do not want to do something, then just say, “I do not want to.” No other reason is required for anything. “I want to” or “I do not want to” are sufficient reasons without any further elaboration. Let your yes be yes and your no be no.

You make the world a smoother place for people around you if you simply do what you yourself say you will do.

Now, this morning I told Ginny I’d move that chair out of the hall... so I guess I’d better get up and move that chair.

Friday, July 08, 2005

Christmas in July's Hurricane Season

I spent Thursday preparing our house and yard for Hurricane Dennis.

I’ve found that hurricane debris is easier to clean up if the yard is mowed before the ground gets too soggy, so I spent the day cutting grass and pruning branches while thinking about God & Christmas.

I often follow the blog of Karen, a young lady in England who apparently works among teenagers (<http://nerakf.blogspot.com/>) . Recently a 15-year-old boy asked her “Where in the Bible does it say that Jesus is God?” Her blog asked for readers’ thoughts on the subject.

That question got me to thinking about the deity of Christ. So naturally, as I sweat pushing the mower in 98 degree heat I got to thinking about Christmas.

You’ve heard the reading dozens of times:

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

Jesus = God with us.

I had to dig a trench to channel anticipated rains away from a garden shed where I have some books stored. I shoveled still thinking about the deity of Christ and Christmas:

“Behold, there came wise men from the east... and, lo, the star, which they had seen in the east went before them...And when they were come into the house, they ... fell down and worshiped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

Would wise men worship something less than God?

The garbage men pick up yard trash about 6 a.m. on Fridays so I lugged the pruned branches and clippings to the curb— humming Christmas carols in the July heat.

As I hummed a beautiful rendition of Handel's *Messiah* while carrying a garbage can, the thought occurred to me that the Prophet Isaiah knew that Jesus is God come in the flesh:

“Unto us a son is given...And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

The Mighty God!

Is it time to take down the birdfeeders yet before they blow away? Not yet. There's not a cloud in the sky here yet, although the radio noon news says that Dennis strengthened to a Category Three Hurricane.

I took a break still thinking about that Jesus/God thing and here's some things I came up with to send my e-friend in England:

Jesus claimed to be God: John 8:23-24 — “I am from above... I am not of this world... If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.” Perhaps you could ask your teen friend what he thinks this passage means: John 10:30 —

His enemies knew Jesus said he is God

His friends heard Him claim to be God

St. Paul knew that Jesus is God:

Angels worship Jesus as God:

The Bible (almost) says: The wise man builds his house upon the rock; the foolish man lives in Florida!

Odd New Feature: audio

This evening Eve and Donald came over unexpectedly bringing in Chinese food for our supper. Donald installed a digital microphone and software (Mp3 My Mp3 2.0) on my computer.

Ginny sat and read ignoring the uproar as the rest of us attempted to make the thing work.

Donald set this device so that it will record everything said in our living room for up to 600 minutes at a time! As you record, little wavy lines bounce up and down on the computer screen— or they don't. We made a couple of test runs with the thing while laughing like idiots not knowing when it was on and when it was off.

Donald eventually hopes to establish a computer pod-casting network and I am his guinea pig.

In light of approaching Hurricane Dennis, Donald advised me to transfer the *Stacy Letter* files I'm working on to an out-of-state server so that if we lose electric power like last year or if my system is damaged, we can download the files again.

On the 4th, tv news said few Americans know all the words to the *Star Spangled Banner* so we set out to prove them wrong.... But they were right.... Besides, Donald had some kind of Indian music playing in the background and we joked about recording a broadcast from Calcutta.

Anyhow, if you want to hear sound excerpts from a typical evening at the Cowarts, check out the audio experiment files. I don't plan to use this exotic software often—you'll see why if you listen!

Saturday, July 09, 2005

Up The Creek Without A String Trimmer

I feel guilty.

Friday morning someone called asking if I had a manual edger, one of those half-moon blades on a shovel handle, they could borrow.

Yes, but I haven't used it in ages because the handle is split; I use an electric string trimmer to edge our yard. I said I'd come edge their yard for free with it if they'd drive over to pick me up.

No. They did not want me to do the job. But, could they borrow my electric trimmer instead?

This placed me in a dilemma because on one hand I try to follow the Scripture, "Give to him that asks of thee; and of him that would borrow, turn thou not away." On the other hand, I use the electric edger two or three times a week. It takes about six hours to mow and edge our yards and I'd really be up the creek with out this edger.... Besides, the person who wanted to borrow my tool is notoriously unreliable.

So I balked.

I'd edge their yard myself but I'm not about to let my tool go off in the hands of this person.

They got huffy, said they'd use the manual edger themselves, then talked about working in this 98 degree heat, etc. Then told me to just prop the edger against the gate so they could pick it up without "bothering you any more."

I dug through the shed to find the old half-moon edger. The handle is iffy but I sharpened the blade and propped it against the gate... it's still there this morning; they never did come by to pick it up.

So I feel like a stingy creep.

But I figure I can live with my guilt easier than I can live without my tool.

For our Friday Night Date, Ginny & I went to Jimmy's Fried Chicken, got a corner booth by a picture window to watch a fiery sunset, and gorged while talking about various contract problems at her office. Back home, we watched a library check-out video made in 1980 by some African film company; *The Gods Must Be Crazy* has to be one of the greatest movies ever filmed. That scene with the Land Rover in the tree is one of the funniest ever. And the girl who plays the school teacher is one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen.

(And yes I did notice that she had flowers on her panties).

Ginny & I got so tied up in the movie we forgot to watch the weather report about Hurricane Dennis which at six o'clock was a Category Four with sustained winds of 150 mph.

O well, if it comes up this side of the state, we'll probably notice.

One other thought about lending out my tools:

In such situations the Scripture says I'm to be as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove.

So... Next time somebody wants to borrow one of my tools — if I'm in serpent mode, I'll sink my fangs into his ankle; if I'm in dove mode, I'll fly over and crap on his head.

See there, I am too a Bible-believing Christian! But nobody fiddles with my tools!

Monday, July 11, 2005

Rainy Days With Ginny, Dennis & Sherlock

Ginny & I hunkered down for the weekend like squirrels snuggled in a hollow tree. Our only venture into the outside world was a trip to the library where we checked out an armload of books & videos.

We watched weather reports on Hurricane Dennis, but if we had not owned a tv, we would never have known there was a hurricane at all. At our home, it was just a gray, rainy, blustery day— perfect for reading Sherlock Holmes mysteries, which I did all weekend.

The only hurricane related problems we noticed were a few downed branches (One did hit the roof, another punctured the pool liner). Blowing rain did flow under the door of my outside office and a few books and papers got wet (worry about mildew and mold now). But, no major problems at all.

It felt a little weird during our devotions Sunday night to pray being thankful that the storm hit somebody else instead of us. Pretty selfish, huh. But that's the way my prayers are.(O, and God bless those poor bastards in the Panhandle— Better them than us).

Among the library videos we started to watch —but cut off after a brief time— were several recent Hollywood films classified as “Romantic

Comedy.” They were neither romantic nor comic. In fact I have seen outright porno films with more wholesome moral values. At least in the porno films lust or fun motivate the couples; in these “romantic comedies” greed, sleaze, deceit, cheating, a desire to undercut and corrupt, and a theme of “noble adultery” motivate the couples. We found these Hollywood films too offensive to finish watching. Yet, other people apparently find them enjoyable —Each to each his own taste, I suppose.

We did really enjoy watching *Spiderman 2* and *The Wind And The Lion*. Great fun both.

Sunday morning the kids all got together for a breakfast out at the Golden Coral buffet; they called inviting us but we were too comfortable in our own little nest and passed on the invitation. They report that they had a riotous good time. But on this rainy day, Sherlock Holmes held more appeal for me.

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

To Anyone Else It Would Be A Boring Day

Hooked up two fans in the outside office to dry out the carpet. Sat at my desk editing *Stacy Letters* from 4 a.m. till 10 p.m. — Exciting for me, boring to anyone else.

Oh well, Jesus is Lord of even the most boring day.

Wednesday, July 13, 2005

Audio Experiment: Two Fat Guys Talking

Once a week or so my friend Wes Bassett & I get together for breakfast and conversation. We often talk about theology.

My son Donald encouraged us to record some of our talks. He wants to turn these into a fascinating, professional quality podcast to be named “*Two Fat Guys Talk Theology*.”

We've tried audio files several times in the past, but screwed up because we don't know enough about computers (or theology) to make it work.

Recently Donald installed a new microphone thingy on my computer so now we can do audio files — maybe.

Of course, today's topics ranged from cooking on wood stoves and brewing moonshine whiskey to training teams of oxen. What inspired these topics was that last week Wes drove from Jacksonville, Florida, up to the Foxfire Museum in northern Georgia.

No theology at all today. But that's the way it goes when friends get together to laugh and talk with no agenda or rehearsal.

So here goes a try (*Takes about 80 seconds to download*) at a 17-minute audio file on [old time country stuff](#):

!!! Sorry. Screwed up again — Only half the conversation plays before the tape? or whatever it's called on a computer? goes into a loop repeating from the start... I'll ask Donald to get it right as soon as possible.

Stage Fright: Checking the site stats for my website this morning, I see that over 3,000 readers have visited the site already this month.

Panic attack!

Scares the hell out of me!

What do they expect from me?

They are all looking right at me.

What should I do?

What in the world do I have to say to an audience that large?

Are they disappointed when they read the trivial meanderings of my recorded days?

It seems to me when I read other people's blogs that the world is filled with excellent writers, people who live exciting lives, who experience funny things, who have significant things to say.

And most of my postings simply tell about sitting at my desk writing, or about working in my garden, or about seeing a bird at the feeders – simple, everyday stuff of no importance to anyone but me.

A temptation comes:

I feel I need to manufacture important things to say.

As a Christian I get to thinking that I'm responsible to tell the reading world about how to be saved, about how to live in crisis, about how to handle problems, about the Glory of Christ, dramatic answers to prayer, miraculous healings, etc. etc. – in other words, to lie about my life and interests.

Bull!

I tend to forget that I'm a cog in God's wheels.

Surely the Almighty and Everlasting God can honor Himself thru a simple guy sitting at his desk trying to do his duty or mowing his grass or loving his wife or enjoying a bird.

But deep inside, I want my life to be a Hollywood Spectacular with seas parting and martial music and crowds cheering – and ME in the starring role with a disheveled Marilyn Monroe, two thirds out of her bodice, clinging to my muscular thigh as I protect her from heathen barbarian hordes with my shining sword... Dream on John!

Yes, sometimes God does come as a mighty rushing wind; but most often He comes as silently, as imperceptibly as dew forming on a morning spider web. The important thing for us to know is that He comes daily.

So, what did I really do yesterday?

I sat at my desk editing the *Stacy Letters*. Thanks be to God.

Thursday, July 14, 2005

But, Will It Float?

A book manuscript resembles a fully rigged clipper ship.

Once all the lines, ropes and stays are in place, if you adjust the tension on one, you must change the tension on all the others too.

Last night I finally finished my sixth or eighth edit of the *Stacy Letters*. Thanks Be To God! Now comes the scary work of adjusting details without screwing up the whole thing and sinking the ship.

King Solomon said, “Of the making of many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”

He hit the nail on the head!

Still remaining for me to do:

Writing an introduction; getting an ISBN; registering copyright and applying for a Library of Congress catalogue number; e-mailing text to Wes (Thank God he volunteered) for proofreading; removing invisible graphic frames; converting to a pdf for the printer; adjusting the kerning; generating an index; praying for potential readers; rechecking pagination; wording a dedication; pricing; and writing a marketing blurb...

Nothing to it.

Except that I'm scared to touch the thing again for fear of knocking down the whole tower of cards.

Oh well, the Lord Jesus got me this far. Maybe He'll see me the rest of the way through.

If not, the clipper ship is His to sink; the tower of cards is His to knock down.

It is not beyond the realm of possibility that His purpose in all this effort and energy I've expended was not for the benefit of potential readers and historians, but simply to keep me off the streets.

His ways are not necessarily my ways — But (sometimes) I suspect He knows what He's doing.

Ginny is making a presentation at City Hall this morning. A lot hinges on the outcome. If you're inclined to pray...

Friday, July 15, 2005

I Don't Need Your Help! I'm Not A Wimp!

I once sank to my armpits in quicksand.

I really could have died under the sucking sand.

My brother and I were fishing in Matanzas Inlet when I tried to cross a tidal run and got stuck and sank in the sand which locked me in a vice-like vacuum. David was only a short distance away fishing with his back to me .

I could have called to him for help.

But I didn't.

I determined in heart and mind that I'd rather die than ask anybody, even my own brother, for help!

The tide flooded in loosening the sand's grip on me and I swam free, although I did lose my shoes— and darn near my pants— in the struggle.

So stupidly independent.

So easily embarrassed.

So prideful.

Rather drown my own fat ass than to ask for help – that's me.

Yesterday, I had to ask for help.

After a long, painful internal debate, I called Ginny at work and asked her to come home because I couldn't handle things. Hated to do that. Hated to disturb her at work. Hated to admit that I could not do it on my own. Hated to admit weakness.

Hated to ask the one person who loves me most in the world to help me.

I'm like that with God too.

Of course, Ginny dropped everything and came immediately to my aid.

What else would you expect?

Saturday, July 16, 2005

I Gotta Leak

I gotta leak.

The family plans a generic celebration this evening to observe several birthdays, a job promotion, and a friend's upcoming wedding.

The kids decided to hold this shindig at our house with an everybody-bring-something cookout and pool party.

Problem is I gotta leak. Perhaps a falling branch during last week's storms cause it, or maybe there's a loose hose, or it could be a failed gasket— whatever— our pool loses water faster than the garden hose can fill it

First, I dawned a facemask and descended to the bottom with a patching kit.

Since I am so buoyant (read fat) I can't stay on bottom long, so when I dive, Ginny places her foot in the small of my back and steps on me to hold me down underwater.

We've done this sort of thing before.

Last winter when the water was too cold for her, she stayed outside the pool and held me on bottom with a long broom.

Hey, it worked.

But today even after we patched all holes we could discover, the pool still leaks.

So I checked hoses.

All ok.

We bought some sealer and tackled the gaskets. We both ended up covered with black sticky glop.

And the water still gurgles down – somewhere.

And we can't find the leak.

We just see the level going slowly, persistently down, drained away into the sand.

How symbolic.

Yeap, we're celebrating last week's birthdays — one of 'em's mine.

Another year down the drain.

Where did it go?

What did I accomplish?

Did it count for a damn thing?

Life seeps away drip by drip by drip.

Good thing I'm such a giddy optimist, or this thought track could really get depressing....

The drip by drip phrase reminds me that I once wrote a piece about how I stole the leg from somebody's dining room table ([Jesse James And Me](#) (right-hand column, cowart.info). You'll find that happier reading.

While you enjoy reading that, I'm headed to a pool-less pool party.

Sunday, July 17, 2005
A Generic Party



Saturday Ginny & I, along with over 600 other people, visited the Grand Opening of the Maxville Library. The Head Librarian herself lead the two of us on an extended tour of this magnificent new 8,500 square-foot facility with 14,000 items in the collection

Yes, we saw thousands of brand new shiny books, video tapes, DVD discs; video conferencing equipment, donuts, lemonade, herds of children – everything bright, fresh and new.

As we talked with The Head Librarian, Branch Manager, she told us about the Kinsley's Bar-B-Que just down the road. We found the place and enjoyed some of the best BBQ I've ever tasted. A stuffed boar's head decorates the dinning room, and it was two stuffed customers who left the building.

As soon as we arrived home Donald showed up to begin hosting the generic party. He brought a huge computer monitor for me and hooked it up. Now, I can see what I'm doing online.

Then he prepared a lavish feast for family and friends. We gorged on shrimp kabobs, bean soup (for the vegetarians among us), beef stroganoff, Krispy Kreams, cakes, snack things, ice cream, marshmallows, and more.

Eve's librarian friend, Janeen (sp?) sent me an ancient, lovely edition of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I did not own a copy and I'm happy to get this 19th Century one.

We lit a bonfire in the fire dish by the fountain and we all feasted and talked in firelight and moonlight.

Unfortunately the engaged couple found other things to do so they didn't show up (again) so Donald was disappointed about his friend's failure to show (again). Guy should just have said, "No I don't want to come" instead of stringing Donald along for hours as he's done on previous occasions. But anyhow, Jennifer & Pat invited several of their friends and I enjoyed the conversation.

I feel I talked way too much. I'm sorry about that. Neal (Neil?) has a knack of asking questions that kept me gabbing – he has the skill/art of an excellent conversationalist – while he said virtually nothing about himself. Poor Bill, Ginny, Duval and Eve couldn't get a word in edgewise because of my yakking continuously. I felt guilty after everyone left for home.

When Donald set this thing up, we'd agreed "no presents" (Ginny & I hardly ever exchange gifts). But Donald had seen two tasteful, cultured, works of fine art which he felt would blend with our décor. He gave Ginny a statue of a cat which even ardent cat-lovers found grotesque. (She refused to let me photograph it).

But here's a blurred photo (Below, taken by someone's cell phone and e-mailed wirelessly to my computer) of the crab playing a guitar which he gave me; I'm the first on our block to own one!



No, that's not the crab; That's Eve, the Head Librarian, Branch Manager.

Next photo is the work of art:



Birthday Crab plays a guitar... or maybe it's eating a Girl Scout cookie

Monday, July 18, 2005

Crash & Burn

Sunday, I crashed and burned.

The rubber band effect kicked in from the strain I've been under preparing the Stacy ms. Once the tension released, I snapped into a limp, tangled heap and slept about 12 hours. I ought to know better than to get in such a state, but it happens every time I finish a project.

Barbara's granddaughter died at 4 a.m.; she was 21.

Nothing more constructive I can say.

Wednesday, July 20, 2005

Walkin' and Prayin'

This morning, for the first time in ages, I took a prayer walk. As she leaves for work, Ginny drops me a mile or so down the road and I walk home praying for the homes I pass in the neighborhood, situations I know about, people who come to mind.

Problem is, this morning I walked more than prayed.

I noticed a dead cat in the road, a kid's lost shoe, a new pothole, graffiti on a passing boxcar. Why is it easier for me to pay attention to such things than to God?

Well, when you can't see glory, pray about grime.

I try to link the things I see so they remind me to worship and talk with the Father about the concerns of my fellow man.

- That dead cat looked as though someone had deliberately cut its throat; Lord, please temper the cruelty loose in this world.
- That kid's lost shoe; Lord, remember when our kids buried their shoes so they wouldn't have to go to church and how we made them go barefoot? Well, help that kid's parents not to feel as desperate and frantic as we did; help them know that You will provide whatever's needed.
- The pothole; Lord, our city is a mess. The budget is shot to hell. Carpetbaggers and republicans control the government. Services are being cut back. Look upon Jacksonville with mercy and give us better leaders than we deserve.
- Graffiti on a boxcar: Lord, there are gangs of young men hanging out on the corner every night. Nothing to do. No place to go. No future. No hope. What, if anything, am I supposed to do about it? Please send them someone they will listen to.

Do I feel any different after my walk?

No.

But I'm glad I walked— Except, now my feet hurt.

SORRY FOLKS:

Last night Donald tried to teach me how to write some html code.

You see the results.

I managed to loose all access to my own blog! (Except for this comment).

Either that or Bill Gates snuck into the house while I slept and hit my computer with an ax.

Never fear, Donald plans to come over Saturday and repair whatever it was that Bill or I did.

Maybe the Blog will be up and running again then.

Meanwhile, maybe you'd like to read some of my regular website.

Again, I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Friday, July 22, 2005

An Unexpectedly Happy Day

Ginny & I enjoyed an unexpected pleasant day; she'd clustered several doctors' appointments for this morning and we held grim prospects of a day sitting around a waiting room, but it didn't work out that way at all.

I was up at my usual 4 a.m. filling out online government forms to register books with the Library of Congress and puzzling over their conversion software for converting ten digit ISBNs to the new 13 digit ones. Of course after you do all that, there are still only ten blanks on the forms where you can insert the numbers ????

Mysterious.

Maybe I got it right.

I'm sure they'll let me know if I didn't.

Workmen have been replacing wooden ties along the railroad tracks near our home. They piled the old ties in a field for later pick up.

We thought these might be a good textured background for a new author's photo for the back of *Glog*, a novel I plan to publish next month; it's about a dinosaur who prays for divine guidance.

So early, before the first doctor visit, we posed:





To our surprise, Gin's first test proved to be a walk-in-walk-out affair. So we enjoyed a leisure breakfast at Denny's. Over morning coffee we compared our experience with prayer to going to a charity hospital's emergency room. You go in hurting only to find 38 people there ahead of you. You put in your request with full confidence that the Doctor will help

you—but, until He gets around to you, all you can do is endure. You may be miserable in that waiting room, but you know that help will eventually come... It's just that they haven't pulled your number yet.

Not a cheerful view of prayer, but that describes our personal experience best.

Since we had extra time, we drove to a store to shop for stuff we've been meaning to buy but just haven't gotten around to: bird seed, a dishpan, shower curtain, etc. Nothing urgently needed but things we were glad to mark off our list.

Off to a new doctor's office for Ginny's next two tests. I told the tech doing the bone density test that it was not needed because Ginny is the densest woman I've ever met ...

But he gave her the test anyhow.

Then we drove to a hardware store to replace a broken drawer handle. Of course the salesman said, "They don't make 'em in that size anymore." He wanted to special order a new one for \$38; but since, years ago, we'd only paid \$40 for that chest anyhow, we decided to pass on that bargain.

We enjoyed lunch at Harpoon Louie's. We ate outside on the deck overlooking Fishweir Creek. No other customers were there so we sat for two hours sipping tea, munching fried onion rings, smoking, watching birds and tide, and talking: Here's a photo we took of Fishweir Creek:



Back home we discovered four pleasant surprises:

1. Ginny's mother sent us a nice birthday check.

2. My computer blog, which had disappeared for some reason this morning, is back online.

3. Ginny applied for a job as a budget analyst months ago and today personnel called arranging an interview with her. I have no idea what a budget analyst does, but Ginny understands and she's excited at the prospect.

4. The Library of Congress sent me the control numbers for both *Glog* and *Letters From Stacy*. So all systems are go for those two books.

Gin & I spent the afternoon dabbling in the garden, napping, reading and talking about books.

Our Bible reading after supper came from John's Gospel, about the second miracle Jesus performed and we puzzled over the structure of the passage. Gin said the word "believed" is used with two different meanings and I'm confused over the time element mentioned. The more we read of Scripture, the less we understand.

We transferred, with much pain and anguish, wailing and gnashing of teeth, the photos we took this morning. Then tried to decided which one made me look less like a dork to use on the *Glog* book jacket.... Maybe a pix of the *other* dinosaur would be better.

Spent the evening reading novels and so to bed.

We thought we were going to spend this day hanging around waiting rooms. Instead, we enjoyed a delightful time together. You can never tell what a day may bring forth.

Saturday, July 23, 2005

On Being A One-Ply Christian

Again today I re-discovered that my religion is as thin and flimsy as one-ply toilet paper.

I'm fine as long as I'm safely on a roll, but let the slightest bit of friction come, let something rub me the wrong way, and — well, there's a nasty break through.

As often happens, today's break through came because of my own expectations; I'd envisioned spending the weekend in a certain way accomplishing certain things important to me. Instead, I find other people have other plans. As usual, this rubs me the wrong way. I grow frustrated. My Christianity rips.

And there you have it!

This afternoon I vented a lot of this frustration in the presence of my daughter Eve— who had nothing whatsoever to do with the situation. Eve is a gentle fawn of a girl who just happened to be in the room when Dad began his rant.

Did I complain about the situation at hand?

No. I raged about everything that bugged me from an unexpected \$400 bill, to the government's handling of the war in Iraq, to the carpetbagger jaguar football team moving from Jacksonville (leave losers!), to the letter "I" sticking on my keyboard.

Poor Eve got to see the real me – the bitter, sour, grump who lurks brooding beneath my thin layer of Christian faith.

*Incidentally, one reason Eve was over at my house – after treating me to a nice lunch out – was to set up her own blog. She made her first posting today. Please visit her new site to leave a comment welcoming her to blogging. Her site is called *Of Cabbages And Kings* and it's found at <http://www.eveyq.blogspot.com/>*

Anyhow, does the breaking through of my frustrations, my ranting and raving and exposing the ugliness that underlies my thin, flimsy faith, prove that that faith is not real?

When a Christian falls, does that mean his faith is only a misty vapor?

On one hand, it would be easy to say that a person who acts like me, is not a real Christian. Real Christians don't say the sort of things I said.

But I am a real Christian. I'm a born-again, fire-baptized, spirit-filled, card-carrying Christian and I've got a tee-shirt and bumper sticker to prove it! (My tee-shirt says: JESUS LOVES YOU – BUT I'M HIS FAVORITE!)

On another hand, does such behavior as mine mean I'm just a hypocrite, pretending to be a Christian, but just using Jesus to enhance my own reputation?

That could be.

I do believe better than I act. But I'm working on that one.

On still another hand (yes, three hands), does the behavior of any frustrated Christian under stress, when the faith hits the fan, mean that Christianity is false. That there's really nothing to it?

Not necessarily.

The truth of Jesus in no way depends on being propped up by His followers.

He is Himself whatever we are.

Besides if I, being a Christian, can be such a mean, bitter, sour, nasty old grouch underneath my one-ply faith— just imagine what I'd be like without that thin redeeming film of God's grace!

Sad, isn't it?

And here I thought so highly of my own shining, sterling example as a model Christian. I thought so much better of myself than that.

I expected more of me ...

Maybe that's the whole trouble right there.

Sunday, July 24, 2005

Guy Stuff/ Girl Stuff

Donald amazed me today.

He came over about 8 a.m. to do computer stuff for me. He designed some book covers I need and did all sorts of esoteric stuff with my computer, working on it all day. Considering that he gets about \$50+ an hour for outside consulting, this represents an enormous investment of time, cash and energy on his part.

It was such a pleasure to watch him work. On one project he blended a photo of a swimming muskrat into a different photo of a swamp for the cover of my novel, *Glog*. I couldn't imagine attempting such a complex task; I marveled at his skill and efficiency.

Not only did he craft photos and covers and help me structure the manuscript, but he also made astute suggestions for the writing and business aspects of my projects. It behooves me to pay attention when he speaks.

He proposed a subtitle: *Glog, A Dinosaur Novel... Of sorts*. That's my next book. It's about a sentient dinosaur who prays for divine guidance.

I would never be able to get any of my recent books written without Donald's help and encouragement. Although I rather suspect that I drive him nuts because he will teach me how to do something but my mind can't retain the information and he has to teach me the same things over and over again.

I exasperate him.

While Donald and I worked posting *Letters From Stacy*, (which we think has no realistic market, not being of interest to anyone but me) Ginny cleaned the bathroom and hung the new curtains. Her work makes the room look so much larger and brighter.

After Donald left, we met the four girls (Patricia's back from college for the weekend) for supper at a Chinese buffet.

There, Ginny reigned as the center of attention. All the girls questioned her about babies. They asked how much they weighed at birth? How long was her labor? ... All sorts of baby questions.

I had nothing at all to contribute to that conversation.

Monday, July 25, 2005

Lazy Sunday

Ginny & I need to decide what to do about our pool.

Peripheral winds from Hurricane Dennis dropped a branch into the aboveground pool puncturing the liner. We patched this along with a dozen or so smaller holes in the ten-year-old pool but it still leaks seriously. But we can't find where it is leaking.

We could take it out altogether; install a new liner; buy a new pool; or keep trying to locate and patch the present leak. Each option has advantages and disadvantages, different expenses and expenditures of energy.

We are not sure what to do.

Not only does the pool give us pleasure and add to the value of our property, it also adds a safety factor — i.e. it served as a reservoir of clean water when city power and water were cut off during the hurricanes last year.

I hope this is the most painful decision we ever have to make!

But, even in small decisions we ask the Lord Christ to help us choose aright.

We enjoyed a rousing breakfast at Dave's with Jennifer, Pat, Donald, Eve & Patricia. The kids offered all sorts of helpful input about various situations other family members face.

The wisdom of my own children astounds me.

Afterwards Eve & Patricia came over to our house. Earlier, ripe fruit bent our fig tree and the girls planned to pick some. But while we were at breakfast, so were the bluejays and thrashers and woodpeckers. The birds stripped the fruit till nothing was left for the girls to pick.

Patricia began a new blog. So far all she has in it are a couple of test entries but here is her address. Please drop by and add a comment. Her site is The Rabbit Hole at <http://www.holerabbit.blogspot.com/>

Tuesday, July 26, 2005

A Writer's Frustration

Went out to breakfast at Dave's with Barbara; afterwards we came back to my house to sit in the garden and talk. I listened.

Her granddaughter's funeral is scheduled for Saturday. Ginny & I have other commitments so we don't plan to attend.

Ginny went for that job interview this morning but they called immediately afterward saying they are giving the job to someone else.

All day long I battled the headers and footers in my *Glog* manuscript. *Word* (a pox on all their houses) insists on changing right input to wrong! And when I'd correct it, *Word* changed it back again to the wrong thing!

Infuriating.

A friend, a fine writer I admire, e-mailed me this weekend, about her frustration over the vision she sees and what actually get on the printed page. She said:

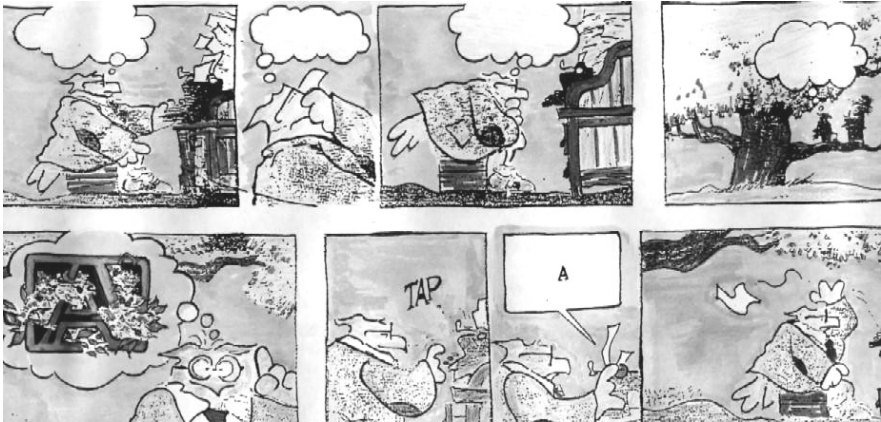
“I have finally figured out in my mind I want to write I just don't know how. I can't seem to gather my thoughts about how ... I see what it is suppose to say in my head not what it is actually down on paper. Does this make sense? I have a hard time explaining it even. My mind sees what it wants and skips ahead.”

Do I understand what she's going through?

You Bet!!!

Long ago I clipped this *Shoe* cartoon by Jeff MacNelly out of the newspaper. I framed it and it has hung by my desk for years.

Here it is for her (and for me, and for other frustrated writers):



Wednesday, July 27, 2005

Nothing Much To Say

Sat at my desk editing my *Glog* manuscript all day; I may have solved that header/footer formatting problem. — Maybe.

I went out to see the space shuttle Discovery launch, but it was too cloudy to see it from our backyard this time. My oldest daughter took me out to lunch at Arden's Café. Ginny finished reading the latest Harry Potter book. Piles of stuff to do but neither time nor strength nor energy to do it.

Nothing else to say about today,

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Blessed Are The Peacemakers For They Shall Be Called....

The man from down the street stomped up my next door neighbor's drive hefting a wooden club as though he intended to brain somebody.

My computer faces the front window and I glanced up from working on my *Glog* manuscript just in time to see the irate gentleman. Just that glance showed he was seething mad about something and he was loaded for bear.

None of my business, is it?

Besides, my next-door neighbor, a nurse, is not even home. I saw her leave for the hospital hours ago.

Nevertheless, I slipped on my shoes and walked outside to intervene in what looked like big trouble.

Mr. D--- stood at her back gate swinging his club over the fence while Felony, the nurse's pit bull, danced and barked just out of reach.

"Gonna kill that damn dog," Mr. D--- growled at me. "Bakrin' all the damn time. Keepin' me awake with that damn yapping."

Now, having worked night shift myself I can sympathize with a man whose sleep has been disturbed at 10 a.m. But I also know that Felony is a good dog who hardly ever barks. Mr. D--- was not prepared to listen to any defense of the barking dog.

But I realized why Felony barked— roofers were on top of a house across the street and the dog realized that these men did not normally belong in the neighborhood— especially on top of a house. So she sounded the alarm.

Mr. D--- calmed down when he saw the roofers banging created as much noise as the dog's barking. He was still not happy but he returned to his own home still hefting his club and muttering about calling animal control.

Feeling pious, I remembered a passage of Scripture, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called"

But as he stalked away, I'm sure I heard Mr D--- call me a "Damn, inteferin' son of a bitch!"

In response to six comments, I answered:

Just trying to pour oil on troubled waters of confrontation.

My first concern was for the dog. She's normally a good dog. I work about ten yards from where she stands at the fence and I did not hear her barking.

My next concern was for Mr. D... because if he had hit her with his club, she just may have jumped the fence (I've put her back in the neighbor's yard when she did that) and who know what a pissed off pit bull might do to him.

Besides, I couldn't swear to it but drink may have been a contributing factor in this confrontation between man and dog.

Friday, July 29, 2005

5/16 Of A Prayer Answered

Screwed!

Gin skipped work and we began changing the liner in our above ground pool. Wouldn't think you'd work up a sweat in a pool but I certainly did.

I rigged and spliced various hoses to drain the remaining water; Ginny worked the outlet end of the hoses to water the flower beds so the water would not go to waste.

As the water drained, I tried to unscrew the fittings and top rails. Each of the dozens of fittings is attached with **eight** screws, yes, eight (8) screws! in each and every post. And two clamps, a metal baffle and a plastic clip.

All the screws have rusted in solid. Instead of unscrewing, the rusted heads tend to twist off leaving the shank of the screw embedded in the posts.

Getting just that first screw out took me over 30 minutes struggle!

I do not have the muscles for this project. But it must be done because after that limb fell, I counted 36 holes in the pool liner.

I walked next door to see if my neighbor had a 5/16th sprocket wrench that would fit. He drove up in his truck while I was rummaging in his tool box. I told him what I was trying to do and he reached in his shirt pocket and handed me a 5/16th nut driver. He'd picked it up at his job this morning and just happened to have it still in his pocket.

The tool was perfect for my job! By sundown I 'd manage to unscrew about half the fittings. It's still a monster job, but without that nutdriver, I'd be screwed.

As I worked, I reflected that while I'd been bitching and cursing and moaning about those rusted screws, I don't recall consciously praying for help. Yet, Something prompted my neighbor to stick the very thing I needed in his shirt pocket, and Something prompted him to drive home for lunch.

I can't claim this is a big, dramatic answer to prayer, because I hadn't prayed — yet somehow, I'm reminded of the Scripture where God says, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

On one hand, I felt thankful for this small mercy as a sign of God's care in providing me with the right tool to do the job.

But, of course, being the kind of Christian I am, I immediately wondered *If God cares for me, then why'd He allowed that branch to fall and punch 36 holes in my pool liner in the first place?*

Well, like my grandfather used to say, "Some folks would complain if you was to hang 'em with a brand new rope."

Saturday, July 30, 2005

Tits & Tobacco: an odd occurrence

All day I unscrewed pool fixtures and carried out my usual Friday duties.

Gin & I both celebrated birthdays in the same week earlier this month and her mother sent us a nice birthday check (*Thanks, Alva*). So, for our usual Friday night date, we splurged by cashing the welcomed check and going to Donna Maria's, an open air Mexican restaurant on the waterfront.

Scrumptious.

While there I saw a bird (actually it landed on the table next to us). I'd never seen one like it before. But Ginny calmly announced that it was a *boatswain grackle*. The scope of the woman's knowledge amazes me.

Anyhow, this Mexican place sits right next to a Hooters Restaurant which also has an open air section. The two places blend together, so while we dined, I watched a fascinating jiggle show as sweet young things bent over vigorously polishing tables .

An aside: We went to a different Hooters once years ago when Ginny's new boss treated the office staff and spouses to dinner there. About 18 or 20 people attended. Four or five waitresses brought out huge mounded platters of chicken wings and everyone prepared to dig in. But the new boss tapped her glass for attention, stood up, and said, "Mr. Cowart, I understand you are religious. Would you say grace for us."

At this, the four or five waitresses paused in their serving, lined up posing and jutting, and stood in an impressive, but respectful, line. Other noisy customers packed the place but the stance of the girls caused a hush to fall.

Normally I believe in praying in secret, i.e. in private, not public, prayer. But what do you do when asked to pray in public in a Hooters?

Stunned, I stood up at the table and prayed aloud saying something or another in thanks for food, jobs and beauty. Then the feasting began .I've heard it said that a Christian needs to be ready to preach, pray or die at a moment's notice — but this really caught me off guard. I have no idea what I said, but afterwards several people commented about how appropriate the prayer was.

Anyhow back to tonight, I enjoyed my fried peppers stuffed with something and coated with the Mexican version of Velveeta. And I enjoyed the scenery of boats, birds, and boobs galore.

Afterwards, Gin & I strolled holding hands along the Riverwalk. A guy came up with a cell phone pressed to his ear. He stopped us and launched into a long story about wife and kids in a broke down car, dead battery, expensive hotel room— and could I give him \$57 to make ends meet. Ha! Fat chance.

(The asking price of panhandlers has gone up. My Daddy told me that back during the Great Depression a running joke was: Q: "Say, Buddy, you got a nickel for a cup of coffee?" A: "No. But I'll get along somehow.")

I gave the man a bit of change and he pressed for more till I said that was all I'm willing to give. I suspect the cell phone was only a prop for his scam; panhandling is illegal on the Riverwalk and there is a strong police presence.

So much for that.

Now here's where things get weird:

As Ginny & I drove home we stopped at a Walgreen's drug store because they were having a sale, a dollar off, on my brand of pipe tobacco. I bought my tobacco and Gin picked up a couple of things she needed.

Now remember: the sum total of my thinking all evening – tits, tobacco.

As we walked to the car, I saw a homeless man. No shirt. A ragged bundle of clothes. Thin as a rail. Not a hair on his head. Looked like an AIDS victim with a really bad T-Cell count. He foraged in a trashcan, found a plastic soda bottle with a little liquid left in the bottom, and he drank it (heat index of 105 today).

Now without thinking I gave this man a tiny courtesy, nothing big, just the sort of normal kindness you'd extend to anybody you know.

He started crying.

He stepped close and threw his arms around me and lay his head on my shoulder and cried his heart out. I have a great aversion to being touched; it's so strong in me that I cut my own hair rather than let a barber touch me. And here this stranger is embracing me and crying. I deliberately shelved my aversion, steeled myself to being touched, and put my arms around him. I cradled him in my arms. I patted his back and rocked him back and forth like a child.

All I said to him was, "It's ok. It's going to be alright. Don't be afraid. It's all going to be ok."

I said this over and over.

I think we stood like that in the Walgreen's parking lot for a good ten or 15 minutes. Ginny quietly got in our car and waited.

Now, here's what's odd.

This man sobbing in my arms said, "Forgive me. I'm just a sinner. Please forgive me. Forgive me."

I had not said one word about religion. I quoted no Scripture. I gave no testimony. I didn't read *Four Things God Wants You To Know*. I did not lead him in *The Sinner's Prayer*. None of that standard Christian witnessing stuff

– Tits & tobacco had been the only things on my mind. – And here I felt God was using me??? Why? Maybe He’s scraping the bottom of the barrel for witnesses here in Jacksonville.

Yet, nevertheless, this poor bastard was crying for forgiveness with tears streaming down his face and snot dripping from his nose.

Finally, he pulled himself together. Wiped his face with his forearm, picked up his bundle and walked down the street sniffing and saying, “Lord, forgive me. Lord, forgive me..”

I really don’t know what to make of this.

Don’t you have to be pious and prayerful and “on fire for the Lord” to be used by God?

Or, maybe I was not “used by God”

Maybe I just ran into an emotional AIDS patient.

Maybe the man is a kook who does this with everybody?

Or, was this some kind of scam? Cynical Christian that I am, after embracing, cradling, and rocking this guy, I immediately checked to see my wallet was still in place – it was.

I really don’t know what to make of this odd incident.

Was I on *Candid Camera* or something?

Puzzling.

One commenter remarked:....I can see you at Hooters saying, "I don't pray publicly too often, but I'll try my breast."

Sunday, July 31, 2005

Saw A Hawk

As Gin & I drove out for supper, a gay pride parade forced us off our usual route and we ended at the Publix grocery store near Five Points.

Across the parking lot Ginny spotted an enormous hawk eating its supper on the pediment of a building. We sat outside watching it for almost an hour.

By comparing the size of the hawk with the width of the casement window below, we determined that it was between 18 and 24 inches in length. Because of the angle we watched from, the bird stood in sharp relief against the sky. It had caught some other bird, a pigeon or dove, and was eating the prey alive even as the prey quivered and fluttered to escape. The hawk held the victim down with its talons and ripped bits of flesh off while loose feathers drifted down from the ledge.

Because we saw the hawk in silhouette against the sunset, we could not make out its markings, but from the profile, we ruled out northern harrier and

identify it as either a Cooper's hawk or a sharp-shinned hawk. Because of the enormous size we're inclined to think it was a Cooper's.

Although dozens and dozens of people around us went in and out of the stores, not a single other person stopped to watch the drama being played out just three stories above their heads.

Monday, August 01, 2005

Good, Clean Fun

Sunday afternoon Donald came over and helped me dig out all the old mud foundation from the swimming pool. Shovel. Shovel. Shovel. Donald, a math genius calculated the pool dimensions ($\pi \times 18 \times 6.2$ or three=?). He estimates that we moved 249 square feet (or maybe he said cubit meters, or yards) of mud.

Impressive.

But once I stumped him with this math problem:

If a telephone wire stretched from here to St. Augustine is divided into four sections and on the first stretch of wire sit 500 mockingbirds, and on the second section sit another 500, and on the third another 500, and on the fourth still another 500 — then in metric units, how many mockingbirds are there?

Two Killamockingbirds!

Nothing else to blog about

Wednesday, August 03, 2005

Still Digging

Phoned the pool supply place with model number, serial number and all info on parts I need. "Sure we have that in stock," she lied. Drove 45 minutes across town to the store. "We can order that for you; takes eight to ten days..." They did not stock the items I'd called about.

No, John. Christians shouldn't talk like that!

Thursday, August 04, 2005

Life in the hole

Yeap, I'm still digging.

Look at any pool ad. You see a bikini girl relaxing on a float with a colorful beverage in her hand.

Look at our pool today, you see me covered with mud and sand with dozens of clothespins attached to my filthy tee-shirt, my shoes in tatters, me sweating like a pig— with a disposition to match.

No fear. I'm sure to have the pool filled and running by the next freeze.

PS: The clothespins are a handy way to anchor the vinyl liner and I wear them on my person so they won't be at the other side of the pool whenever I need one— like every other tool I reach for.

In other news: Ginny's office is moving to another building this week. She can't find the files she needs to work. In fact, she can't even find the file cabinets; they may still be in the old building. It's 96 degrees today and the air conditioner in her new building has not been turned on yet. So between me in the mud and her office move, our week has been Well, you get the picture:



Joy. Joy. Joy. This is the day that the Lord hath made — What the hell happened to it?

Saturday, August 06, 2005

The Pool Boy's Socks

I envision how our backyard pool will look when I finish work on it:



No, this is not our pool and I don't know who the bathing beauty is, but this picture from the net epitomizes the finished pool in my mind.

Unfortunately, I have a ways to go yet.

Friday, my daughter Eve came over to work. She sawed a sheet of plywood and built a platform for the pump filtration system. (Eve acquired building skills by volunteering to build houses for Habitat For Humanity when she was a teenager). She helped mow. She vacuumed my neighbor's pool (one of my usual Friday duties). She squeezed air bubbles from under our pool liner.... And to start the day, Eve put my socks on my feet.

Yes, my arthritis hurt so bad today that I couldn't pull on my own socks!

And here I keep the mental image of myself as a macho guy — faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap off tall buildings in a single bound, defender of truth, justice, and the American way of life.... No, wait a minuet. That's Superman.

I was never able to do any of that stuff ...

But I've never before needed my daughter to help me put my socks on either.

As Eve helped me, naturally my thoughts turned to my favorite church service; the church we sometimes attend practices foot washing each year on the Thursday before Easter.

That is by far the happiest occasion in the church year. Inevitably some guy tickles his wife's feet. A playful slap follows. Kids giggle as daddy washes their feet. Somebody always tips a basin over. Laughter reigns in the sanctuary ... Just as Jesus said it should:

“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet... If ye know these things, *happy* are ye if ye do them.”

Anyhow, Eve put my socks on me and worked with me all day. Here's a photo she took of the tools we used. I keep them lined up in order so I don't end up burying my own shovel:



Once Ginny & I saw this movie about a pool boy named Hershel. He knocked on the doors of suburban homes to be greeted by bikini-clad young lovelies anxious to have their pools cleaned — among other things. The mere sight of the pool boy inspired these women into amorous fits. Deep in my fundamentalist Christian heart, I've always envied Hershel. What a neat way to make a living. Pay isn't much, but Hershel did enjoy certain fringe benefits.

Now that I've been working as an official pool boy for the past few weeks, I wonder if the sight of me in my pool getup would similarly inspire the bikini girls???

Here's a photo of me in my pool boy outfit:



No, black socks with shorts are not a geriatric fashion statement; I've wallowed in so much dirt all week that these are the last clean pair I own. Notice the chic clothespins clipped to my shirt for easy access while adjusting the liner. Do I look like a lopsided porcupine? And, incidentally, Donald's old shirt that I'm wearing carries the physic's formula $W=Fx D$,

Work equals force times distance— which I think is a scientist’s way of saying, “Avoid being forced to work by keeping your distance.”

Don't I look cool?

Eat your heart out, Hershel!

Cowart, your pool boy replacement, is on the prowl.

Ginny’s office, which I think involved about a hundred people, has finally moved. Now all they have to do is find their desks, computers and chairs in the chaos. Gin says a lot of trash meant to be thrown out at the old building, got moved to the new building. Happens every move. She’s glad that part of the job is over.

For our usual Friday Night Date, we dined in a romantic private alcove at Jimmy’s Fried Chicken where we lingered and chatted and got re-acquainted. Then, because it is a soft summer evening with drifting clouds, wafting breezes, and a rising moon, we spent our intimate time together at Home Depot getting more fixtures for that damn pool!

One final thought about socks:

In First Century Jerusalem men didn’t wear socks with their open-toed sandals and the camels, horses and donkeys plying the streets were not equipped with emissions control devices.

Jesus did not wash the disciples’ feet just to institute a quaint religious ceremony.

He washed their feet because their feet were dirty.

What a Savior! He is absolutely terrific!

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, ...

Down & depressed for several reasons, some external but most of them from within myself.

I get this way periodically. So it’s a pain in the ass, but no big deal.

External factors included:

- Computer problem with my bookstore front. Even if someone wanted to buy one of my books, they’d have a hard time navigating the site. In the same vain, I received printer proofs of the *Stacy Letters* and find a pagination problem which throws the index off. AGGGGG!
- A letter from a Civil War buff pointing out what he says are ten factual errors in a history piece I wrote many years ago. To check out the accuracy of the information I’ll have to dig out moldering files in storage.

- Letdown from pool work: as usual when finishing a project I'm experiencing a backlash. You know, the way you feel after final exams in school. Perfectly normal, but depressing nonetheless. Besides, yesterday I discovered a pump seal leaking which meant dismantling a bunch of work and taking it to the repair shop.
- Also, the cleanup from the pool project remains to be done and I find it overwhelming. I still have lots of dirt, shoveled from the pool bed, to distribute and spread to low places in the yard. I'm growing to my shovel.
- Several of my children face major decisions and I'm concerned about them.
- Several friends and neighbors tell me about developing tensions.
- Several people have asked favors which will require extra physical work and time from me if I choose to help out.

Internally, I feel a useless looser spending more and more wasted days in a wasted life. This is my normal mental outlook, although I think my own view of reality may be a bit skewed; cain't nobody be as bad as I feel I am.

Then I feel a tad guilty that as a Christian I feel the way I do because I'm told that Christians are supposed to be happy folks filled with joy, confidence, purpose, and all that crap. Those things are beyond my daily experience.

I'd like for life to get back to normal – but the thought comes that This Is Normal!

My meager devotions feel hollow, less than shallow. I have a hard time remembering what Bible passage we read last night... O yes, it was about the transfiguration. If you'd like to read my take on that odd occurrence in a science fiction piece I wrote years ago, please take a look at the [Transfiguration Of What's His Name](http://www.cowart.info) (Left-hand column, www.cowart.info)..

Sorry I don't have anything more positive to say in my blog today, but if I only wrote about the good times, that would not be honest and would not reflect the Christian Life as she is lived — at least by this one guy.

“Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, What did you think of the play?”

Thursday, August 11, 2005

Sometimes, nothing is the best thing to do.

Too depressed and distracted to do much positive today so I concentrated on doing obvious, non-pressing duties such as storing tools I'd pulled out to work on the pool, laundry, washing dishes, etc. I mailed the required copies of *Letters From Stacy* to the Library of Congress.

And I picked up my pool pump from Jax Electric Motor Exchange.

Can you imagine! The repair shop bumped work on my pool pump back because some housing development needed repairs for their sewerage treatment pump which handles waste from a hundred homes. Mr. Fuller, the repairman, felt that work on their pump deserved priority over mine so he delayed fixing my pump by about three hours.

But I had my order in first!

I mean it's like going to a hospital emergency room with a toothache and here comes some guy having a heart attack and the triage nurse jumps him to the head of the line and makes me wait even though I was there first.

It's just not fair.

I wonder if prayer works like that? I wonder if God is fair? Could it be that He thinks that there are more important people and issues in the universe than ME?

That's something to ponder.

Meanwhile, Donald took today off work and took me out to lunch at Arden's where we enjoyed the finest food ever cooked in Jacksonville.

I mean Bill Gates did not eat any better than we did today! Good stuff!

We just hung out all afternoon talking about life, God, computers, books — and women, a subject more complex than any of the others.

Donald looked over the pagination problem with the *Stacy Letters* and advised me to forget it because the thing that bugs me is only cosmetic, unrelated to the accuracy of the material. It's just a vanity thing for me that no one else is likely to even notice.

I have not decided how to handle the questions the Civil War buff raises. When I wrote the piece I used a lot of source material only available on microfilm and now, years later, my eyesight (I have macular degeneration) hinders my being able to confirm or correct what I wrote back then.

My e-friend Eric advises that I leave it alone. He said, "What does this require of you? I'm totally curious. If you just say "okay, fine" and move on without doing a thing, what are the repercussions?"

Good advice.

I think that to be fair, that as soon as I finish the pool work and the *Glog* manuscript and get to updating my website, I'll just post Civil War buff's letter as an addendum to the article I wrote so readers can check the sources for them selves... Would that work? Like the pool pump and the sewerage pump, it's a matter of priorities.

Concerning depression, a thing that helps me is that when my thoughts get to beating up on me, I simply say (aloud if necessary) the word STOP!

Then I redirect my mind in more productive channels. If thoughts fall in the same rut again, I say **Stop** again and move on. The technique really helps me.

However, for a positive Christian active approach to handling depression, this morning I sat down reading a murder mystery and ate half a box of chocolate-covered cherries. ... That's what Jesus would do, isn't it?

Friday, August 12, 2005

Fun Alert!

Ginny & I are late for work this morning because we spent so much time laughing at the photos in Donald's blog posting at <http://slackv.blogspot.com/> Enjoy!

Praying behind a mower

Mowed grass all day. Because of work on the pool, I've neglected the grass, so it is thick and difficult to push the mower through. As I worked, occasionally I prayed for a woman I really dislike.

I prayed that God would do good things for her, keep her healthy, bring her financial prosperity, and give her peace. I still don't like her. I don't like her even a little bit. So no warm fuzzes accompany my prayers.

I prayed for her simply because Jesus said to pray for our enemies. Sometimes, I think Christianity consists of simply doing something (or not doing something) for no other reason than Jesus said so.

Saturday, August 13, 2005

Too Bright — Not Too Bright

Friday I shoveled more dirt using the sand from the pool pit to raise a flagstone walk and fill various low places in the yard. One more day of this should finish the job. Thanks Be To God!

I figure that doing all this work myself instead of hiring professionals saved us close to \$3,000. It may possibly have been worth it; the tv weatherman says the heat index today reached 105 degrees.

This evening Ginny & I went to Salty's with our friends Warren and Carol. We feasted on great seafood, costly but great. The four of us enjoyed inconsequential relaxing conversation about everything and nothing in particular. Afterwards, Carol drove us to the Northbank Riverwalk where we sat on the first bench available and enjoyed the evening lights of the city. Then we drove all over town reminiscing about what building used to be where when we were kids and what's there now.

I awoke at 4 a.m. Saturday and rushed outside. I worried that the city lights would be too bright for me to see the annual August Perseid meteor shower. I put on my swim trunks and got in the pool to float on an air mattress and watch the stars. The lights were not too bright at all and I saw a couple of falling stars.

This is the way to enjoy a pool, floating alone in the dark at 4 a.m., no one around but me and the stars and the Lord who made us both.

My mini adventure did prove one thing: it is possible, in Florida, in August, heat index of 105 — to freeze your ass off!!!

Not too bright.

Sunday, August 14, 2005**The Heavens Declare ...**

It is now 4:02 a.m. and I've been up for an hour outside looking for more shooting stars from the Perseid meteor shower. Unfortunately, an overcast of haze clouds Jacksonville's sky and not a star is to be seen.

I'm tempted to wake Ginny and drive to the beach to watch the sky and the sunrise. I mentioned the prospect to her yesterday and she greeted the idea with less than enthusiasm.

When the kids were little, we used to wake them in the small hours and walk them to a park near our house to see meteor showers, comets, eclipses, things of that sort. We'd all lay out in the grass on blankets and eat cinnamon buns, drink hot chocolate and watch the sky.

I'd try to tell them about how "the heavens declare the Glory of God", etc.; they were more interested in the cinnamon buns.

One night when they were teens, I drug them all out for a walk down to the dock on the Ribault River to watch an eclipse of the moon. There was weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth as they complained about having to be out at that ungodly hour with their crazy dad. And clouds covered the sky so that nothing was visible.

They bitched and whined and said uncomplimentary things about the wisdom of a father who'd subject them to such horrible treatment – forcing them out to see a moon that wasn't there to be seen.

So, I made them all cluster at the end of the dock while I walked to the shore end. I told them to all observe closely....

Then I unfastened my belt buckle, dropped my pants and mooned them.

They chased me home howling with laughter.

That was one scientific outing they still talk about.

Monday, August 15, 2005**A Normal Day Of Odds & Ends**

Ginny & I butted heads this morning in one of our rare arguments. I went to the frig expecting to find stuff to pack her a lunch, but she did not buy the stuff yesterday while we were at the grocery store. It was a case where our both being a tad deaf confused us. She told me this and I told her that, but neither one had heard what the other said and both our feelings were hurt.

When we realized what had happened, we agreed that each of us lives with a difficult person. But that's normal and nothing to get upset about.

We've heard that communication is important in marriage, but we know that it isn't. If we communicated, we'd have probably split up 37 years ago. The most important thing in marriage is to assume the good will of your partner— Especially when you don't understand.

Because of all the outside work we did over the weekend (no, the pool is not quite ready yet) I spent the day playing catch up indoors. Yes, we're down to drinking coffee out of the Christmas mugs again, so I washed dishes, repaired minor stuff, read, and caught up with e-mail and computer work... (I should shovel dirt more often because while I've been away from the computer, several copies of my books sold and the web site was very active — it all works better without me).

A neighbor came by looking for a scarce Bible translation. I just happened to own a copy. I debated within myself about letting it out of my hands but decided that it was more important for him to read it than for it to sit on my shelves completing my collection. Bibles were not made to be collected. So I gave it to him – although reluctantly.

“The Lord loveth a cheerful giver” – Darn, I don't score any brownie points with God even when I give away a Bible!

My visitor wanted to discuss the Eloist, J, E, D and Q sources for Deuteronomy. While I recognize the style variations, I still hold to the overall Mosaic authorship. But it was refreshing to find someone knowledgeable in such matters which I haven't bothered to think about in years. But I agree with Mark Twain who said, “It ain't the parts of the Bible I don't understand that bother me; it's the parts that I do.”

This evening two young ladies from the neighborhood knocked at our door. They have noticed a suspicious car and driver parked nearby, apparently observing our house for about 20 minutes. Some neighborhood boys ask him if he were lost. He told them he was looking for me, but then sped off. They noticed that there were no tags on the car.

Odd.

We live in an obscure area and strangers stick out when they enter. I'm glad the girls were looking out for us. Their gut feeling was that this man was up to no good.

Wednesday, August 17, 2005

Mr. H Dropped A Prune

Monday the young man interested in Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis about biblical transmission (which assumes that the miraculous is impossible therefore some other explanation for Scripture must exist, J,E,P,Q,D, etc.) ...Anyhow the young man told me that Mr. H, an elderly

gentleman on my block, had busted his hip and is just home from the hospital, and could be in bad shape.

Tough.

What's that got to do with me?

I've got plans and duties and responsibilities. I can't be bothered. Besides, although I've spoken to Mr. H, I hardly know the old man.

This morning, Tuesday, I had a yard long 2do2da list beginning with brunch with my friend Wes. While I waited for Wes to arrive I read Peterson's rendering of Mathew in which Jesus said, "I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was homeless and you gave me a room. I was shivering and you gave me clothes. I was sick and you stopped to visit... Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me — you did to me."

When Wes arrived he got to talking about "opportunities to exercise righteousness" in relation to a charity he favors. His words reminded me of a sermon phrase I heard long ago: "The call of God always comes at the most inopportune moment possible."

Well, twix Scripture, Wes's words, and that sermon phrase, my reaction was, "*The poor are always with you — and are always a pain in the ass.*"

I'd much rather read about Christianity, or write about it, than to live it. But, what the hell, I'll go visit the old codger and see what he needs (hopefully, nothing). So I unwillingly trudged around to Mr. H's house hoping nobody would be home.

Turns out that Mr. H is only ten years older than I am. He served a 20-year hitch in the U.S. Army, then a 20-year hitch in the U.S. Air Force, then he served 25 years in the Merchant Marine. When he was a kid playing stick ball, he got hit in the eye, and the stick punched his eye out; he has worn a prosthetic eye (a glass eye) ever since.

Got that?

As we visited, Mr. H told me how he'd chipped his hip bone.

He was getting something out of the refrigerator when he dropped a prune on the floor. As he turned, he stepped on the prune, slipped and fell. It was a long time (maybe an hour or two, he said) before he could drag himself to a phone to call for help.

Rescue took him to a local hospital emergency room. They could not get hold of his regular doctor so hospital staff doctors began to treat him.

They x-rayed him, ran some test for other age-related problems, and began to prepare him for emergency brain surgery.

Brain surgery?

Yes, obviously this old guy had lost his balance and fallen, he'd chipped a hip bone; his speech was slurred from pain and medication – and the pupil of his left eye would not respond to light or dilate – obviously, he'd suffered a stroke or some sort of brain trauma.

They planned to operate to determine the extent of the brain damage.

Fortunately, about that time Mr. H's daughter arrived and explained about the glass eye... the doctor's comment, "Well, it sure looks realistic!"

Mr. H was released, without even needing a cast, and sent home the next day; he can get around with the aid of a walker.

Know why I find his tale of particular fascinating interest?

Well, I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon....

Thursday, August 18, 2005

Happy! Happy! Happy!

Appointments with doctors bookended a happy day for Ginny and me.

She had an 8 a.m. appointment with Dr. A., her eye doctor (no problems); I had a 4 p.m. meeting with Dr. D for a general physical. This was my first meeting with Dr. D. and I'm favorably impressed. He looks cool — like Mr. Rodgers did on tv. He appears to have a firm grasp on reality. He acted as though he knows what he's doing; and he treated me as though I were the only patient he had to see today.

Of course, he ordered tests.

One visit to a doctor spawns others.

A thing I kicked myself for later was that during our appointment, Dr. D. mentioned that he's just had done on himself the same tests he's ordered for me. I did not pick up on that to ask about his health. I mean, nobody would have these tests just for the fun of it. I plan to call and ask him about it.

Between doctor visits, Ginny & I enjoyed a delightful day together. We carried a carload of stuff to the mission — the same mission where I staged my [Great Brassier Hunt](#) (Right-hand column, [cowart.info](#)), but nobody recognized me – Thank God!.

We also strolled through a woodland park and along a boardwalk over a swamp. And we just hung out in the Krystal's parking lot — leaning on the car, chatting, smoking, and sipping Coke like teenagers. Very relaxing. Lord, but we had a good time!

When we got home, we discovered that while we were seeing doctors and strolling in the swamp, **seventeen copies (17) of my various books sold on line today!**

That makes me so happy!

I'm delighted.

Giddy.

To those of you who bought copies I extend my hardy thanks!

Steven King, America's greatest writer, can't be any more pleased about his sales today than I am. Thank you.

Today's book sales inspire me to buckle down with the *Glog* manuscript, work hard and produce something else worth your reading... or maybe, I should take my hands off things and stroll in the swamp more often.

Anyhow, thank you for buying my books. I hope you enjoy my work.

Friday, August 19, 2005

Hello? Hello? Is Anybody There?

In ancient times, biblical prophets looked far into the future to denounce something they called The Abomination Of Desolation; they referred, or course, to Automated Telephone Answering Machines.

Yes, Thursday I played phone tag with various doctors' offices which are equipped with these machines.

"If this is an emergency medical situation," the machine said, "Punch 666 now and hold on till Hell freezes over."

Finally, I got hold of two live human beings in various offices; both of whom had taken assertiveness training classes for dealing with pesky callers. "Someone will call you right back," they chuckled.

I anchored myself to the phone.

Hey, I even carried the phone with me when I took the garbage to the curb so I'd be sure to hear the thing ring. I may as well have put the phone in the can with the other trash.

No call back.

I did get hold of my oldest daughter who said she called the electric company yesterday about her bill. Their telephone machine has a special feature to enable the company to handle more callers – it automatically hangs up on anyone who has been on hold for ten minutes.

How convenient.

On a happier note:

When I went to update my website yesterday, the pop up menu said, "Access Denied." Silly me. Why would I think I could get into my own website?

Anyhow, Donald to the rescue.

He came over after work and, in the light of my recent surge in book sales, refurbished my Bluefish Books Storefront.



He restored the lovely photo of the grinning blue fish logo.

This statue was a Christmas gift from my youngest daughter who knows my taste in aesthetics and fine art. So I decided to use that statue as a storefront logo to attract cultured, refined readers, the sort noted for their exquisite taste in art and literature.

Donald solved the site access problem; he determined that the only thing wrong is that the server computer personally hates me.

But by the time he solved the problem, I felt too weary to update the site anyhow.

Maybe this weekend.

Meanwhile, I'm changing the message on my own answering machine so it will be classy like the ones the doctors' offices have:

Hello. You have reached John Cowart's Automated Telephone Answering System especially designed to screen out calls from riff-raff....If you are Riff, press One....If you are Raff, press Two. ...All others please hang up now to clear the line for more important callers.

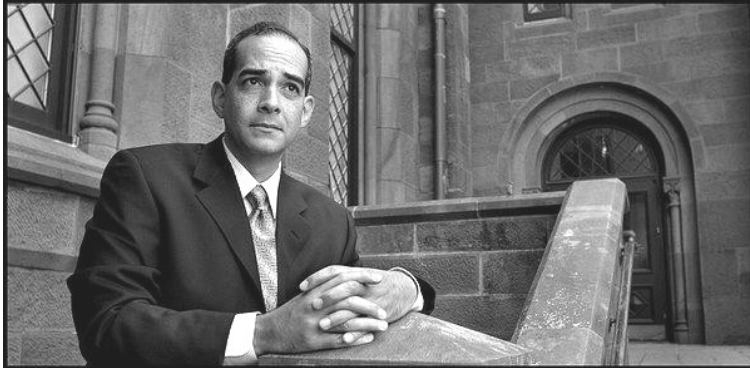
Saturday, August 20, 2005

Is There Intelligent Life at The Smithsonian?

Angry fanatic zealots recently attacked a respected research scientist.

They called Richard Sternberg nasty names and demanded that he be fired from his work at the Smithsonian Institution and as editor of the *Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*.

The August 18th *Washington Post* newspaper carried [an article by staff writer Michael Powell](#). telling about the controversy.



Scientist Richard Sternberg at the Smithsonian Institution

According to Powell's excellent article, the fanatics resorted to name calling, using such terms as *Closet Bible Thumper*,. *Shoddy Scientist*, *Crypto-priest*, *sleeper cell operative*, *Anti-Darwinian*, *Unqualified Scientist*, and *Young Earth Creationist*.

How childish.

They called his ideas bogus and rubbish.

There was even the threat of physical violence.

When the biological society discussed Sternberg's ideas, he was told not to attend the meeting. He said "Feelings were running so high, they could not guarantee me that they could keep order."

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel, established to protect federal employees from reprisals, is investigating.

The Counsel examined e-mail traffic and reported that, "retaliation came in many forms ... misinformation was disseminated through the Smithsonian Institution and to outside sources. The allegations against you were later determined to be false."

Really! You'd expect better from scientists associated with the prestigious Smithsonian Institution.

How pathetic.

You see the zealots are scientists who espouse the theory of evolution; Sternberg published an article in the Proceedings questioning that theory.

His raising questions galled the zealots who found this intolerable and launched an attack to hound him from his position at the Smithsonian.

As I see it, the whole furor is about intelligence.

Intelligence exists, or it does not.

Thought or intelligence, if it exists, has an origin, or it does not.

I suspect that God gave us intelligence and the ability to think; although I must admit that a lot of my own experiences clash with that idea.

But, if intelligence and the ability to think, did not originate with God, then what is the origin?

As I understand it, the evolutionist thinks that intelligence either does not exist at all; or, if it does, that it is the lucky result of Brownian Movement, the random bumping together of various electrons or molecules inside the brain with no order or pattern or design or purpose.

If they are right, then one thought is as valid as another. Hitler's thoughts are no better or worse than Mother Teresa's; Michael Jackson's, than Elvis'; your thoughts than mine; Billy Graham's ideas are no different from Dennis Rader's (He's the sexual deviant serial killer known as BTK) — because, all those ways of thinking have no origin other than the random bumping together of molecules.

It seems to me that in evolutionary theory nobody's thoughts count for anything.

Eminent scientist and corner bag lady— their thoughts are the same purposeless muddle of bumping molecules. The thoughts of one scientist holds no more validity than those of another... So why are the evolutionary scientists acting so childish and upset that another scientist voices another idea? If intelligence has no origin, then no one's thought is valid.

In other words, there is no such thing as intelligence!

And judging from the petty squabbling and behavior of the other scientists at the Smithsonian, I wonder if they're not right.

Monday, August 22, 2005

Lazy Sunday

After a restless night, Ginny & I chose to skip church and go back to bed this morning. We got up about 9 and drove out to a leisurely breakfast at Famous Amos. We lingered over coffee talking for two or three hours.

One thing struck us as funny: on the backs our menu cards, they print topics of conversation to talk about! *Tell about the smartest person you ever met? What movie sequel do you like best?* That sort of thing. How odd that couples might need such a card; I don't think we ever run out of things to talk about.

Back home we decided to wash the car. While Ginny vacuumed, I rigged the garden hose. Soon the car sparkled.

Then I challenged her to a Wet-Tee-Shirt Contest.

I chased her around the front yard with the garden hose while she squealed about not getting her hair wet. So, I sprayed the hose across my own chest and shouted, "I WIN!"

I laughed myself silly.

She didn't.

Seems I'm married to this humor-impaired woman.

Tuesday, August 23, 2005

My Life In A Pinball Machine

I haven't seen one in years but back when I was a kid, every store sported a pinball machine.

Shoving a nickel in the slot released a steel ball bearing which a spring-loaded plunger shot up an incline plane. As the ball rolled down toward a hole at the base, it hit various obstacles. Contact caused colored lights to flash and bells to ring.

On each side of the hole where the ball would eventually disappear, were flippers which knocked the ball up the plane again when you hit buttons on the side of the machine.

The player received no reward but bells and lights.

My activities today remind me of a pinball machine.

I play the roll of the ball:

Sprong! Up at 3:30 a.m. to catch up weekend e-mail and such.

Flip! Pack Ginny's lunch and dress for an appointment with Dr. #1.

Flip! The yard trash men who were supposed to have been here Friday, arrive and place trash cans in the drive so I have to move them before moving the car.

Flip.! Ginny drops me on King Street as she drives to work. Walk to the Whiteway Delicatessen (one of my favorite places for breakfast) where I chat with Sammy, the owner, about Springfield history and high rents..

Flip! Backtrack to the bank to give our house payment to a cashier who had never received one before. I hope it gets credited to us.

Flip. Walk to Dr. #1's appointment. Get my eyes dilated. Twice.

Flip. Call Warren for a ride home.

Flip. Go to Dr #2's office to pick up a referral so I can see Dr. # 3.

Flip. Arrive home to find a message from Dr. # 2 returning my call from Friday. Sorry he missed me; I can try going through the Automated Telephone Answering Machine Experience again if I really need to talk with him (Like, why else would I have called?).

Flip! Call Dr. # 4 for an appointment. Informed I must go to Lab # 5 first.

Flip! Call Dr. #4's office again but the lady wants me to read tiny numbers off the referral from Dr. # 1 and since my eyes are still dilated from

Dr. # 432-8765 I can't read the damn numbers. ... I guess at them, or make them up wholesale (I figure she can read the numbers herself when I take the papers to her office)

Good thing I'm not sick; all this stuff is for routine tests. What do people who are actually ill have to go through?

Finally I am home. I can relax. Eye's dilated. Can't read or work so I'll take a nap...

Flip!

Scratching at the front door. My neighbor's dog has climbed the fence and wants into our living room. I let the dog in, give her a bowl of milk, get dressed, find my shoes, and take her back into her own yard. Back home to resume my nap.

Flip! The phone rings. Dr. # 1's secretary – no, not my doctor # 1, but Ginny's doctor # 1. She's not sick either, but he wants to see her anyhow.

Flip. Flip. Flip – Glanced outside to see that the Polaris Pool Cleaner had flipped onto it's back and is happily pumping galleons of water arching into the air to splash down onto the electric plugs. So, ankle-deep in water, I undid the plugs...

And not once today did colored lights flashed or bells ring ...

THEN GINNY CAME HOME – Rings my chimes every time!

She baked me a cake!

Now it's time for Monday Night Football.

All's right with the world.

Wednesday, August 24, 2005

Sometimes I think I See Too Much Religion

Breakfast at Dave's Diner Tuesday with my friend Wes. We talked mostly about medical stuff (especially some tests I face), living wills, and coding.

I liken my medical tests to taking your car to a mechanic and saying, "It's running fine; but put it on your diagnostic machine and see if you can't find something wrong with it."

My motto is If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It! The medical community on the other hand feels sure that if they test enough, they'll find something somewhere to "fix."

Enjoyed a Chinese lunch with my friend Barbara at Silver Star. I have eaten so much Chinese food that I'm shaped like Buddha.

Barbara says that at the retirement home where she lives death comes in clusters; they'll go for months with no one dying, then several will pass away

within days of each other. She appears in much better health and can go for a ways without the help of her walker now.

Both Wes and Barbara are Christians and thoughts of Christ underlie our conversations whatever the overt subject.

Ginny & I saw a bumper sticker: If You Die Tonight Will You Be In Heaven — Or In Hell?

Ginny said, “If we died tonight, we’ll still be in debt!”

Today Donald reestablished a free daily e-mail devotional service. The site offers two selections: *Daily Light*, a topical selection of Bible verses, and *Charles Spurgeon’s Devotions*. Spurgeon, an 18th Century preacher in London, was the Billy Graham of his generation. If you could use a lift at the start or finish of each day, sign up for one or both of these devotionals. The devotional web address is: www.rdex.net/devotions.php

I’ve been hanging around religious stuff far too much.

It even influences my vision.

As you may know I have the start of macular degeneration which fuzzes some of the things I see.

This morning as Ginny and I dressed for work, I mentioned my holy underwear.

She thought I was referring to briefs with holes in them but, although I do have a few pairs of those, I was referring to the ones that have these initials printed around the waistband— PTL PTL PTL PTL

For ages I’ve thought the cloth was manufactured by some religious group with poor taste. I think the catch–phrase motto **Praise The Lord** is not in great taste on bumper stickers, much less printed on a man’s jockeys!

Ginny looked at the underwear in question and started laughing.

She explained that the initials are FTL FTL FTL — standing, of course for Fruit Of The Loom!

I feel disillusioned.

My faith is shattered.

Maybe an eye exam is called for.

(Ginny says that I should consider what kind of fruit I am producing!)

Thursday, August 25, 2005

Work I enjoy

After all my work on the pool and yard repairing the damage from Hurricane Dennis, and after all my fooling with doctors recently, Wednesday I finally resumed work formatting the manuscript for my novel *Glog*.

Glog, a sci/fi humor fantasy, relates the adventures of a sentient dinosaur in the Chesapeake Bay area where he prays for divine guidance while being buffeted by adverse circumstances which confuse the creature to no end.

I hope, God willing, to finishing formatting and have *Glog* ready for the printer within the next two weeks.

It feels so good to get back working in my own element!

I enjoy writing, yet I avoid it by enmeshing myself in grade B projects. Yes, I have studied time management books, yet I gravitate to old work habits all too easily. I envision long, golden blocks of uninterrupted time so I can do massive amounts of work at one coherent sitting – but life is just not like that.

I still need to learn how to eat the elephant one bite at a time.

Drove Ginny to her doctor's appointment in the afternoon.

She is sick of seeing doctors!

Later, over an Italian dinner at Kosta's, we discussed our personal medical guidelines and policies. There is nothing wrong with either of us that can't be accounted for by our age and we're tired of being jerked around about tests and procedures we don't feel are necessary to our health and happiness. So we made several general decisions we plan to stick with:

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Oh, the eye doctor said that my macular degeneration is stable, that my vision is unlikely to get worse anytime soon, and that I don't need to see him again for one year.

All I can say to that is: FTL! FTL! FTL!

Jennifer called saying she and Pat finally have a contract to sell their home. That's a mixed blessing; they avoid foreclosure, but they have to find a new home and move in a month. She asked me to help dismantle and move their pool.... Joy Oh Joy.

Hurricane Katrina lies south of us. Jacksonville may feel its fringes. We'll see.

Friday, August 26, 2005

Nothing to say so here's a joke:

Thursday I chopped vines from the fence all morning and read all afternoon, a good day for me but nothing to blog about ... so here's a favorite joke:

Three healthcare professionals, an ophthalmologist, a cardiologist, and the chief executive officer of a health maintenance organization, died in an accident and appeared at the Pearly Gates.

The Admitting Angel greeted them saying, "Welcome, gentlemen. Welcome! I'm glad to see you here. But before I can admit you, each must give an account of his life and reasons you should get into Heaven. Who wants to start?"

The first man spoke up, "I was an ophthalmologist. I helped people better see the glories of God's creation."

"That's wonderful," exclaimed the Angel. "That's really something. You go right on inside."

The second man said, "In life I was a cardiologist. I repaired weak hearts, extended people's lives, I even did a few heart transplants greatly improving my patients' quality of life."

"That's wonderful. How impressive," said the Angel. "You go right on inside... Now, what about you?"

"I was the CEO of an HMO. In my executive capacity I helped provide low-cost health care for thousands of clients who might not have otherwise had access to hospital care. At the same time I provided optimum profits for our shareholders."

"That's wonderful," exclaimed the Angel. "You go right on inside... But..."

"BUT! What do you mean But," demanded the CEO.

"Well, you are admitted to Heaven, but you're only allowed to stay for five days."

Saturday, August 27, 2005

Ladies May Want To Skip This Posting

Friday morning rain and wind kept me from my usual outdoor chores so I settled in at the computer for a solid day of formatting my *Glog* manuscript.

Got up to page 178.

Would have gone further but I bogged down browsing internet photos of naked women instead of working.

When I was a kid back in the early 1950s, fellow Boy Scouts clued me in to the fact that library copies of *Esquire* magazine featured paintings of pinup girls by the artist Vargas. I carried a razor blade to the library and sliced out pages of these pictures to sneak home to my room.

A reporter once asked Vargas why he only painted pictures of unclad women; he replied, "Show me something more beautiful than a naked woman and I'll paint it."

Don't need a razor blade any more.

The internet can flash a whole harem full of naked beauties onto my desktop with a single click. Hundreds of thousands of naked women display themselves in poses ranging from tasteful Grecian classic Venus de Milo stances to postures reminding me of the old joke:

Q: What does Lulu put behind her ears to make herself more attractive to men?

A: Her ankles.

Saint Paul said that when he was a boy, he spoke as a boy, he understood as a boy, he thought as a boy, "But when I became a man, I put away childish things."

Good for him.

That's beyond my experience. At heart I'm still a sneaky twerp lurking in library stacks to peek at pinup girls.

Then there's that teaching of Jesus: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out...."

But I'm not lusting; I'm just curious.

Ha!

How can I, a Christian, and not only a Christian but a writer who, on some low level, seeks to honor God in my work, how can I be so perverse as to linger over pictures of naked internet women when I should be working?

Maybe it's because I'm human.

I do what I do because I am what I am.

Or is this just a guy thing?

Once a bunch of guy friends and I were talking about looking at women. Included in the group was Sam, who was born blind. We teased him about never having this particular temptation.

"Bull," he said. "You guys have it lucky. You can see if a woman is a dog. With me, every time I hear a woman's footsteps or her voice, I get this image of a lascivious beautiful babe. To me all women are gorgeous. I see them all that way."

So maybe this is just part of being human; maybe it's just natural...

The thing is, Jesus calls us to a supernatural life, an eternal life. He calls us to be a bit more than human, to be godly.

I wish He wouldn't do that!

Sunday, August 28, 2005

Big Plans

Saturday morning Ginny & I drove to Country Kitchen for a leisurely breakfast before a trip to the grocery store. As the waitress cleared the table we broke out pens and planned our menu for the next few weeks.

Yes, we are planners.

Years ago Ginny made out this menu planning form which we use constantly. One side of the sheet lists the days of the week; the other side has a topical grocery shopping list.

First we fill in the dates, then write down activities we're involved in. For instance, a friend asked me to drive him to the hospital on Sept. 2nd; Ginny has an eye test Thursday, etc. Then we write down meals which fit in with those activities (Finger food for Monday Night Football). Then, on the grocery side of the sheet, we write down what we need to buy for that particular meal.

Our planned menu is not chiseled in stone, but on any given day we have a fair idea of what to cook for supper without having to make a decision at the end of each day.

Today we also added items to replenish our hurricane supplies. Of course, being Floridians, we keep basic hurricane kits in car and closet year round, but a few weeks ago we crossed paths with a poor family going through a rough patch and they got our surplus food stuffs so we felt it wise to restock. Hurricane Katrina hovers south of us and that causes us some anxiety.

No, the projected path of the storm does not include Jacksonville. No problem there — maybe.

But there's a kicker for us in that we plan to go on vacation in a couple of months (We reserved and paid for our cabin back in January.) and our vacation spot on the Gulf lies directly in the storm's path.

That happened to a friend of ours last year, when he went to his cabin, a storm (I think it was Francis) had wiped out the state park, he had to turn around and come back.

Assuming that our cabin on the beach is not washed away by Katrina, we spent all afternoon planning our vacation trip.

The anticipation is so much fun!

We floated on air mattresses in the pool talking about what to pack (our binoculars and bird books, mosquito repellent, negligees), what to buy (good hiking boots, digital camera), where we want to eat (Bamboo House and that fried oyster place for sure), things we want to do (boat tour on the Gulf), sights we want to see (Lighthouse Point, wildlife refuge), and even clothes we want to wear (the tee shirts we bought at Goodwill last year).

We had such a wonderful time planning and anticipating.

Looking forward to an event can be as much fun as the event itself.

We love to anticipate happy things such as our vacation, but we also plan as well as we can for less desired events. For instance, when we bought our home ten years ago, one of the things we considered was our age and health; if we should ever need a wheelchair ramp, we can install one here.

The tiniest things can knock plans whopajaw. A ring of the phone, a knock at the door, a microscopic virus, a dead cell in the car battery, a drunk driver— Tiny, unforeseen factors can change lives and plans forever.

In January 2004, we started planning a vacation trip for last year but as soon as we started, both Ginny and I felt a check in our spirits. That's hard to explain but we both independently knew that we should not make that planned trip. So we cancelled those plans. This year, we both feel free to plan and anticipate the same trip.

Odd.

So, some events we view with anticipation, while others we regard with apprehension. As we do our part, the final outcome of any matter is all in God's hands.

Here's another matter of some concern for us.

Friday night Donald called saying he wants to bring his new girlfriend to meet us over lunch today. We wonder if we will pass inspection.

Poor Donald.

As my old aunt used to say about another young man, "I think the devil owed him a debt and decided to pay him off in women."

Donald's heart has been broken several times as he courted various girls and saw things disintegrate for one reason or another.

I don't understand why he has such a difficult time hitching up with a dream girl.

Donald is employed and sober and he actually wants to get married!

In this day and age, considering the other young men I see around, those three qualities alone should put him high on the list for any young woman.

In addition, he is kind, generous, intelligent, and romantic. He wants someone to love and lavish affection on.

On the other hand, he does keep a vile, nasty cat — but then you can't expect him to be perfect.

He has said that he wants a marriage and family life just like Ginny and I have.

We're flattered.

But I feel apprehensive about meeting his latest date. I don't want to scare her off. Ginny and I plan to be low-key and nice and on our best behavior.

I don't have time to mow the yard today, but we plan to clean house. And I'll shave. And I won't smoke inside around her. And I won't tell her any of the good jokes. And we plan to

To Hell with plans!

Never fails when we expect company....

Ginny just walked in telling me that the toilet won't flush! I'll have to fix that immediately. And we have this over-the-commode cabinet thing filled with plants and seashells and knickknacks and bottles of shampoo — that thing has to be moved before I can lift the tank lid...

Damn.

This is not the way I planed to spend my Sunday!

Monday, August 29, 2005

Stormy Thoughts

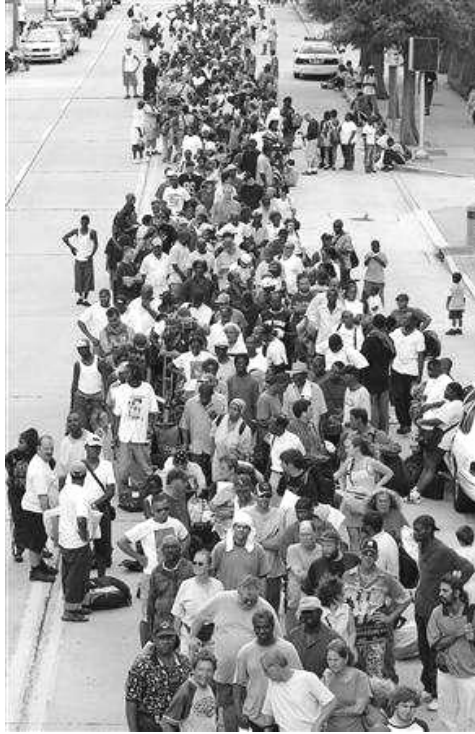
Fixed plumbing.

Met Donald's new girl for lunch with Jennifer, Pat and Eve.

New girl was lost in the Cowart hive. I think meeting us as a group may have overwhelmed her. She's a Jacksonville native and a graphic artist.

I've been at a loss about how to pray concerning Hurricane Katrina which approaches New Orleans this morning.

The tv news shows long lines of people walking into the superdome for shelter and I wonder how many of them will be alive tomorrow.



A couple of random thoughts:

1. Nothing against New Orleans, but I'm thankful it's them in the hurricane's path instead of us. That's not a very Christian attitude, is it? But whenever a storm approaches here, I can't help but pray it will hit somebody else instead.

2. There is no reason it could not be Jacksonville.

3. A natural phenomena, hurricanes are necessary for the earth's replenishment.

4. God controls the path of the storm and for His own reasons He directs it this way instead of that. I can pray that many frightened people will think of Him and call on Him for mercy; but I can't picture such devastation as an evangelism tool.

5. I can't see this hurricane as a punishment for sin; there is nothing that goes on in New Orleans that does not go on within walking distance from my house. So why them instead of us — this time?

6. Ginny & I trained as Red Cross volunteers a few years ago but dropped out after training. I wonder if we perhaps should have stuck with their program.

7. From the photos I see of life in a shelter, I'm so claustrophobic I don't think I could stand being with that many people in any confined space.

I subscribe to a free e-mail [devotional service which Donald](#) put together and this morning's readings seem appropriate for today. Oddly enough, I think the *Daily Light* selections were prepared over 50 years ago; the Spurgeon selections are over a hundred years old.

Here is a section from Daily Light (It could be from the morning news):

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. — It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.—The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

The reading from Spurgeon touches me on a more personal level::

The best of men are conscious above all others that they are men at best.

Empty boats float high, but heavily laden vessels are low in the water; mere professors can boast, but true children of God cry for mercy upon their unprofitableness

Tuesday, August 30, 2005

Adventures In Sitting

At 3 a.m. Monday I sat down at my computer catching up e-mail and updating my blog. I worked formatting on my Glog manuscript all day (up to page 207 now).

Occasionally, I'd go sit in front of the tv to catch the latest news on Hurricane Katrina. The tv news followed its usual pattern of presenting worse-case-scenarios before the event, then saying, "It was not as bad as expected" after the event. I suspect the primary mission of tv news is to keep viewers agitated and upset.

Between sitting at the computer or in front of the tv, I took breaks to sit and read, or sit and eat.

Perhaps I need to get off my tail and get a life.

Wednesday, August 31, 2005

The Good Thing About Hurricane Katrina

No doubt that Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc along the Gulf Coast. People dead. Homes destroyed. Refugees in misery. Lives disrupted. Economy ruined.

On every channel our tv news displays pictures of mass destruction showing what all authorities say is the worst natural disaster in U.S. history.

But overlying the horror another factor looms large.

Thousands and thousands of people reach out to help in every way possible.

- Strong young men and women risk their own lives to rescue victims from housetops.
- Volunteers from every charitable agency mobilize soup kitchens to feed the hungry.
- Businesses give workers paid time off to help.
- Government agencies and the U.S. military activate emergency aid plans.
- Cities all over the country collect cash and goods to aid survivors.
- People who've hardly thought of God in years pray for mercy on the victims.
- Churches of all sorts open their facilities as shelters.
- Gray-haired old ladies donate part of their meager pensions to help.
- Kids drop their allowance in collection jars.
- Burley men load trucks with groceries and bottled water.
- Arthritic old guys sit in their recliners watching tv and cheering rescue workers on.
- Good hearted people pop out of the woodwork to do what they can.

Awesome!

Yes, there are looters and scam artists and oil companies who take advantage of the situation; such are always with us. But the multitude of people doing whatever good they can far outnumbers the wicked exploiters.

Yes, Hurricane Katrina may be our greatest natural disaster so far; but it has also generated one of the greatest outpouring of kindness, helpfulness and good will the world has ever seen.

Over a hundred years ago Charles Spurgeon, a preacher in London, wrote a daily devotional book; his [selection for this date](#) includes these words:

(A man) must simply and entirely trust himself to the providence and care of God. Happy storm that wrecks a man on such a rock as this! O blessed hurricane that drives the soul to God and God alone! ...

When a man is so poor, so friendless, so helpless that he has nowhere else to turn, he flies into his Father's arms, and is blessedly clasped therein!

...

Oh, tempest-tossed believer, it is a happy trouble that drives thee to thy Father!..

Now is the time for feats of faith and valiant exploits.

Be strong and very courageous, and the Lord thy God shall certainly, as surely as He built the heavens and the earth, glorify Himself in thy weakness, and magnify his might in the midst of thy distress.

Delighted!



I'd planned to spent Tuesday formatting my *Glog* manuscript. But instead I devoted the day to my own spiritual renewal by reading, praying, examining my heart, and cooking a big pot of spaghetti.

While my spiritual exercises feel so so, there was a major development concerning *Glog* — which I think is the best thing I've ever written.

When we met Donald's friend Sunday, we talked about *Glog* a bit. Donald and Eve have read the manuscript; their descriptions amused me. What I write, and what readers get can be two different things.

Glog, a science fiction/humor fantasy, relates the adventures of a sentient dinosaur in the Chesapeake Bay area where he prays for divine guidance while being buffeted by adversities which confuse the creature to no end.

Glog eats muskrats, lots of muskrats, and hunger motivates him more than anything else. He also illuminates the uncials in a biblical manuscript.

Today, Donald's friend e-mailed a preliminary sketch for the title on the book cover. I'm delighted. She's combined various aspects of the novel succinctly capturing just what I envision.

I'm impressed!

Friday, September 02, 2005

Woe to them that call good evil

Sorry. I didn't post a blog Thursday; Busy gearing up for a small relief effort unrelated to Hurricane Katrina; although it consumed some energy, my roll is too minuscule to bother writing about. Now for Friday's posting:

One time years ago during a disaster, I got caught in a gun battle between armed looters and National Guardsmen.

Both sides shot at me.

People have also spit on me, thrown garbage cans at me, thrown bricks and bottles. I have been gassed, and threatened with knives, an ax, and a Phillips head screwdriver (which incidentally makes a dandy weapon if you want to carry a weapon but don't want to be caught carrying something that can be called a weapon).

Now and then over the past 40 years I have dabbled on the fringes of disaster relief as a volunteer whenever it struck my fancy.

No big deal. I'd like to say that Christian compassion motivated me, but on reflection, I now realize that I got in these situations because I was young and caught up in the excitement of the moment. Being a Christian had little to do with it; I'd be there for the adventure, for the fun, for the warm fuzzies of being a helper.

Too old and lazy for that kind of excitement now. I just watch it on tv.

And last night I saw an outrage.

On a tv program called Slimetime (why boast their Google ranking) one segment featured a pig fat attorney, laden with gold watch and rings, blasting relief efforts and saying that aid was slow or being withheld because many suffering in the aftermath of Katrina are black!

Sure.

Good thinking.

The guy dangling on a rope from a helicopter to chop open a roof to rescue people trapped in a flooded attic knows the skin color of the people under that roof???

Ok. The pig fat lawyer is welcome to his opinion.

But, with all the facets of tragedy and misery and heroism going on hourly, why did the tv choose to air that man's nonsense over other things?

Were they short of film showing well-dressed guys in book-lined offices talking?

Pathetic!

I wonder why tv news tries to make bad situations worse?

Could it be that since the Nixon era the main way for a journalist to garner prestige is to open some new Pissgate? To sit on the sidelines like the Black Dwarfs in Narnia's *Last Battle* and plunk arrows at those Stallions rushing to aid in the crisis?

And this morning, other media persons jumped on the bandwagon criticizing aid agencies, President Bush (and no I did not vote for him!), the

military, government agencies and whoever else in sight, for nor working hard enough or fast enough!

Woe! Woe! Woe to those who call good evil, or evil good.

But why does this upset me?

Why am I so judgmental?

That's a problem within my own soul.

In the 1660s Brother Lawrence, a lay brother in the bare-foot Carmelite order – actually, he seems to have been a dishwasher in the kitchen – wrote one of the most popular and widespread religious books ever written, *The Practice Of The Presence Of God*. Brother Lawrence's tiny book, only 64 pages, is one of the most helpful I've ever read; and I try to steep myself in its ideas.

One passage says, "That as for the miseries and sins he (Lawrence) heard of daily in the world, he was so far from wondering at them that, on the contrary, he was surprised that there were not more, considering the malice sinners were capable of; that, for his part, he prayed for them; but knowing that God could remedy the mischiefs they did when He pleased, he gave himself no further trouble."

Knowing that God can remedy...

Thus, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, I should think on these things.

But, Lord, I ask, what about rabble-rousing tv news coverage???

And a thought comes to mind, an almost quote from the poet Milton:

*They also serve
who only stand and bitch.*

Saturday, September 03, 2005

Yum. Yum.

I spent Friday waiting on standby but my talents were not needed for the project I'd prepared for.

Another wasted day in a wasted life.

Ginny & I have fallen into a rut as far as our usual Friday Night Dates are concerned. We eat at the same few favorite restaurants, walk in the same few parks, or browse in the same ol' stores.

We've been looking for variety.

So this morning when we opened the front door to go to work, we were happy to find a flyer on the mat announcing the opening of a new neighborhood restaurant just around the corner from us.

Wow! That's great. Maybe it's just what we're looking for.

Standing with the car door open, we eagerly perused the sample menu.

The first thing to catch my eye was a breakfast offering of Cod Fish & Dumplings...

For breakfast???

Leading the lunch menu was Goat Curry.

Hummmm.

Does that really say Macaroni and Cheese Stir Fry?

Beverages include Fruit Punch, Carrot Juice, Ting, Sorrel and Irish Moss. A Glass of water at the new place costs \$1.25.

Their deserts include Black Fruit Cake and peas???

Yes, peas.

I announced that we'd give the place a try for our date this evening.

Ginny refused to consider it.

The woman has no sense of culinary adventure. ... I'm so glad!

Sunday, September 04, 2005

Two Men In A Ditch

I feel ashamed of what I did. But I can't shake my feelings about an odd thing that happened to Ginny and me last winter.

In a way, it has nothing to do with Hurricane Katrina but, maybe in a way it does. For some reason I've been dwelling on it all day.

I woke up this morning thinking about it although it was too small an incident to even record in my journal (I checked the index) and I'd really forgotten about it.

But watching wayyy too much news coverage of people complaining about rescue efforts brought it back to mind during the night and I just can't shake the thing.

Most Fridays Ginny & I go out for dinner here or there depending on our finances. Last October or November we ate at a Kentucky Fried Chicken place. Even though there are only two of us now, we ordered the big bucket planning to dine on cold chicken over the weekend.

While Ginny was packing up our leftovers, I walked outside to smoke my pipe.

“Help! Help! For God’s Sake Help Me!”

I heard a man yelling. I ran across the parking lot to see a man down by a culvert in a drainage ditch leading to a retention pond. I scooted down the embankment and waded to him through just a foot or two of water. I grabbed him by the shoulders and tugged him up on to the embankment.

“I’m sick. I’m sick,” he moaned.

“I’ll call an ambulance,” I said.

“Don’t want no fucking ambulance. I need food. I’m starving,” he said.

I climbed out of the ditch and went to Ginny. She took food out of our bag—chicken, fries, biscuit—and folded it into a napkin for him. I carried it down to him, again assuring him that I could call an ambulance.

Again he refused vehemently.

He was wearing one of those plastic ID bracelets showing that he’d been in a hospital recently.

He began to wolf down the food.

“I need something to drink with this stuff,” he said.

Now, I’d put my own take-out soda on top of our car when I came out of the restaurant so I got that for him and carried it back down into the ditch.

He took a big gulp and spit it out at me.

“This is got sugar in it! What you trying to do, Kill me. I’m a diabetic. I need the diet soda. Go get me a diet cola,” he demanded.

I straightened up.

I said, “If you die in this ditch, how is my world going to be diminished?”

“Huh.”

“If you die in this ditch, why should I care,” I said.

And I turned my back on him and walked away.

Next time we were at that Kentucky Fried, I glanced to see if there were a body clogging up the culvert.

There wasn’t.

So I suppose he got out of the ditch ok.

Or not.

Monday, September 05, 2005

In A Peaceful Garden

Monarch.

American Snout.

Cloudless Sulphur.

Red-Spotted Purple.

Male Black Swallowtail.

Female Black Swallowtail

Eastern Tiger Swallowtail— Our garden has been aswarm with butterflies this weekend. To me bugs is bugs; but Ginny got this book on the butterflies of Florida to identify the ones in our garden. We spent hours yesterday lounging in the backyard spotting butterflies, looking them up in her book, and discussing them.

No better way to spend a Labor Day Weekend than to hang around with someone you love and talk about bugs.

Wednesday, September 07, 2005

After Labor Day

The Labor Day holiday is over; it's time to get back in harness – sort of.

I'm in the home stretch formatting the *Glog* manuscript while waiting for Donald and his friend to finish the book cover design.

Since I'm that close to finishing *Glog* (which I think is the best thing I've ever written), today I began gathering materials for a small Christmas book. I'm inclined to call it *Gravedigger's Christmas* after the first true story in the collection... or I may go with *A Warning About Illicit Kissing On Christmas Eve*, another true incident.

I'd planned to work on manuscripts all day but life intervened.

I went to breakfast with my friend Wes. Of course we talked about Katrina's aftermath, which led us to the fall of man and the character of God. Wes told me about Tillman's (I forgot what its called) view of the purpose of life. In case you haven't guessed, Wes is a theologian and actually a member of a national association of smart guys who think and talk about theology (I forget what the organization is called too, but it sounds important).

Me, I don't think about God much except to say "Thank You" once in a while.

Ginny had an eye exam so she took the afternoon off work. Afterwards we went to Wal-Mart to buy a digital camera but came away having only bought bird seed.

The camera counter lady knew less about cameras than we do, so we decided to pass on buying one.... Good thing too. Because this evening Donald called saying he'd give us his "old" camera because its been upgraded since he bought it as state of the art six months ago and he wants an excuse to buy himself an even better one.

Ginny and I had asked all our kids to neither call nor come by over the Labor Day weekend because we wanted to be alone to restore our own souls. So we've been on the phone all day catching up on their activities and plans:

Donald and his friend baby-sat three boys Saturday for some friends to give the parents some respite care. Sounds like they had a blast.

Jennifer and Pat finally sold their house and signed a contract on a new one. That's a relief. For a while there I thought the two of them and their five dogs would end up living out of a grocery cart beneath an overpass.

The latest on Eve is that she was featured in a newspaper article last week. I'm proud she's doing so well. She also attended a friend's wedding over the weekend.

Neither, Fred, John or Patricia have been heard from this month; I assume that's good news.

This afternoon Ginny & I shopped for groceries to stock up for Tropical Storm Ophelia which is projected to strike Jacksonville dead on. With all the tv coverage of Katrina, we thought about our own hurricane preparations and both of us remembered a cartoon popular back during the Cold War of the Kennedy/Eisenhower era when everyone expected atomic war any day.

The scene is a store selling home Fall Out Shelters.

A portly middle-aged couple stand bewildered on the showroom floor amid displays of various types of shelters.

A swarthy salesman supplies the caption saying:

"Well, Folks, just how big of a bomb do you want to survive?"

Thursday, September 08, 2005

Good Ideas - Bad Ideas

Sometimes brilliant ideas occur to dumb people; unfortunately, most of the time dumb ideas stay dumb no matter who they occur to.

Case in point:

Yesterday I had a brilliant idea to tweak my Glog manuscript. Since Glog (a sentient dinosaur who prays for divine guidance in tough circumstances) eats muskrats, lots of muskrats, I thought it would be neat to use a muskrat's distinctive tracks as a divider on the heading of each page.



How cool.

A bit of advice for writers: Change NOTHING in a header or footer once you have it right. Bad idea. Bad, bad, bad idea.

Picture the rigging of a clipper ship. If you change the tension on one of those hundreds of lines, you must also change the tension on every other line also or the ship flops over on its side and gurgles to the bottom.

Gurgle. Gurgle. Gurgle.

There goes *Glog*.

So I hit the handy, dandy undo icon — too many times. Word recognized that I was trying to do and undo and began to helpfully change things I never thought of changing. All without bothering me by telling me beforehand.

It changed spacing, punctuation, pagination and God only knows what else. So I spent much of the day undoing the redone done and undone again and again.

I am undone myself.

Does Stephen King have this problem with his manuscripts?

I was trying to get *Glog* finished so I can upload the file to a server in another state because Tropical Storm Ophelia hovers just southeast of Jacksonville unable to decide how strong to get or where to hit land.

I can tell it where to go.

Some guy in Hamlet, a play by some other great writer, tells the maiden Ophelia, “Get thee to a nunnery.”

Good idea.

I heard an anguished lady on tv question, “Why does God allow hurricanes? What is He trying to do to us?”

Here’s a thought. There were hurricanes in Florida long before there were people here. On his first voyage in 1492 Columbus ran into a hurricane. They’ve existed from time out of mind. Now, if I build my house in the middle of a railroad track, can I reasonably expect God to derail the trains? The Bible calls him who build his house on the rock a wise man; those of us who build our houses on the sand are called Floridians.

Speaking of hurricanes, Ginny is signing up for training to work in Jacksonville’s Emergency Management Operations Center as a volunteer. We already have our personal hurricane plans in place to the extent we are able (First Rule of Hurricane Preparation: Eat All The Ice Cream!) so she wants to do this as something extra.

That reminds me. Years ago we both took the Red Cross training for relief workers. The interviewer asked Ginny if she had any experience in handling crisis situations or disasters?

She told the man, “I’m a mother. I’ve put five teenagers through high school.”

He checked her off as Experienced.

Friday, September 09, 2005

Donald Gave Me A Digital Camera

Donald came over Thursday afternoon bringing me a Nikon Coolpix 4300 Digital Camera — but don’t expect to see pictures on this blog anytime soon.

It has dials.

It has icons.

It has buttons.

It has advanced features — Lot’s of ‘em.

And Donald actually handed this delicate instrument to a man who has yet to learn how to operate a Scotch Tape Dispenser without getting gummy!

But not to worry; the camera comes with an instruction manual.

One of the projects Donald is working on is a software program that converts the English of the *King James Bible* into modern speech. Thus “thee” and “thous” become “youse guys” or whatever. Donald says he’s doing this because 17th Century English is so hard to read... yet he expects me to understand a camera manual which contains sentences like:

“Manual and auto focus-area selection can be used in combination with spot AFarea metering to meter exposure only in selected focus area.”

Give me Ezekiel any day.

One instruction in the book I do understand – but I wonder why it is needed???

“When operating the mode dial and the zoom button with your eye to the viewfinder, care should be taken not to put your finger in your eye accidentally!”

I’m not kidding.

It actually says that.

However, I plan to master this contraption and produce beautiful photos someday soon. Watch this spot.

Donald’s friend, the graphic artist, came over with him to bring this lavish camera to me. She tells me that she earns \$50 an hour for her graphic designs. I am so out of touch with the times. The most I ever earned in my life was in a job that only paid \$10 an hour (No, that’s not true. A law firm paid me \$150 an hour to testify as an expert witness for six hours in court once. But my highest normal earnings were \$10 per hour).

In other news, the mayor on tv said we can expect broken tree limbs on the wires to cause power outages as Hurricane Ophelia approaches Jacksonville. I'm trying to do as much computer work as I can before the electricity goes off. Looks like, after this happening year after year, the electric company would figure out how to bury the wires underground like they do in real cities.

But hurricanes are not the only disasters. I learned second-hand today that our youngest daughter lost her job and had to drop out of college recently. She has struggled so hard and, although this is a major set back for her, I believe she will land on her feet. Her sister is driving downstate to help her this afternoon.

With all the hurricane news compelling our attention, it's easy to forget that normal, everyday calamities go on all around us. Marriages break up. Cars break down. Hearts attack. Cancer creeps. Lives crumble.

And no helicopter drops in for the rescue.

So, we can't all rush off to New Orleans and pluck some poor soul off a roof, but we can look for folks trapped in everyday, normal pain. Today, lets look around us for someone who is hurting and do some little something to make life easier for them.

And, Donald, thank you for this nice camera. I appreciate your gift and I'll try not to poke my eye out with it.

—

It's all a mystery isn't it Where did kids learn how to do all this high tech stuff — VCRs, computers, cameras, toasters? It's proof that water can rise higher than its source. ... I can't even see the those gray icons printed on black buttons to turn on the air conditioner.

Saturday, September 10, 2005

When You Can't Work On One Thing...

The ground squishes wherever I step.

I'd promised to mow my neighbor's lawn Friday but rain from Hurricane Ophelia, now 200 miles due east of Jacksonville, saturated the ground. I can't push a mower through tall, wet grass. So I cleaned their pool instead.

When you can't work on one thing, work on another.

Since my work on *Glog* frustrated me so, I tabled it till next week and worked on two other books. I've got the Christmas book material together. And I scanned into the computer one of my previously published books, a collective biography, which has been out of print. I want to re-issue it.

Each book requires different computer skills— which I don't have. So I inch forward with this or that, a book, a chapter, a page, or a word at a time.

Ginny came home from work frustrated and upset over her day. She needed to cry on my shoulder for a while. She's sick of doctors. She's exhausted from work and just needed to unload.

She had one of those days. You know, a day when everybody in the world has taken Assertiveness Training Classes — Except you.

We went out for dinner at a familiar place and then strolled along the riverbank in the moonlight for a while. With the hurricane moving east at the moment and the tide ebbing, the St. Johns has never looked more beautiful. We watched a cruise ship dock and a train cross the railroad bridge.

I held her hand and listened.

I want to be a hero for Ginny and slay all her dragons; but, for tonight, just being there to lean on seemed to be enough

Sunday, September 11, 2005

A Good Day, Great In Fact!

Ginny and I spent all Saturday sitting in our garden talking about books we've read and enjoyed.

Tuesday, September 13, 2005

I is a writer so I writes

Resumed work on the *Glog* manuscript Monday. No phone calls. No visitors. One of the most solid days of work I've been able to put in for ages. Heavenly!

Over the weekend I printed a hard copy and I've been working from that instead of the computer screen. It really makes a difference. I thought the manuscript was in good shape; I did not realize how many needed corrections would show up in print. For instance, being a lazy typist, I tend to use two hyphens instead of an em-dash, very unprofessional. I also found comas where periods should be and vice versa. For some reason I always type the word *form* when I mean *from*. I think in spurts so I needed to combine many spurts into whole paragraphs.

Lots of nits to pick but they add up.

This is all delicate work, like adding a chimney to a house of cards.

I have been working on *Glog* off and on for years and years. I do think it is the best thing I've ever written, yet it is so off beat — a dinosaur who prays for divine guidance?— that I doubt that any one will buy the book. So I wonder why I'm so obsessed with getting every T crossed and every I dotted.

Who cares?

I do.

This is the one piece of writing that speaks my heart. Over the years, I've had to interrupt work on the *Glog* manuscript again and again in order to

write piles of business articles for newspapers and magazines just in order to make a living. Selling those pieces kept my family alive but quenched my spirit. Whereas in *Glog* I express my worldview and joy in life; I relish and rejoice in it.

Besides that, I really do want to give readers their money's worth when they buy one of my books, so I fuss inordinately over the quality of the finished product and I feel so damn inferior because of my lack of computer skills and writing skills, and grammar skills and general spiritual blah-ness... But I keep on going like that damn rabbit on tv.

I is a writer so I writes.

Last night Ginny & I attended a neighborhood watch meeting where a police officer lectured about Florida's new Deadly Force law. Beginning in October it will be legal to shoot anyone who threatens you anywhere.

Now, you can only shoot them if they threaten you inside your own home; then, you can blow them away anywhere.

Return to Dodge City.

The cop said citizens are better off running than shooting. He emphasized the civil suit implications of shooting a bad guy because his family may then sue you for 80% of your income for the rest of your life.

But, I'm reminded of an old adage: Better to be tried by twelve men than carried by six.

Wednesday, September 14, 2005

Not Worth The Water...

Again Tuesday I managed to devote another 16-hour session to making corrections in the *Glog* manuscript. Now, I'm just waiting for the cover art before ordering printer proofs. I've worked on this book, off and on, for close to 20 years and now, all of a sudden, I'm anxious, jumping around with ants in my pants to see it finally in print.

So much for *Glog* ...

One of my daughters lost her job.

Last night I got to remembering how painful it was when I've been fired from various jobs. I recall one supervisor saying, "Cowart, you're not worth the water it would take to flush you down."

I remember how scared I've been at losing a job. How would I pay the rent? How am I going to feed the kids? Why did this happen? I thought I was doing a good job and now, look what happened.

I remember the anguish at having to go home and tell Ginny that I'd been fired. I remember how ashamed I was to tell anybody and how I'd try to hide the fact that I was unemployed.

I remember the despair and the loneliness and the feeling of rejection and worthlessness and uselessness and hopelessness.

I remember the degradation of standing for hours in Food Stamp lines, of living in HUD housing, of taking sick kids to the packed emergency room of a charity hospital.

I remember being so mad at God that this would happen to me. I raged instead of prayed. And even knowing that He Himself was “despised and rejected of men” didn’t comfort me one bit.

I remember five of the kids all coming home from school happy and bouncing and excited about their school photos, each in a packet costing about \$40 — And I remember not having money to buy anything but a single wallet-sized photo of each kid; and they thought I would not buy their photos because I didn’t like them.

Damn!

I remember thinking about suicide so Ginny and the kids would at least have my insurance money; I felt I’d be worth so much more dead than alive.

But I remember something else too.

I’d worked for the local mosquito control board for over ten years and one of my duties was to grow mosquitoes for test purposes. Then I got fired. So here I was, a white male, pushing 40 years old who knows how to grow mosquitoes for a living.

Obviously, I could write my own ticket in the job market.

Not exactly.

I could not find a job doing anything.

So I wrote a magazine article about unemployment.

It sold.

But not for much.

So I wrote an article about coping with poverty ...

And for the next 25 years I’ve been a freelance writer with scads of newspaper and magazine sales to my credit and a couple of paperback books. Never made much. I’m not what anyone would call a successful writer.

But my work has been translated into as many as eleven foreign languages. Some pieces were transcribed into Braille. Several were used as radio show scripts. And readers from all over the world have thanked me for making life a little easier for them.

This year I’m trying to get my own publishing company off the ground, a task for which I feel eminently unqualified!

It's a bit like riding a grocery cart down a ski jump; who know what will happen at the bottom, but the ride is exhilarating to say the least.

And life does go on.

There is hope.

So, Patti, if you read this, I know being fired is a bitch. It hurts. But, Love, it is not the end of the world.... It can be a beginning.

Much Love, Dad

Thursday, September 15, 2005

Last Of The Ramin

Wednesday I topped my house of cards with a chimney and sent the *Glog* manuscript to Donald. He'll look out for computer problems within the text.

Last year a book posting bounced back to me because the printer's computer said I had embedded a font.

Honest, I've never embedded a font in my whole life!

Donald straightened that problem out; now I can ask him to check for problems before I send anything to the printer.

So much for *Glog*.

Back when we were poor, a primary food source for my family were ramin noodles. This food from India or China sells in a grocery store at seven packs for a dollar. That comes to less than 20 cents per meal.

No cheaper food can be found anywhere.

We ate lots of it.

Lots and lots of it.

Tons of the damn stuff.

Once when a check came in, Ginny bought some pork chops and fried them. Donald, who was about six at the time, did not know what to call them. He gobbled down his first one then asked, "Please, can I have another one of those hamburgers with a bone it?"

Yes, we ate cheap.

I ate so many Chinese noodles that I'm shaped like Buddha!

I ate so many ramin noodles that the thought of them would make me want to puke and I vowed that if I ever got to where I could afford real food, I'd never eat another ramin noodle as long as I lived.

Things changed. The kids grew up and went off to college. Ginny began working outside our home. We prospered. We could afford real food. American food.

I made a horrible discovery: I am addicted to ramen noodles!

They must sprinkle the noodles with opium.

Unless I eat lunch with one of my friends, I cook a pack of ramen noodles for my lunch daily. I like the damn things now that I don't have to eat them.

Now, we buy them by the case. And I cook them daily.

I love the taste and texture and ease of cooking. What else can you eat for lunch for less than 20 cents a day? And I love the helpful cooking instruction on the package which actually says:

To Lower Sodium Content, Add Less Salt!

I'm writing about this because yesterday I cooked the last pack in the cupboard. We need to go to the grocery store and buy another case.

In response to 7 Comments: John Cowart said...

Hi Guys,

We must establish a ramen support group here. Like I said, they must sprinkle the things with opium at the factory to make us like the awful things so much.

Hi, in answer to your question, am I a fundamentalist?

I'd describe myself as a just common, ordinary, garden variety Christian.

Years ago when I worked for a local newspaper, some of my editor friends teased me about being a rabid fundamentalist and I started signing my work that way.

Because way back then the Logicon computer system we used would only allow a three letter extension, the signature came out as RABID.FUN which gave me the idea of writing a religious humor column. That's where the title of my web site and blog come from.

In response to a comment, I said,

Thanks for the tip about the embedded fonts. You obviously know a lot more about computers than I do. I'm really fortunate to have Geek children because once I write a piece they bail me out...

One night Donald and Eve were kibitzing behind me as I worked when my cursor froze.

They said, "Dad, pay attention to what you're doing."

So I hunched closer to the monitor, but the cursor still would not move.

They started laughing and said, "Dad, look at what you are doing."

I stared intently and the screen, shoving the mouse here and there but the cursor still would not move.

The kids laughed harder and harder at my frustration...

Then they told me — I was moving Donald's cell phone all over the mouse pad!

Hi tech, I ain't.

Friday, September 16, 2005
Developing A Book Cover For Glog



I snapped some photos of a swamp to use as a book cover for *Glog*.

Glog, a sentient dinosaur, lives in the marshes of the Chesapeake Bay area where he eats muskrats and prays for diving guidance. He also illuminates the uncials in a 15th Century manuscript text which his father left him.

I felt a hauntingly beautiful picture of swampy marshland would be an appropriate book cover.

Donald used his computer skills to tack title and author's info on the cover. He added a vanity photo of me to the back cover as I continued to fine tune the manuscript (which I've worked on off and on for over 20 years).

A few weeks ago he brought Ms Helen Glass, a graphic artist who works in his building, over to see me. She designs websites, skins, newsletters, company brochures and book covers. She took one look at the thing I'd pieced together and volunteered to do it right.

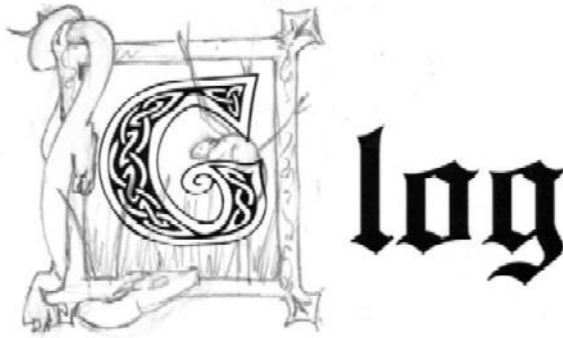
At each step in the process she has kept me posted as to progress.

Here's how it worked:

She chose a font that reflects Glog's work and embellished it:



She asked my approval, then moved to the next step, a line drawing of her concept:



Then she refined and colored the drawing, giving it a parchment background:



She plans to fine tune this and have the finished book cover ready in a few days.

I could not be more pleased with her craftsmanship.

I plan to send off for printer's proof copies of *Glog* this weekend and I hope to post the finished book cover Monday.

I'm as tickled as if I were 7 years old and it's Christmas Eve.

Books Are A Keyhole...

Thursday morning I called my friend Barbara and we went out for breakfast at Dave's. She hardly needs her walker at all now, although she still needs help at curbs and stairs.

Barbara had just been interviewed for some radio program but she couldn't remember the name of the station or the time her interview will be broadcast. That was a great laugh because the topic of the program was "The Nursing Home As a Mission Field!"

We talked about books, comparing conflict between good and evil in the writings of favorite authors Stephen King, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams. Barbara pointed out that some of my confusion lies in viewing things as allegory instead of symbol.

She says the authors do not give a point by point analysis of their world view revealing everything, but rather each book is a key hole we peek through to glimpse a bright room where wonderful things are happening.

I think most readers want things spelled out more concisely, hence the popularity of books such as *827 Easy Steps To A Tolerable Life*.

Speaking of books, last week the library at Barbara's nursing home culled their collection to make more space. Barbara brought me some books they were throwing in the trash including a beautiful edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* with the Gustave Dore engravings!

A real treasure!

I'm delighted.

Back home I anxiously checked for progress on the *Glog* manuscript.

No word.

So I decided to clean the swimming pools (ours and our neighbor's).

Midway, I came back in the house for something and as I dripped past the phone, Donald called telling me to check my e-mail for more drafts of the book cover... It is shaping up terrific!

But that deserves a posting all by itself.

After supper Ginny & I snuggled on the sofa to watch the President's speech from New Orleans. I felt it contained several disturbing elements.

For one thing he said the federal government would reimburse cash to churches for their work in relieving disaster victims. Why in the world should churches be paid for doing do what churches are supposed to do?

Worship and work are what churches exist for. No government money should be involved. I hope the churches have the integrity to say, “No, thank you” to Caesar.

Sometimes I wonder if anyone in government or media has ever looked up the words *disaster* or *catastrophe* in a dictionary. It doesn't look like it from the way they toss those words around when it comes to relief efforts.

I also wonder if any of them has ever read a history book.

This disaster follows the classic pattern of all disasters since Pompeii. In fact, I imagine that if you took Pliny The Younger's account and substituted the word *helicopter* for the word *trireme*, and *hurricane* for *volcano*, and if you changed the place names, why it could be printed in today's newspaper as an account of New Orleans and few people would notice any difference. The pattern is classic and we are just following it without knowing.

But enough of that...

Lord, help me to do what I can, where I am, with what I have.

Saturday, September 17, 2005

On Living In A Bus Station

I live in a bus station.

I can prove it.

The carpet in our entrance foyer used to be a tapestry hanging on the wall of a Greyhound Bus Station; it features the familiar red, white and blue swirl and bounding greyhound logo of that company. When they were closing a nearby substation they were actually going to throw the tapestry in the dumpster but I asked the manager and he gave it to me for our floor.

(I'd post a photo but I'd have to vacuum it first, so just picture it in your mind).

No more appropriate carpet could be found for our house because although we live on a cul de sac and I work at home alone like a hermit, yet the world winds its way to our doorstep. An amazing number of people pass through this house.

Friday morning I drove a neighbor to the hospital. He had a heart thing installed recently and can't drive himself yet. I don't know what the doctors did to him. It's a thing implanted in his chest, not a pacemaker, but it goes by initials which are **not** the first letters of the words the thing is called. I keep wanting to say it's an IUD, but I know that's not what they put in his chest.

Anyhow, it has initials something like that.

As soon as I got home, Jennifer and Pat came over to deliver a mirror Ginny needs for work and to bum some money. Ginny needs the mirror because in the new building her desk faces away from the door and because

she's so deaf, she does not know when people come up behind her. She plans to put the mirror over her desk so she can tell when someone is there.

Jennifer and Pat were still parked in the drive when Wes came by. I went with him to deliver some clothes and household goods to the Lord's Store Mission. I teased him that any one shirt he donated would serve to cover five normal-size poor guys!

Wes just returned from a few days driving the full length of the Blue Ridge Parkway from West Virginia on down stopping at little mountain towns to absorb the culture. I think he found it refreshing.

He treated me to lunch at Kosta's and we gossiped about a friend, who... Well, never mind.

Back home I caught up on phone calls and e-mails.

With so much human contact today, I got to remembering how the house swarmed with activities back when the kids were in college. Most weekends and every holiday they'd sweep up all the foreign students stranded on campus and bring them home. Sometimes we'd have as many as 18 holiday guests sleeping on floors, sofas, chairs, everywhere.

And they'd all bring in their laundry!

We've had Koreans and Haitians and Jews and Arabs and yankees and Nigerians and Peruvians and ... some out-right crazies straight off the streets that our kids drug in.

And I remember once Jennifer's then boyfriend, a fireman, brought the whole shift from the fire station, six or eight guys, over because Ginny was cooking BBQ. They parked the fire truck in front of our house and left the engine running in case of an emergency call while they ate.

See why the Greyhound rug seems appropriate?

But, anyhow, back to yesterday:

Ginny got home from work exhausted. Both of us felt peevish and actually snapped at eachother, an unusual occurrence.

She got an intimidating e-mail from a supervisor recruiting "volunteers" for a political rally sort of thing this councilman is piggy-backing onto a legitimate agency function. Especially, since Gin applied for a promotion, she finds this letter disturbing; she doesn't know how to best respond.

For our Friday Night Date, we went out to a restaurant we favor. After the waitress took our order, Ginny commented on the girl's new hair style. I told Ginny that I had not noticed because I'd focused on two of her other attributes at eye level. Then the girl passed the table again and I said, "You're right. She does have hair." Ginny started giggling. She says I'm pathetic.

Must be tough being married to a dirty old man. But she's managed for 37 years. Personally, I think that's what attracted her to me in the first place.

After supper we strolled out in the parking lot to a pile of logs where we sat smoking, watching the full moon rise, and talking.

She tells me that Saturday we are going to a store that sells cloth things. Unfortunately it is not the Victoria's Secret store. No. It is just a regular cloth store where she intends to buy new dresses for the office.

Goody! O Goody.

I get to go stand around a cloth store.!

I can hardly wait.

Is there a bus coming yet?

Sunday, September 18, 2005

The Things We Do For Love

Saturday, butterflies fluttered in our garden. Birds flocked to the feeders. Flowers bloomed. The pool sparkled. Weather balmy! So how did we spend the day?

Inside cloth stores!

First, we bought some new glasses for Ginny.

Then she wanted to buy some new dresses for the office.

We walked around the corner to this cloth store and read the sign in the window. It was actually etched into the glass. It said:

**Custom Clothier & Personal Image Consultants.
By Appointment Only.**

Ginny, Thank God, had NOT made an appointment, so we drove to this other cloth store that peddles women's dresses. There, in only four and a half hours of shopping, Ginny bought two dresses.

Yes, two dresses in only 4 ½ hours!

I stood around the cloth-selling store trying not to look like a dork. There was one other male person in that store. I had the distinct impression that he was there selecting dresses for himself.

Once we finally got home, we watched a tv movie.

A real movie.

Friday night Ginny had picked the movie, one of those noble adultery films about this dorky writer who leaves his wife when he finds inspiration in the arms of his muse, a widow with kids, but she croaks saddling him with four brats to raise.

Ginny teared up over this lovely tale.

But tonight we got to see *Armageddon* with Bruce Willis. And these taxi cabs blow up and tumble through the air and land on top of other cars. And meteors smash into New York City. And the Pentagon scrambles jets. And Godzilla steps on this traffic cop and squishes his guts out. And these astronauts, who are really common everyday joes working on an oil rig, blow up a Russian space station, and two U.S. space shuttles, and six or eight more taxi cabs, and an asteroid — And they save the world for the exotic dancer they'd met in a bar the night before they blasted off.

Ginny did not tear up over this lovely movie.

But she watched it with me anyhow.

Ah, the things we do for love!

Now, the movie *Armageddon* presents a slightly different worldview from mine, but I enjoyed it anyhow. One thing I didn't care for was the general's references to a "biblical" end of the world.

Many years ago I wrote a regular series of religious humor columns for a newspaper. One of these was titled [The Party At The End Of The World](#) (Left-hand column, www.cowart.info).

This article so offended one religious group that they sent a delegation of clergy to protest to the newspaper's owner. He immediately cancelled my column and assigned me to writing obituaries for the next couple of years.

That wasn't as much fun as writing a regular column; but it was not the end of the world. Not a single taxi cab blew up.

In response to several outraged comments, all from ladies, John said, "Apparently, movie reviewing is not one of my many talents."

Monday, September 19, 2005

Saying nothing

It's 5:30 Monday morning. I've been up working for a couple of hours but I have nothing to say. So I won't pad my blog by saying it. I hope you enjoy your day.

Tuesday, September 20, 2005

A Learning Day

While waiting for the corrections on *Glog* to come back to me, I spent Monday learning.

I began reading a line-by-line copy editing text book on "using editing techniques to produce flawless sentences." I learned that there good.

Then I studied the manual and fiddled with the new digital camera Donald gave me. I learned that good too...Well, not too good because I can take pictures with it, but I can't figure out how to download them to my computer; I think I'm missing the driver software.

Then, I took my first-ever on-line computer class. It involved book production techniques and manuscript formatting. I really learned a lot from that. I expect to be able to produce better quality books in the future.

Yes, today my head is stuffed full of learning. My heart... well, that's a different matter.

Some people never learn.

Wednesday, September 21, 2005

I can't think of a clever title this early.

Up at 3 a.m. and checked e-mail to see if Donald finished the corrections to my *Glog* manuscript.

He's still working on it.

So I'm going back to bed in a few minutes.

I remember the frustration I felt when dealing with outside publishers in the past. It would take as long as 18 months between the time I wrote an article and getting the check.

They say that waiting is good for your soul.

They lie.

While I waited yesterday I felt stagnant but hesitated to begin a new project before *Glog* is published. I filled my time studying the line-by-line editing book.

The book offers handy tips such as:

"Sometimes tightening provides a way out of stylistic infelicities."

And

"You should have no trouble distinguishing legitimate uses from the periphrastic expressions that clutter virtually all writing."

What are they talking about????

And this is a book which promises to make my writing clearer!

Here's a funny memory... back in the late '70s or early '80s, a college text book quoted a section from an article I wrote to illustrate proper English grammar. What makes that so funny is that I never made above a C in any English class!

Another useful thing I did yesterday was to read the blog of a nurse who stayed working at a New Orleans hospital during Hurricane Katrina. Her address is <http://www.livejournal.com/users/auryn24/>

Wow!

The tv news doesn't show the half of it.

This lady lived through Hell.

Her own experiences make for amazing reading and she provides photos and links to the blogs of other nurses who are in the same disaster.

So it's 4:30 a.m. and I'm going to nap now.

Thursday, September 22, 2005

Stormy Day

I thought it was thunder.

Hurricane Rita, one of the most powerful storms on record, is over 500 miles away from Jacksonville but the tv weathermen say that the heavy rain falling outside my window is one of this storm's feeder bands.

About noon Wednesday the lightening and thunder intensified so I shut down my computer and unplugged it.



Navy S-3 Viking jet

One crash of thunder shook the neighborhood but it turned out not to be thunder. A Navy S-3 Viking fighter jet crashed and exploded in Westside Regional Park just a few miles from our home. Two crewmen died in the crash. The jet narrowly missed a residential area. The military is not saying what weapons may have been aboard the fighter.

While I wait for the corrected copy of my *Glog* manuscript I'm scared to put away all the clutter in our living room (piles of books, maps, notes, printouts) for fear I'll just have to dig them out again for fact checking.

I'm anxious to get *Glog* to the printer. I know that this will happen in God's own good time but I want it done NOW! But I have to wait patiently on the Lord – Who is notorious for dragging His feet when we're in a hurry.

I once heard a preacher say, "God may not get here when we want Him, but when He does arrive, He's never late."

A problem with being a Christian writer is I have to live Christian too.

I can't just write about it.

Another problem is that my own words often return to bite me on the ass.

For instance, today as I gnawed in impatience at having to wait, I kept recalling a chapter from one of my earlier books (now published as *I'm Confused About Prayer*) in which I describe the virtues of waiting patiently.

I wish I hadn't written that.

On another front: Rats invaded Ginny's office building, the new construction the agency opened in August. Have recent rains driven them in? Did they get moved over from the old building in file drawers? Had they taken up residence during long delays in construction? Ginny, who for years supplied the office with candy, bought a new, glass rat-proof candy dish to go on her desk. The administration is all aflutter about the rats. They combat the vermin by issuing memos. Nothing rats hate more than a good memo.

Friday, September 23, 2005

A Man Alone Deep In The Forest...

Thursday my friend Wes called and took me out for breakfast at Dave's. Our conversational topics ranged from metallurgy in Bible times to questionable sources cited in the Wescott & Hort Greek text.

Wes know about such stuff.

I just listen.

I can't tell Wescott & Hort from Ben & Jerry's.

From such esoteric quasi-religious subjects we soon got to talking about Hurricane Rita and our families; before long, we got to telling ribald jokes so terrible sailors would cover their ears.

I haven't laughed so hard in ages. It was great fun, very refreshing.

After Wes left, and while I waited to hear from Donald. At his work he's installing a Linux cluster computer system which carries out 32 Billion operations every second! As I waited to hear from Donald about *Glog*, I began structuring a new book.

Unfortunately, I'd written this one on a dedicated word processor. Transferring the text to a computer presents all sorts of technical problems. For instance, even when I *Save-As* a text-only document, the files come into *Word* with a paragraph mark at the end of each and every line on every page.

I tried this and that and the other to remedy this, but then the text appeared without a single paragraph mark, indentation or break in 136 pages!

Back to the drawing board.

Again I tried various remedies but in the end I just sat at my keyboard deleting 863 paragraph marks— One at a time.

Computers are wonderful, efficient, labor-saving, devices which free the user from boring clerical tasks and thus inspire creativity.

Other people's computers, that is.

I felt more creative back in the days when I wrote all my manuscripts long hand with pencil on yellow legal pads.

A neighbor talked with me about a developing squabble among people in our area. I'm not involved but she wants me to play the role of peacemaker. I would need to take another two days a month from my own work to do some physical stuff for the benefit of the community. Writers don't actually work, you know; they have all sorts of free time.

I'll think about it.

Ginny came home from work feeling down in the dumps. I don't know if it's a matter of her blood sugar being low or if it's something I've done — or haven't done.

Ah, the mystery of woman.

How does that old saw go:

If a man standing alone deep in the forest says anything, but there's no woman around to hear him, is he still wrong?

Sunday, September 25, 2005

A Little Tin Box



One morning last week I made myself a couple of new matchboxes.

As a pipe smoker I prefer wooden strike-anywhere matches. Pipe smoking carries an entire ritual of behavior patterns that add to the satisfaction, and for me decorating match boxes is part of that ritual.

In recent years I have used the tin boxes that package Altoids peppermints. Friends and family save the tin boxes for me and every month or so, I fix a set of them up for my matches.

Usually I fix a batch of five matchboxes at a time: for the car, for my pocket, for my desk, for beside my reading lamp, and for the tv room.

Here's how I do it:

First clean the box with a damp napkin then glue a striking surface to the bottom. For strikers I use either a scrap of sandpaper or the rough strip from the sides of a cardboard match package.

I trace the curved shape of the Altoids lid on a sheet of clear stiff plastic and use that as a template for my design. I place that clear template over a picture that suggests my mood at the moment and trace around it. Then I cut the picture out with scissors and glue it to the cover of the tin box

I keep a file folder of magazine clippings (National Geographic is a great source) of photos which appeal to me for box covers. I choose matchbox cover pictures to fit my mood, or relate to some writing project I'm working on, or touch on some holiday or event important to me. Usually I glue a photo of a bikini girl who strikes my fancy inside the box.

This photo shows some of the matchboxes I've used while working on the Glog manuscript.



I suppose there are better ways to spend my time than pasting pictures on little tin boxes, but it keeps me off the street.

Tuesday, September 27, 2005

One Downer Of A Posting:

Depression is such an Everest of a feeling that it overwhelms.

I've avoided writing in my journal or my blog the past couple of days. I've felt that nobody wants to hear me whine. I think readers have enough downers in their own lives that normally I want my writing to give a lift. So I try to enter bright sunny postings reflecting the joys of Christian life.

That's dishonest.

Yes, I am a Christian.

Yes, I am a happy man.

But there is a flip side to my life also.

And recently I've been pissing against a spiritual wind.

But that's shameful and I don't want readers to know about that side of me. I have a reputation to maintain. I don't want to give folks another reason to reject Christ; I don't want to bring reproach on His name. I want readers to think I'm a nice guy.

So, I lie.

I pretend to be happier, cooler, more spiritually in touch than I really am.

Well, this past week my faith has hit the fan.

Over the years I have written scads of biographical profiles of successful businessmen for Chamber of Commerce type magazines. I've also written a number of biographical sketches of outstanding Christians. And one thing always bothers me in collecting materials for such articles: biographers tend to tell only the good stuff about their subjects.

That bugs me and leaves me hopeless.

I mean if I'm reading a life of some spiritual giant hoping to find some inspiration and meaning in my own life, but all I read about are his successes, then what is there that I can relate to as I stumble through life without a clue?

Don't these Real Christians ever have an off day? Aren't they ever tempted to say, "To Hell with it." Don't they ever just give up and lay in the dust for a while before climbing to their feet and trudging on?

Maybe I'm just a hypocrite.

Maybe I'm not "Filled With The Spirit."

Maybe I'm not a true, dedicated believer.

But I'm here.

I put a certain premium on honesty. I've resolved to be honest in my journal entries and record what's there, not just what ought to be there. And I try to do that in this blog. The subtitle of this blog is "a befuddled Christian looks for spiritual realities in day to day living."

Sometimes that spiritual reality is "Being A Christian Sucks."

Am I still a Christian? Yes. As Peter said, "To whom should we go, Lord? You alone have the words of eternal life."

Am I a hypocrite? Yes. I do want to put my best foot forward. Once I even wrote a newspaper article on hypocrisy (Right-hand column, cowart.info).

Anyhow even though today's posting is a downer, it's what I have to say.

That's what you get here: one miserable bastard — and Jesus.

I hope someday some guy who's down will read the stuff I write and say to himself, "You know, if a stupid looser like John Cowart can try to walk with God, maybe there's hope for me too."

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

A 90-year-old Dying Man

My friend Ginger, a nurse in a major area hospital, often tends to dying patients. After her shift Tuesday morning, she called inviting me to breakfast. She's run into a situation which upsets her.

The patient, a man in his mid 90s, was a preacher. He's suffered a stroke with many medical complications. Heart problems. Kidney failure. Diabetes. And a host of other age related ailments. When he is lucid, he appears to be at peace and ready for death. As the Bible puts it, he is full of days and ready to be gathered to his fathers.

But his daughter insists on every possible medical intervention to keep him going.

This daughter, a deeply religious person, wants the hospital to get the old man well enough to travel. Then she plans can carry him to a faith-healing meeting conducted by one of the television preachers she watches. There, she feels, the old man will be cured.

The lady sits by her dying father's bedside continually with a huge black Bible open in her lap. The room's television blares out religious programming. And the lady loudly proclaims to any and all passers-by that she expects God to perform a miracle and heal her father.

Several things about this situation upset Ginger.

"John, she's going to be devastated when the old man dies," she said. "I think she's going to just lose it and come apart."

She thinks this lady feels so desperate for hope that she's relying on religious fantasy instead of realistic faith.

Jesus never cured anybody of old age.

Ginger, a dedicated Christian who wants to live as a testimony to Christ among her coworkers, is also concerned about the effect this woman's stance has on the hospital staff.

When skeptics see this Christian lady's frantic clinging, how can they take what we Christians say about our belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come?

Does our own behavior belie our own words?

This dear lady proclaims that she expects a miracle, for God to make a sick 90-year-old man healthy and young again.

Can God perform such a miracle?

Certainly.

Is that likely?

There's a reason they're called miracles.

Once I had a toothache. An abscessed tooth. I did not have money enough to see a dentist. I could not get into a charity clinic. I suffered and suffered and suffered.

I prayed for God to heal me, to ease my agony, to make my pain go away.

Nobody home in Heaven that week.

Finally I boiled a pair of pliers, rinsed my mouth out with alcohol and pulled my own tooth.

I do not recommend this.

Did my faith in a loving God fail?

Damn right it did!

Nothing like a good toothache to turn this particular Christian into a practicing atheist.

Why did God let me suffer in agony like that?

I have no idea.

I do know that He himself suffered anxiety:

"Father, if it is at all possible, let this cup pass from me..."

I do know that He himself felt abandoned in pain:

"My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?"

I do know that He himself cared about the family of the dying.

"Woman, behold thy son..."

I do know that the life Christ offers us is based on physical reality:

"I thirst."

No fantasy about it.

Buried under dirt in a tomb for three days Christ — like a visitor to a hospital burn unit walking out with a validated parking ticket in hand — headed back Home.

He once said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am, there you may be also.”

I grieve for Ginger. This is the third big hit she’s taken this week.

I grieve for the lady clinging to her Dad because I think this is more about her than about him.

I wonder how much of my own faith is fantasy and how much is reality.

My experience teaches me to view the world as a pretty screwed up place, and it seems that Jesus holds that same view; He said he came to save the utterly lost in the worst possible situations (the incarnation did not take place in Disneyland).

But this world ain’t the whole show.

We live in a staging area.

Temporary quarters.

Transitional housing.

Dorm rooms for the semester.

Resurrection and Home lie ahead.

Thursday, September 29, 2005

Deer Doctor,

Still down and depressed, I couldn’t face writing so I sat and read all day Wednesday. When writers don’t write, we read.

Among the things I read was an article from the *Florida Times-Union*, my hometown newspaper. Here are the main points of the story:

* After a high speed chase across three counties, police in North Carolina arrested a man from Jacksonville who was driving a stolen ambulance.

* The driver was dressed as a doctor wearing scrubs, a stethoscope, a pager, and latex gloves.

* Strapped to a gurney in the back of the ambulance was a deer.

* An intravenous line was attached to the six-point buck.

* A defibrillator had been used on the animal.

* The deer was dead.

In other news, it’s SunnyBunni’s birthday. Hope you have a great day.

Friday, September 30, 2005

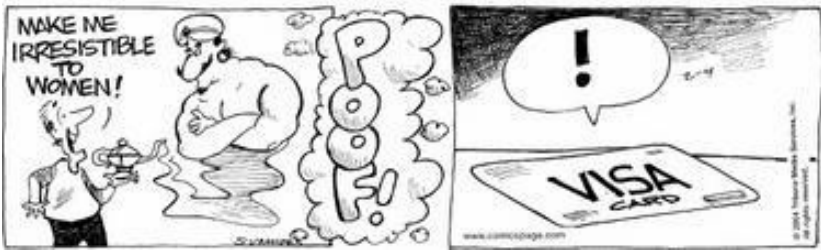
The Birds & The Bees & The Dogs

I didn't feel much like writing Thursday so I spent most of the day outside doing yard work.

I saw a species of bird which I've never noticed before. It was apparently building a nest in a hanging basket in our fig tree so I assume I'll be seeing more of it in the future. I'll dig out the bird books and identify it next time I see it. For now, I'd classify it as what ornithologists call an LGB.

That's scientist jargon for a bird they can't identify; it means Little General Bird.

In reading blogs yesterday I ran across the funniest cartoon at [Moogie's World](http://www.moogiesworld.com/index.php) (<http://www.moogiesworld.com/index.php>).



This broke me up big time!

I suppose one reason this cartoon rang my bell is that recently Ginny has joined the ranks of millions and millions of other women who find me conspicuously resistible.

But, we won't go there.

Except I'm perplexed as to how a Christian guy ought to handle this... Maybe I should try a new aftershave? Or maybe I should just shave, period.

Anyhow, speaking of dogs, today the library where our daughter is manager institutes a new program: Read To A Dog.

Yes, in this program kids who have trouble learning to read get to read a story book to a dog inside the library. The dogs in the program are service animals specially trained for this ministry.

The dog's handler spreads a mat on the library floor where the kid and the dog sit for 15 minutes. The dog will not leave that mat. It will pay rapt attention to the kid reading to it. The dog never criticizes or complains; it acts delighted over the kid's reading. So the kid's self esteem and confidence grow quickly. The kid has an audience which approves and appreciates being read to --- And other kids drool with envy.

So far Jacksonville has only five of these dogs registered in the program but others are in training.

Our daughter's branch is the first in the system to offer this program and Jacksonville's mayor will be there today to launch the first session.

Saturday, October 01, 2005

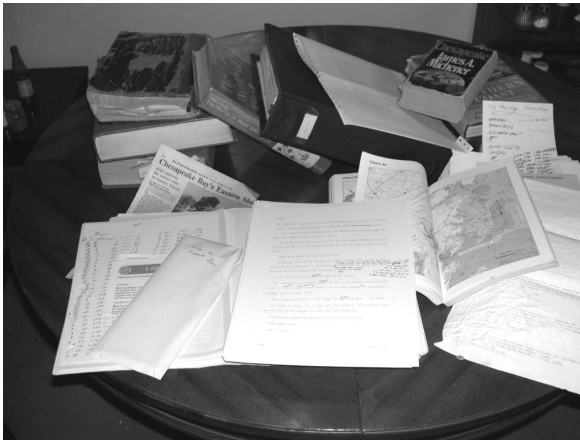
A Book Is Just The Tip Of The Iceberg

Friday word came from Lulu Press, the printer, that they are mailing my proof copy of *Glog*; yes, by this time next week, God willing, I will have reviewed it, made adjustments and released it for publication.

Glog will have transformed from a manuscript into a real live book.

I should feel excited, but all I feel is numb.

Friday I began packing away notes and reference materials related to writing *Glog*. There is another cardboard box full of notes in the closet, but here is a photo of some stuff that went into writing *Glog*:



Obviously I enjoy researching a book more than the creative aspects of writing. And I pride myself on attention to detail; for instance, when *Glog* is under 60 feet of water, or 12 feet, in the Chesapeake Bay, I've consulted navigational charts to be sure the Bay is 60 feet deep, or 12 feet, so many miles off the town of Honga.

This obsession with detail arises from my own insecurities. I have this vision of giving a lecture and someone in the audience standing up declaring, "But the water's not that deep. I read your stupid book and ran aground in that very spot!"

And when *Glog* tells how to tell a male crab from a female, I researched until I could tell the difference myself.

One funny thing happened in writing *Glog*. Several years ago (I started writing *Glog* in the mid 1980s) I needed to know the name of a particular bone; I knew what it was, but not what it is called. After exhausting every research book I could think of on animal anatomy, I called the Jacksonville Zoo to ask a zoologist. The guy I talked with didn't know the name of that

bone off the top of his head, so he asked another zoologist. The project gripped the fancy of the Zoo staff and they apparently dropped everything and hunted here and there even calling other zoos. Remember, this was back in the days before the internet (yes, I've been writing that long) and for three days zoologists from all over the country phoned me almost hourly to explain everything I'd want to know about the *baculum*.

Anatomical research aside, on one level, *Glog* can be read as a simple action tale in which a dinosaur gets ensnared in mishaps and adventures and troubles not of his own making. It's purpose is to entertain.

On another level, the story involves a good-hearted, thinking creature who wrestles with philosophical and practical problems such as why do the innocent suffer, what are we here for, how does God guide us, and what's to eat? These questions perplex Glog and form the backdrop for his adventures.

These are the same questions that perplex me.

Anyhow, yesterday after I packed away the research materials in the photo, I went out to mow our grass. I find walking along behind a lawnmower a mindless relaxing activity in which I don't give a thought to God or man.

And that's what I needed for the moment.

Oh, you'd like to know what a medical dictionary says about the *baculum*?

Baculum – The word is derived from Latin, meaning *walking stick*. The *Baculum* or *Os Penis* is a slender bone stiffening the penis of certain animals. Its size and shape are often a characteristic of a species. It is particularly well-developed in carnivora.

Sunday, October 02, 2005

How Turtles Have Sex

To tell a male turtle from a female, look at the shell of the stomach. The stomach plate of the female is flat; that of a male turtle, when he is laid on his back, curves inward like a cup.

God has designed turtles thus so that when they mate, they nest together like spoons with the outward curve of her back shell fitting into the concave curve of his belly shell, thus bringing their organs into contact. Seeing such things be so, who can doubt the majesty of God, Creator of all, who maketh even turtles fit together in His scheme of things?

The above quote comes from a historical fiction novel set in the 1660s.

What brought it to my mind was that when my daughter arrived from Gainesville Saturday for her birthday party, she brought a pair of huge turtles, her long-time pets, to leave at our house till I can make arrangements to deliver them to a new home.

The working title of my historical novel was “*The Cook’s Book*.”

The place I’m supposed to deliver the turtles to is a restaurant.

But this arrangement does not bode ill for Patricia’s pet turtles; the owner also raises turtles and offered to place them in her turtle corral.

Now, while the sexual practices of turtles may indicate an intelligent design in the universe, our party certainly does not.

Quite the contrary.

This party just happened with no one person planning or coordinating the event. Our kids, who initiated the party, just put out a general word, “Everybody bring something or another.”

Each person brought, or didn’t bring, whatever food struck their fancy. That usually meant cake or cookies or pies or ice cream.

Nobody thought to bring soda at first, so we had to scrounge for drinks.

And for a time there it looked as though the main dishes for supper would be trail mix, deviled eggs, and celery sticks filled with cream cheese.

I’m not sure Martha Stewart would feel at home at our house.

Then late arrivals poured in with fried chicken and humus and veggies and salads and the table groaned with goodies of every sort and description. A lavish feast was spread with no evidence of intelligent design at all.

Ginny & I had planned to host this thing outside but afternoon rains squelched that idea and the crowd packed our tiny living room. Chairs were at a premium and smokers, out of courtesy, huddled under an awning out back.

Laughter shook the house.

Except of course when I told my joke about Rene Decarte which elicited a universal groan.

Lively conversation abounded about books, and movies, and sick cats, and somebody being dragged down the stairs by her hair by her sister, and archaeology, and music, and philosophy, and physics, and cars, and flight reservations, and Godzilla, and the library’s reading to dogs program, and computers, and the time Donald sold his bedroom to his sister, and avian flu, and, of course— turtles.

So, his concave shell fits over her convex shell nesting together when they have sex. Humm...This arrangement may not be conclusive proof of God’s intelligent design, but the turtles find it satisfactory.

Monday, October 03, 2005

Party Food

Chalk Sunday up as just another wasted day in a wasted life.

This morning I realized there was some pepper jack cheese in the refrigerator, a left-over snack from Saturday's party. I also found some gingersnap cookies.

I wanted some but I hesitated a long time before eating any.

It's been years since I tasted a gingersnap even though I like them.

The problem is that my mother always snacked on gingersnaps with cheese as she sat at the kitchen table and chewed me out for hours and hours telling me how disappointed she was in me. In fact I think the phrase I heard more than any other as I grew up and well into adulthood was, "John, I'm so disappointed in you."

And here I was this morning confronted with a brown paper bag of gingersnap cookies and a block of cheese.

Ah, the memories.

Who the hell else in the whole wide world finds cheese and crackers traumatic?

A moral dilemma?

A challenge to his manhood?

Being a Christian proved of no help at all with this. The word gingersnap is not even mentioned in the Holy Scripture. It's a bitch when a man (who at least sometimes tries to behave in accordance with Scripture) runs into a situation with no Bible verse to lean on.

I had to wing it.

"Mama's been dead for 15 years and I want a gingersnap with cheese," I thought. "Damn it. I'm going to eat me a gingersnap."

And I did!

Hey, slaying dragons isn't the only thing a man can do to demonstrate his courage.

At the party Saturday night I encountered another uncomfortable situation involving food—in this case a key lime pie.

You see, I have this slight quirk, a minor idiosyncrasy, an tiny eccentric mannerism. OK, call it a crazy obsession: I find it almost impossible to eat in public

My teeth went bad years and years ago destroying underlying bone structure in my face. Hence I am a sloppy eater. I drool and slobber and spill things and dribble.

This makes me a trifle self conscious. I don't want to disgust people. So, unless with the closest friends, I avoid eating where anyone can see me. In a group I usually just sip on a cup of coffee and join the conversation as

everyone else eats. My family is so accustomed to this behavior that they ignore it – or maybe it is all in my mind and nobody ever pays the slightest attention to what I’m eating or even if I am.

Well, during the party I got really really hungry.

Don’t these good, life-long friends and dearly beloved children EVER go home?

But they were all talking and laughing in the living room.

Nobody at all was in the kitchen.

The last slice of the key lime pie beckoned me. Pale green luscious filling topped with an eight-inch snowy cloud of meringue. More alluring than a Playboy centerfold.

Everyone appeared deep in conversation.

I picked up a fork and that last slice of pie. I turned my face to the wall so just in case anyone came into the kitchen they wouldn’t see me eating.

But someone did.

I didn’t hear her, but the lady who baked that pie came up behind me.

Startled, I jumped and shuttered and turned away from her.

Guilt paralyzed me; I felt as embarrassed as if she’d caught me masturbating or strangling a bunny or writing on the wall with a permanent black marker.

I stammered something or another incoherent and fled the crime scene...

Now, an objective evaluation of this situation would simply conclude that I’m crazy. But

Here’s an aside: it is not politically correct to call them crazy, my e-friend Eric coined a proper term; such people are to be referred to as: “Mental Health Consumers!”

Anyhow, once again I’m confronted with a situation for which the Bible offers me no help whatsoever. Nothing in the Old Testament dietary laws covers eating without being seen. And while the Scripture does make certain allowances for kooks (*Comfort the feeble minded*) nothing addresses my particular mind set.

The facts I know and the things I feel do not necessarily mesh. I suspect that in certain situations, God lets us cope on our own as best we can. That does not mean He doesn’t love us; it means He expects us to grow up.

So, as I seek the path to spiritual enlightenment, there a few more gingersnaps in the bottom of the bag...

Don’t you be watchin’ now.

Tuesday, October 04, 2005

Turtle Thoughts



When I was in Junior High School, the teacher forced us to read an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. Here 50 years later I still remember one phrase from that essay.

I think Emerson's point was that we think like we think because we are what we are.

He said, "All the thoughts of a turtle are turtle."

My big accomplishment, in fact, my only accomplishment, for Monday was to deliver Patricia's turtles to their new home at Arden's Restaurant.

When the other kids would come home from college, all they'd bring was their dirty laundry. In fact, Donald used to collect dirty clothes from all up and down his dorm hall to bring home for Ginny to wash – I suspect he charged his buddies a fee in this enterprise.

But Saturday Patricia showed up with her two enormous turtles. She's raised these since they were tiny. Now they are bigger than my desk dictionary. Because of her [job troubles](#) she has to drop out of school (for a time I hope) and because her apartment lease is up at the end of the month, she can't keep the turtles any longer.

She made arrangements with the owner of Arden's to take the varmints in, but since the restaurant was closed over the weekend, I've been chief turtle-keeper till today. Here is a photo of the turtles' new home:



Wednesday, October 05, 2005

Preparing For Jax History Lecture

I spent Tuesday reading and gathering materials for a lecture on Jacksonville history that I'm scheduled to give at South Mandarin Library.

In my talks I used various rusty artifacts I've collected here and there to illustrate points, a hand-forged ax, a Civil War sword, flint arrowheads, etc. Trouble is that I keep this stuff all over the place – some outside in the garden, some in a bookcase, some in a closet — and I have to round it up again each time I give a lecture.

One section of the lecture which always seems to perk the audience up involves [Dr. Robert Bateman](#), who founded a Jacksonville rescue mission, and who died in the sinking of the Titanic.

I'm still waiting for the *Glog* proofs to come from the printer.

After several days of rain, many of the plants in our garden are flowering; when Ginny got home from work, I took this photo of her, one amid the angel trumpets:



Thursday, October 06, 2005

Glogging In The Rain

Wednesday, as rains from Tropical Storm Tammy sheeted over Jacksonville flooding streets and yards, a representative of the United States Postal Service pressed through the deluge to lay a package in the puddle at my front door.

With the kindness and consideration for which USPS is famous, the mailman did not bother to knock on the door; he obviously didn't wish to disturb anyone inside the house during such a torrential rainstorm.

However, I saw the mailman sloshing around outside – I’ve watched for him hourly everyday this week – and rushed out to rescue my package before it floated away.

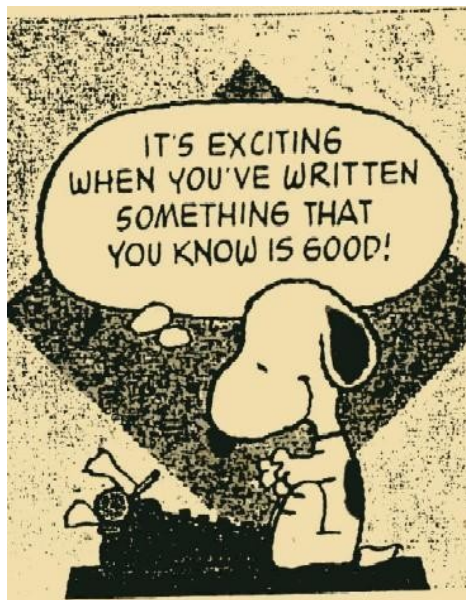
Printer proofs of my *Glog* manuscript have finally arrived!

I intend to give the text one final reading and, God willing if all goes well, (Ginny already spotted and corrected one misspelled word) *Glog* will be ready for publication tomorrow, Friday, October 7th, 2005.

Last night because of pouring rains – or the boring speaker — only five people showed up for my Jacksonville history lecture. I gave them the best I know how to give.

It would take more than a drizzle and a small turnout to dampen my spirit.

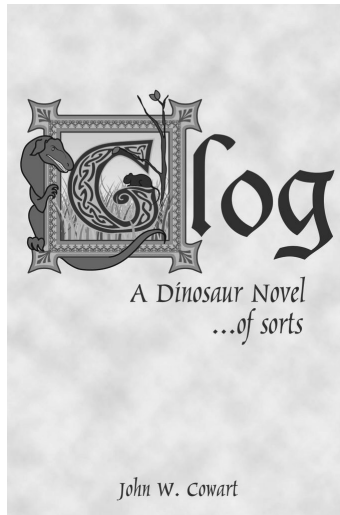
I agree with Snoopy:



Friday, October 07, 2005

Glog is finished and so am I

Here is a picture of the *Glog* cover.



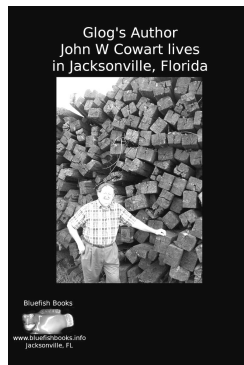
After correcting 54 mistakes (mostly misplaced commas) in the *Glog* proofs, I uploaded the text, covers and sample chapters this morning.

Glog is published.

I think it's the best thing I've ever written.

If anyone would like to see the results of my work, please check out www.bluefishbooks.info.

The back cover of the book features a photo of me... I should have combed my hair that day.



Ginny is off work today and we plan to spend a quite weekend... At this moment I don't want to see another book, or touch another keyboard — ever.

But, God willing, I'll be back to blogging Monday. Hope you all have a great weekend.

Saturday, October 08, 2005

Friday Night At The Fights

Yesterday Ginny took the day off work so she could be with me while I put the final touches on the *Glog* manuscript and afterwards we went out on our usual Friday Night Date.

We chose to go to a favorite Italian place where I was a good boy and ordered an antipasto salad instead of something yummy. As we ate we became engrossed in conversation about a murder mystery she's reading, *Coffin Corner*, an old Dell Shannon, Lieutenant Mendoza mystery.

The area around the restaurant is a Friday night haunt of hundreds of young people so intent on individualism that they all appear to be in uniform — chains, black clothes, body piercing, tattoos, spiked green-dyed hair-dos.

The guys dress weird too.

After supper we sat on a brick wall across the street smoking, watching the parade of young people, and talking still about Ginny's mystery.

Between us and our car a fight broke out.

Much screaming, cursing, pounding and grunting as 20 or 30 of the uniformed individualists clustered around the combatants. One guy banged another's head on the hood of a parked car as they kicked, panted, screamed curses, and threw punches, then rolled on the pavement biting and tussling.

To me it was obvious that neither guy knew diddle squat about fighting. No weapons were evident. I didn't think either guy was capable of really damaging the other. Even though the opponents were in their 30s, it looked more like a school yard brawl than a street fight

I briefly contemplated walking over to the crowd and speaking peace and grace and the love of Jesus Christ and all that good stuff — You know the drill: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall butt in — but I felt no prompting of the Spirit and I was more focused on listening to Ginny so I said "Screw 'em. Let the bastards fight."

Ginny had taken out her cell phone thinking to call the cops, but she hesitated then slipped it back into her purse. "I don't think I'm going to call," she said, "Let them sort this out themselves."

Aren't we quite the Christian activists?

We finished our smokes then crossed the street and passed by on the other side (Hey, that's biblical) as the fight escalated, more people joined the ruckus, and the crowd of onlookers swelled.

I locked Ginny in our car before going around to my side.

And then we drove away and spent the rest of our evening at home in peace and companionship and love while Ginny finished her mystery.

In reply to 7 Comments: I said: *Just weeks after we married, 37 years ago, I saw Ginny pick up a broom and chase away a government inspector who was harassing me. Never before or since have I witnesses such fury.*

But she looked like such a demure bride... I was impressed.

Sunday, October 09, 2005

A Day In The Bookstore

Ginny & I spent a huge chunk of Saturday browsing in a used bookstore. The prices appalled me. These were used books for Heaven's sale! I only bought two slender paperbacks for my Florida history collection and they set me back a bundle.

I can't afford to buy my own books.

I think they must be printed using gasoline instead of ink.

Monday, October 10, 2005

Somebody Moved Columbus Day

Many thanks to those of you who have ordered copies of *Glog*. Your response really makes me feel good.

Now that I've published *Glog*, I feel numb, not knowing what to do next. I'd thought of a Christmas book but I really don't have enough material to make the book I envisioned worth the money it would cost. I'm thinking of re-issuing a collective biography of people whose faith inspires me. It's been out or print for years except in foreign language translations... I'm still mulling that over.

For next Wednesday, October 12th, I'd planned to post a blog about Christopher Columbus but yesterday Ginny informed me they've moved Columbus Day to today so they can link it to a weekend.

I didn't know that.

I checked my calendar and sure enough, they've moved Columbus Day. No one I know gets a day off, so I can't phantom why they'd move the day.

Is the 4th of July tomorrow?

Anyhow, Christopher Columbus blogged in the style of his day; i.e. he kept a daily journal of his activities, a log of his voyages. Back in the mid 1980s I wrote a profile of Columbus, [The Admiral Of Mosquitoes](#) (Left-hand column, www.cowart.info) which quotes a bit from his blog.

At the grocery store yesterday, I picked up a plastic bag planning to put some peaches in it. At the counter a young man blocked my way as he examined peaches carefully. He hefted each one. He rubbed it up and down the skin of his bare arm. He lifted it to his face and sniffed it closely. He licked the peach. Then he put it back on the display counter. And picked up another one...

I looked around for a store employee but of course none was in sight.

I decided not to buy any peaches today.

Oddly enough, the young man didn't buy any either; he just left the counter having examined six or eight....

Do I wash produce enough?

The national news Friday said that today churches would be celebrating Porn Sunday. I planed to go to church. I even shaved to get ready. But Ginny said they would not be showing movies in church. So I said phooey on it and we dabbled in our garden instead of going.

In reply to 9 Comments: I replied,

Ah. Your comment here tells the story of my life. "I almost bought your book..." How many times I have heard those words! LOL!

Thank you so much for the kind things you say about me in your blog (<http://wwjblog.blogspot.com/>) this morning. That was such a happy surprise. You made my day.

But!!! This word verification thing won't let me make a comment on my own blog; it keeps changing the squiggly letters faster than i can copy them! Help! I'm trapped in the web...

Tuesday, October 11, 2005

Sic transit gloria mundi ...

Several years ago I gave a speech which was given extensive coverage by the newspaper and the four local tv stations.

The following day an official of the church we then attended called.

"Did you see me on tv," I asked.

"Yeah. I saw that. But what I'm calling about is — the janitor goes on vacation next week I need somebody to mop floors and clean the toilets while he's gone. So I thought of you..."

I had much the same experience yesterday. Friday I finally published *Glog*. All weekend I have basked in that accomplishment.

And Monday morning I saw that [Darlene](http://wwjblog.blogspot.com/) (<http://wwjblog.blogspot.com/>) said all sorts of nice things and posted my photo in her blog comparing my masculine physique to that of tv star Ty Pennington (the whimper).

Heady stuff.

Then, my phone rang.

"I see you're finished that book thing. So now you're free to help me shuffle cars to the shop," said the elderly gentleman on the line.

Then someone called needing me to drive them to the hospital.

Then two more callers. One with a simple computer question; one with a historical research problem.

Then an elderly neighbor from a few blocks down the street came by our house wanting me to transport some children's clothing to the mission.

Not having our car, I walked to his house with my wheelbarrow to pick up the bags of clothes. On my way, I saw the garbagemen had dumped the empty cans right in the middle of my next door neighbor's driveway. I moved them so she could get in her drive when she gets off work. A Nuisance Task. "Some people are too sorry to be garbagemen," I grumbled.

As I loaded the clothing bags into my wheelbarrow, the old woman said, "Bushes out back are overgrown. Could you come chop them down for us?"

They have grandsons a whole lot bigger and younger than I am, so I asked if the grandsons could do that when they come for supper?

"Oh, I wouldn't ask them," she said. "There's snakes all out in those bushes and they're scared of snakes."

I'm not scared of the snakes but I feel that if the grandsons eat there, they can work there. So I passed on that opportunity.

But I feel guilty about it.

I'm all hot to trot on my next writing project and here I am besieged with requests for menial service. Hey, I'm a published author; I'm too good for that dirty hands stuff ain't I?

No.

No. I'm not.

I can't write Christian if I don't live Christian.

Christ died so that I might be saved, not so that I might be important.

A servant is no better than his Master and if He washed dirty feet then I'm certainly not to think myself above doing the same.

But I do.

In my heart, I do.

Brother Lawrence said that God counts not the greatness of a task but the love with which it is done.

Well, I don't rack up any Heavenly points in that area either, because although I agreed to do the things the various people needed, I resented being asked to do them.

Remember the Bible story about the guy who asked his two sons to harvest grapes?

One son said, "Sure thing, Dad. I'll get right on that"... but he didn't go.

The other son said, “Hell No! I won’t go”... but he trudged on out there and picked the stupid grapes and dumped them in the vat.

I identify with that second son.

You know, if God spoke to me directly, if He appeared to me in a burning bush, (my first reaction would be to grab a fire extinguisher) But if He did speak directly, I think I’d pay attention to what He wanted.

Trouble is, God doesn’t speak to me directly; He always seems to say what He wants through other people.

I mean, not many of us would turn down a direct request from God Almighty. But, when it’s that pest down the street who conveys the request...

But is it really God who wants me to do goody-goody stuff for people? Is that part of being Christian? Or do I just want to be thought well of? Hey, I was a Boy Scout long before I became a Christian and I had the Scout oath and motto and all that engrained in me before I ever learned a Bible verse. “Do a good turn daily... A Scout is helpful... To help other people at all times... Trustworthy. Loyal. Friendly...”

When I say yes to folks who ask my help, am I being Christian or just a geriatric Boy Scout?

Then I wonder, are requests for mundane help opportunities to serve Christ or hindrances to the work of writing which I really should be doing?

Are such requests for help just obstacles which keep me from my writing goals? Don’t I have an important contribution to make to Christian literature? Why, I have this idea for a world-changing book; I think I’ll entitle it: **The World’s Greatest Book On Humility** by John W. Cowart.

Doesn’t that have a nice ring to it?

Perhaps such nonsensical ideas are one reason God never lets me make the Times Best-Seller list. He knows such success would cool my heart, puff my head, and snare my soul.

Am I too high-falutin a writer, too self-important a person, to give help without resentment and bitterness? Can’t the little people who have not written a book do those things?

Do I really mean it when I tell Christ, “Yes, Lord. Whatever. Whenever. However?”

Do I intend to be a Christian guts, feathers and all?

Is Christ the Lord of my energy, my money, my time?

Or do I just use Him as a springboard to enhance my own reputation?

Then this verse comes to mind: The Lord Loveth A Cheerful Giver.

Damn!

I'm supposed to be cheerful too?

O crap! Looks like I need to take off my shoes, climb in that vat, and stomp those damn grapes –

Cheerful? That I'm gonna have to work on.

Wednesday, October 12, 2005

All Dressed Up And Nowhere To Go

According to the counter software Donald installed, 3,392 readers have visited my web site and 786 readers have visited my blog so far this month.

That scares me.

Will I disappoint these readers when they call again?

I feel under pressure, compelled to say today something more witty and spiritual and mind boggling than I said yesterday.

But I got nothing!

This morning, Ginny says that's ok; I can just be my self. I think she means witless, unspiritual and mind boggled. So here goes:

I woke up at 1:30 a.m. Tuesday to catch up e-mail and such before I prepared myself to spread light and joy and gospel and helpfulness throughout the world as I drove J. to the hospital for her operation at noon. So I shaved and dressed and put on shoes (I usually work all day barefoot so this was a sacrifice). I set the security system and the dogs so I could walk out the door immediately when she arrived. (I was supposed to drive her car).

Then I waited.

And waited.

And waited.

At 1:30 p.m. she called saying the operation has been postponed.

I was not needed.

All dressed up and no place to go.

Now what?

I could start work on the next book; but I want to be fresh for that.

I could browse porno sites; but my back ached too much to sit at the computer for that.

I could go out and mow the lawn; but I didn't want to start so late.

Ginny says sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is to take a nap.

So that's what I did.

That was my Tuesday.

Monday afternoon Ginny visited the doctor to have her hearing tested.

He said she hears well for a 90-year-old woman; trouble is that she won't be 90 for decades and decades yet. He said she should have gotten a hearing aid 30 years ago! Her hearing loss makes for many an interesting conversation around our house.

For instance, we'll be at the table and I'll say, "Please pass the salt."

My Beloved will look up and reply, "I love you too."

Now, its very nice that she's is so accustomed over the years to hearing me say "I love you" that she assumes that is what I just said... But that doesn't get me the salt.

She has adjusted so well to her hearing loss that most people do not realize she has a problem. At work she keeps her phone on the loudest setting and she hangs a mirror above her computer terminal so she can see when anyone comes in the office behind her.

Oh, Oh. I just remembered. Here's something cool. When one of her former bosses met me at a party he said, "Virginia hardly ever says anything, but nobody can walk in that office for five minutes without knowing that she's a Christian."

That's her presence.

I'm so blessed to be her husband. If anybody were ever to write my biography, it would be a love story.

Anyhow, her hearing is getting worse and we discussed this hearing aid thing at length. She needs two of them and each one will cost us more than our car would sell for! So we'll cut into the money we've been squirreling away for a vacation trip and spend it on the hearing aids. (We still plan our trip; it'll just have to be cheaper).

She goes in for a fitting next week.

We talked about praying for healing (and we do) but Ginny said, "Until God gets around to healing me, I want to go with the mechanical aid."

I'm in love with a practical woman.

Yes, I already get plenty of loving around here – but next week I'll get salt too.

Thursday, October 13, 2005

A Rattlesnake At Eve's Library

Wednesday Ginny & I spent a delightful evening with Eve, our middle daughter who is head librarian in a tiny rural community west of Jacksonville.

She filled us in on some of her latest adventures:

For instance, the other night a reader entering Eve's library announced that a rattlesnake lay blocking the door.

Ever the reference librarian, Eve consulted her leadership training manual. Humm. No listing for rattlesnakes in the index.

One patron helpfully mentioned he had a pistol in his glove compartment, but the snake lurked between the main entrance and the parking lot. Besides, although it is a rural library, Eve discourages guns in her reading room.

Fortunately a local fireman was browsing for books. He found a shovel and went out to do battle with the reptile. This was brave indeed because a Putman County fireman was killed by a rattlesnake just last Monday.

But by the time the fireman got outside, the snake was gone...

Somewhere.

I've never heard of this before and I have no idea if it works, but the fireman told Eve to sprinkle moth balls around the library entrance because rattlesnakes are territorial and will leave the area at the scent of mothballs. He also told her that the library ought to stock a "snake killing shovel" for her staff to use.

Eve plans to request a snake shovel and 50 pounds of mothballs in her next supply requisition to county headquarters. I wonder what the accounting department will make of that.

Oh those wild and crazy librarians!

Since her library building is brand new construction, the builders dug a retention pond near the entrance. The other day as she was conducting a meeting to discuss library programs for teens, a little kid walked by the picture window with a fish dangling from a bamboo pole. He'd been fishing in the library retention pond and caught a few sunfish.

Immediately the teens (who ride to the library on ATVs) suggested that the library sponsor a community fishing contest right there in the pond.

Eve is scheduling the event.

Last week Eve took some vacation days and went camping in the wilds of west Florida. She also went cave exploring. Yes, Florida does have caves.

Strange to think of our little girl as combating snakes, camping in the deep woods by herself, and exploring caves. Eve was always the quiet, timid, shy, demure one. She is the most gentle fawn of a girl, yet incredibly adventurous and brave. She's the one who won the scholarship to London and traveled all over Europe by herself. She has also ventured into the (to me) terrifying realm of on-line dating.

She's the one who participates in virtually every charity walk for MS, MD, Heart Association, Birth Defects, Cancer Society... anything that touches her tender heart.

Ginny & I are so pleased with her.

Eve does keep cats...

But then nobody's perfect.

During our usual prayer time after supper, Ginny read this beautiful prayer which I'd never even noticed before:

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art willing to give us more than we either ask or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, And giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Friday, October 14, 2005

Prayer And Fantasy

Labora est Ora

I did not feel like writing Thursday so I used the day to mow the yards, ours and our neighbor's. This task usually takes me about six hours. That may indicate the size of the yards, or it may just show how slow I move.

I've heard a Latin motto, *Labora est Ora*, which means "Work is prayer." I think that means that when we want some desired end, we both ask God for it and physically work for it ourselves. Since our physical actions are limited, ora is more powerful than labora. But both try to accomplish the same end.

I've never actually tried this but I suppose that I could pray for the grass to stay short. I doubt that would work. I think that God wants us to do certain things for ourselves.

I remember the old joke about the guy who heard that prayer can move mountains. He had this mountain in his backyard so he decided to spend the night in fervent prayer that it would be moved. He agonized in prayer. He claimed the promise. He strained all night to have faith and believe.

Next morning he looked out the window.

The mountain still stood there.

But there in his backyard a miracle had happened. Over night there had miraculously appeared a brand new wheelbarrow and a shovel.

Occasionally, I pray for people and about things as I mow the lawn.

But not today.

I did not pray as I worked.

Today, what I did was fantasize.

What will I do with that 16 million dollars when I win the Lottery?

That's what I thought about all day long as I pushed the mower.

Hey, I know we can't serve both God and Mammon —

But I try.

Saturday, October 15, 2005

Goodbye Marilyn, I Miss You Already.

Sometimes things I've written in the past return to bite me in the ass.

Friday I as I worked on page lay out for my next book, I was searching for a reference in my own computer when I came across the start of a book manuscript that I'd started but given up on. I'd even forgotten that I'd once started that project. But one line caught my attention and whacked me.

I do not think of myself as a "Christian writer." In fact I don't feel as though I'm a particularly religious man at all. I'm just a guy, a writer whose work sometimes touches on faith – or, more often, my own lack of it.

But on some level I do feel an intense gratitude to God for all the many good things in my life. And I want to express that gratitude. I also want to express a certain degree of love and appreciation to the Lord Christ simply because of who He is. I feel He is worthy of respect and honor.

This creates a dilemma.

I am me.

And being me includes some not very nice things.

Among those things is an enjoyment of internet pornography.

Every so often I've been browsing sites and saving images of women in various states of undress. I accumulated a large file of photos. I justified my photo collection on the grounds that I was just enjoying the pleasure of looking at pretty women who were there posed anyhow whether I saw them or not. A harmless indulgence.

And I think it actually is. Everybody has fantasies of one sort or another. Just like imagining how I'd spent my Lotto winnings. No substance to it. Marilyn Monroe is not likely to appear naked on a bear skin rug in front of my fireplace on a snowy winter evening.

For one thing, we don't have a fireplace.

That sort of thing is just the adolescent pipe dream of this particular old man. It will never really happen. Besides, if it did, Marilyn would intimidate the hell out of me!

Yet such pipe dreams carry with them an element of sleaze.

Do I really want to honor Christ in my life, or is that just talk.

That piece I wrote years ago contained these words:

Nothing in life counts but following Jesus.

Nothing.

We should render him all because he is worthy of all.

Who else can honestly command all our devotion, strength, attention, love and resources?

If we will spend all eternity honoring Jesus, why shouldn't we start right now?

When I blundered across this passage, which I had written myself, I immediately thought of my collection of girly photos.

These two elements of my make up don't exactly mesh.

Is Jesus preeminent in my life, or just a prominent feature in my writing?

"Oh, the hell with it," I thought. "I've got to stop writing mush like that. But, in for a penny, in for a pound."

So I pulled up my computer folder files labeled xxx Beautiful Women, and xxx Beach Bunnies, and xxx Bikini Girls, etc. I reluctantly moved each folder to the recycle bin. Then I right clicked and emptied the bin permanently deleting those folders.

Did I feel a sense of spiritual triumph, joy, purity and victory?

Of course not.

This is life, not fiction.

If anything my strongest feeling was — regret.

Come right down to it, I wonder if deleting those files is just a sign that I'm getting too damned old and there was nothing of any Christian significance to the action at all.

But, sometimes I think it's ok to do something just on the off chance that Christ will be honored

Does this mean that as a strong, handsome, pure-hearted Christian guy I will never ever again in my whole life look at a naked woman's photo and fantasize about owning a bear skin rug?

Knowing my track record, I doubt that.

But, that's what's going on in my life on this one particular day.

P.S. If Bill Gates is reading this blog, please e-mail me instructions on how to recover permanently deleted files.

Sunday, October 16, 2005

A Happy Day With Ginny

At dawn Saturday Ginny & I ventured out into the backyard in robes and slippers to fill the bird feeders and enjoy our coffee on the patio. I played around with the digital camera Donald had given us. Here's a photo of Ginny with a ginger lily:



After breakfast we went for a long drive in the country passing acres covered with goldenrod, morning glories and black-eyed susans. We visited Eve's library and enjoyed a wonderful time browsing in this brand new collection. Apparently there was a local football game so hardly anyone else was in the library so we essentially had the place to ourselves.

Eve is asking the town Four H Club or the Future Farmers of America to landscape the area outside the huge picture windows in the lounge. But she asks Ginny and me to think about being backup to do the job in case the local organizations can't. So we strolled around outside (watching for snakes) planning which plants to put in. We want low-maintenance plants in varieties which would ensure something blooming outside that window all year long.

Funny thing is that this weekend up north Gin's mom and Dad are spearheading the landscaping of their local library. They both hold Master Gardner certification.

Ginny found several books by a favorite author and enthusiastically told me about them in the library's conversation pit. Eve snapped this photo of us talking surrounded by the books we checked out:



For lunch Eve drove us to an eatery which was packed with local hunters engrossed in conversation anticipating the opening day of deer season. And, eavesdropping I learned that, today only, the feed and grain store is having a special on hammers. I loved the Florida accents I heard all around me as these good people talked about things close to their hearts and phrases like, “We’ll be lifting you up in prayer about that” are natural parts of a conversation about dogs, not just church words.

As we drove back home Gin & I began planning in earnest about a vacation trip out in the piney woods for ourselves.

Donald has started a new Slashdot [technical journal](http://slashdot.org/%7Edcowart/journal/). The site address is (<http://slashdot.org/%7Edcowart/journal/>). I read some recent postings but I have no idea what the journal is about—the computer literate will love it.

Recently he also added to the free e-mail devotionals he offers daily. This latest set comes from Octavius Winslow, a 19th Century Nonconformist minister. It is a little easier reading than Donald’s technical journal. Check it out at Daily Walking With God at <http://rdex.net/devotions.php>

And that’s my posting for today.

Monday, October 17, 2005

Will Today Be The Day Of His Coming?

He has undoubtedly promised to come.

Sometime. Somewhere. When least expected.

My wife believes he may come today. All weekend long she has poured over the literature, reading religiously about the magnificent things involved in the promise of his coming.

Horns will blow. Champaign corks will pop. Beautiful girls will bring armloads of flowers. Crowds will cheer. Released balloons will soar colorfully upward into the Heavens. He will usher us into a limousine and escort us to the mansion he has prepared for us.

Our poor sullen neighbors — for whom he has not come — will gather in envy at our door; but they'll congratulate us anyhow.

Ginny believes this very day may be the day.

But then, she's gotten all worked up over this anticipated event before only to be disappointed when he didn't show.

But her hope springs eternal.

Who knows? David Sayers and the Publishers Clearing House Prize Patrol may indeed come today.

Hey, I spend all Sunday sacked out on the sofa watching tv football, how can I blog about that?

Tuesday, October 18, 2005

Holiday Chaos Ahead

Over this past weekend Ginny and I planned for the horrendous holiday season ahead of us. Between now and mid-January we face 4 family birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving, an anniversary, a vacation trip. out-of-town guests, Luminary Night, New Years, Superbowl, a “**What?** Party” (to celebrate Ginny's hearing aids when she get them), and Halloween.

We placed an order for toys and give-away stuff for the Halloween packets we prepare each year. We attempt to give the kids who come by our house the very best treat packet they will get anywhere. This year's packets will include flying dinosaurs, color books and crayons, train whistles, rubber frog zappers, spider rings, and of course gobs of candy, and a bunch of other stuff to delight the hearts of trick-or-treaters.

Of course the reason we distribute all this stuff is to convey tracts honoring Christ into the homes of the kids who visit us.

Over the years we have given out hundreds and hundreds of such packets containing little comic book tracts put out by the Chick Publishing company. These little booklets often carry a strong gospel message illustrated with powerful drawings. But, you have to read them carefully yourself before buying one to give out because the artist sometimes attacks others in an uncharitable manner and they can be offensive.

My favorite Chick tract is one called *One Way*. It is designed for people who can not read and it carries the message through pictures. We also gave out *Titanic*, about a man who thought he had it made in life when he voyaged aboard the luxury liner; *Room 310*, about a man dying of cancer being witnessed to by his also dying roommate; and *Holy Joe*, about a soldier who

testifies to Christ in battle. We also gave the children tracts about a church mouse and other figures suitable for young children.

Word has gotten around among the neighborhood kids and we have repeat batches of them come to our house year after year.

We really can't afford to do this this year, but what the hell, we do lots of things we can't afford.

Of course, Hurricane Wilma may put a damper on our plans. But if it does, we'll just pack the nonperishable stuff away for next year.

We are not much for handing out religious tracts, but since we usually have anywhere from 60 to a hundred people walking up to our door, why not give them the best we can give? It's just a feeble gesture toward evangelizing our own neighborhood.

This weekend we also planned the Halloween display we'll set up – Gin wants me to put it together next weekend. We decided to use the same one we did last year illustrating the 23rd Psalm; Here's a photo of last year's display:



Thursday, October 20, 2005

Was That Hurricane Wilma That Passed, Or Is It Still Coming?

I don't know where to start; the past couple of days have been harried.

Tuesday my friend Wes and I went to breakfast and, among other things, talked about existential philosophy. We laughed like fools because due to my facial deformity and lack of teeth, I can't say the word "existentialist." Of course this is not a word that comes up often in my vocabulary and I did not know that I'm unable to say it. So, I just substituted the word "heathen." The conversation was a hoot for us but you'd have had to be there to see how funny it was.

Later, I went off with my friend Ken to transfer his Cadillac while his Rolls Royce is in the garage. He took me to lunch at Whiteway where he related a Christmas story he's read recently; the story disappointed him because, even though it was written by a bishop, it contains no Christian element. Ken expected more from a bishop.

I only wrote a few lines in my next book Tuesday.

Wednesday, my friend Barbara took me to breakfast at Dave's. She's just returned from a trip to visit some Jewish/Christian friends up north. While she was there their house caught fire (unattended candles) and was saved from more extensive damage by the heroic actions of the family dog and Daniel, an 11-year-old son.

Barbara and I discussed weaknesses in my writing. I feel my work lacks power and contains only the most feeble witness for Christ; she reminded me that God's strength is made perfect in weakness and that any good my writing does for readers must be through Christ's power, not my own wittiness or ability.

Donald and a friend came over for lunch and I cooked them ramen noodles; Donald needed to see me about a bank transfer of funds to a needy person. While here, he upgraded my computer to a faster DSL.

His friend tells me that her teenaged daughter is reading a copy of *Glog* with evident enjoyment. That really pleases me.

As Donald left the driveway, Ginny pulled in. She'd come from the doctor's office where she'd been fitted for those hearing aids; she should actually get them in a couple of weeks.

Elizabeth Taylor wears earrings that cost less than Ginny's hearing aids!

Since overnight Hurricane Wilma strengthened from a tropical storm to a category five hurricane and is now the most powerful Atlantic storm on record, and since the projected landfall is in south Florida at the moment, Ginny & I began our usual hurricane drill. Although current projections put Jacksonville on the fringes, we go through the drill anyhow. The last couple

of hurricane “fringes” have left us soggy, branch-covered and without electricity for weeks, so we prepare as though we’d be in the eyewall.

Not scared, just prudent.

We refilled her prescriptions for diabetes medicines; gassed up the car; surveyed our hurricane supplies; made sure we have mosquito repellent etc.; backed up computer files; uploaded my current book projects to an out-of-state server; washed all the laundry; and so forth.

We decided to lay in a few groceries to restock our normal supplies before the stores get too crowded. HA!

As we withdrew grocery money from the ATM, a man in a car wheeled into the bank parking lot and braked beside us. Immediately my hackles arose to Defcon Three Mode— but there was no cause for alarm.

Although I did not recognize the man, it turned out that back in the late ’70 or early 80’s I’d written up some historical research for his brother and he recognized me as the writer who’d done the job. He asked me if I were still writing and when I told him about *Glog* and mentioned it was a book about a dinosaur, he became very animated and asked me how to order the book because his teen-age daughter is crazy about dinosaurs and he wants to buy a copy of *Glog* for her Christmas!

That really pleases me.

Hardly a cart to be found at the grocery store; apparently, we were not the only ones restocking hurricane supplies.

In the parking lot, I did help a lady start her broken-down car (actually I watched while someone who knew what he was doing started her car but I gave moral support) and I recovered a lost walking cane for an old crippled lady. And Ginny listened at length to the troubles of a guy confined to a wheelchair – but eventually we got our own shopping done and came home to follow the first rule of hurricane preparation:

First, Eat Up All The Ice Cream!

Chocolate.

We feel we deserved it.

In reply to 6 Comments, I said, All of your comments mean a lot to me. Sometimes I feel as though I'm typing on air, but your comments make me think someone is actually interested in what I have to say.

Ginny will not actually get the hearing aids for a couple of weeks; she thinks the brand name is Axion or something like that (she didn't hear what the doctor called them)

Friday, October 21, 2005

Inspired Living In A Bathrobe

I didn't even get dressed for most of the day Thursday; I hung around in my bathrobe reading Stephen King's short story collection *Everything's Eventual* while waiting for the UPS man to show up with a package.

Yes, I had all sorts of duties to attend to, but I just didn't have the spirit or energy to do any of it.

After any victory I feel letdown. I expected to spring back with renewed energy within a week of getting *Glog* finally published, but instead I feel too sluggish to ever want to write another word.

You know the feeling?

It's sort of like the way I feel on Christmas night; the presents have been opened, the feast celebrated, the guests have left, the football games have been won or lost, the worst of the debris picked up – then you crash.

That's me and writing.

I know what my next project is, but my exhilaration is drained and I'm reluctant to touch it.

Last week my eldest daughter offered to carpet our bedroom with some brand new carpet left over from her new home. The carpet in our bedroom has been there for over ten years and shows a bit of wear... but the thought of disrupting our life and moving furniture and extensive cleaning dismayed us. Ginny and I turned down Jennifer's offer.

The old carpet's not going anywhere, neither are we.

Thursday afternoon a neighbor called asking me to look at a workbench he is taking out because of extensive renovations to his house. I can have it if I want. It is a beautiful, sturdy, solid workbench... but the thought of all the labor I'd have to do to clear an area and transfer it to our house daunts me.

I feel too bone weary and depleted to want to improve our own home.

I feel as though I've been whipping a dead horse to make him trot a few more miles.

Hey, I've reached a point where Stephen King stories cheer me up.

What I need to do is get off my lazy ass, get dressed, and get to work.

Over the years I've found the best help in my own Christian life is to learn about the lives of other Christians in their struggles.

About 15 years ago InterVarsity Press published one of my books which they titled *People Whose Faith Got Them Into Trouble*. Sales proved less than spectacular and the English language edition soon went out of print and the rights reverted to me— although the book was picked up and translated

by foreign publishers and I think it is still available in German, Afrikaans and Philippine editions.

Over the years I've added several chapters on people who inspire me. The new chapters just about double the size of the book So that is my next writing project, i.e. to restructure those biographical profiles and re-issue the book under my own title, *Strangers On The Earth*.

That's what I'm working on (or should be) at the moment.

The title comes from a phrase in the New Testament Letter to the Hebrews, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off ... They were pilgrims and strangers on the earth."

One of the women profiled in the book is [Madam Jeanne Guyon](#), a lady who lived in the time of King Louis XIV, one of the most corrupt courts ever in Europe. I view this lady with awe. If anybody anywhere ever earned the right to lounge around in a bathrobe all day and mope, it was her.

But she didn't.

Her life inspires me to wrestle on in faith, to claim victory in Jesus, to win the lost, to challenge the devil in his lair — Or at least to go ahead and get dressed for today.

Some days, even when you feel inspired, getting dressed is all you can manage.

Saturday, October 22, 2005

Of the making of many books, there is no end...

Friday's mail brought me an astounding offer from a book promoter.

In the morning I'd mowed grass, cleaned the pool filter and helped my friend pick up his Rolls Royce from the garage. I drove his Cadillac which is always a nerve wracking experience for me because he keeps both cars in mint condition and I dread the possibility of getting a scratch on one.

But back home I opened the mail to find that a book promoter claimed to have read my work and wants to market it. Wow.

He promised to schedule me for a tv talk show. He promised to air taped interviews with me on two radio shows. He promised to contact every major retail book store telling them about my work. He promised to mail copies of my books to major daily newspapers for reviewers to see. He promised to....

All I'd have to do is pay him \$7,500.00 for each book I want to market.

Since I have five books now in circulation I could market them all by paying him only \$37,500.00.

What a bargain!

Long ago I learned of the existence of an entire industry which preys on would-be-writers. Some offer to polish your work. Some offer to critique your manuscripts. Some offer to edit; some to promote. Some call themselves agents who will represent your work for a fee.

They all want money from you.

A pox on all their houses.

If you chose to write as a professional, publishing companies pay you; if you write say a poem or a family memoir meant to be read only by your mother or your aunt, then maybe for your self-satisfaction, you might pay a printer. But for a young writer, the waters are full of sharks whose only interest is to get your money before you sink.

Once years ago, this “person” who owned a publishing company asked me to evaluate the manuscript of a historical novel set in an age I’m familiar with. Of course, I took advantage by asking him in return to read the manuscript of my book *The Lazarus Projects*.

The gentleman came to me crying. Yes, tears ran down his face. He claimed to have been touched by my account of the crucifixion in the book. He said he wanted to publish *Lazarus*. He set up an interview with his editor-in-chief. The three of us sat down and talked about the book.

They talked with burning enthusiasm about press runs, size, color process, cover art, distribution packages, remainders, etc. They wanted me to go to a national book sellers’ convention in Texas for a weekend to man a booth promoting their company’s products. They even offered to give me a new blazer to wear while in the booth shilling their products.

Then I mentioned money.

Back pedal!

They wanted me to do this for “experience.”

No advance. No royalties. No money.

I’d been writing for over ten years at the time and getting paid, not much, but paid for my work. I had all the experience I wanted, thank you.

A week or so later, that editor-in-chief wrote me a nasty letter saying *The Lazarus Projects* was such garbage that his company would not consider publishing it, however, if I wanted money, they had a job opening for a truck driver delivering their paper products to book stores. Would I be interested?

If such shenanigans were a once in a lifetime experience, I’d be able to write it off as “experience” indeed. But in the course of years I’ve run into such wonderful opportunities for writers again and again.

Writers, beware. An entire industry is based solely on ripping you off.

On a lighter note:

Ginny and I discovered a new danger from second-hand smoke.

After breakfast at a favorite restaurant this morning, we sat outside on a bench beside the parking lot smoking. A young family came out of the restaurant to get in their minivan.

A kid, I suppose he was four or five, saw me lighting my pipe. Obviously he'd never seen a man with a pipe before. I fascinated him. He could not take his eyes off me as he walked – BOING! – right into the side of the minivan. He bounced back and fell flat on his tail spilling his carry-out coke all down his front.

Simultaneously, Ginny and I both said, “The Surgeon General warns...” and broke out laughing.

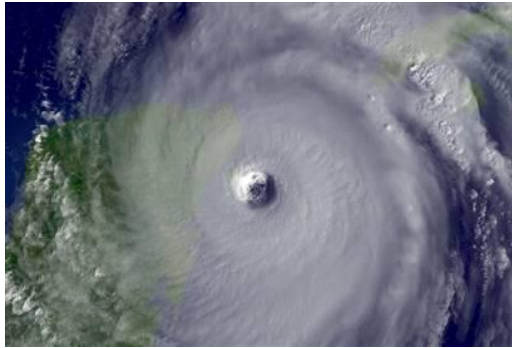
Oh, what about the promoter's offer?

Unfortunately Ginny shredded it. I forget which famous writer it was, but he replied to a critic's letter, as best I can remember, with this note:

“I sit reading your letter in the smallest room in my house. Your missive is unsettling, but soon I will put it behind me.”

Sunday, October 23, 2005

Angel Hairs



Satellite photo of Hurricane Wilma

He's snickering at me.

That roly-poly little man wearing a white apron and a tall puffy cook's hat stands in our kitchen snickering at me.

As tv news issues dire warnings about Hurricane Wilma approaching the Florida coast, Ginny and I continue our meager preparations. Although the storm path is projected to only brush Jacksonville, past experience with these things leads us to suspect we'll get some downed tree limbs and have to live without electricity for several days.

No, we don't board up our windows with plywood; I just don't have the strength to lift sheets of plywood so we take our chances there.



But this is a nervous time which calls for comfort food and one of Ginny's favorite comfort foods is spaghetti. She asked me to make a big batch so we can eat on it throughout the stormy days ahead.

He's snickering at me.

I think I'm a good cook, but my family claims I have but a single recipe: Take What You've Got And Mix It Together.

For my spaghetti, I crumble a couple of Vidalia Onion Burgers into a pot and fry in olive oil. I slice the ends off a couple of Italian sausage, peel off the skin and crumble the meat in with the burgers.

The peeled sausage skins look just like used... Well, never mind.

He's snickering at me.

I chip up a couple of onions and celery stalks to add to the frying meat along with a couple of cans of mushroom caps and stems. I add a can of diced tomatoes with basil and some Ragu sauce. I sprinkle the lot with garlic salt, black pepper and chili powder.

Then comes the tricky part.

While my sauce simmers, I boil water and force noodles to drown in it.

I bought my own spaghetti noodles at the grocery store. (Here's an odd aside, for some strange reason, Publix does not stock grits on the pasta aisle; I don't understand that.) Anyhow, as I surveyed the pasta shelves I spotted something called Angel Hair Spaghetti. I read the box.

We religious fanatics are suckers to buy any product with the words "Angel" or "Elvis" on the package. So I bought the angel hair spaghetti.

That little man is still snickering at me.

When I tried to break this angel hair stuff into manageable lengths, it snapped and crackled and popped and shot all over the stove, the counter, the floor and me. It splashed boiling water up onto my hands and arms.

I said some words not related to angels at all.

What the spaghetti box does **not** tell you is exactly where on an angel's anatomy these hairs were plucked from.

I didn't know angels had hair there.

This stuff burned the crap out of me! All the way to my elbows.

And Chief Boyardee just stands there snickering in that superior way of his....And our kitchen looks as though a hurricane had already hit.

Not to be too melodramatic but on a more serious note, some great preacher of a former generation, I think it may have been John Donne, said that a Christian should always speak as a dying man to dying men.

Having a frivolous mind, I seldom speak seriously, but with a whirlwind bearing down, perhaps I should say what's really most important to me:

Jesus Christ is worthy.

He came into his world to save us from whatever's got us licked.

We tortured him to death for his trouble, but death could not hold the Prince of Life. He rose from the grave and ever lives in glory.

He has prepared a place for us if we chose to go there with Him.

He is worthy of every ounce of our strength and time and talent and mind and energy and resources – without exception.

For some reason within himself, He enjoys us. He wishes us well and wants to see us live in joy. He takes us from where we are at this moment.

There's not a mean bone in his body.

He will judge us, but he never snickers at us no matter how we screw up.

There is hope. No matter what we've done, no matter what's been done to us, there is hope in Jesus.

That's the most important thing I have to say in case our electricity goes out and I can't post again for a while.

Occasionally during our devotional time after supper, Ginny reads a prayer I like. It says, "Protect us, O Lord, from the dangers of this night — and from the fear of them — through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen."

Monday, October 24, 2005

When You Sleep Thru A Storm...

Being the conscientious person that she is, Ginny drove through wind and rain to work this morning; being the conscientious person that I am, I went back to bed and slept till 3 this afternoon.

It was a rainy day but if we did not own a tv, here in Jacksonville we would never have known there was a Hurricane Wilma.

Tuesday, October 25, 2005

Evolution, Intelligent Design, and Reality

You'd think with all the day sleep I had Monday that I'd have been awake all night, but before the first quarter of the Falcon/Jets game was over I dozed off and slept straight through the night. Must have been tired.

I've been thinking recently about controversies in different school systems over teaching kids about evolution and intelligent design. The news on tv says a lot of people feel strongly about this.

I do too because the other day I bought a hamburger.

As I paid for my food I looked at the cash register. There were no numbers on the keys. Instead, little icons picturing a fish, a burger, a milk shake, a box of fries, etc. were printed on the keys. The manager said that the kids she had to hire did not know how to punch in complicated things like 69 cents, so the company bought these keyboards with pictures of the food items which figured up the prices.

How can kids get far enough along in school without knowing how to make change for a dollar?

Why would school systems want to teach speculative, nonessential subjects while neglecting basic education? Why would teaching kids theory — any theory — of where they came from be of more importance than teaching them how to get where they want to go in life?

Once a kid learns how to read, then he can be taught peripheral subjects, but until he is able to read either Genesis or Darwin himself, then either theory of origin is a non essential and should be tabled.

The topics are inappropriate in the curriculum.

Education should focus on what is rather than on what might have been.

Let the kids dissect a cat to learn about the respiratory system, circulatory system digestive system, nervous system, reproductive system, lymphatic system, etc. There is no need to speculate on how all cats are descended from skunks (as is my personal belief).

Until the burger place can put real numbers back on the cash register keys, schools should stick to reality instead of speculation.

Anything less cheats the kids.

Unless something significant happens in my life today to blog about, tomorrow I think I'll write about how the churches are as bad as the schools in speculative teaching on nonessential matters.

Wednesday, October 26, 2005

Life On The Fringe

Tuesday, as I thought out loud about intelligent design and evolution I said, "Unless something significant happens in my life today to blog about, tomorrow I think I'll write about how the churches are as bad as the schools in speculative teaching on nonessential matters."

Well, significant things did happen yesterday as I had contact with nine live humans, including our children, as well as phone calls, and e-mails.

However my life yesterday gave little evidence of intelligence and none of design.

I live like a Christian pin in the bowling alley of life.

And yesterday was typical. Not unusual. I've lived like this for years.

My big problem as a Christian is not believing doctrines, but living life.

These two elements seldom mesh.

When Ginny & I were first married, for several years we drove an over the road tractor trailer rig all over the United States. Each Sunday we attended a different church in a different city. One thing determined our choice of which church to attend – the size of the parking lot.

So we were exposed to many different styles of worship and emphasizes in teaching. It seemed to me that most churches have little to do with God and virtually nothing to do with me.

After settling here in Jacksonville, until recently, we attended the same church for 27 years. But we were active in a number of interdenominational and ecumenical endeavors as well.

One thing strikes me from these experiences: we Christians dwell on peripheral issues and neglect our own basics.

For instance, in a liberal church I heard an impassioned sermon on how we ought to write our congressman about pending oil depletion allowance legislation. In a conservative church the pastor railed against women wearing slacks because he said the Bible forbids women dressing in men's clothing.

Here's an odd aside:

Once I chanced to be at church on a weeknight while an AIDS support group from outside the church was meeting. Their scheduled speaker canceled and the group leader asked me to present a devotional message.

Having less than ten minutes warning, I repeated a Bible lesson I'd taught to an adult class the Sunday before. A gorgeous young woman— lets call her Betty— came up to me afterwards saying that my talk helped her and tell me about her failing T-cell count. I invited her to the regular adult class.

The following Sunday a number of strangers showed up in the class and afterwards a handsome young man introduced himself to me.

It was Betty!

I welcomed him/her and said, "I don't know quite what to say; you're the first transvestite I've ever had in one of my classes."

"John," he said, "You mean that I'm the first one that you know about."

My teaching must not have helped because a few weeks later he killed himself.

Anyhow, neither oil depletion allowances nor slacks have much to do with Christianity. Yet we Christians continue to emphasize such peripheral matters – matters which demand no commitment on our part.

Some Christians talk as though a Seven Day Creation is the very bedrock of our faith. But knowing the details of creation requires no commitment on my part.

Some Christians just about wet their pews when talking about the end of the world. Believing this or that about a Pre-Millennial or Post Millennial Second Advent again requires no commitment from me.

What am I supposed to do about the beginning or the end of the world?

Exciting stuff to speculate about, but nothing I can do about either one.

Every once in a while a movie comes to Jacksonville and church people march with placards protesting, thus drawing tv cameras and newspaper reporters and giving the film free advertising.

Abortion protests. Rock concerts. Marches for Jesus. In God We Trust on money. Prayer at high school graduation. Chain letter e-mails that promises blessing if you forward within 15 minutes. Church bake sales. Buying carpet for the sanctuary – All of these quasi-religious activities have one thing in common: They push the rock bottom central teaching of Christianity into the background to be neglected and ignored.

The devil loves for us to get involved in peripheral, non-essential causes. And we ourselves loved to get involved in great causes. It make us feel a part of things, with it, insiders. Besides, going on a protest in the name of faith is so much easier and more exciting than cooking supper for a grumpy husband, or helping the kids with homework, or listening to that mother-in-law criticize , or caring for Daddy's Alzheimer's.

So we gleefully march in marches, or write books, or do anything and everything to avoid the central basic factor in Christianity:

Jesus rose or rotted.

That's the one fundamental.

If he died and rotted in the dirt then what He said or did has no more weight than the words and actions of Jesse James. Jesus is just another dead guy. The world's full of 'em. You can't walk anywhere without kicking up their dust.

If he rotted then that stuff he taught — nice as it is — just doesn't matter.

But, if Jesus Christ walked out of that tomb after we tortured him to death, if he walked out under his own steam, then he is declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead — and what he taught really does matter.

Why?

Because we are also headed toward a tomb.

Our own.

If He is indeed the Son of God, the Alpha and Omega, the Prince of Life, the Bright and Morning Star, The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Almighty God, then nothing else in my life counts other than my relationship with Him.

And that means commitment.

Life commitment.

If he's dead, he's dead; if he's living, he's Lord.

But the allure of lesser things attracts me. My books. My slippers. My pipe. My plans.

Surely Jesus would be satisfied if I spend my time on the fringe of faith, not outside all together but not wholly involved either. Surely there's some way to show I'm a Christian without being fanatical about it.

Ah, here's just the thing...

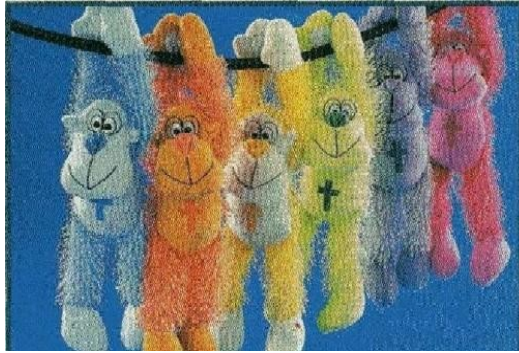
As I started writing this posting this morning, a friend dropped by to show me a catalogue of religious paraphernalia. The cover says these items promote "a celebration of faith." I can order an expression of my Christian faith — and it won't cost me a penny more than \$14.95.

Much better than a life commitment.

It epitomizes what pure religion and undefiled is all about.

If I have one of these everybody will know for sure that I'm a Christian.

It's called "a long-armed religious gorilla." It's got a cross and everything. Here's a picture:



I think the lime green one looks holier than the purple one, don't you? Yes indeed, when it comes to religion, we need to stick to what's important.

Friday, October 28, 2005

Four Treats Just For Pleasure

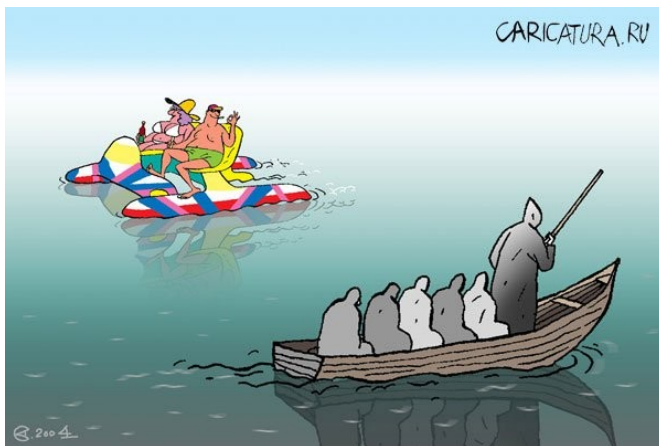
Well, my whole posting this morning hinged on three photos — but blogger refuses to upload any of them.

I've been trying since 4 a.m., but the system just keeps giving me error messages, and the "help" section doesn't tell me how to fix whatever is wrong.

Sorry. I'll try again later today or tomorrow.

GOT IT NOW(at 1:20 p.m.), Thanks to Donald:

*1. Here is the funniest cartoon I've seen in ages. It comes from Fuzzy Squid's website at <http://fuzzysquid.com/main.html>. Is another Gary Larson in the wings?



*2. Another great fun thing can be found through Heather's Halloween blog at <http://epnurse.blogspot.com/> . She lets you carve your own pumpkin. Here's one I did:

Ok, Even with Donald's help I can't transfer my pumpkin pix — but I can tell you that when Michael Angelo sees my sculpture, the poor fellow will weep with envy... or something.

*3. Last week Donald set up this next fun thing. It's a dream log where you can record your dreams and have other people comment. Or you can read their dreams and make your own comments. This is just for fun and it can be found at <http://www.dreamlibrary.org/> I find it hard to navigate (remember, they wrote the Dummy books with me in mind) but normal people and more computer literate folks should have no trouble.

*4. The other day I met a lady who just bought a copy of my dinosaur novel, *Glog* – only she pronounced it LOG!

It seems that she had never heard of an illuminated manuscript so she did not recognize that the initial G was a letter of the alphabet.

This dismays me because many scenes in the novel revolve around Glog's work illuminating a Bible manuscript as he ponders the purpose of his existence and the question of intelligent design in the universe and in his own adventures. But this reader had no idea of what an illuminated manuscript even looks like.

Honest, it just never occurred to me that readers would not realize what I was talking about. But I suppose it's like computer geeks expecting me to know what a Linux cluster does. Or an auto mechanic thinking I'd know where the voltage regulator is under my hood. Or a seamstress telling me to nit one, pearl two. We can't expect other people to have the same background we bring to any given subject.

Back when I was young, I worked for about ten years at the Library Of Congress. There were over 3,500 employees there at the time. Occasionally I was assigned work in the rare book room and I actually got to handle some of the illuminated manuscripts.

In fact I once received a letter of commendation for finding and killing some bugs in one volume the library's Guttenberg Bible (It was printed in three volumes). I don't know enough Latin to read either illuminated manuscripts or a Guttenberg Bible; all I can tell you about them is that those suckers are unbelievably heavy!

But they are also beautiful.

I find them so exquisitely beautiful that they bring tears to my eyes.

So, just for the pure pleasure of seeing them, here are a three links where you can enjoy authentic illuminated manuscripts and incunabula for yourself:

<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/sewmss/wmss/medieval/browse.htm>

<http://www.kb.nl/kb/manuscripts/index.html>

<http://www.drgenescott.com/stns.htm>



Sunday, October 30, 2005

We Get Ready For Halloween



After a leisurely two hour breakfast at Dave's, Ginny & I put up our Halloween display. Usually we'd have had it up more in advance, but the rain from Hurricane Wilma discouraged us from setting up last week. That little elf greets people at the foot of our drive and there are a few other ornaments but here's a photo of how we set it up the main display, I'm especially proud of the bromeliad pods in the valley (they were my idea):



I've been thinking about the 23rd Psalm as we put together the display. Along with the Lord's Prayer and Christmas readings, Psalm 23 is perhaps the one passage most familiar to people. "The Lord is my shepherd..." has been read at every funeral I've ever attended because the words offer such comfort "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me..."

The Psalmist acknowledges that bad things do really happen: "Yes, when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Bad things happen to us because this is life that we're living— life in a twisted, fallen world. Bad things happen in the natural course of life. We are indeed few of days and full of troubles.

In his first letter, Peter said, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you... knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world."

Yes, some bad things are just the common lot of mankind everywhere.

Death happens. Disease happens. Divorce happens. Defects happen. Disaster happens. To everybody, everywhere, at some time or another.

That means we're alive.

We are moving through bad things.

Yet the Psalmist distinguishes between bad and evil. Evil, I think, being the deliberate chosen actions of wicked creatures either physical or spiritual. Being finite they can only do us limited, finite, damage because the Lord walks with us – if we chose to let Him. Jesus once said, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

So death is as bad as it can get — but it is limited.

Whereas life in His presence is unlimited, a banquet table prepared, a rod, a staff, an overflowing cup, a place to dwell , goodness and mercy – forever.

Will the kids who come to our house for candy think about all this stuff.

Bull!

Not a chance.

They come for the goodie bags. We’re trying not to disappoint them. Here’s a photo of the typical loot:



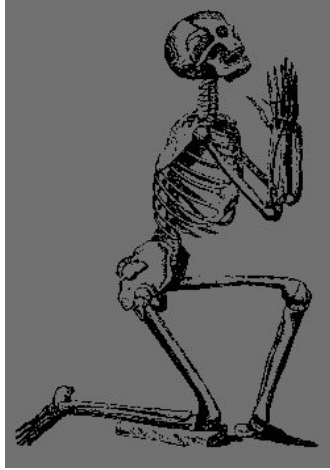
Ginny and I stuffed Ziploc bags full of goodies for the trick-or-treaters as we watched the Florida/Georgia game on tv.

Gators won.

Bulldogs lost.

God’s in His Heaven and all’s right with the world.

Monday, October 31, 2005
A Halloween Bedtime Story



**Yes, even when I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
because You, Lord, are with me.**

For a Halloween treat, here's [Bad Children/Good Children](#), a short story I wrote (left-hand column, cowart.info). You may enjoy reading this bedtime tale to your family tonight. I hope you enjoy the evening.

Tuesday, November 01, 2005
Halloween Was Slower Than Expected

Last night fewer children showed up at our door for Halloween treats than ever before. I suppose Monday's being a school night may have something to do with it, or maybe it's just the general graying of our neighborhood. Or perhaps parents are fearful of letting kids go out; we do have one registered sexual predator living on our block.

Wednesday, November 02, 2005
The Way James Bond and I Spend Most Days

One trouble with keeping a daily journal or posting on a blog every day is that during most of my days nothing much happens.

I sit at my computer making text corrections which generate other corrections to be made. Yet 87 readers checked into this blog yesterday and I feel that I let you down if I don't have something exciting to say.

But I don't.

But what the heck. Even James Bond doesn't save the world every day; he washes his socks every once in a while.

So here's what I've been up to:

Enjoyed breakfast at Dave's and a long conversation with my friend Wes then I resumed work on the *Strangers* manuscript.

I hope, God willing, to have this one ready to publish before Ginny and I leave on vacation, but I doubt that I'm going to make that goal. A lot of the text has been previously published and even translated into several other languages so the work should go quickly. However, my computer ineptitude makes the work sluggish. Again, I battle headers, footers, gutters and all those details I normally don't even think of while writing.

This sort of work represents a new discipline and I feel clumsy doing it. I think that learning new skills stretches my mind – too much. Ruts are so much more comfortable.

A week or ten days ago, while moving some yard stuff, I dropped a board on my foot. A dumb thing to do. This hurt a bit at the time, but has not bothered me until Monday when my toes began to turn black. I'd almost forgotten about it. But yesterday the pain flared up. Puzzling. Why would the thing wait a week to really start hurting? Makes no sense.

In other family news: Monday, Ginny was interviewed for a promotion she applied for; we'll see what happens there. And our librarian daughter is now regularly posting on her own blog at <http://www.eveyq.blogspot.com/> I really enjoy her postings, but then I would. I'm her dad.

How come James Bond never drops a board on his foot?

Thursday, November 03, 2005

Why Did This Happen To Me?

Remember how in Fredric Forsyth's action thriller *Day Of The Jackal* the assassin smuggled the rifle close to French President Charles deGaulle? Well, I've got me a pair of those... not a sniper rifle, but the camouflage device.

During my scheduled doctor's appointment Wednesday, after we'd talked about important things, I decided to mention the board I dropped on my foot last week. The doctor had me remove my shoe. He has ordered that I keep all weight off my foot and do nothing for at least a week before seeing him again because he wants to consult a specialist over my x-rays. A cast or foot surgery may lie in my near future. The doctor wants me to use either crutches or a wheelchair until our next appointment.

Seems that I cracked a metatarsal lengthways.

This is a pain in the ass... and the foot.

I have other plans!

Being a person who looks for spiritual realities in everyday life I'm questioning why God would let such an awful thing happen to me?

Doesn't He know that I'm one of the good guys?

Apparently not.

When a bad thing happens to me – like cracking a bone in my own stupid foot, for instance – I ponder five possible reasons it may have happened:

* 1. This happened to me because there is something God wants me to do — Like maybe He’s enforcing that I sit at my computer and finish rewriting *Strangers* instead of gallivanting about (which is how I busted my foot).

* 2. This happened because there is something God wants me to avoid — Like for instance, Ginny & I planned a trip to celebrate our 38th anniversary next week, but if I can’t drive, then we may avoid killing someone on the road or being mangled in an accident ourselves. So perhaps God is using this bad thing to save me from a worse thing.

* 3. This happened to me as the natural consequence of my doing something stupid— Like trying to carry four boards instead of one because I didn’t want the guys I was working with to think I’m a wimp so one of the boards slipped from my arms and whacked my own foot. Jesus saves us from our sin, not our stupidity.

* 4. This happened to me, not because of God, but because of physics and physiology— Like, put your foot on a concrete slab, raise a ?? pound board four feet in the air above your toe, and let it go. Board, concrete and foot all obey the laws of physics and physiology which God instituted at the foundation of creation. The board hurt my foot because I live in a created world where it’s my responsibility to move my foot.

* 5. Maybe this happened to me because God is punishing me for something. Now that could be. Heaven knows over the years (Heck, this past week) I’ve done enough stuff deserving of punishment. But I find it hard to imagine God resorting to a sort of celestial hot foot to put me in line; actions do have consequences — but I just don’t see Him as that sort of person.

He looks at my aching foot and feels my pain.

He feels every pain we ever suffer.

He knows what it is to hurt.

He know how much an injured foot can hurt.

After all, both of His were nailed down.

His hands too.

And while my injury may be attributed to any (or all) of the five reasons I’ve mentioned above --numbers three and four seem especially prominent — the pain Jesus suffered when he spread out his hands on the hard wood of the cross came about because of only one reason...

What do you suppose that reason was?

You're right!

You're absolutely right.

Friday, November 04, 2005

The Pattern Of My Life

All day Thursday I lounged in my chair reading murder mysteries, napping and keeping my busted foot elevated. Looks as though this will be the pattern of my life for another week or so.

Monday, November 07, 2005

I've Got A Secret

Medical Update: Well, doctor #2 says my foot is not as bad as doctor #1 said it was. Hurts just the same and the treatment is just the same whichever doctor is right. But I'm on the mend, more or less.

Post Secrets is updated every Sunday, so every Monday I check out the Post Secrets website at <http://postsecret.blogspot.com/>.

On that site a gentleman in Maryland displays postcards which folks mail to him as they anonymously reveal some secret they've been keeping.

Some secrets are heart wrenching. Some are hilarious. All are fascinating.

Every time I look at these secrets they remind me of how I goof over the three things Jesus said we should all keep secret.

"When you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

I suspect Jesus wants us to give in secret for two reasons. First, to save us from embarrassment. If other people really knew how little I give, I'd be ashamed. The pittance I give doesn't amount to beans.

Saw a cartoon once of a guy talking with his pastor. Guy says, "I'm concerned about world hunger, about AIDS in Africa, about the homeless, about cancer victims and the plight of unwed mothers. I want to volunteer my help to relieve suffering, aid the needy, and spread the Gospel of light in the world. I'm free to volunteer between 2 and 4 p.m. every other Thursday."

I identify with the cartoon guy.

I piddle about giving a buck or an hour here and there, now and then, when it strikes my fancy. I slip God a little pocket change ... And I feel proud of myself for these pitiful acts of charity.

For Heaven's sake! I've even written [magazine articles](#) about my own generosity.

But Jesus said we should keep our giving secret... it is really nothing to brag about.

I think the second reason Jesus said to keep our giving a secret is to emphasize that our faith is strictly between us and God. The Lord is real. Christianity is real. If I really have faith in Him, then there is no room or need for showboating. If I'm convinced that my relationship with God is real, valid, then there's no reason to show it off to anybody else.

Dose that mean hiding my light under a basket?

No. People in darkness will see a light if there really is a light to be seen, and they can tell the difference between a lighthouse and a glowworm.

Jesus also said, *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray... to be seen of men. ... When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

We are to give in secret and to pray in secret.

Why?

Those of us who are even remotely religious face a temptation to show off our religion. We support a whole bumper sticker industry! We want folks to know we are special... but when I boast of my own piety, I'm simply using Jesus to enhance my own reputation.

That's not honest.

It's dumb.

Again, if folks knew how little I actually pray, I'd be ashamed of my lukewarm attitude toward God Almighty.

And again, if I really believe in the Unseen God, I don't cheapen Him by displaying my own piety. It's wise to pray in secret and to avoid public prayer. Want to pray? Go in the men's room and lock yourself in a stall... Er, I don't recommend kneeling to pray in that environment, sitting is ok.

But isn't praying in the bathroom irreverent?

Why should it be?

Hasn't God ever caught us with our pants down before?

Jesus said to keep my prayers secret.

Even if I boast to some poor slob, "I'll pray for you", the implication is that I'm above him in my own imagined spiritual hierarchy. The superior prays for the inferior. I've got this special in with God and my prayers count more than yours. Nayah. Nayah. Nayah.

But, if I really believe God hears my prayers, then I don't need to make my prayers obvious to anybody else; God himself will make His answers to prayer evident...

Or don't we believe that?

So, what do I do about praying in secret myself?

I believe in secret prayer so much that I wrote a book about it! A book that's been translated into several languages and spread all over the world. No secret prayer for me.

No wonder [I'm confused about prayer!](#)

So, if Jesus said I should keep secret my giving and my praying, and instead, I've written whole books and articles on these very subjects, Where does that leave me?

Let's not go there...OK?

Here's another thing Jesus said to keep secret:

"When you fast, do not look somber... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

To fast means to go without food in order to devote yourself to prayer, service or something else more important than eating.

When we do this, we should fast so that it will not be obvious to men...

Along with giving and praying, it should be kept secret.

I'm home free here!

I'm a winner on this one.

Look at a photo of me anywhere on my website or this blog.

Look at that photo close.

Go ahead, guess my weight.

Now, would anybody anywhere ever ever ever suspect how often I go without food?

This one secret thing out of the three that I've got down pat!

Tuesday, November 08, 2005

It Only Hurts When I Blog

Recently I've gotten virtually nothing done at my computer.

I need to keep my busted foot elevated. But the configuration of my desk, computer and chair forces me to work with my feet on the floor. So after just a short time spent typing, my foot begins to first tingle then ache. I can only stand to be at the computer for brief stretches... Besides that, I have little to say today.

I spend all my time trying to get comfortable. But that's not easy. Heck, last night I had a hard time even watching football from my recliner.

Just before the game, Ginny discovered a nice surprise when she clicked onto our daughter [Eve's blog](#); Ginny found her own picture when she followed Eve's link to the American Diabetes Association site. Eve is in one of those walk things and has dedicated her mileage to Ginny.

Me, I ain't walkin' no place till my foot gets better.

Wednesday, November 09, 2005

Ken & Barbie & Mary Magdalene



I got an e-mail from a stranger asking me to send \$200,000.00 to a poor widow in Appalachia.

I didn't do it.

Yesterday, my friend Ken discovered that Barbie scammed him out of several thousand dollars.

Earlier this week a woman in her 20s at Ginny's office died abruptly; .

Last night Ginny knelt before me and soothed some moisturizing lotion onto my stinging feet.

These four things caused me to think about one of the most interesting women in the Bible, Mary Magdalene.

For years Ken, a generous young Christian gentleman, tried to help Barbie over a rough patch in her life. A long rough patch.

He's "loaned" her thousands of dollars but now finds she has no intention of paying the money back as she promised.

He feels let down.

While trying to exercise Christian charity, he feels he's been played for a sucker.

I told him that it is better to be conned by a scam artist than to let one genuine needy person go hungry. It's God's money and He can sort it out.

Ken and I talked for a long time about how we can best give to the poor and naturally the conversation turned to Mary Magdalene.

When the prostitute washed the feet of Jesus and anointed him with spikenard, one of the disciples objected saying that the lotion could be sold for \$300 and the money used to help the poor.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone... you have the poor with you all the time and whenever you want to, you can do them good."

Then He gave this woman the highest sort of commendation saying, "She hath done what she could."

This is told in Matthew, chapter 26; Mark, 14; Luke, 22; and John 13. The anointing of Jesus is one of the few incidents recorded in all four gospels.

Some Bible scholars question whether the lady's name was actually Mary Magdalene; they question how the ointment could be both in an alabaster box and in a flask. Obviously these guys aren't married. Ever seen Ginny's cosmetics on her side of the dresser?

Anyhow, here's my own paraphrase of the words of Jesus when he spoke about this woman:

Throughout the world, in every age, in every place, anywhere my story is told, her story will be told also. That's her memorial.

Her act of love in washing His feet, anointing him with "an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious", and drying his feet with her long hair strike a cord in our hearts. He said that she had done this aforehand to anoint his body for burial.

Yes, He knew full well that he faced crucifixion and burial.

The torture came as no surprise to Him.

Yet, He went ahead... for us.

And after we nailed Him down. After we stood the cross in its socket. After we mocked. After we stuck His dead body in a hole in the ground. After three days, the very first person to see Him after He shook off death and walked out of the grave... that person was Mary Magdalene.

There's a tendency to think of Jesus as a local boy who made good as far as death is concerned.

That's not what the Scripture says.

He is declared to be the Son of God, the Prince of Life by His resurrection from death. He constantly said that He had deliberately come into this world to seek and to save the lost, to destroy the works of the devil, to give us abundant life, to forgive sin, to die and to take up His own life again...

Doesn't sound as though He was from around here, does it?

I sometimes have a tendency to think that helping the poor is the most important religious thing we can do.

Not necessarily.

Giving a few bucks to the poor makes me feel important; big daddy feeding the big-eyed starving kid with the begging bowl. But Jesus said the poor are always with us and we can do good to them whenever we will. So paternalistic motives and nonsense aside, we should do it, but that is not the main thing.

Giving to the poor is such a tangible thing. I can see results; I can feel peeved when I don't see results.

But the worship of the Lord Christ is not tangible. Over the ages all over the world many great artists have chosen Mary Magdalene as their subject. A Google search turns up about 6,000 images from every age and every place throughout the world. Sometimes the artists portray her in her prostitute days, sometimes they show her washing the feet of Jesus, sometimes they paint her as running to hug the risen Christ when she recognizes Him – that sort of painting sometimes carries the Latin quote, *Noli Me Tangere* – Don't touch me or Don't cling to me.

God is spirit and we are to worship him in spirit and in truth.

While giving to the poor is important, the more important thing is that I try to recognize Him as who He is, to honor Him in the way I act, to try to appreciate what He does for me, to pay attention to what He said – to face reality.

And yes, I should give cash money to help the needy; and yes, sometimes I'll get conned out of that money. But if I am giving to God, using the poor as a channel of that giving, then it's His money.

And if my few coins happen to fall through the cracks, that's OK.

He can afford it.

Thursday, November 10, 2005

A Closed Door, An Open Door

Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" but fortunately Ginny & I have this spy-peek hole thingy so we can see who's out there. If it ain't the Lord Himself, we're not opening our door to anybody the next few days.

Once again Ginny did not get the promotion at work she applied for; the position went to a political appointee. In the past two years, they've appointed seven different bosses this way!

Each time, they ask Ginny to train the person they appointed over her.

Grumble. Grumble. Grumble — Not Ginny, me.

She's a Christian type who believes that God has placed her where she works and she does her job as service to Him. And while she seeks advancement, she's also content.

So she trains the new person as best she can.

Me, I wouldn't even tell the turkey how to find the bathroom.

However, on the good side: Ginny is taking the next few days off work so she can nurse me and rub that lotion on my feet (what a turn-on!) and cook my favorite foods, and cater to my every whim and fantasy.... Yes, I'm still enjoying ill health.

So for a week or so we've told the kids that we will not answer the door or the phone. We intend to hide from the world, get reacquainted, and recharge our batteries.

I am probably not going to post blog entries for a while either.

Depends on what bugs me and how bad.

On a different note, our librarian daughter is posting blog photos of her Roll Over And Read program (<http://www.eveyq.blogspot.com/>); that's where they bring dogs into the library and kids having trouble reading get to read to a trained service dog. The results astound as kids build self-esteem and reading skills by reading to a non-critical, adoring audience. I think that's the coolest thing.

Eve took us to dinner last night and she's tickled to be raising a bunch of money from sponsors of her walkathon for the American Diabetes Association. She claims that she's walking as a tribute to Ginny and that all the charity funds raised are dedicated to fighting the disease.

I tried to talk her into cutting out the middleman by giving the donations directly to Ginny but she insists that they go to the Diabetes Association.

Humph!

Just you look and see if we'll open our door to her!

Monday, November 21, 2005

Chugging Along With Joy



When Ginny & I saw this ancient train in Blounstown, we were first shocked — then broke out laughing.

According to the historic marker beside the relic, this train linked the town with the outside world carrying mail, passengers, lumber and staples before automobile travel became commonplace in the Florida panhandle. The M&B Railroad ran from 1909 to 1972. To us it looks like the sort of train Jessie James or tribes of Indians might have attacked.

The thing that shocked us and set us laughing is the realization that this train was still actually running when we got married in 1968!

Makes us feel antique.

Yes, we have now entered our 38th year of marriage and we're still in love and chugging along just fine.

For over a year we planned to observe this anniversary with a vacation trip to Port St. Joseph Peninsula State Park but until just 30 minutes or so before we actually left on the trip, we thought we might have to cancel, so we left in a state of mild confusion. Gallery (Right-hand column, cowart.info) has photos of [our trip](#) and the [cabin](#) we stayed in. Rather than try to catch up a day by day journal of the past ten days, here are a few highlights:

Dancing Naked In The Moonlight: We had the park pretty much to ourselves during our stay; I doubt if we saw ten other people including park rangers the whole time. The balmy weather allowed us to live in shirtsleeves during the day and the nights were just cool enough for a fire's glow in the evenings. The moon waxed full in a cloudless sky. Mars and Venus were fully visible and stars blanketed the night.

So one morning I packed a picnic breakfast and woke Ginny at 4 a.m. for a beach walk under the full moon. We crossed the dunes to the Gulf side of the peninsula, stripped off our clothes, and strolled naked in the moonlight. I splashed surf on her and we danced on the sand.

Personally I envisioned a scene out of *From Here To Eternity* in the breaking waves but sharp shells, sand, arthritis, and common sense (hers, not mine) prevailed— So we dressed and ate breakfast as the moon settled over the Gulf and the sun rose over the bay.

I did quote some poetry to her from Lord Byron:

She walks in beauty as the night
Of cloudless climes and stary skies
And all that's best of dark and light
Meet in her aspect and her eyes...

Birds We Saw: Ginny & I carried our binoculars and bird books as we strolled over the dunes and in the woods. On our first walk we encountered an American Bald Eagle which glared at us malevolently. We also saw quail, eastern phoebe, kingfisher, plover, red-bellied woodpecker, great blue heron, a huge flight of red-winged blackbirds, and several species of sandpiper, along with a host of other birds we could not identify.

Deer Hunting: On our drive over to the Florida Panhandle, we stopped in the town of Perry. I soon noticed that I was the only male in town who was not wearing camouflage gear. Hunting season had just opened. Rifles were evident everywhere.

Ginny & I decided to go hunting with our camera, the digital camera Donald gave us a few weeks ago.

We tramped through the woods for two days without seeing even a squirrel but one afternoon Ginny spotted a doe lying in the undergrowth and we got our photo. But before we left, the deer had become so accustomed to our presence that a herd of seven grazed right outside our cabin. We could watch them as we ate breakfast.

Snakes: We saw one water snake while in camp.

However while we were gone, another snake showed up at the door of Eve's library. This time a patron who lifts weights saw the snake curled up at the door. The man went out to the trunk of his car, brought out a barbell and squished the snake with it. Eve should get hazardous duty pay.

Speaking Of Books: I should go camping more often. While we were off in the piney woods, a bunch of people ordered copies of my books.

Thank you. I appreciate your interest and I hope you enjoy my writings.

Two Odd Bits Of Human Behavior: In a restaurant in Perry we observed two interesting snippets of human behavior.

The waitress who took our order, a lovely young lady in her mid-twenties I suppose, wore a rather low-cut blouse. Whenever she spoke to a female customer in the crowded restaurant, she stood bolt upright; when she addressed a male, she leaned forward toward him. I'm sure the girl was

entirely innocent and unconscious of her action, she was not at all flirtatious. But she looked like one of those bobbing birds that dip their beaks in a glass of water. It was really amusing.

As we ate a late supper, a local man entered the restaurant and spoke to the cashier. Together they went from table to table asking about a car in the parking lot; the man had hit it as he pulled in. Unable to find the owner at first, he borrowed a cell phone from a customer and called the police. Before they arrived, the woman who owned the car (she'd been fussing with her grandbaby and had not paid attention) realized that it was her car he had hit. They went out in the lot, looked at the damage and came back inside. She told her daughter, "Hell, he only knocked off a little chunk of the bumper. Forget it. No harm done." The guy, who was apparently a stranger, sat at the table with them and ordered coffee. Perry doesn't seem to be part of our litigious society.

Spiritual Restoration?: One of our goals in taking this trip was to refresh ourselves spiritually. But, to tell the truth, the whole time we were gone I didn't so much as open a Bible. I hardly gave God a thought except to be thankful now and then for this and that.

When Ginny and I returned to Jacksonville, we drove up to Five Points for supper. Park street was closed off being decorated for some holiday event, so people thronged the streets. Kids on skate boards whizzed all over. And sweet young lovelies paraded past in various states of dress and undress.

As we sat on a brick wall smoking after supper, an old man passed by.

"G'Evenin,,"he said.

"G'Evenin. Nice night," I replied.

Where upon he fell to weeping. He threw himself into my arms hugging me and nestling against my shoulder as tears streamed down his face.

He told me he is dying and that he's afraid of dying alone.

"Bet you've never had a black man cry on your shoulder a'fore," he said.

Oddly enough, this is the second time this year this sort of thing has happened. If you've any idea how I cringe at being touched, you may credit a touch of divine grace in my being able to stand this stranger's embrace.

Anyhow, here this man wept profusely in my arms as I rubbed his shoulders and cradled his head and soothed him. "I'm so scared to die alone. I got nobody," he said.

I assured him that we all die alone. That Jesus is our only hope.

I told him that he probably knows more about Jesus than I do — he's heard preaching all his life — but it's time to give up fighting God and trust.

The guy eventually walked away muttering, “But I want to be forgiven. I want to be forgiven.”

Ginny and I do not know what to make of this. The same sort of thing happened up at Walgreens a couple of months ago.

Why is it that old dying black guys throw themselves into my arms? Why not some of the sweet young lovelies who were on the street?

I don’t understand at all.

After breakfast out Sunday, Ginny and I came home and dabbled at our own projects around the house. As always after a time of intense intimacy, we need to distance ourselves a bit. We ignored each other all day in different rooms. We hardly spoke but it is so good to know she’s there.

Anyhow, now it’s Monday morning. Ginny gets her hearing aid today. The kids are full of Thanksgiving plans and I need to clean the yard and get back to work on my *Strangers* manuscript. Vacation’s over. Damn it!

Oh, be sure to check out those photo links up top; we took Gin’s laptop and downloaded hundreds of pix but I’m just posting a few for the folks who asked what the park and cabins are like.

Another Oh – My foot precluded our taking that 18-mile hike I’d so looked forward to. For much of the time, Ginny & I sat in rocking chairs listening to the pine needles whisper in the wind and talking for hours and hours and hours. I left those crutches at home and used only my cane but the swelling in my foot is down and I was able to walk fine on the short tramps we could take.... It only hurts when I blog.

Tuesday, November 22, 2005

Virginia's Song

All day Monday I rehearsed a song to sing for Ginny when she got home from the doctor’s office after picking up her hearing aids.

I wanted that song to be the first thing she would hear when we met.

It’s a song I wrote 38 years ago especially for her. I wrote the lyrics. I actually made up the tune.

She is the only person in the world who has ever heard her song.

I have only sang it to her a dozen or so times over the years.

So when she arrived home from the doctor’s, I cuddled her on my lap, enfolded her in my arms and sang Virginia’s song to her.

She deserves more than a song but it’s what I have to give.

It’s hers alone.

Wednesday, November 23, 2005

Somebody's Hiding In Our Cassia Tree

Tuesday I tried to catch up on yard work. As I edged the front yard, a car stopped at the curb and the man called me over; he asked me if he could root some cuttings from our cassia tree. I snipped off a few branches and advised him to peel back the bark a bit and worry the cut, then to place the branches in a bottle of water with an aspirin to foster root growth.

Our friend Barbara gave us our Cassia tree about three years ago. At first we planted it beside the house, but there the plant stayed only about knee high. Two years ago I transplanted it into a spot with full sun at the foot of the drive and it took off growing.

Each night the leaves of our plant fold in on themselves like clasped hands. Yellow butterflies, called cloudless sulfur I think, throng to the plant.

They lay eggs.

Caterpillars hatch out.

Hundreds, if not thousands, of caterpillars.

Mockingbirds swoop in to eat those caterpillars.

Here's a picture of a caterpillar-covered branch:



Just look at all those caterpillars!

What? You don't see them? Lets look closer:



Just look at all those bugs... What? You still can't see them? They are yellow with brownish-black markings like the flower stamens.

Here, I'll get one down for you to see:



They blend so well with the flower parts that, even though I know they are there, I have to search for one.

I'm impressed.

I realize that the protective coloration of creatures does not necessarily prove any intelligent design, or a divine plan, or the existence of God above the natural world ... but their camouflage does make me wonder if Somebody isn't hiding these caterpillars from hungry mockingbirds.

Back when we were poor, eating with Food Stamps and living in HUD housing, I wrote a Thanksgiving article for a local newspaper. If you're interested in what a person living in deep poverty has to say about being thankful, here's a link to [The Little End Of The Horn](#). (Right-hand column, you know the drill).

While Ginny & I were away, my son Donald and his friend Shawn started a new ongoing computer project which I suppose could be called [The Geek Bible](#). It generates a translation updating King James English into modern speech — I think. Since I can barely cut and paste with a computer, the intricacies of this computer code project escape me.

But Geeks among you will want to check this out at http://www.rdex.net/projects/KJV_Translation/index.php.

It's 6 a.m. and I have no idea what my children are doing!

Thursday, November 24, 2005
Happy Thanksgiving



Last night Ginny said the photo I planned to post for Thanksgiving day is tasteless. It's a photo of my holiday matchbox for Thanksgiving and I feel the picture of the alligator feasting on a raw chicken captures the true spirit of Thanksgiving here in Florida. But she says it is tasteless and that I should post a more appropriate picture. So, here goes:



Friday, November 25, 2005

When You Give A Feast...

Yesterday we drove to the Thanksgiving feast at Jennifer & Pat's new home.

We'd been invited to celebrate with Pat's family. About 20 or 30 people showed up. The girls set up tables in the yard by the pool to accommodate the crowd. They are all wonderful people and I really tried to be sociable, but being so shy and so fearful of being seen eating in public, I made myself a plate of goodies and slipped in the garage to hide and eat my meal.

On the drive over there, Ginny and I got to reminiscing and laughing about former thanksgivings in our own home.

Years ago we'd read the words of Jesus in Luke 14:12-13 where He said, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor" etc. He said that people who do this will be blessed, or happy.

So, for ages at Thanksgiving or Christmas, as part of our normal family preparation for the feast, we'd go out and pick up a hitchhiker or homeless guy and bring them home to share the feast with our family. Our kids have carried on this tradition by bringing in foreign students stranded at college with nowhere to go for the holidays, etc.

A funny thing happened the first time Ginny and I tried this. It was back in the early '70s when Jennifer was just a babe in arms and we were abjectly poor ourselves. In fact some church folks have given us a food basket weeks before Thanksgiving and we'd eaten all of it except for a bird, which we thought was a chicken, and some green beans and corn.

This was the only food we had left in our house except for some baby food jars (As I recall they were named High-Meat Dinners and made for the worst smelling poop in history!)

We did not have a car at the time and we'd walked pushing the baby stroller to a corner church for services and on our walk back home, we met this bum who said he was broke and hungry and could we give him a few dollars for something to eat.

Well, we did not have even a dollar, but we invited him home with us for the chicken dinner. At the time, we ate off a card table which Ginny had covered with a white cloth. She put out our best china. She had baked this bird on a timer setting while we were at services. She cooked the corn and green beans.

The three of us sat down to eat with the baby in her highchair at the table.

We said a blessing.

Ginny placed the bird in golden perfection in the center of the table. It appeared to have a golden glaze on the breast.

Then she started to carve the bird.

She had trouble.

The knife would not cut it.

The bird, though it appeared perfect, had the consistency of rubber. Our guest bum said it was not a chicken but a duck. He tried to cut off a drumstick. He could not pierce the skin. Apparently, whoever had given the bird to us had once frozen it then let it thaw and then frozen it again.

Thinking that if we held it firmer, Ginny would be able to slice it, the guy took one leg of the duck and I took the other and we pulled while Ginny tried to cut a leg off.

The legs stretched to an impossible length and Ginny sawed like mad but we could not penetrate the golden glazed skin. When the guy and I let go, like a chunk of rubber tire, the bird snapped back together again.

The three of us started laughing.

Here we had this golden duck which looked and smelled delicious and which could not be sliced under any circumstances. I mean a chainsaw would not cut this duck!

We laughed and we laughed and we laughed and tears streamed down our faces and we laughed some more.

We gave up on the bird and feasted on corn and green beans alone.

When it came time for him to leave, the bum said to me, "Mister, I lied to you when I said I was broke. I've got ten dollars here and I want you folks to have it." He slipped the money into my hand saying, "This was the best Thanksgiving meal I ever had."

We ate off that man's ten dollars for another week.

Thanks be to God.

Saturday, November 26, 2005

Dressing For Heaven

Traditional imagery pictures people in Heaven as wearing gold-foil hats and flowing gauze robes. Friday, I imagined a different picture; I imagined that I would stand before the throne of God wearing the very same clothes that I have given to the poor.

Yes, all afternoon Ginny and I padded around the house in our underwear trying on all our clothes to see if they fit as we cleaned out our closets and packed up clothes to send to the poor at the mission.

Ginny is infuriatingly systematic, methodical, and self-disciplined. In her closet she has 20 green clothes hangers, 20 blue ones, 20 white ones, and 10 clear plastic hangers. She keeps 20 dresses for work on the green ones, 20

casual outfits on the blue ones, etc. I'm not sure about the exact numbers or color codes but you get the idea.

She refuses to add to the number of hangers.

That means that whenever she gets a new office dress, an old one must go. A new casual blouse means that one now on the hanger must come off.

That way she only has her very favorite clothes in her closet at any given time. No muss, no fuss, no clutter.

She's the same way about her books. She has one bookcase. When she gets a new book, an old one must be replaced so her shelf space remains constant.... On the other hand, I have ELEVEN bookcases in our house and piles of books on the floor, in chairs, under the bed, in the closet... Well, you get the idea.

Yet, somehow this strange woman and I remain married.

Another factor adds to the clutter in our house. For some reason our friends, neighbors and children bring us stuff to go to the mission. I mean, even back when we did not own a car, folks who did would bring mission donations to our house and I'd have to borrow a van or something to get the donations out there to the poor. That still goes on, so the foyer of our home is always piled with bags and boxes of stuff to go the mission.

We cleared the foyer yesterday morning and took out a load, but already another three black plastic garbage bags full of clothes are in our foyer. I'm looking at them right this minute!

Anyhow, yesterday Ginny and I also cleaned out our own closets. This meant we were constantly having to make decisions as to what clothes to keep and which items should go to the poor.

This presents me with a dilemma.

What do I sent to the poor, what do I keep for me?

Pants are easy. If they still button and zip and I can sit down in them, they stay. Those that have shrunk too much for me to zip up, some poor guy can wear them.

Shirts present a different problem. Some are easy to send to the suffering poor. For instance that tee-shirt with cute fuzzy kittens in a basket on the chest that Aunt Hazel gave me – hey, the poor like kittens, don't they?

But here's that neat tee-shirt I bought myself, the one with the pack of wolves eating into a harp seal with blood and seal guts strewn about in the snow — That's a keeper. Definitely a keeper. I'll be such a hit when I wear that one to Jennifer's Christmas party.

So I made choices about which shirts to send to the poor — that's when I got the idea that the clothes we'll have to wear in Heaven will be the ones we give to the poor here on earth.

As I recall, Russian writer Leo Tolstoy said that what we have there, is what we give here; and I think C.S. Lewis said the same thing about the books we'll still have in Heaven. Apparently, we lay up treasure in Heaven by giving to the poor on earth.

I doubt that's right. Sounds too much like salvation-by-works to me but, nevertheless, I suspect that Christ approves of us giving our best.

We can't brown nose God. Giving to the poor should simply be an expression of our love for the Lord Christ, Prince of the Poor, who though He were rich yet made Himself poor for our sakes.

Be all that as it may, as I packed stuff to go to the mission, I got this ridiculous idea about what clothes I might have available to wear in Heaven.

Do I really want to appear before the throne of Almighty God in castoffs, with my bare belly hanging over pants that won't zip and wearing fuzzy damn kittens on my chest?

Sunday, November 27, 2005

Up On The Housetop...

Saturday morning I spent up on our roof with a leaf blower clearing off sticks and leaves and cleaning the rain gutters.

Then I watched the Gators beat the Seminoles at football. Since I've had family at both schools, I did not know which team to root for.

Monday, November 28, 2005

A Blatant Sales Pitch

Tv news showed an appalling scene: a Christmas shopping mob racing into a store on Black Friday. That's what they call the day after Thanksgiving when the Christmas shopping season opens and retail stores record their biggest sales and profits.

The first people through the door ran screaming as though Godzilla were stomping hot behind them.

Good thing they ran fast because the second wave of shoppers knocked down folks in front of them and stomped them in the floor.

In the mall parking lot irate drivers deliberately rammed cars into other cars battling over parking spaces. Fast shoppers trampled slow ones. Tiny tots screaming for Mommy got lost in the crowd. Old folks got shoved aside. Husbands got separated from wives. Women's heels were bumped with shopping carts. Young men rolled on the floor fighting over a computer game. People cursed and elbowed and kicked and shoved and snatched merchandise; they actually tore items to bits as they fought to buy.

Some shoppers ended up with human bite marks on their arms and I heard a rumor that one man lost an ear.

Let me assure you that not one single one of these shoppers were fighting to buy my books... No, my books sell on-line to readers of refined, dignified taste who do not bite or gouge out eachother's eyes in a buying frenzy just to own a copy of *Glog*, or *The Lazarus Projects*, or *I'm Confused About Prayer*.

I mention this because the tv commentators call today Black Monday or Unproductive Monday. This day is given such names because when people return to their offices after the holiday, they go on-line to shop and do no work whatsoever for their companies. Apparently this practice has become a holiday tradition.

Therefore I hope that today as you shop, you will consider buying some of my books on-line at <http://www.lulu.com/bluefish> .

I can't promise, but I doubt that you will get trampled or leave the site with bite marks on your arms. And I guarantee you no one has ever lost an ear from buying one of my books.... Yet.

Tuesday, November 29, 2005 **Beautiful Boat Parade**

Last Saturday Jacksonville hosted the 21st Annual Light Parade featuring over 50 decorated boats cruising up and down the St. Johns River. Thousands of people lined up along both stretches of the city's riverwalks to watch the boat parade. Unfortunately Ginny and I lacked the energy to attend and take photos, – but the local newspaper's posted a photo feature of the event at <http://jacksonville.mycapture.com/mycapture/folder.asp?event=79841> by Becky and Tom White:



I spent Monday engaged in one of the world's most boring human activities, hanging around a doctor's office, tied up for six hours, waiting to drive a friend home.

Doesn't God have anything better for me to do?

Apparently not.

Thursday, December 01, 2005
When The Faith Hits The Fan

Sometimes I hate being a Christian.

Case in point – last week an elderly lady of my acquaintance phoned asking for help with a minor chore, a chore which should take me about three or four hours to do. Instead of telling her to go to Hell, I agreed to help the dear old soul.

It turned out that the simple chore consumed three whole days of my life and mind because she kept changing the perimeters of the chore so that it became more and more difficult for me to help her. She just made the thing harder and harder for me to do. *Could it be that she treated me like I treat Jesus???*

Instead of a one-shot deal, this lady's chore expanded like the Chicken-Heart-That-Ate-Cleveland. It involved three personal visits from me, two from Ginny, and between eight and 12 phone calls.

And each step of the way, I grew more and more resentful and frustrated and bitter until what started out as a simple act of Christian charity transmogrified into an occasion of black seething sin inside me. At one point I vowed never to help anybody with anything ever again in my whole life! Ever!

You know, it's relatively easy for me to think I'm a Christian when I alone with my books and my computer, when I'm thinking deep thoughts about my imaginary god and imaginary people — but let me get out in the world dealing with the Living God and real people, let my faith hit the fan, let my idealized version of Christianity inconvenience me, then I feel put upon and I grow bitter, resentful, depressed, angry... Mad at God and man.

What the hell kind of Christian am I anyhow?

Probably a typical one.

But we won't go into that.

So dawns the season of light and joy, of Peace on earth and Good Will toward men – and here I'm peeved and ready to kick ass.

In spite of my vow to never help anyone anywhere ever again, will I eventually calm down and act like a Christian again?

Possibly.

Probably.

But today might not be the best day to ask me for a favor.

Thanksgiving is past, the first furor of shopping is over and now, in the lull before the frenzy picks up again, is a time to enjoy a few minutes of reading something happy. Back when we were poor, I supported my writing

habit by working at various odd jobs, flipping burgers, writing obits, delivering fuel oil, and digging graves at a local cemetery. [Gravedigger's Christmas](#) is a piece I wrote during that period (Left-hand column, cowart.info). And yes, this really happened.

Friday, December 02, 2005

A Naive Guy In The Lesbians' Bathroom

Wednesday Ginny got sick at work, just a passing malady unrelated to her diabetes, but yesterday I drove her to the doctor's office and I'm nursing her again today. In sickness and in health and all that jazz — but I definitely prefer her in health.

A friend e-mailed me a cartoon that for some reason reminded me of an odd incident that happened to me years ago in a lesbian couple's bathroom... actually, as I recall there were two separate incidents:

Now, before my evangelical readers get all hot and bothered, let me state that I think homosexual guys and lesbian girls are missing out on something nice. I think they miss the best by substituting something less.

Besides, in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans (verses 24 to 32) St. Paul ranks homosexual behavior right up there with envy, greed, arrogance, disobeying parents, bragging, and gossip in his checklist of things which God considers reprobate. Boy, folks who do awful stuff like that had better watch out on Judgment Day!

But since you and I don't do any of those abominable things, we're ok... Right?

Anyhow, over the years I have held dear a number of folks who'd make St. Paul's list, and one time this lesbian couple, who cared for a senile old grandmother, called on me to help them tear down this termite riddled shed in their backyard.

The girls had to run to the store and asked me to keep an eye on Granny till her visiting nurse showed up.

When the young nurse arrived instead of the usual caregivers, she found this strange man, me, in the house. She needed to go into the bathroom to wash up before giving Granny her shots or whatever.

She closed the door.

After a while she pounded on the bathroom door and yelled that she was locked in. I tried to open the door from the outside. It wouldn't budge. I tried to slip a plastic credit card between the lock plates like James Bond does in the movies. I couldn't trip the lock.

The nurse was beginning to get a bit excited thinking I had shut her in there for some nefarious purpose.

I found a screwdriver and tried to pry the door hinges to let the lady out. Bent the screwdriver.

By this time she was in a near panic and Granny realized that the nurse was locked in the bathroom. She found that funny and began to cackle, loud as a jackhammer.

Finally, I went outside and pried off the screen, forced open the bathroom window which was painted shut, and helped the nurse (who was wearing an interestingly tight skirt) climb out the window.

She was not happy.

But she treated Granny — quickly — and left.

When the girls arrived home they said, “Oh we never close that door all the way; that lock sticks. We’ve been meaning to fix it for years.”

I crawled through the window, got the door open and fixed the lock.

On another occasion I’d gone over to help the couple move a monster-huge sofa bed. This time, I was the one who needed the bathroom.

While I was in there I noticed this strange appliance prominent on the shelf. At first I thought it was a flare gun... A flare gun in the bathroom??? A pink, plastic flare gun???

It appeared to have a thick barrel leading to a circular chamber attached to a pistol grip with a long black electric cord... What in the world is that thing?

What would a lesbian couple use a thing like that for?

I mean I know that there are stores that sell adult toys... but what is this thing? What would it do? You could get electrocuted...

I imagined this and I imagined that, but nothing I imagined made any sense. How could they use that to...? I mean how would it fit?

I puzzled and puzzled. Nothing in my experience supplied an answer...

So when I came out of the bathroom I worked up my courage and asked a very embarrassing, personal question, I described the thing I saw, and asked what they used it for.

The girls started giggling. Then they laughed. Then they howled in glee.

“John, that’s a hair dryer!!!! What did you think it was???”

Hey, I’d never seen one before; what was I to think?

Anyhow, here’s the cartoon that reminded me of that bathroom:



Sunday, December 04, 2005

Donald Gave Me This New Computer

Saturday evening Donald and Helen came over bringing me a new computer. It is less than a third the size of my old one but four times as fast and has four times the memory. That means I can generate four times the mistakes that I made on the old computer.

Inside the old computer, two of the cooling fans wobbled on their bearings making a buzzing sound. Donald decided that instead of replacing these bearings, it would be better for me to have a new computer system.

So he bought me this new one and spent a couple of hours installing and testing it. It cost a bundle but for some reason he thinks it worth the investment to keep me writing on line. I appreciate his confidence and gift.

This came at a time when again I was thinking of throwing in the towel. Thinking in terms of an end-of-the-year financial statement, I've landed on someone else's Boardwalk — With a hotel!

So from that standpoint, the game is not worth the candle.

However, financial considerations are not the only factor. My writing does bring me a certain amount of satisfaction, and a few people do seem to find it helpful.

If it were a case of being called by God to this task, then there would be no question but that I'm to continue, but I have never felt any particularly calling to do anything. One job seems to be the same as another. The Lord seems to say, "Go outside and play" and He doesn't much care if I play football or baseball as long as I play fair and don't squabble with my playmates.

But writing is what I do and Donald's gift will certainly help me do it better. Problem is, that now I have no excuse for not producing. I've got this high-tech straw and now I should buckle down and churn out bricks like crazy.

After Donald and Helen set up this new system --Did I tell you it has chrome trim and, like a new car, it's so quiet that I can't tell when the motor is running? -- After they installed the system, we all went out to a Chinese buffet. Much of our table conversation revolved around how to pray for somebody you don't like.

For instance there's this one guy, whom I consider to be walking garbage, who has recently been diagnosed with an illness which carries a minimal survival rate. I know he's hurting. I know he needs comfort. I feel he needs salvation. I know he's scared and upset... Yet, when he comes to mind in my prayers, I'm likely to think, *About time the world's rid of this sleazy trash.*

Ginny and the kids say that while my feelings are real and it's ok to "complain to the Management", yet the very fact that I'm aware that my judgmental attitude is unacceptable and that I do try to consciously re-adjust my prayer to request good things for X's benefit, then I'm on the right track.

As the Bible says, "The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet."

I'm so thankful for my family; they constantly show me what it is to live Christian instead of just write about it.

And, as for X, well perhaps there will be a need for garbage men in Heaven; somebody has to sweep up those golden streets. The most honest prayer I can muster up for X is that I hope he gets the job.

Monday, December 05, 2005

Day Of Rest

Sunday, in need of intellectual stimulation, I clicked on the tv to watch *Mars Attacks*, but fell asleep on the sofa and zapped out for close to seven hours while my new computer spun its wheels alone.

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

One Of God's Little Digs

Remember how just before we left on vacation Ginny had applied for a promotion but was turned down and a political appointee from outside was given the job?

Well yesterday was the appointee's very first day in the office.

Yesterday was also the day when everyone in the office drew names out of a hat and the person whose name you drew is the person you buy a nice Christmas gift for.

Can you guess whose name Ginny drew?

You're right!

Ginny is to buy a nice gift for the outside appointee who bumped her from the promotion.

Doesn't that situation just cause the Christmas spirit to well up inside you?

As Ginny and I talked about the situation we decided that this may be one of God's little digs to remind us to concentrate on making our way toward Heaven rather than making our way on earth.

"But I want it both ways," Ginny said.

I sympathize.

I find her situation distressing because years ago I found myself facing a similar dilemma, the big boss at work brought in a guy just released from prison and gave him a job I wanted. And to top that off, about that time folks from Kairos, a prison visitation ministry, recruited me as a volunteer for a one year commitment.

You might enjoy reading about my experience, [The Elder Brother's Side Of The Story](#) (Right-hand column, cowart.info) My tale is not related to the holidays but it reflects the Christmas Spirit around the Cowart house tonight.

For some reason the graphic shows up in Mozilla but not in Internet Explorer so if you can't see it, it's just a picture of a guy frowning. I'll try to post it here:



Wednesday, December 07, 2005

Christian Ornaments

In upgrading from my old computer system to this one, I fell behind in reading the blogs I regularly track, but yesterday I played catch up and discovered a delightful treat at the December 3rd posting on [Moogie's World](#) (<http://www.moogiesworld.com/index.php>) titled Christmas Lights.

I turned my speaker volume all the way up and gleefully clapped my hands as I played this video clip four times back to back. Then when Ginny got home from work, she played it twice.

Great fun.

I'm delighted!

It's a clip of Christmas lights flashing in time to a happy tune and it just blew me away... Then I watched the evening news on tv.

Two nearby towns are involved in a squabble and someone is initiating lawsuits over whether or not to display a Manger Scene, a Menorah, and a Holiday Tree in a public park.

This sort of things appears to have become a national issue while at the same time here in Jacksonville vandals have attacked and destroyed various Christmas displays in private yards.

Now it seems that some people in my community are up in arms over these Christmas trappings. They seem to regard holiday decorations not as emblems of seasonal fun but as essential symbols of faith.

But if, as the Bible says, God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, then what exactly marks that?

What did Jesus say would indicate whether or not we are His followers?

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye decorate trees in your homes and put Ten Commandment plaques in your courthouses, if ye sport fish outlines on thy bumpers and wear crosses around thy necks, if ye place manger scenes in your parks and sleighs on your roofs, if ye erect crosses on your watertowers and play *Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer* on your radios, if ye...

Maybe I'm not quoting this Scripture exactly word for word; let me look it up in my concordance... Ah, yes, here it is in John's Gospel, Chapter 13, Verse 35; That's where Jesus said there is only one mark, one symbol, one single indicator which designates whether or not we are His people:

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35).

Anything less is just flimsy tinsel.

Thursday, December 08, 2005

Another Happy Day

Wednesday morning as I was fixing up my matchbox for the season, the girls, Eve, Jennifer & Pat, called inviting me out.

We drove way out in the boondocks to another town and ate a delightful lunch in a country dinner. Then we went for a long crisp walk in the piney woods, along a boardwalk over a Cyprus swamp, and around the border of a spring-fed lake.

Ginny got off work early to have her hearing aid adjusted by a computer then we went Christmas shopping and out to supper at a favorite restaurant where we managed to hit at an off hour. So the two of us took a booth usually designed for six. We spread out, lounged and talked for about two hours enjoying the Christmas lights and overhearing the banter of the waitresses who had little else to do.

We plan to give those ladies a little something extra for Christmas... maybe an autographed copy of one of my books with a green bookmark.



Ginny & I discussed that new animal just discovered in Indonesia. Google news has been full of it for the last couple of days; it's the third major new species discovered by western scientists in the past year. They are calling this one a Bornean Carnivore. Somehow this discovery brings Glog to my mind. Who knows what creatures live unseen among us? Space is hardly the last frontier; I think that is right here on earth.

Oh. About my matchbox...

For the outside cover I pasted on a picture of Santa with toys by a Christmas tree; inside the cover is a young lady in red ... She's wearing tassels, so I guess she must be an elf.

Friday, December 09, 2005

A Long Post About Two Things Occupying My Mind Recently

Well, it's Friday already and I still haven't finished Monday's 2do2da list. I've stayed busy all week but have accomplished little.

Story of my life.

Two things have occupied my thoughts recently:

A few months ago I decided to stop clicking on internet pornography sites to look at girly pictures. So far, so good. But I'm being tempted to return to that practice.

What is it about the Christmas season that makes me want to lower my standards and look for license? Observing the incarnation of God into the world should make me grateful to Him, but instead I'm tempted to celebrate the season by cutting loose to look at girls in (or out of) red flimsies.

I've been told that mature Christian men out grow such adolescent fantasies, but you couldn't prove that by me. Apparently I'm a 67-year-old man with the mental outlook of an 11-year-old boy.

I have not given in to the temptation yet, but knowing my own history with temptation – I have rarely been tempted to do anything that I eventually didn't do it — .I'm not guaranteeing anything.

But at the moment, this bugs me.

At the other end of the spectrum, I have also been thinking about the essential nature of God. (Hey, my mind works that way).

At breakfast Monday, my friend Barbara mentioned something about God being "Wholly Other" and I've been thinking about that.

God is unique. That is, there is nothing else like Him. He is one, complete in Himself. He is not exactly like any other being in, or beyond, the universe.

He is Creator, all the rest of us are creatures of His making.

Men, roaches and archangels have more in common with each other than we have with Him. He is Creator; we are all created entities.

Yet, in creating us, He apparently stamped nature with some hints as to His own nature and character. The majesty of thunderclouds, the power of the tornado, the potential of an egg, the wings of a butterfly, the protective coloration of a caterpillar, the love shared by man and woman, the splendor of an angel, the thoughts of the human mind – all these dimly reflect some element of the One who created all.

He is above all and in Him we live and move and have our very being.

That's scary.

For one thing it means He's big.

Huge.

Immense.

I don't picture the Incredible Hulk when I think of God, but that's close.

In a way I think of when I go downtown and stand at the base of a skyscraper and tilt my head way back and look up; even though I'm standing on solid pavement, I feel as though I'm falling and I get dizzy.

God scares me because He is so big. He holds all the universe in His hand as though it were no bigger than a peanut.

He makes me feel fragile.

I don't think my view is uncommon.

Remember for yourself one of those times when you felt close to God in your own experience. Regardless of the circumstances, I suspect that you felt some of the same things that I felt.

In my own 67 years, I can only remember a few times when I've felt particularly aware of God's presence. These experiences were almost

overwhelming and I feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, even remembering them much less speaking about them.

Oddly enough, only one of these occasions occurred in a church service. Once it happened when I was a kid in my bedroom, once when I was out camping in the woods, once when I saw a girl in a yellow dress, and once when I was dissecting a pig in a biology class.

Odd places to encounter God.

Whatever works for you.

My experiences probably have a few things in common with your own:

While I felt a fear of God, I also felt a strange attraction to Him. I was afraid but at the same time, there was an incredible sweetness. I wanted this awareness of Him to never end.

Was it that way for you too?

I became keenly aware of my own unworthiness, insignificance, uncleanness – not for particular things I’ve done, but just in the light of His holiness. I felt as though I was someplace I didn’t belong – but I was being welcomed anyhow.

Know what I mean?

Now I’m a guy with all sorts of questions, complaints and problems, but during those time I felt aware of being in God’s presence, all that stuff faded into insignificance. No questions were worth asking. No complaint worth voicing. No problem worth discussing. The only thing that mattered was God Himself; nothing else counts.

So here I was, a worm and no man, in the presence of the Almighty, yet I felt loved, accepted in the Beloved, welcomed. And this felt overwhelming, that the Mighty God cared about me. The King of the Universe really cares.

That’s a hard thing to get over, isn’t it?

Now, I’m thinking about the incarnation, that the Creator of the universe, King of Kings and Lord of Lords cares about us.

He sees that we’ve scrambled the eggs He gave us, and He reduced Himself to become a human baby to come into this world and unscramble the mess we’ve made and are helpless to unscramble ourselves.

Somehow I envision the Incredible Hulk in a straw manger.

Yes, in the incarnation, the Lord God emptied Himself of some of His prerogatives, focused His scary immensity into a tiny baby – nothing to be scared of – and came to seek and to save the lost.

So the angels told the shepherds, “Don’t be scared... it’s only a baby.”

Then ... well, you know the rest of the story as well as I do.

But there is one other thing I recall about my own experiences of being aware of the wholly other God. I was aware that the scary, sweet bliss I felt would not last. I knew that I was only seeing a temporary glimpse for that moment, that the real, permanent awareness of God still lies far ahead.

Meanwhile there remain bills to pay, phone calls to make, oil to change, leaves to rake, people to love (or at least tolerate), Christmas presents to buy --Yes, in Him we live and move and have our very being – but we do that here and now.

So I need to spend this day catching up on Mondays list — and not clicking on porno sites.

Lord, please be merciful to John Cowart, a sinner.

Saturday, December 10, 2005

I Need To Buy A New Tux



I'm A Wise Funky Blogger

I've won an award!

Yes because of my debonair charm, keen wit, masculine physique, handsome face and great humility, yesterday the Academy notified me that I am a recipient of a 2005 Wise Funky Blogger Award.

Actually, what the e-mail said was, "You made it into my Wise, Funky Bloggers post! If you want the code to post your award on your blog, e-mail me using the link on my blog! Cheers!"

But I'm sure an awards banquet must be scheduled. Searchlights will sweep the sky. Red carpet rolled to the curb. Photographers will flash bulbs in my face as my limo driver opens the door for me and Ginny (She can wear that low-cut blue thing with no back)...

I'll modestly strut to the podium amid thunderous applause, straight-up cool as I always am, while starlets swoon and losers who did not win an award bite chunks out of their Champaign glasses...

I have my acceptance speech already written:

Ladies & Gentlemen, I want to thank the academy, Ms Funky Bugs, and the United States Department Of Agriculture Food Stamp Program for enabling me to be here tonight...

To read the entire Press Release concerning my prestigious award, please visit the Wisdom of Funny Bugs at <http://funkybug.blogspot.com/>

And under my United Bloggers' Union contract, Funky has to pay for the limo, Champaign and my tux...Right?

Monday, December 12, 2005

Good Will Among Aliens & The Alienated

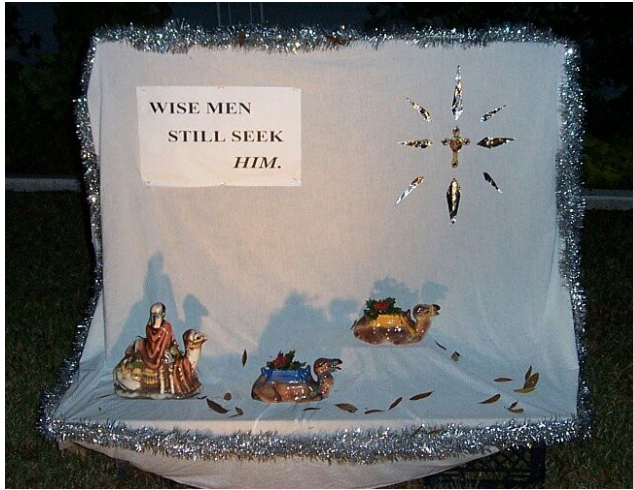


Saturday I balanced atop a rickety ladder to pull six to ten boxes of Christmas decorations down from the attic. Among the treasures I recovered was a large balloon which, according to a note on it, we'd put up there in 1997; after nine years it remained fully inflated.

Ginny & I decided to hang it up as our outside decoration this year. Usually we arrange a display in our yard, but we just lack the energy to try that this year so we are just going with the balloon. It's shaped like a green, round-headed space alien and it carries a sign declaring "Earthmen Have Been Visited – Merry Christmas."

In my mind this display hints at the Incarnation of Christ, God imposing self-discipline on Himself to come down to earth – you know, the sort of thing I wrote about in Friday's blog. Ginny thinks my idea for a display is too esoteric to get across to most passers-by. She's probably right, but like I said, we lack the energy to string exterior lights and do a more elaborate display. Besides, our decorations are for our own pleasure, who else pays attention?

Here's a photo of some of our front yard decorations last year:



Now in this season of peace and good will, for some reason Ginny & I were at odds all day Saturday. It was one of those rare occasions when nothing I did pleased her and when I found her aggravating. Know how it is when you introduce a new kitten in the house to your established cat? Well, we circled our house like those two cats, observing the formal courtesies but estranged and leery of each other.

I have no idea what caused this alienation. It's easy to blame it on external circumstances. I'm antsy from being so far behind in my work; Friday she'd just finished writing the annual report in her office. We both feel that we're treading in deep water just to meet normal daily obligations and duties so the added activities associated with Christmas overwhelm us... Or maybe, the tension was physical: her blood sugar being off; my sleep deprivation.... Or maybe some demon picked today to goad us ... Or maybe, we're getting sour in our old age... Who knows?

It was one of those times when we had to say, "I love you forever, but I can't stand you right this minute."

You know, part of the normal cycle of being in love but having to live under the same roof. (We've observed there is a cycle to that rhythm of life).

Anyhow, we acknowledged that we were having a bad day where we were not meshing as usual, and we moved on from there.

In the evening we watched a video tape of *O Brother Where Art Thou* and enjoyed it thoroughly.

When we woke up Sunday morning the tension was gone and we resumed our normal intimacy. Ginny arranged our manger scene (We'd bought that when our honeymoon began almost 40 years ago and in all that time only one piece got chipped) while I played with toy soldiers beside the tree.

I also added to the festive atmosphere of our home by gracing the bust of Shakespeare on the bookcase with a Santa hat.

Cool!

We sorted presents and wrapped a few while listening to Christmas music and enjoying flickering candles. We ate lunch at a yuppie sandwich shop where we paid more for soup and a sandwich than we normally pay for a full dinner at a real restaurant (never going there again). We shopped for groceries and a few additional presents. We watched football on tv snuggled under one blanket with her head nestled on my shoulder.

So maybe it is the season of peace and good will among couples, and Saturday we just hit a Grinch glitch.

Tuesday, December 13, 2005

Spent The Day Eating

I spent Monday eating.

I called my friend Barbara and took her to breakfast at Dave's. Her daughter has been diagnosed with a particularly virulent lung cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments but the outcome does not look hopeful.

Barbara observed that when we become aware that we have nothing to offer God, then we can offer that nothing, and He will accept it and use it to fill in empty spaces between threads in the tapestry He weaves.

As soon as Barbara left my house, Jennifer and Pat arrived. I took them back to Dave's for lunch. They are gathering toys and goodies for a waif they're sponsoring for Christmas. We talked a lot about blogging and Pat may start one soon.

When Ginny got home from work, I cooked supper for her and we talked over her day at the office before watching football...

Last week Ginny bought this nice box of chocolates as a gift for a coworker on her Christmas list. She had not wrapped them yet...

They were delicious.

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

My Most Productive Day In Ages

Tuesday: No phone calls. No visitors. No friends. No family. I edited 70 pages of text. That was my day.

Since I have nothing worth saying, let me refer you to two people who have:

Last Sunday (12/11/05) my e-friend Big White Hat (<http://bigwhitehat.blogspot.com/>) posted a stimulating article touching on discipline for children. It was the third in a series of postings honoring his

grandfather, Ozzie. This one generated over 30 comments as readers voiced their opinions. It's worth checking out.

Also on Sunday Moogie (<http://www.moogiesworld.com/index.php>) did it again. Her posting on ice scraping is the funniest video clip I've ever seen.!

Thursday, December 15, 2005

The Blind Leading The Blind

Wednesday I helped a lady who is legally blind set up her brand new blog.

Considering that my own computer skills range all the way from cut to paste, this was a major undertaking.

It was a real life case of the blind leading the blind.

But we did get her set up so she can begin her own postings.

If you're inclined, drop in on her site and welcome her to the wonderful world of blogging in a comment box. Her site is called *P&J's Dog House* and the address is <http://pjsdoghouse.blogspot.com/>.

Her home is infested with those little yapping animals I call rats but Mexicans call dogs, and we laughed because neither one of us can spell Chihuahua. She needs to trade her five Chihuahuas in and upgrade to a seeing-eye German Shepherd that I'm not as likely to step on when I visit.

In the morning, my friend Wes called and took me to breakfast at Dave's where he explained — at length — the system of Hebrew vowel points in the Massoretic text of the Old Testament comparing those with an engraved copy of the Decalogue in paeleohebraic script on a rock carving.

While he explained, I folded my napkin to look like a ducky.

Wes has a heart much bigger than his brain.

Back at my house we lit up our pipes and talked about the phrase "Glory to God in the Highest..."

I asked what it means to give glory to God and how do we do that???

Wes, who is an expert in Greek as well as Hebrew, used the English word *phenomena* to explain:

Phenomena is made up of two Greek roots, one has to do with mental activity, the other with physical activity.

Wes taught me that we glorify God first by our mental assent that God is who He says He is in the Bible. That's what we believe in our hearts. Then our physical activities are to spring from that assent; that's what we say with our lips and live in our lives.

In other words, we glorify God by both faith and works.

Trying one without the other is like trying to row with one oar, or to eat Chinese food with one chopstick.

And so the seraphim before the throne ever cry, Holy! Holy! Holy. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory, O Lord Most High.”

And the angels told the shepherds “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, Peace, good will toward men.”

Friday, December 16, 2005

The Things We Guys Suffer For Love

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

I’ve seen these words inscribed in stone above the entrance to a Post Office; they are a sort of unofficial motto for your mail man.

The Greek historian Herodotus first wrote these words concerning the postal system of the ancient Persians during the reign of King Cyrus, who is mentioned in the Bible’s Book of Esther by his Persian name, Ahasuerus.

Ahasuerus lived about 500 years before Christ.

Herodotus marveled that the Persians could get a letter from the Mediterranean coast all the way to India in only three days!

What brings this to my mind?

Well, Thursday morning Ginny wanted me to mail a Christmas package for her. ...I spent three and a half hours just trying to get that package from my house — not to India — but to the local post office!

Yes. My Beloved Wife actually sent me to a post office...

In December...

Just days before Christmas...

And here I thought she loved me.

Of course she needed the car to go to her office Christmas Party, so I went to a restaurant near the Post Substation to hang out till the window opened, then I walked down to the substation only to find a sign on the door saying it was closed due to a fire.

Ok. I’ll just walk to another substation in the other direction; it’s only about two miles... but I haven’t been there for a while so I’d better call ahead.

That substation was closed due to budget cuts.

So I walked back home carrying this dumb package Ginny wanted mailed

I called my daughter Eve for a ride to yet another Post Office.

No answer.

I called my daughter Jennifer. She was getting ready for a school program to help kids make gingerbread houses but she rushed by and drove me to a Post Office where less than 800 people stood in line.

Mostly guys.

Carrying packages.

The clerk asked me how soon I wanted the package to get there.

I told him I didn't care if it ever got there as long as I didn't have to carry it around anymore.

He asked me what was in the package –Flammables? Explosives?. Guns?

“I have no idea, my wife told me to come to the Post Office and mail it.”

“Oh,” he said, “The things we do for love.”

He's obviously a married man too.

When I finally got back home, [Eve](#) called saying she'd got my earlier message off her machine and was sorry she missed my call but would I like to go to lunch? She took me to a Chinese buffet and filled me in on what's happening at her library. She's spearheading a drive to cull duplicate books from the Jacksonville library system to restock libraries in towns flooded by Hurricane Katrina.

She's also involved in a project where people in her library knit warm afghans for an old folks home up in Wisconsin where they've been having a blizzard with sub-zero temperatures – and where, last week, according to the *Chicago Tribune* newspaper, in the town of Mauston, Mr. Ralph Hamm pulled out of his drive and hit an animal.

He got out of his car only to discover that he had run over and killed a kangaroo.

Yes, a kangaroo.

Now the burning question I have about that incident is why would anyone, even a yankee, go out of his house in a subzero blizzard?

The newspaper doesn't say if he is married, but I'd be willing to bet he was mailing a package for his wife?

We guys do crazy things for love. Once, back when I was young and dumb and unmarried, I actually drove Ginny to a mall on Christmas Eve!

How insane is that!

And what happened as I drove her there was one of those things that are hilarious funny to read about but terrible embarrassing to live.

I wrote a piece about it called [Warnings & Illicit Kissing On Christmas Eve](#) (Right-hand column, www.cowart.info).

Ah, yes, How do I love thee? Let me count the ways... but going to a mall or a post office again before Christmas ain't one of them.

Saturday, December 17, 2005

Harried Preparations For Christmas

Ginny & I have been eating our emergency supplies all last week.

No. There's not a hurricane. It's just that nothing remains in our refrigerator except a pack of fish sticks and we have not been able to go grocery shopping.

You see, it's only eight days till Christmas and I still have things to do:

- I need to buy antifreeze, drain the car radiator and re-fill it.
- Jennifer has a birthday next week.
- Eve has a birthday next week.
- I expect the lady to call asking me to serve soup at the mission.
- I need to clean my neighbor's yard thoroughly because they're hosting a family get together.
- We have a closet full of presents to wrap.
- Breakfast with Wes Tuesday?
- Breakfast with Barbara Wednesday?
- I'd like to get out to the cemetery and tend my parents' graves.
- Patty is coming home from college.
- Luminary Night is Sunday.
- I'd planed to have the current book manuscript ready to publish but I'm not finished formatting and editing.
- I have to cut my hair before someone shoots me thinking he's bagged a Yeti.

Oh the joy of the holidays:



So, let's see the first thing I have to do is.....

“Be still and know that I am God.”

Oh Sure.

I'll add that to my list somewhere.

Sunday, December 18, 2005

The Joy Of Christmas Shopping

Heavy, pouring rain all day yesterday.

Ginny drug me out in it Christmas shopping.

I will not reveal the name of the store, but outside at the door a man stood tolling a bell...

And the quote inscribed above the entrance says:

Abandon Hope All Ye Who Enter Here.



Monday, December 19, 2005

The Curse Of Laocoon



When the ancient Greeks attacked the city of Troy, they couldn't get inside the walls so they made this hollow wooden horse filled with soldiers.

You know how that worked.

In Troy lived a seer named Laocoon who tried to warn the people not to bring that Trojan Horse inside the walls. He said:

Do not trust this horse, Trojans,
I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts.

When everyone ignored his warning to Beware of Greeks bearing gifts, Laocoon got peeved and threw a spear at the horse.

This annoyed the god Poseidon who had a thing about horses, so he condemned Laocoon and sons to an eternity of wrapping Christmas presents.

Thus the miserable trio remain forever entangled in miles of green and red ribbon, yards of wrapping paper too small for the packages, strips of Scotch tape that stick to every surface but the paper, and thousands of stick-on bows that have lost their stickiness..

About the year 42 B.C. the Rhodian sculptor Agesander carved a statue of Laocoon and his sons entangled in Christmas wrapping.

You can see that sculpture in the Vatican today:

Why does a vision of that famous statue stick in my mind?

Well, yesterday for SEVEN HOURS!!! I helped Ginny wrap Christmas presents.

Enough said?

Tuesday, December 20, 2005

Exchanging Gifts With Bill & Melinda

If *Time* magazine's Persons of the Year, Bill and Melinda Gates, the richest couple in the world, stop by our house this week with a Christmas gift for me, I'm ready for them.

Yes. Big Lots had chocolate covered cherries on sale for 99 cents a box; these make great retaliatory gifts.

You don't know what I mean?

A retaliatory gift is when somebody you don't expect to brings you a gift and you haven't bought anything for them, so you run in the back room and bring out some generic trinket and say, "O I haven't had time to wrap yours yet" and give them something just to keep from admitting that you haven't given that person a thought.

They give you a gift, so you retaliate with some gift of your own.

That way you can feel smug and equal.

You ain't beholden to anybody.

You are a giver, not a receiver.

Ain't in anybody's debt.

You are a player.

Sound cheesy?

Well, yes it is.

But we all want to be superior givers, not humble receivers.

So when Bill and Melinda come over to deliver my Rolls Royce with the red bow, I'll proudly hand them chocolate covered cherries in exchange.

Sound ludicrous?

Absolutely ridiculous?

Maybe so.

But you and I do something like that all the time.

There is Someone who gives us a gift of great value, and we attempt to avoid the embarrassment of being receivers by trying to hand Him something or another in exchange — Like, maybe, a tube of Neosporin for those places on His hands.

What says the Scripture?

“By grace are ye saved through faith.... It is the gift of God,...”

But instead of receiving, instead of accepting His gift, all too often I feel proud and offer Him some trinket — “Here's my life. I'm gonna live for Jesus from now on!”

When I do that, I feel as though I'm offering Him a box of chocolate covered cherries after I've already eaten half of them.

Why not simply say ‘Thank You’ and enjoy His gift gratefully?

Isn't that a bit more realistic?

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

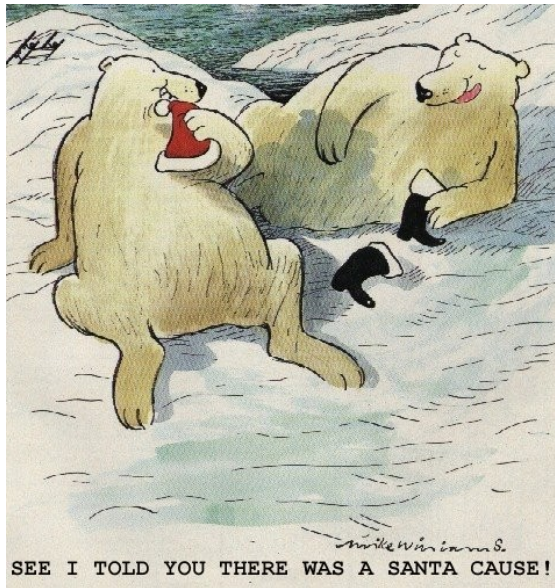
A Crisis of Belief & An Old Temptation

Monday night Ginny chipped a tooth as she brushed her denture.

Tuesday she visited the dentist for repairs. This afternoon, she can pick up the repaired bridge with a new tooth installed.

This makes me think about the Tooth Fairy, God, and Santa Clause.

Every year parents struggle with the question of what to tell their kids about Santa: is he real or ain't he real.



When our kids were little, we never had that problem. From the start we told our kids that Santa was a legend that we pretended was real because it was so much fun. So, as far as I know, there was no crisis of belief when the kid questions whether the parents have been lying about everything previously believed.

I rather suspect that the root of most religious skepticism lies not in intellectual process but in disappointment. Yes, I spent much of my youth in the atheist/agnostic camp. And the roots of my own skepticism lay in my finding out the truth about Santa. I remember thinking, “If Santa is not real, then God must not be real either; they’ve been lying to me all along.”

So I taught my kids that Santa is an old legend which we pretend is real because it’s so much fun.

I think they believed me.

But, they refused to believe what I taught about the Tooth Fairy.

I told them that when you loose a tooth, if you will put it **and a quarter** under your pillow, then in the morning both will be gone because the Tooth Fairy charges a quarter to haul old tooth away and cause a new tooth to grow.

I collected a lot of quarters till other kids corrupted their minds with false doctrine. I like my version of the Tooth Fairy story up until now.

Ginny finds that to replace her missing tooth will cost us \$106! Maybe I should convert to the kids’ idea that the Tooth Fairy is the one who pays.

On a more serious note, I'm again being tempted to browse internet porn sites. I keep thinking of young women wearing santa hats and red skimpies; they'd make such a festive screensaver for my computer. But, so far, I'm sticking with images of snowmen, decorated trees and such.

Nevertheless, I'm tempted.

Why is it that at a time when we celebrate the coming of God into the world, I feel the holiday gives me some sort of license for self-indulgence?

I over eat, justifying my gluttony because it's Christmas. I spend money I don't have justifying the budget breaking because it's Christmas. The other day I found myself standing in front of the wine section in the grocery store thinking about buying liquor when at any other time of the year I wouldn't even notice the shiny bottles.

My Aunt Hazel, God rest her, once commented on something I said by observing, "John, you were born an old man."

I suppose she was right.

That's the story of my life — **A Dirty Old Man Goes Bad.**

Anyhow, the temptation to look at pictures of naked women has been a constant with me for most of my life and here approaching Christmas it's particularly strong.

I haven't indulged it recently – not because I'm strong-willed, Christ-centered, and virtuous — but because I've been too damn busy to take the time. But anyhow, for what it's worth, that's where I am today.

Thursday, December 22, 2005 **Depression At Christmas Tide**

I am older than my father.

I've already lived more years than he had when he died.

As Christmas approaches, I think of my parents often. I remember Christmases past and the things I remember strongest are the disappointments – not how I felt disappointed, but how I disappointed the people I cared about.

The one phrase I remember most of my childhood is "John, I'm so disappointed in you." My Dad really wanted me to succeed as a truck driver and told me how disappointed he was that I never made the grade. My Mother's greatest fear was that I would embarrass her.

And I did.

As Christmas approaches I recall how often I've disappointed others in my life. From my oldest son to my youngest daughter, I keenly feel how I've failed them, slighted them, and not lived up to their expectations. And around Christmas, my mind dwells on these things.

Like that time back when we were poor and my teenaged son Johnny wanted a guitar so bad he could taste it. With a guitar he felt he could be such a hit with his high school crowd. He knew he would win girls and influence girls if he only had a guitar.

Well, times were hard back then. Keeping the family afloat was hard. The winter was hard. My job was hard. Everything got hard but me.

But Johnny needed that guitar, so I prowled the pawn shops at Eight and Main till I found one I could afford. It cost ten dollars. Ten dollars was all I had in the world.

When the man took it down from the wall I found that it was a five-string guitar, but there were only three strings on it. The pawnshop man told me he could sell me a pack of guitar strings for an additional ten dollars.

But I didn't have another ten dollars.

I paid for the guitar thinking I'd be able to buy the strings after payday – but my next payday wouldn't be till after Christmas.

So I ended up giving my son a guitar with no strings.

I remember how his face lit up when he saw that guitar under the tree; and how his face fell when he realized he couldn't play it. Oh, he was thankful and appreciative and said it was alright, that he'd wait till payday came ...

But at one time or another I've seen that same expression on the faces of virtually every person whose path crossed mine in life. My parents, my children, my first wife, my teachers, my bosses, my friends – and, sometimes I imagine God Himself, has worn that expression.

The biggest fear in my life is that someday Ginny will come to her senses and realize what a disappointment I am; I fear that people who read my books and stuff will suddenly realize what a fake I am.

I worry that I will be found out. Uncovered. Exposed.

Then I realize that I am not the center of other peoples' universes.

Instead of being shocked at me, they are most likely to just say, "O, that's just John" and move right along with their lives undisturbed.

I am not alone with my annual Christmas depression.

Yesterday morning Jacksonville's sheriff was on the radio saying that this time of year traffic deaths increase 18%. Heavy drinking increases. Suicides increase. Family squabbles increase. Domestic battery increases. Depression increases.

Besides that, there are dozens of Christmas songs that trigger depressing feelings. You'll be bobbing along to *Sleigh Ride* when the radio switches to *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* and the load drops.

What are we to do about such depression?

Sometimes about the only thing we can do is pray the prayer of Ziggy:



That helps.

Another thing that helps me when my mind tracks with depressing thoughts is to say the word STOP! Right out loud. Or silently if I have to. That halts the negative thought train and I can deliberately switch it to another track.

I also try to think about why Christ came into this fallen world – to seek and to save the lost, to give us abundant life, to destroy the works of the devil, to help us beat whatever’s got us licked.

He came to make us accepted in the Beloved.

Yes, we’ve disappointed others. Mostly we’ve disappointed our own high opinion of ourselves...

That hurts.

But someday mobs of people, thousands of thousands and ten thousands of ten thousands of people from every tribe and tongue and kindred and nation on earth will stand before the throne of God to hear him say, “Well done, you good and faithful servants.”

There is a chance — an excellent chance because Christ is good at what He does — that you and I will be back there in Row 832, Section G-7, cheering right along with all those others.

Yes indeed, whatever else it does, Christmas reminds us of hope.

Friday, December 23, 2005

A Profound Thought For Christmas:

For the past hour or two I've been casting about in my mind for something profound to say in my blog – I got nothing. Even though I'm noted for writing at length even when I have nothing to say, today I'll avoid that vanity and leave you with a single profound thought for Christmas:

Teacher says, "Every Time A Bell Rings, An Angel Tinkles."

Saturday, December 24, 2005

Some Christmas Treats

Well it's Christmas Eve and unless you'd like to read about how I crawled around under the car yesterday working on the radiator, I have nothing else to write about – except a few of my favorite cartoons.

Every once in a while when I need a lift I visit some of the hundreds of cartoons in the archives of Reverend Fun at <http://www.reverendfun.com/artchives/>. I never fail to find something to make me laugh out loud, Here, used with permission, are a few of my favorites:

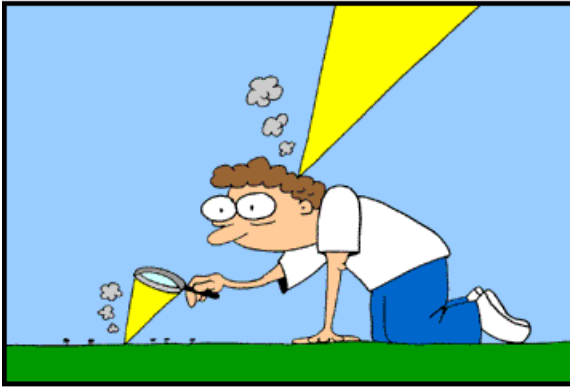


Thanks to Doug Ross (See Exodus 7-12)

10-14-2005

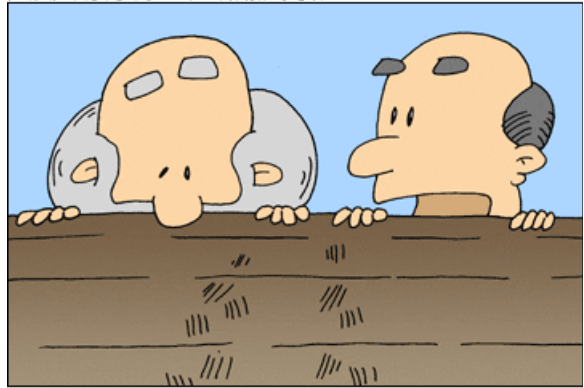
**THERE IS A DENSE FROG ADVISORY IN EFFECT
FOR ALL OF THE EGYPTIAN VIEWING AREA**

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.



07-24-1998

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.

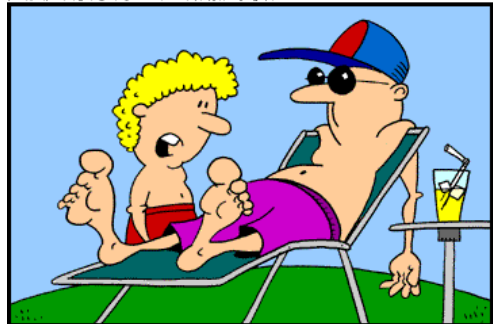


Thanks to Frank the Tank (See Genesis 6-8)

10-27-2004

THAT CAT WON'T BE FINDING ANY OLIVE BRANCHES ... PERHAPS WE SHOULD SEND THE DOVE OUT

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.



Thanks to Benoit Faquette

06-30-1996

IF WE ARE BORN AGAIN, THEN HOW COME WE ONLY HAVE ONE BELLYBUTTON?

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.



(See Luke 10:30-36)

09-10-1998

**DON'T GET TOO EXCITED FELLA, I'M THE
MEDIocre SAMARITAN ... I ONLY GIVE YOU A
BANDAID AND THEN I'M OFF**

REVERENDFUN.COM COPYRIGHT GCI, INC.



Thanks to Sheila Bragg

07-20-2005

**COME QUICK EKE ... WE'VE JUST DISCOVERED
MORE DEAD SEA SQUIRRELS**

Sunday, December 25, 2005

Christmas Eve At The Cemetery

Merry Christmas!

First, I can't resist one more cartoon from Reverend Fun:



SEASON'S GREETINGS

Sometimes I don't understand why I do the things I do.

Among my other activities on Christmas Eve I drove out to the cemetery where my mother, father and grandmother are buried to tend their graves. This is my practice every Christmas Eve but I don't know why I do it.

There is no physical need. Gravediggers maintain the cemetery without fault. Nevertheless, I carry a rake, trimmer and broom to spruce up graves.

There is no spiritual need. It is appointed unto man once to die and after that, the judgment. Once people go where they go, they're there. When Christ returns for us, those already dead will leap to meet Him, and if we're still living we'll join the throng. So, I'm convinced that whether our bodies lie in a beautiful cemetery, or in a mass pit, or have been lost at sea and eaten by sharks, or burned in a crash – The God who called all molecules together in the first place is perfectly able to reassemble them.

Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. And hath given him authority to execute judgment also. Because he is the Son of man.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

So although I feel no need to pray for the dead, in actuality, I do it. Doesn't everybody?

Neither, do I feel there's any need to talk to the dead – although, in actuality, I do that too. I sit by my parents' grave smoking my pipe and telling them a bit of what's been going on in my life.

There's no need for this. The Scripture hints that the dead are aware of what's going on among the living; they are in that great cloud of witnesses, sitting on the 50-yard line cheering for us to make it. I believe this, but I sort of mentally talk to my parents at the graveside.

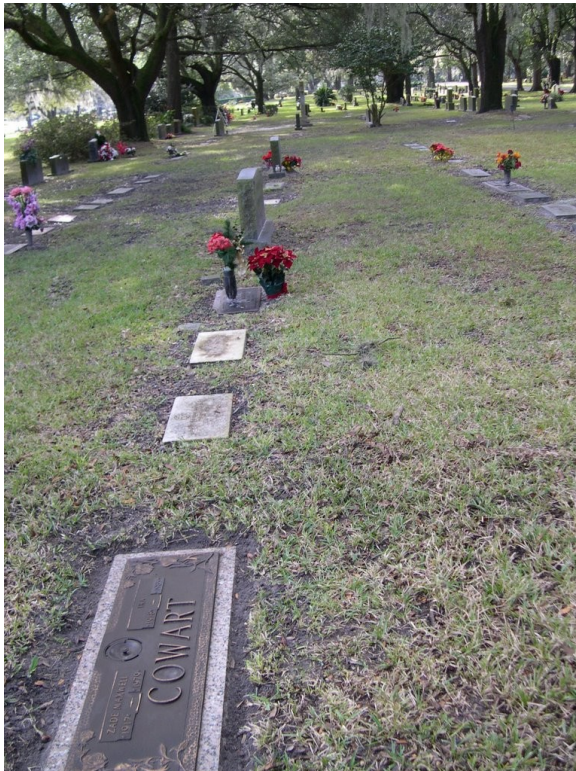
So, if there's no physical need, and no spiritual need for me to visit these graves each Christmas Eve, then I wonder why I do it?

I'm not aware of any emotional need within my self for this practice. I did what I could for my parents while they lived. All said and done, we parted on good terms. I don't particularly miss them or anything like that.

So I wonder why I practice visiting their graves each Christmas Eve.

And I can't come up with an answer.

It's one of those things — like so much in my life — I do because I do it.



Monday, December 26, 2005

Peace On Earth And Good Will Toward Everybody Who Goes The Hell Home After The First Nine Hours Of Visiting!

Christmas Day I got so tired and irritable I snapped at everybody.

Tuesday, December 27, 2005

Rusty Pipes



Monday, after meeting the kids for breakfast,, I took Ginny to see a pile of rusty pipes.

Hey, you can take any ‘ol gal to the yacht club, but you only take your True Love to the really special places.

I’d seen these pipes when I drove to the cemetery Christmas Eve and I wanted to show Ginny these beautiful rusty pipes.

Construction crews unearthed these along Riverside Avenue and dumped them as trash to be hauled away. Although the workmen probably didn’t notice, they inadvertently created a spot of unintentional beauty, of what – to my eye — is organic art. And I wanted to share it with Ginny.



Who else would take her to see such lovely things the day after Christmas?

Ginny picked up an embossed brick as a souvenir of the place.

We prowled amid the debris for an hour or so relishing the odd shapes and textures and contours as we snapped photos of the city in the background



Ok. Ok. I know this is nothing but a trash pipe – but beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and with Ginny beside me, even a trash heap become a garden of beauty.



Recently I've had a couple of dizzy spells and troubling spots of forgetfulness. At the breakfast buffet this morning I picked up a bowl of grits, put it at my place then went back to the counter for something else and returned with another bowl of grits. I knew there was something off kilter but I couldn't put my finger on it till I got back to the table to find I had picked up two bowls of grits – that's a bit worrisome.

And just a week or so ago, Donald and Helen came over and taught me how to do a computer thing I needed to do in order to edit the manuscript I'm working on. But when I tried it last week I'd forgotten how to do the things they taught me and I feel embarrassed to ask again.

Damn!

Whenever I'm not befuddled, I'm just plain fuddled.

I was hoping that I would mellow as I aged, but I fear I'm just curdling and getting more and more sour.

Wednesday, December 28, 2005

Gifts Of Love



Tuesday I looked forward to an outing with my youngest daughter but that fell through and while I was casting around for alternative plans, I half-listened to a local radio station.

Apparently the disk jockeys had asked people to call the station to tell about the worst Christmas gifts they had received. One caller told about a six-pack roll of paper towels attached to a subtle note about cleaning her kitchen. Another said a co-worker gave her a statue of copulating frogs.

Now remember, I was making phone calls and such with the radio providing background noise, so I can't remember the exact words, but one lady's voice caught my attention and her conversation went like this:

"The worst Christmas gift wasn't something I received," she said, "But something I gave."

"What was that?" the announcer asked.

"I gave my husband a 55-pound anvil."

"A 55-pound anvil?"

The lady said she asked her husband what he wanted for Christmas and he circled a number of things he'd like to have in the Home Depot catalog.

She browsed through the catalog perusing the things he had circled and decided to buy him an anvil.

As anyone who has been married a long time knows, there is no telling why your spouse wants anything and it's best not to ask because you won't

understand why they want it even when they explain (Case in point, why Ginny once wanted a paper shredder for our wedding anniversary!).

So the radio lady drove to Home Depot, bought a 55-pound anvil. She had a store employee put it in the trunk of her car.

At home she found someone to help carry the anvil to the backyard and hide it in the bushes.

On Christmas Eve, she got more help lugging the thing into the living room and putting it under the tree.

Christmas morning her husband saw this anvil and asked, “Why in the world did you get an anvil? What am I supposed to do with that thing?”

“But you circled it in the Home Depot catalog as what you wanted!”

“I certainly did not! Why would I want an anvil?”

“But you had it circled.”

She brought out the catalog to show him ... it seems he had circled his wish list with a felt-tipped pen and when he circled a toolbox on one page, the circle bled through around the anvil on the next page!

Our kids lavished gifts on us this Christmas.

Jennifer and Pat presented me with Jesus Of Nazareth chewing gum and tee shirt which says: **I Used To Be Schizophrenic But We're Okay Now.**

Eve and Patricia gave me a world globe made of stones from each different country. They also baked scads of cookies and pies for the feast.

Donald gave me a tee shirt picturing Godzilla (as a reminder of my Glog book) and this upgraded computer. On the package containing the tee shirt, he fastened an old artist's paintbrush from the days when I used it to paint pictures as a street-preaching tool and his card said, “Same Street Preaching – World Wide Canvas.”

This refers, I suppose, to my website which, according to the Webalizer counter software, has drawn 100,898 readers from 85 countries so far this year. That outreach would not have been possible were it not for Donald's constant help and encouragement all year long.

Ginny & I did not exchange gifts this year. Sometimes we do, sometimes not. The main thing is that we are on the receiving end of a lot of love.

Thursday, December 29, 2005

Friends, Photos, Family & Phone Calls

Wednesday my friend Wes took me out to breakfast where he showed me some photographs he had taken of a shipwreck uncovered by waves and tides back in 1985. We have a few hints that this was a famous Spanish-American

War vessel, but I want to do a bit of research to confirm the facts before posting the pictures on www.cowart.info .on a future date.

Remember the tale about the Christmas anvil I told yesterday? Well, I inadvertently gave Wes an even worse gift. He collects old medical books and a few months ago I ran across a tattered, coverless book with no title page in a thrift store. It cost a dime. Seeing it was a medical book I snatched it up and last week I wrapped it and presented it to my friend as a present representative of my generosity and thoughtfulness.

Yesterday Wes informed me that the book I gave was not a medical book at all – or rather, it is a medical book but it was written for veterinarians!

Hey, medicine’s medicine ain’t it?

Anyhow, he got a good laugh at my chagrin.

I’m ashamed to have wasted a whole dime on this gift for him.

Just you wait till next year!

In the evening Ginny & I drove to Office Depot to shop for an executive calendar/planner for her. She examined dozens of them carefully before choosing one she can live with for a year.

Over our supper at Denny’s we talked for a long time about sex and marriage. Every time I mention my own temptations in this blog, I receive a number of private e-mails from folks concerned about these same things. For several weeks now I’ve mulled over a post about my views on the subject but my own thinking is too jumbled to write about it yet. So we talked about reality in marriage. Perhaps after the first of the year, I’ll know what it is I want to say and how to say it. I don’t want to give snap, glib answers because it seems so many people’s happiness is intertwined with sex.

And, No. Rest assured, when I write my post ,I will not reveal anything other people have asked about in their private e-mails.

Our kids often urge us to write a book on happy marriage... we tried once but floundered because we’re not sure what it is that we’re doing right and whether or not the things that work so well for us would help other couples.

O, by the way, Ginny’s new hearing aid must be working right – yesterday morning, for the first time in five or ten years, she said, “Oh, John, would you hush up.”

This is a problem we’ll have to address – I know, I’ll hide her batteries.

I have trouble distinguishing opportunity from temptation.

Two weeks ago I learned of the chance to volunteer to care for a gentleman, an atheist, dying of cancer. He needs round-the-clock care in his

home. A number of his friends from a local church take turns staying a night or two each week. I could join this group of helpers if I choose to.

But I already feel stretched to the limit trying to finish the books I'm working on. My books could possibly nudge some reader closer to Christ – or not. Caring for this sick guy may— or may not— help him.

I'm a writer who uses any excuse to keep from writing. So I wonder if my inclination to join the gang helping is a temptation to avoid the work I'm supposed to be doing; or is this a legitimate call of God for hands-on service.

I'm also well aware that I can't write Christian if I don't live Christian.

And the woods are full of fine Christian writers; on the other hand, the woods are also full of Christians who wash out bedpans. Both serve Christ equally, but where do I fit in?

Another factor that Ginny points out is that my own physical limitations may make me unable to care for the guy as well as I should; he needs to be lifted between wheelchair and bed, etc.

I think I'm willing to do either service for the Lord. But, like I said, I can't tell if this is an opportunity or a temptation.

This evening I enjoyed a long phone chat with Donald. He's doing something technical with our dedicated computer server. He's been making movies and he's enthusiastic about his one site where people write down their dreams and other people comment – like a dream-blog, I suppose. His address is <http://www.dreamlibrary.org/>

I could not believe that really over 100,000 readers have spent at least ten minutes on my website this year so I asked him to verify the Webalizer statistics. He did and they do.

Mind-blogging.

Ginny says, “That means there are a lot of people with waaay too much time on their hands.”

I'm definitely going to hide her batteries.

Donald also discovered that if you do a Google image search for *Pool Boy, Socks* the number one listing is – ME!

Isn't that a hoot?

Ginny's Mom and Dad called right after I hung up the phone from talking with Donald. They spent Christmas with other family in Virginia and they tell us that Ginny's little brother, the lawyer, and his wife sold their home for – get this — \$150,000 **more** than their asking price. Potential buyers got into a bidding war over the place.

All the family up north had a very nice Christmas. But not one of them got a ten cent veterinarian book for a present.

Right after they called, I talked with my friend Barbara to ask her out for breakfast tomorrow. The chemotherapy/radiation treatments seem to offer a bit more hope for her daughter this week.

This morning PatH also phoned. She's the near-blind lady I tried to help set up with her own blog on December 15th, the lady who can't spell chew-wah-wah dogs. I must have screwed up something or another because her own site locked her out until today. Then for no apparent reason, it let her in again and now she's able to post. Pleased give her a welcome to the blog world; her site address is <http://pjsdoghouse.blogspot.com/>

O, one last medical/phone thing:

This afternoon my friend Bernice called. She trains new nurses at a local medical facility. In the wee small hours of Christmas morning this one new nurse had the first patient in her care to die.

This understandably upset the young lady.

Bernice assured her that the patient, a 90+ year old man, had received the very best in compassionate care.

"But," the young lady cried, "Isn't it bad luck to die on Christmas?"

Friday, December 30, 2005

Wind and Spirit

When Ginny and I were on vacation, our cabin stood next to a stand of pine; we often sat in porch rockers and listened to the wind whisper through pine needles.

We walked and heard the wind rasp sand along the beach.

I have heard the wind moan and whistle through the columns of a deserted church at midnight.

I have heard the howl of a hurricane and the roar of a summer storm.

I have heard the wind snap a flag and ding the rope against the flagpole.

I've heard leaves rustle in the wind and watched beards of Spanish Moss sway among the oak branches

And I have heard the silence of falling snow ...

And drifting fog.

Yesterday, as my friend Barbara and I sat talking in the backyard, we heard the wind moving through a stand of bamboo.

Barbara said, "The sound the wind makes depends on the material it moves through."

That explains a lot.

Jesus once told a man, “You should not be surprised at my saying, you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Saturday, December 31, 2005

Closing The Book On 2005

It's time to close the book on the past year.

Looking back over past blog entries to see what I've accomplished, I see that I've done a lot of yard work and washed a lot of dishes. That's about it.

One thing that pleases me is that back in May my book on prayer was translated and published in the Indonesian language under the title, *Mengapa Doaku Tidak Dikabulkan*.

Isn't that a cool title!

Indonesia is the world's most populous Muslim nation.

The same day I learned of the book's publication, riots broke out in Jakarta, the American Embassy was attacked, and a market frequented by Christians was bombed killing many people. All this in the immediate aftermath of the Tsunami which killed 175,000 people in Indonesia alone.

In all that turmoil, I hope my little book brought some comfort to someone.

Mengapa Doaku Tidak Dikabulkan — in English that's “I'm Confused About Prayer” or “Why Don't I Get What I Pray For?.” The Indonesian publisher's website is <http://www.perkantass.org/> . English copies are available on-line at <http://www.bluefishbooks.info> .

The book takes a humorous approach to problems I myself have with praying. I really hope it contributes a modicum of peace to readers who have just about given up on God.

As far as my book sales in the U.S.A. are concerned, I can proudly announce that for the 48th week running, my books have ranked number 82 on the *New York Times Book Review's* Worst Seller List!

Eat your heart out, Stephen King.

So, I'd like to close the year out with a poem. I wrote it years ago but for some reason it's been running through my head today:

Today I Killed A Unicorn

Today I killed a unicorn.
It was a silver little beast,
No bigger than an inch,

With tiny wings of feathers on its back.

It lighted on the pages
Of an ancient book I'm reading,
And it pranced a stately gallop
Up and down the printed lines.

I watched the little creature
As it roamed across the pages,
Then, with greatest care,
I slammed shut the ancient book.

I hate unicorns!

Sunday, January 01, 2006

Future Plans

An old saying goes: If you want to hear God laugh, make plans!

A dizzy spell woke me up at 3:30 Saturday morning and stayed with me throughout the day; this curtailed plans I had to work on the car. I felt leery of taking the radiator apart if I might not feel well enough to put it back together again, so I stayed inside working on my manuscript all day.

While Ginny disassembled Christmas decorations, I wrote out a work plan for the coming year. This meant trying to realistically examine what I hope to accomplish and evaluating whether or not it's worth doing.

Sometimes yea and sometimes nay.

On some level I do want to be 100% at the disposal of Jesus Christ and available to fit into His plans; on another level, I have my own ideas that I want to push through come Hell or high water.

I've pretty much decided to let other people take care of the young man dying of cancer, yet I'm trying to stay open to the work if I see I'm really needed. I've looked at my motives for wanting to be involved (being with a group of insiders, wanting to impress folks with my hands-on piety, and crap like that) and I see my motivation is a great deal less than love. On the other hand, I realize that a person in need doesn't give a damn about the motives of the helper – the soup tastes just as good to him even if I cooked with paternalistic motives.

At any rate, I decided not to help in this instance but I'm not satisfied with my decision and I'm open to changing my mind.

During break times from our work, Ginny and I sat together smoking and recounting various things we have to be thankful about. We accumulated quite a list. Things have gone very well for us. We also nosed about things, good and ill, to anticipate in 2006. We'll take those as they come.

She also advised me about some formatting problems I'm having with the current manuscripts. As a writer, I used to envision a special niche in hell where editors would thrash around in flaming piles fueled by manuscript pages they had rejected.

Now that I'm editing my own copy, I can see that editors may have suffered a bit in the here and now already. Their job is not as easy as it looks.

I did get a pleasant stroke when an e-mail arrived from a young historian asking permission to quote from *Crackers & Carpetbaggers*, my book on Jacksonville history. He's writing his own book on J.E.T. Bowden, a politician in the 1880s, and wants to quote me as a source.

I couldn't be more flattered!

I'm putting together a response with some tips so he can avoid some of the bogs I got stuck in as I wrote my own work.

Another happy thing is that about 4 in the afternoon I received my very first New Year's Greeting from Jellyhead, a young lady in Australia – where it was already the New Year. That was certainly a lift. Her blog address is <http://jellyheadrambles.blogspot.com/>.

Jennifer and Pat hosted a New Year's Party at their house with pizza, videos, and milk shakes, with a trip downtown to see fireworks at midnight. Ginny & I planned to stay home and watch tv – but I fell asleep about 9:30 and the New Year managed to arrive without me.

Reuters News Service reports that in Palu, Indonesia, a New Year's Eve bomb exploded in a Christian market killing 8 people and mangling 53 others. The bomb was packed with nails to maximize damage.

According to the wire:

Central Sulawesi has been plagued by religious violence and tension since the late 1990s. Fighting between Muslims and Christians from 1998-2001 killed 2,000 people, mainly around the Muslim town of Poso....

While a peace accord halted the 1998-2001 bloodshed in Central Sulawesi, violence has erupted sporadically.

In one of the worst incidents, three teenage Christian girls were beheaded near Poso last October. Bombings last May in the Central Sulawesi Christian town of Tentena killed 22 people.

Inter-communal violence has killed thousands in Indonesia since the downfall of longtime autocrat Suharto in 1998.

The nation of 220 million people has experienced several major bomb attacks on Western targets as well, mostly blamed on Jemaah Islamiyah, a group seen as al Qaeda's Southeast Asian arm.

In addition to such violence, Indonesia is experiencing an outbreak of polio, and bird flu still looms on the horizon.

If you're inclined to pray, please ask the Lord to help my little book on prayer honor Him in this troubled place and time.

Monday, January 02, 2006

An Ordinary Day

Yesterday I drained the car's radiator and poured in new antifreeze. A neighbor saw me working on my car and asked me to jump start hers.

Ginny mended clothes and caught up on odds and ends chores she's been meaning to get around to.

I answered a few e-mails and researched the shipwreck photos Wes gave me last week, but I couldn't identify the wreck. It was not the one I thought.

Ginny & I watched football on tv.

A common, ordinary, unexciting day.

My blog heading says I'm a guy who looks for spiritual reality in daily life. So, where is God on a day like this?

The Bible says, "God is near." It says, "In Him we live and move and have our very being."

Why wasn't I aware of Him as I fiddled with the car or watched football?

I wonder if it's not that He's far off, but that all of us — like people who live in the mountains who take the view for granted — I wonder if we grow so accustomed to ordinary, daily mercies that we lose sight of Majesty.

I live my life unaware of wonders, insensitive to splendor. Plodding along with my head down, seeing only dirt on earth.

I wonder, are fish aware of water?

Tuesday, January 03, 2006

I Owe A Debt To Dracula

The first book I ever stole was a library copy of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

In 1951 I became a Boy Scout and other boys in my troop introduced me to the thrill of horror movies. Having seen Bela Lugosi in the movie, I naturally had to read the book.

The story and its format captivated me. I found it not horrifying, but charming.

And Stoker's choice of format changed my life.

A series of journal entries, diaries and letters give the book its structure.

As a 12-year-old boy I had never before heard of a journal or diary. Discovering that some people led lives so interesting that they recorded what happened to them every day intrigued me.

The fact that Jonathan Harker kept a record of what he did each day and that tracking his days led to the destruction of the monster ... Wow! What 12-year-old boy could resist? I had to begin writing a daily journal so that when I encountered some great adventure, or met a vampire, I'd know how to cope.

I began recording my life's days in a school notebook. Alas, what a bore.

So I quit journaling.

Too much work.

But the idea stayed. I remained convinced that life is worth recording.

Then, as a young man I encountered the *Journal of David Brainerd* (1718-1747), a missionary to the American Indians, and I was deeply touched by this man's life. Then I read excerpts from the extensive diaries of Samuel Pepys (1603-1733); the massive journals of John Wesley (1703-1791) ; the utterly charming diary of 8-year-old Marjorie Fleming (1803-1811) ... and a host of other journal writers, people who wrote for themselves trying to make sense of their own lives.

I collected a whole bookcase full of other people's journals.

The real life daily struggles, problems, observations, concerns, and triumphs of ordinary people fascinate me. I look for meaning in their lives and my own.

Off and on over the years I have started and stopped my own journal a number of times. Some of my earlier attempts were lost through divorce, house fire, moving, etc. But a back closet still contains my own daily record of my life and thoughts for the past 25 years...

And then last year, in conversation, my youngest son used a word I'd never before heard – Blog.

Thus I began this on-line series of daily postings – which are not very much different from my journal entries except that I'm MUCH more inhibited in these, and all too aware that other people may read over my shoulder practically as I write.

Two odd incidents related to my journaling:

Once a few years ago the phone rang and an attorney I'd never heard of before asked me to appear as an expert witness at a trial concerning a dispute over an old diary. He'd read a book review I'd written for a local newspaper and I'd mentioned diaries in the review. I certainly never think of myself as an expert on diaries but the judge paid attention to my testimony.

Another time years back, a young lady where I worked asked me if I had kept track of the day an unusual incident had happened on the job. Puzzled

by her request, I checked back six or seven weeks and found that I had recorded the incident.

I was able to tell her the exact day it happened – but I asked why she needed to know.

Blushing, she told me that she wanted to know because that was the night she'd gotten pregnant!

Wasn't me!

Maybe Dracula slipped into her bedroom that night.

Actually, she now had — thanks to my journal — a specific date and time for a long talk with her boyfriend.

Anyhow, if anyone is interested in some of my old journal excerpts, I've posted a sampling in the right-hand column of my website under the heading "Today In Former Years." That section takes a random date and tracks that date back over a number of years.

When I read back over the events of my own life, I see certain patterns in the mercy of God to me; I see recurring problems and failures; I see jokes I'd forgotten; I see the growth of the love Ginny and I share; and I see our (now grown) children flourish and thrive.

I'm pleased.

Mr. Dracula, I owe you a great debt.

After watching the Rose Parade and football all day yesterday, Ginny & I drove to Jennifer and Pat's new home for dinner with them, Donald and Helen, Eve and Patricia.

We lounged in pool and hot tub and around the fireplace listening to heavy rain on the roof.

We talked about each person's hopes, and especially career plans, for the next year. We also kicked around ideas about a family charitable endeavor we're considering.

In a mini family conference, we discussed ways to market and increase sales of my books. About the only thing we actually decided was not to post more blatant ads on either my website or blog.

I hope that my writing gives readers hope and nudges them closer to Christ, so I (and, to a lesser degree, the family) feel that advertising might muddy the water.

So many people think that religious folk are just in it for the money. Thus, to avoid that putting that stumbling block in the way of readers, we again decided not to clutter the sites with any more promotional material.

Therefore, Jennifer urged me to write a book about coping with poverty.

Now, that's a field I am indeed an expert in.

Anyhow, we all had a great time and laughed our heads off over juvenal jokes and ancient family stories – the kids told about a pissing/vomiting contest among themselves that Ginny and I never knew about until last night.

This teaches me that no matter how carefully I record my life – I don't have the slightest idea of what's been going on around me in my own home.

No, I've never seen a vampire scale an ancient stone wall clutching a bag-full of squirming babies to feed his voluptuous companions; my journal has never recorded such an incident... but should I ever see such a thing, my pen is ready....

And you'll get to read about it right here.

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

Beauty In The Junk Yard

My youngest daughter stayed over an extra day from college to hang around with me, get reacquainted, explore and take photographs.

We had a great day!

After breakfast out, she took a picture of the phone post outside Dave's Restaurant where for years folks have posted Lost Dog or Garage Sale signs; hundreds of nails and staples remain in the post giving it an intriguing texture.

(Having trouble with photos today. Blogger refuses to transfer that photo! Please use your imagination for this one.)



We are both interested in beauty, shapes and textures, especially as they appear in unintentional art, i.e. ordinary objects left out to weather until they gain a rustic beauty.

So I took her to photograph a rusty door in a tiny house near the railroad tracks:

(But the Rusty Door photo will not transfer to Blogger for some reason??? I think Blogger hates me.)

Then for a special treat, I took her to a junk yard ... excuse me, the proper term is salvage yard. For over 70 years workers at Burkhalter Wrecking have dismantled abandoned buildings in Jacksonville. They salvage architectural features worth preserving for resale. These range from a sea of toilets to a galaxy of chandeliers.

Mr. Trey Burkhalter gave us permission to photograph some of the treasures in the huge collection and we spent about three hours roaming amid

hundreds of doors, roof tiles, old sign boards, antique toys and bottles and door knobs.

Patricia took over a hundred photos and I've posted a sample of them in the Jacksonville History section of my website at www.cowart.info under the title, [Jax Junk Yard](#). My favorite picture is one of a bucket full of door knobs:



Patricia plans to post a selection of her own favorite photos on her blog , The Rabbit Hole at <http://www.holerabbit.blogspot.com/> .

Also Mr, Trey Burkhalter, who is proficient with computers, designed his company website at <http://www.burkhalters.com/> where he offers a virtual tour of the grounds.

Our father/daughter outing was a resounding success; we have not spent such a happy time together in ages. I came to a new appreciation of my grown daughter's beauty, wisdom, grace and maturity. And her business acumen also impressed me greatly – How in the world did I miss all that before by just thinking of her as a college kid?

Dads are denser than anybody.

But looking for beauty in a junk yard, I found it.

Sometimes I think God gives us glimpses of beauty, mystery and wonder in the most mundane settings. Seeing all the debris of once-great buildings with my daughter reminded me that the only thing on earth that lasts forever is people.

The ones we love, the ones we hate, the ones we discount with indifference – every person around us – we ourselves – will spend all eternity Somewhere.

And the Scripture reveals God's odd promise of giving beauty for ashes. I think that's wonderful.



Thursday, January 05, 2006

I Made A Top Ten List!

I am honored (sort of) to have made a Top Ten List.

At least I think I'm honored.

Yes. I am indeed honored. And I'm very pleased.

You see, I maintain three spots on the World Wide Web: There's this Rabid Fun Blog (which you are reading), my Rabid Fundamentalist website (www.cowart.info), and my book store front (www.bluefishbooks.info).

Yesterday, according to the Webalizer Counter Software my son installed for me, 95 readers visited my blog from 15 countries; 390 readers from 50 countries visited my website; and not one single one of my books sold.

A typical day.

But I got a surprise and a laugh when I looked at the top search strings readers used to arrive at my blog:

- Pool boy
- Weird
- John Cowart
- Living in a bus
- Little tin boxes

- Crazy party food
- Recycle plastic grocery bags
- Socks and shorts, and ...
- The top ten twerps of year 2005 in the Philippines!

How did I make this list in the Philippines?

The only thing I can think of is that last spring an edition of my little book on prayer was published in that country and it was this book that earned me my spot on the top ten list.

It's good to know that my writing is appreciated.

And I am indeed honored that readers in the Philippines have noticed my books more than readers in my own country.

I wish the Philippine people joy and peace.

Thank you.

I am honored.

PS: The book *I'm Confused About Prayer* (or portions of it) has also been translated and published in German, French, Spanish, Indonesian and Afrikaans. Alas, most of these are long out of print. But an English edition is still available at www.bluefishbooks.info.

Friday, January 06, 2006

A Virtual Sidetrack

For days now I've had this great idea to write a blog posting which would inspire and educate, amuse and uplift, convince and convert, thrill and bring joy to all readers.

So, this morning I Google searched for a cool graphic, something perfect to illustrate my brilliant idea. I looked at the Reverend Fun cartoons at <http://www.reverendfun.com/artchives/>.

I got hung up. I kept clicking from one cartoon to another all morning till time ran out.

Sorry.

Maybe I can write something inspiring some other day.

In my own exciting real-time life, yesterday I formatted 76 pages of my manuscript, cleaned the pool filter, cut my own hair, ate supper, then fell asleep in front of the tv.

Saturday, January 07, 2006

Second Thoughts

I'm having second thoughts about my Christianity.

Meeting a man covered with tattoos brought this about.

About a month ago I was over in Arlington to see a lady on business and she introduced me to her son who happened to be in the office. Blue and red tattoos snaked up both his arms and before we shook hands, before the guy said one word, in my mind I wrote him off as a sleaze.

Because some of the tattoos appeared to be amateurish, I thought he'd been in prison when he got them. I thought of him a worthless, no-account, vicious criminal.

But, no sooner than I had these thoughts judging the man, a second thought came to mind: *Get real, John! Here is a child of God, a potential saint, a man who may walk in obedience to Christ better than you do, John.. You are judging on an impression with a bare minimum of information.*

That second thought caught me up short.

Last Saturday as Ginny and I drove to WalMart, the driver of another car, full of people, crowded us because he was in the turn lane but wanted to drive straight ahead. My first thought – in fact I said most of it aloud – was: *You son of a bitch! I hope you crash into that lamp pole and mangle your whole family. I'll stop and watch you bleed. And I'll spit in the puddle of blood when I pass. And darn if I'll waste one cell phone minutes calling 911!*

No sooner than I thought this, I has a second thought: *Why are you cursing that guy? Haven't you ever been stuck in the wrong lane yourself?*

I saw a girl.

A well endowed girl.

A very well endowed girl.

My first thought was Any guesses?

But then comes a second thought: *John Cowart. Why are you thinking like that? You have no evidence that she's a slut. And, no, those would not bounce so vigorously they'd splinter the headboard. What you're thinking says nothing about her; everything about you. Have you prayed about her problems, her hopes, her destination in life?*

I watch the evening news and see more Americans killed in Iraq.

My first thought is: *We ought to bring our soldiers home then nuke every town between Spain and Hawaii! No mater which way the wind is blowing, it won't drop radiation on anyone who means America well.*

Then comes a second thought: *Many of our soldiers in Iraq are dedicated Christians and by exposing the people to their lives and testimonies, they are influencing the people whose paths they cross toward the Kingdom of Christ. Perhaps, that is why God allows this otherwise senseless war.*

I could go on and on — about Hurricane Katrina victims, about foreigners, about politicians, about ... Well, you name it.

There's a pattern here.

My first thought is always hostile, bitter, lustful, greedy, mean-spirited.

My second thought comes closer to being Christian.

In fact, my second thoughts define and identify my faith.

I am not the first Christian to entertain such dual thoughts. St. Paul wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I can not do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is I do... I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind..."

There may be people out there who always put Jesus first in their thoughts and actions; but that state is beyond my experience.

Of all the things which race through my mind, Jesus is not always running in first place. He's not always even in second place. I confess that sometimes He's number 18 in a field of 30.

But I am a Christian; He is always in the running.

If my life were a tv talk show, on occasion I obey Him as though Jesus were the Director; at other times I treat Him as though He were only a guest celebrity putting in a spot appearance to raise my ratings.

What a shabby way to think.

St Paul once said, "What person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of that man? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

So we see thoughts of man on one hand, thoughts of God on the other.

And His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, yet He knows the very thoughts and intents of our heart.

So here I stand with my first thoughts and my second thoughts.

Sometimes I act on one, and sometimes on the other.

And the Scripture teaches that a Christian's life involves bringing every thought captive to Christ.

Is it any wonder that I get befuddled?

I'm tempted to say with Miss Scarlet, "I'll think about that tomorrow."

In fact, I'm tempted to avoid thinking about such stuff at all.

But the spirit of a prophet is subject to the prophet. I chose which thought I act on.

I hardly ever sit down at my computer without my first thought being, *Hey, I wonder if there are any new pictures on that porno site? What harm is there in seeing?* Then comes a second thought, *How about browsing cartoons instead? Or maybe you should work on that manuscript. Or maybe write a blog posting* Both my first and second thoughts hang before me; But I choose where to click.

My second thoughts – and how I act on them – reveal my heart.

OK. Those are my thoughts on the matter, but what about God’s thoughts? What do His thoughts reveal?

One Scripture comes to my mind, a paraphrase of Jeremiah 29:11:

I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, they are thoughts for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

And I think that’s great!

God Almighty has let us in on His own thoughts.

And I think that’s great.

I think That's really great.

Sunday, January 08, 2006

The Things I Do For Love

Ginny did not have any idea of where we were driving. I’d made all the arrangements and kept all secret from her.

I told her to trust me implicitly and to wear the shirt I picked out of her closet.

We’ve been in a bit of a rut recently and I wanted to thrill and delight her, to bring joy and light into her dull, drab existence.

But, for this post to make any sense, you need to understand that I am NOT a cat person.

That means that when I go into a room where there are eight or ten cat lovers all calling “Here, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty”, the cat will ignore all of them with disdain and jump into my lap and purr.

I’ll gently shove the filthy varmint onto the floor. The cat lovers will Ooh and Aah. But the creature will glare at them with hate and climb into my lap again.

While the serpent may be the most subtle of all beasts of the field, the cat is surely the most perverse.

But in spite of that, I took Ginny to a Cat Show – which she did not know was in town. I think it made her happy:



The place swarmed with cats and cat lovers:

I was reminded of the Wanda Gag poem:

Cats here.
Cats there.
Cats and Kittens everywhere.
Hundreds of cats.
Thousands of cats.
Millions and billions and trillions of cats!



When I paid the fine and went into the place, they stamped my hand with the mark of the beast:



Ginny went around cages actually touching cats. Live ones:
I endured.



The cat people at this show acted so intense. Indistinguishable cats were being given ribbons for some reason and the owners acted as though they

were competing in the Olympics. Some owners were actually swilling Gatorade to calm their jitters about the judging.

Ginny appeared enthralled and charmed by the show; she didn't even balk at my many clever, witty jokes involving never having seen so much pussy in one place before.

She tolerates me.

I love her.

I took her to a cat show.

Ah, the things I do for love.

Monday, January 09, 2006 **Exploring A Shipwreck**



A few years ago my friend Wes and his brother explored a shipwreck site on Ponte Vedra Beach, a few miles south of Jacksonville, Florida. Just before Christmas, Wes gave me a set of photos of the wreck to post on my website.

Every once in a while as hurricanes surge up Florida's east coast, the wind and waves and tides uncover things buried in the sands of the beach.

When I was a boy, I heard about a man who, as he strolled the beach down south of here, found an 18-foot-long chain made of heavy gold links. And on this gold chain hung a cross studded with emeralds and rubies. It had been buried in the sand for centuries, debris from a Spanish galleon's wreck in the 1500s.

Yes, the waves uncover odd things in the sand.

But the sand washes back in to cover all sorts of things too. I've seen cars, parked on the beach for only a few hours, completely covered by sand so you

can only see the roof and radio antenna. Docks disappear beneath the sand and even whole houses.

Then, after a time long or short, the tides uncover them again. I've heard of ancient Indian dugout canoes which were buried in the sand being uncovered by the moving waters.

My friend Wes has no idea of the name of the ship he and his brother found, but he did take photos of the Ponte Vedra shipwreck. I've tried to Google search Florida shipwreck sites without being able to find any information at all about this particular ship. The hand-hewn timbers and rusty square-cut nails indicate it is an ancient wreck.



The 15 photos Wes took are posted in the Jacksonville history section of my website at www.cowart.info. (Left-hand column, under the heading Ponte Vedra Shipwreck). If anyone out there in the Blog World has any information about this ill-fated ship, I'd appreciate an e-mail.

I chose today to post these shipwreck photos because today marks the one-year anniversary of my venture into blogging.

In that year I've seen many things uncovered within myself that I thought were safely buried beneath the sands of time. Waterlogged timbers from the shipwreck of my life, rusty twisted wrought-iron ideas, sharp slivers of broken glass from my past ... but even, now and then, a tiny flake of gold.

In ways, I feel exposed, ashamed, uncovered, when I realize that people read my posting – the counter software says about 13,000 readers of the blog in this first year and scads more readers on the website.

I brag and feel proud and flattered...

Yet, like a ghost crab, I'm tempted to scurry for cover and burrow back under the sand when exposed to light. It's uncomfortable to be so vulnerable.

I feel I am a singularly unsuccessful man, a loser, a washout, a shipwrecked soul, a man Christ rescued by the skin of my teeth.

Other men have to drink heavily to get to where I am in life. And I got here sober!

I feel ashamed of myself and my failings and I want to bury all in the sands of time...

Yet I feel there are a lot of beachcombers out there in the world, people wandering the beach hoping to find something of value in the litter washed up by the tide, people searching for a flake of gold, people hoping to find something worthwhile leftover from a floundered ship — or from my floundered life.

I write with these beachcombers in mind, thinking they may find something useful in the shipwreck site that is my life.

So, I let the tide wash over me exposing worm-eaten timbers and broken crockery and shipwrecked dreams — and an occasional bit of glitter worth putting in your pocket.



I try to be honest in this blog, writing happy things and pleasures as well as frustration and despair; temptations and failures as well as giddy joys.

You'll find a lot of plain old aluminum tab tops when digging through my blog. But every once in a while, maybe someone will uncover a cross in the sand. That's what I hope they'll find.

Or, maybe my musings are just flotsam and jetsam which should rightfully be covered by the sands of time with no loss to anyone.

But, nevertheless, I keep on believing and I keep on writing.

It's what I do.

Tuesday, January 10, 2006

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