

**Kasilof
Community
Church**

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KCC Newsletter

Spring 2008

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In March, as many of you are aware, we sent a construction team from our church to Ometepec, Mexico to help build a second story on a school that Tim and Barb Woods, missionaries we help support, are integrally involved with. The 12-member team consisted of Pastor Paul, John Evan-son, Bill Davis, Darrell Mis-ner, Perry & Sheryl Neel, Roxane Matthewson, Issac and Hannah Hutchison, Cody Brown, and Chloe and Arnie Nelson. By most ac-counts the trip provided last- ing memories, and even though the construction re- sults might not have met pre- trip expectations, the gen- erosity of so many at KCC has and will go a long way toward meeting the building goals. To that end, thank- you to everyone who took part, either through very

generous giving, or by very selfless volunteer efforts, or both. When people go on a trip like this, it very often ends up changing lives. There- fore, the KCC Newsletter asked all of those who par- ticipated if they wouldn't mind sharing their experi- ences in this publication. Many accepted that invita- tion and we are the lucky recipients to be able to hear first hand what it was like to travel all the way to Omete- pec, Mexico to serve the Lord. Their experiences are similar, yet diverse. Rela- tionships were formed be- tween traveler and citizen, between those that gave and those that received (not always in the order you might expect). Scattered in this issue of the KCC News- letter, please join the "KCC 12" journey to Mexico.

From the Pastor's PC

In Mexico, we learned that roosters are irritating. Penetrating the deepest sleep, disturbing the weariest soul, the crow of the rooster is loud, abrasive and relentless. Slowly, we acquiesced to the rooster's presence.

In the gospel message, our Lord spoke to Peter about the rooster.

And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." **Mark 14:30**

After our experience with roosters, I wondered if there is intentionality to arousing Peter to his sin with the rooster's crow. Peter was often in the honorable forefront of faithfulness to Christ. Among other things, he was the only one to actually walk on water with Christ and the first to confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. But on the night of Jesus' trial, Peter was bitterly wakened from his blissful oblivion to personal sinfulness -- by an irritating rooster.

We can learn some lessons from this part of Peter's life.

1. No matter how perceptive, ardent and sincere our previous confession of Christ we are vulnerable. We sin.
2. We may need the loud, abrasive, relentless but gracious crow of a rooster to pierce our slumbering heart. God loves us enough to test us with loss, stress, difficult relationships and challenging circumstances to remind us of our deepest need for His mercy.
3. God often allows us to spend a period of time in bewildering confusion and grief as we waken to our flaws. Peter went out and wept bitterly. We know he lived with this terror of the soul for several days. While actually momentary, this time can seem like an eternity.

4. Our Lord wants to restore us from this condition and will do so as we respond to him. When the Lord moved to renew His relationship with Peter, Peter humbly and vulnerably jumped out of the boat and swam toward the Lord. Forgiveness and restoration soon followed.

We all need to seek God about “roosters” that are currently active in our own lives. We will benefit from it.

How about you? Do you sense God using something difficult to improve you or are you hoping to sleep through it, wishing the rooster would be silenced? If so, let's waken together and join each other in the journey toward spiritual maturity.

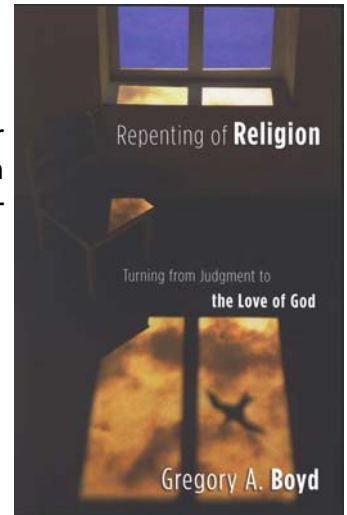


Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God

book review by KCC's anonymous book reviewer

Have you ever noticed that some people are really grumpy – like ALL the time? And surely you've noticed that guy? The one who always acts so totally selfish? And that person over there who always has that angry scowl on her face? And don't even get me started about . . . and have you ever noticed how you actually 'notice' these things?

Gregory A. Boyd has written an intriguing book: Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God. He begins with a quick discussion of the two trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Since Adam and Eve ate from the second tree instead of the first, one result is our constant, without-even-thinking-about-it, judging of others: she's ugly, he's too fat; she's mean to her kids, he's lazy . . . “the Accuser has succeeded in making us accusers” says the author. Even when we take the positive route it's still a judgment. The identifying of good and bad according to our own standards is inherent in each of us – and this author says it comes from our decision to participate in the ‘knowledge of good and evil’. While this practice infects all of humanity, we in the church have taken it a step further: we have carefully chosen to declare “war on one aspect of the forbidden fruit (evil)” while we self-righteously eat from the other side (good). We have determined the ‘good’ way to act, the ‘good’ people with whom to associate, the ‘good’ books, movies, hobbies, foods, etc. This seems right in our eyes but God declared that the whole tree is forbidden. For us to decide, and then judge ourselves and others accordingly, as to who or what is ‘good’ is just as evil in His eyes as deciding who or what is ‘evil’.



When we become a Christian we become a new creature (2 Cor 5: 16-17). This constant determining of who or what is good and who or what is evil is a part of our ‘old man’. In our new nature we recognize that God has clearly told us that He is the only One able to judge. The job He has given us is to love as He has loved us. The author explains it this way, “The central defining truth of the believer is that in Christ God ascribed unsurpassable worth to us, though we did not deserve it . . . the central defining mark of a disciple of Christ is that each . . . ascribes unconditional worth to themselves and all others”. In practice this means that our love for God is revealed by consistently choosing and acting on God’s opinion of each person we meet or think about, including ourselves. To do less gives away our yet fleshly heart that believes we are more competent to judge than God.

I can hear you sputtering! Questions and Scriptural passages are probably flooding your mind as they did mine. Boyd quickly states the following: “I understand and appreciate the concern for truth, holiness and correct biblical doctrine, especially in these postmodern times, and I fully agree that we need to be balanced in all our teaching. But the concern to balance love with any competing command is misguided. It is, in fact, unbalanced.” Hmmmm. He is right that love is very clearly identified as the greatest command (Mt. 22:37-40) and as the greatest of the things that will last (I Cor 13:13). Boyd states that any attempt we make to qualify God’s love with another attribute i.e. His wrath, moves His love away from the center of His revealed truth. God’s love is impartial and universal and He calls us to follow His example. It’s important to note that the example of love that Jesus gave us is not a shallow form of tolerance. “Scripture does not say that Jesus fellowshiped with former prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners . . .” says Boyd. “The point of the story is not how Jesus fixes the messiness of people’s lives but how he unconditionally offers the wellspring of God’s love in the midst of the messiness. . .” He has given “unsurpassable worth to people who in and of themselves have little apparent worth”.

Are you squirming in your seat as I have, trying to change the definition of ‘judge’ or justify my own right to judge in maybe just ‘this one’ instance?? God doesn’t need us to determine whether His children’s actions, intentions, ability or workmanship is good or bad. “Here is where it is crucial to know what you can know and what you can’t know” says Boyd. “We can know God’s character is decisively revealed in Jesus Christ. . . What we can’t know – what we can at best only guess at – is what it’s like to be God running this universe. We can’t judge God on the basis of His behavior . . . for the same reason we cannot judge others: We have no divine right or omniscient capacity to do so.”

So what’s the take home message? First we need to ask God to show us the huge and constant role that judging others for good or bad has in our life. A natural outcome of God’s revelation to us will be repentance of our current and past practice and the unknown damage it has inflicted both on our own spirit as well as unknowingly on others. From this we will work to replace every recognized judgment, spoken or thought, with a demonstration of love --possibly as simple as a quick prayer for the person or situation.

And as far as I’m concerned, you can go ahead and be grumpy – even ALL the time. It will give me more of a chance to practice learning how to love you!

For a more complete discussion of this interesting topic please purchase Repenting of Religion: Turning from Judgment to the Love of God by Gregory A. Boyd from your local Christian bookseller or order it on line.

The Mexican Rooster

by Bill Davis

After a long trip by plane and van, we were totally exhausted when we checked into our hotel rooms in Ometepe, Mexico. I shared a room with Pastor Paul. Sleep came easily and I was soon dreaming of golf courses with lush fairways. Around 3:30 a.m. we were suddenly awakened with the sound of a rooster crowing. It sounded as if he was standing next to our window (which was wide open due to the heat). The rooster or roosters continued to crow at least once every several minutes. Around 7:00 a.m. we were up and having breakfast with the rest of the team. The main topic of conversation at breakfast was the rooster; it seems as if the rooster was outside their window also. I equate it to the same experience as seeing Mount Redoubt from different locations in our area. No matter what road you turn up, there is Mount Redoubt. Well, the rooster seemed to be outside every one's window at the same time. I questioned this in my mind as some of these rooms were directly opposite our room, and their windows faced the street outside the hotel. It just shows you the intensity of the rooster's voice.

After breakfast we all walked to church and enjoyed meeting many of the people in Tim and Barb Woods' church. Since it was Sunday there was not any work planned for the day. Arnie Nelson and some of the team went swimming. The rest of the team just relaxed and rested. Later that afternoon Paul and I were revisiting the rooster crowing problem. As a typical male American, I decided that I would solve this problem by purchasing the rooster or roosters. I did realize that this may have meant the rooster would end up in the stew pot, but I did not dwell on the subject. I left our hotel room with the thought that I would find out who owned the rooster. My first stop was in the lobby of the hotel. The hotel lobby worker was stretched out in a hammock and talking to four Mexican men who seemed to be relaxing on the steps near the lobby. I addressed the hotel clerk with a full version of my story about purchasing the rooster. About half way through my story I realized they did not understand even small parts of the English language. They all seemed to be very polite and were nodding their heads, but they clearly did not comprehend any part of my rooster story. Then, with out giving it much thought, I tried to explain using metaphors and sign language. I imitated a rooster [caca doodle do] etc. I strutted around the room and flopped my arms like a chicken. None of this rang a bell with the Mexicans. I am sure they thought they were witnessing a large Gringo who was either drunk or had a few marbles missing in the brain. I saw that this was not getting me any where and I politely excused my self and went back to our hotel room. My big mistake after this was telling Pastor Paul about the episode. He started laughing so much he almost fell off of his chair.

Well, as far as we know, the rooster is still alive. We learned to live with his morning song, and to tell the truth, two weeks later I kind of miss hearing his voice.

HUTCHISON REPORT



On Sunday, March 30, Hannah & Isaac Hutchison gave a brief report to the congregation about their trip to Mexico.

Not surprising, Hannah was able to make some good friends while in Ometepec, friendships that will last well longer than the two weeks in which they were formed. Although Hannah did not speak about her role as part of the team, others did and

they said that Hannah was always willing to help and seemingly always with a smile on her face.

Isaac shared about what many of us have heard, but obviously seeing it first hand made quite an impression on him, that being that most of the local Mexican people live in conditions that are far more humble than even the poorest American lives in. Yet their demeanor and attitudes are not what you would expect. Isaac spoke to the contrast of how little the locals have, but how content they are. This incongruous equation impacted Isaac, as it did all of the team members.



“The Pillars and the Pews”

by Peggy McGarry

Recently I had an eight hour layover in the Salt Lake City airport. Not one to patiently sit around, I looked at billboards to see what I could do in the city and noticed a poster offering free shuttle rides to “Temple Square” in downtown Salt Lake City. I made my way to the designated area and waited 45 minutes before the van arrived. A delightful older couple was the volunteer driver and tour guide. Their friendliness reminded me of our former church greeters Dave and Sheila Danielson. The man told me that they have shorter hours in the winter and I was the last pick up of the day and would have to find different transportation for the return. I agreed to the one way trip, hopped in the van and listened to his wife talk the entire 15 minute ride into the city. She gave me an overview of the area, specifics of the Temple and some personal history of her life. When we came to the Temple Square she insisted on walking me over to the North Visitors’ Center. At this impressive three story building she introduced to a lady arranging tours as well as every volunteer she encountered.

Due to the fact it was a quiet late winter afternoon, I received the VIP (meaning I was the only one) tour from two lovely young women serving as missionaries at Temple Square. I realized God was giving me an opportunity to converse with them privately that otherwise would not have been possible in a group tour. The more experienced and confident woman was from Canada and the other from Russia. I was impressed with their knowledge and sincerity. As they led me around explaining much about Joseph Smith and slightly less about Jesus Christ, I asked the Lord to show me how I might graciously stimulate dialogue with them without being offensive. My guide was very animated, hardly taking a breath, and I wondered when that opportunity would come. Finally she asked if I had any questions. Remembering her frequent reference to the prophet Joseph Smith restoring the gospel that had passed from the earth at the death of the 12 apostles, I asked her what was the true gospel that was restored. She explained it was the complete ordinances and sacraments of the church. Then I asked her what the significance of Jesus dying on the cross held for her. With a questioning look and short pause, she quickly spied off a rote response and then went into her testimony of “Heavenly Father’s” purpose for her on earth. Moving me along quickly after that, mental red flags continued to

pop up when she would venture past the description of the buildings and into their theology.

More and more, I found myself hurting for these sincere young women as I sought for God's words to open the door of truth to their minds. Since it didn't appear that I was making significant headway with them, I began asking the Lord if there was some way He could allow these people into heaven. Was there something here that He could confirm as true faith? But there was no wavering from the Lord as He reminded me His truth cannot co-exist with contradiction.

My lovely tour guides then took me to the Tabernacle where the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings. It was built in 1867 and is an incredible acoustical and architecturally designed building. Inside my guide pointed to the pillars which were made from white pine. Each one had been polished and delicately hand painted to appear like marble pillars. She also proudly pointed to the five remaining original pews that were also crafted from white pine and through a seven layer process were hand painted to look like oak. From this building we went over to the Assembly Hall which was built in 1882 and had some unique features that demonstrated that people were smaller 125 years ago than they are now. We laughed, talked for a few more minutes, and too quickly my 30 minute VIP tour was over. I wrote them a Word of encouragement from scripture and they handed me some brochures. They suggested I continue to look around the 35 acres of the Temple Square.

While the buildings were beautiful and the people extremely friendly, I found it was not a place that renewed my spirit. Despair settled over me for these people who so confidently have put their faith and belief in the teachings of Joseph Smith. I wandered back over to the Tabernacle building and sat down to think and talk to the Lord. He directed my eyes to the pillars and then to the pews, reminding me of the description given by my tour guides. I wondered why the builders changed their appearance from the white pine. It was then, through this imagery, God began to make clear to me that no matter how lovely these objects appeared to man, they were masquerading as something they were not. They were neither true marble pillars nor solid oak pews. In the same way, the outwardly beautiful and polished Mormon religion was concealing the truth of its heritage. However painstaking the craftsmanship of man, it can only mimic the work of God, but it is not and never will be the real thing.

My Lead Dog or My Spouse?

Submitted by Karla Hudson: found in *Mushing Magazine* by Josh Hudson

For an enlightening reality check, fill out the following quiz. Answer all that apply to you. When finished, add up both columns. If the number marked in the left hand column exceeds the number marked the right hand column, burn this immediately. If the right hand column exceeds the left, cut this out and hang it on your refrigerator.

	Lead Dog	Spouse
1) I'll never forget the first time I saw you.	_____	_____
2) I wanted you immediately.	_____	_____
3) I often find myself daydreaming of you.	_____	_____
4) There's a photo of you on my desk.	_____	_____
5) I love showing you off to my friends.	_____	_____
6) Often, you sleep on my side of the bed.	_____	_____
7) In the past year, I've spent more than \$50 on you.	_____	_____
8) I want to take you to Alaska.	_____	_____
9) Our last adventure lasted more than a 1hr.	_____	_____
10) You always respond to my commands.	_____	_____
11) I would never let anyone else take you out for a ride.	_____	_____
12) You make my heart beat faster.	_____	_____
13) I worry that you might have ticks.	_____	_____
14) You've taken me places I never thought I would see.	_____	_____
15) When you move, it's like poetry in motion.	_____	_____
16) When we're together, we bond as one.	_____	_____
17) You look at me like I'm the only person that matters in the world. .	_____	_____
18) Your unconditional love knows no end.	_____	_____
19) When your old, I'll hand feed you.	_____	_____
20) I'll never replace you with your younger sibling.	_____	_____

House Raising in Kasilof

It seems like the spirit of giving through building projects is alive and well in Kasilof as many folks from KCC banded together for an old fashioned “barn-raising” to help Jim and Diane McRae get jump-started on a new home. Neither



spring snow-storms or fingers caught in chop-saws could deter the progress. Take a look at some of these pictures while you sing “Praises to the Lord” in thanksgiving for those who so selflessly have given to

the people of Ometepec, Mexico and also Kasilof, Alaska.



Four Fishing Bears

by Ruth Lawler

Once upon a time in the Alaska summer of 2007, five of us went fishing northwest of Augustine Volcano at Dry Bay. Our transport vehicle was a Piper Cherokee 6 piloted by Jim, who stayed on the beach with the plane. The rest of us followed the creek inland in search of silver salmon. Jim stayed behind due to a bum knee, and not because bears had once eaten the remains of the lunch he had left out on the tail of the Cherokee.

Tom and Dixon were from Connecticut. Tom keeps a Super Cub at our place and has been coming to Alaska for over 20 years. Dixon, an elderly sportsman, was Tom's guest. We had met our guest, Brett, in Wyoming. Everyone was armed but me, and since I knew that many bears fished here, I never strayed far from the men.

Tom and Dixon headed for the first bend in the creek while Brett and I continued on to our favorite fishing hole further upstream. On the opposite side of the creek were four bears, mama bear and 3 half grown cubs from the summer before. We reckoned there were plenty of fish for everyone, but we were wrong. The bears showed little interest in us; instead they headed upstream where there are many other fishing holes. I thought they were gone for the day. The creek at Dry Bay is clean and clear, but the fish that are usually visible just weren't. So after a while Brett and I gave up casting for nothing and headed downstream to see how Tom and Dixon were doing.

Once there we discovered that the four bears had not continued on upstream, they had doubled back to where Tom and Dixon were. I thought that was kind of sneaky. They were attracted no doubt, by the fish the men had caught and stashed uncut in the weeds. Now these four bears were all lousy fishermen, that was plain to see and quite comical to watch. Trouble was, they wanted our fish, so all at once they started to cross over to our side of the creek to get them. We hollered, stomped, screamed and flapped our arms and jackets, making such a fearful racket that they turned around and went

way back into the trees. Relieved, we resumed fishing, leaving our catch whole so as not to entice them by the smell of blood and guts. Keeping the fish in a cooler would have been better, because they knew, we had fish and they didn't. They were plotting, and I was watching for them.

The inevitable happened. In about 20 minutes the bears reappeared. "There they are, back again!" I shouted. And they came, at a dead run, not unlike a cavalry charge. Dixon was in the creek where he would be the first one eaten, so naturally he was the most excited. Whipping out a shotgun, he shouted, "Should I shoot them? Should I shoot them?" "No! Don't shoot," we advised in unison. Tom and Brett had drawn pistols, and three of the bears had stopped short at the edge of the opposite bank. But one cub, like the foolhardy adolescent he was, was coming across.

What to do? We began hollering, flapping, jumping, and making a terrible racket again. It had worked once on all four of them, and now only one bear was charging. Bewildered, he stopped in midstream when he noticed no one else was with him. His family stayed put on the other bank. We kept up the noise, and the adolescent decided that an army of one was just not going to cut it. He went back. Dixon stopped shaking and got out of the water. The bears wandered off once more into the trees, but it was late and our nerves were frazzled, so we picked up our fish and headed for the plane.

Unsatisfied and unfed, the four fishing bears followed us to the beach. They were too bold and growing bolder. They had obviously been successful at stealing fish, and other fishermen had probably been feeding them. Sooner or later they were either going to hurt someone or get themselves shot. They had spoiled our favorite fishing spot, but even so, we had great photos to show the folks back home, fish to eat, and an exciting story to tell. And there's a happy ending, because on our next few trips to Dry Bay with other out of state visitors, we never saw those bears again. So herein lies a mystery, whatever happened to them? We may never know, and even so, I don't really care. But now the moral; please, please, whatever you do, never, ever feed the bears.

Letters from a GRINGO

Editor's note: the following is a compilation of email messages (letters) sent back to Kasilof from Arnie Nelson during his trip to Mexico. I think these might provide an "inside" look at what our Kasilof work team experienced on their trip.

March 1, 2008

Hi Lynn,

Made it to Ometepec at 9:30pm to-night. Barb met us and served chicken enchilada casserole and home made limeade. For breakfast this morning I had Juevos con Chorizo (spicy sausage) at a little outdoor restaurant at the edge of a 70' cliff overlooking the crashing surf of the warm Oceana Pacifica. Tim advised highly against the Chorizo because it was made from pork. I decided to take a chance. It was delicious and the fried eggs looked horrible. Also served with homemade tortillas and all were fixed in outdoor kitchen over wood fire heat. Chloe ordered OJ with hers and the waiter said they didn't have OJ only soda. Then he remembered that they had some oranges so they juiced them so the girls could have their orange juice. The room is very comfortable but no a/c. Fast Wireless internet though. Going to bed soon. Almost midnight. Getting up for breakfast at 8:30am and church at 10am. Everything walking distance.

Love, Arnie

March 2, 2008

Good Morning Lynn,

Got up when I heard a rooster crow at about 6:30am. It was the same rooster that has been crowing about every 30 seconds, all night long. Sometimes you couldn't hear the rooster because of the dog barking. Was okay night though - slept about 6 hours. It is 7:15am and you can hear someone playing mariachi music very loud on some speakers, church bells from the Catholic Church, horns honking, TVs blaring from the neighbors. I don't think I have ever heard all of these things mixed together before.



Forgot to mention that Suzie and Andy also were there to greet us at the dinner last night. Andy said we might be able to get in some futbol (soccer) pick up games. Basketball too if we want. We plan to play Hoccer (International Trademark Pending) with the school kids.

We will attend a short church service this morning and then go back for the regular service tonight at 6pm, I think. Our schedule for the week will be breakfast at a little restaurant next to the hotel. Then walk to the school where we will work until 1pm (quietly they hope while school is in session until 2pm). We will take a break and eat lunch and siesta until 3pm. We will then go back to work until 6pm. We learned last night that there are 3 brothers from the church who are experienced builders and one of them will act as foreman. Wish we had known this as it was a great relief to know we didn't have to be the experts. It is going to be hard work but very rewarding I can tell.

I love you all very much. Will send pictures soon.
Arnie

March 2, 2008

Hi Lynn,

Very busy Sunday. Started with breakfast of huevos rancheros and a 15-minute walk through town, which was already bustling. Got to church which is more of a big gazebo but everything has big fences and is lockable for security. The music was similar to ours but in Spanish. Much more energy, I guess. Words shown on screen and 2 friends of Tim & Barb's (Erin and Anne) interpreting the songs and the praises/prayers and message and even announcements. They have keyboard (Cesar) and drum set (his son) along



with 2 guitars and vocals and sticks (very musical.) Cesar has 2 children and a motorcycle. He loaned me the motorcycle and invited us (through an interpreter) to the Rio to swim after lunch. I was very skeptical because the rivers we had seen so far looked more like sewer drains. He said it would very nice.

Asked others if they wanted to go. Nobody was excited about getting back in the van but the eight of us that went were Sheryl, Perry, Cody, Darrell, Hannah, Issac, Chloe

and I. Then there was Anne & Erin, Nereida (Andy's friend), Andy & Suzie, her friend Yeni (Jeni... her mom owns the Hotel Yeni where we are staying), and Cesar. Left pretty late (3:15pm). Drove back roads for 45 minutes to an hour. Went through very small Indian villages. Parked the car at a very beautifully kept Hot Springs. Had 3 pools. Hot, Very hot, and boiling. I jumped in the coolest pool to check it out. It was plenty hot. Then we walked 15 minutes to the river. I was very skeptical because there was no sign of a river for 100 miles. We hiked down the valley to a small stream about 4 feet across with a few goats wading in it. I was a little disappointed but thought it was nice enough and clean. However, we hiked another five minutes over another hill to reach the best swimming hole I have ever been to. The water was clean, the current pretty strong, the water was cool, but not cold. Rocks to jump from, sandy beach, and a foot bridge suspended 50 ft over the valley. This is dry season so the river is only about 10 ft deep but there are high water marks in the canyon showing at least 20 ft higher at flood stage. Could stay only an hour, as we had to get back for evening church. Before we left I jumped in the 2nd pool and waded across. Then I put my foot in the 3rd pool and practically scalded it. Then I just waded in up to my thighs and jumped out almost in tears. I was the bravest (craziest) one there until Cesar stepped over the wall into the 3rd pool and waded quickly across the length of the pool. Alaskans hate to be outdone so I got in and waded slowly across and back. Andy told Cesar that, "I wasn't right in the head". Cesar agreed and gave up. I proved them right by diving in and swimming 2 lengths in the boiling water. Felt great as I was used to it by then.

Got to church in the evening and the music was great again. Tim was in the middle of delivering a great gospel message when I thought I felt a mosquito landed on my ankle. I was wearing long pants as requested by Tim even though it is 75 degrees in the evening. I scratched at the "mosquito" and forgot about it. Erin was in front of me whispering the translation of the sermon. Tim was really getting into it and asking people "what" could save them from their sins. I felt the "mosquito" on the middle of my calf. I just ignored it as I was paying attention to the translation going on in a whisper right in front of me. Just as Erin was explaining that Tim was saying, with some emphasis, that only the sacrifice of Jesus could save us from eternal separation from God in hell, I felt something bigger than a mosquito right at my knee and inside my pant leg. At first I told my self, "Don't panic, I am sure it is nothing." Then I thought of scorpions and I



started jiggling my leg as fast as I could and swatting at my pants to get that thing out of there. A couple seconds later a gecko lizard about 4" long ran down my leg and across the floor. Erin thought it was pretty rude behavior on my part, but I only missed a few lines of the sermon. Can't imagine what the people thought of me. They probably thought that I was possessed.

It doesn't sound like it, but I am homesick for you guys. The people here are wonderful. Will write more soon.

I love you all, Arnie

March 3, 2008

Hello Pat:

I was exhausted last night when I typed that email and I forgot to add the tagline at the bottom, "**NOT APPROVED FOR NEWSLETTER USE**". It is good to hear from you. I was saying on the way back from the swimming hole that I wish you were with us. I intend to return someday and I want you to come with me.

I am sitting in a lawn chair on the 3rd floor roof at 6:30am and it is already warming. The city has been bustling (donkeys braying, horns honking, radios and tvs blasting, rooster that never stops, dogs that bark at the rooster) since I got up here about 5:30am. I couldn't sleep. Felt a cold coming on last night and have it pretty good this morning. Still, I am looking forward to the work at hand. Wish I could type faster. I have a million things I want to tell you all. Please forward this to Lynn so she has something from me this morning.

Bill Davis learned that the man who owns the rooster goes to Tim's church. I told him to go to the man and explain that rooster is a delicacy in America and offer to buy the thing and have it for lunch. I last saw Bill walking towards the man while reaching for his wallet. Haven't heard how it turned out.

Just talked to Isaac and he said the pig was worse than the chicken last night. I didn't hear any pig but I would think a grunting pig would be more relaxing than a rooster crowing, but who am I to start an argument.

Much more to tell you and haven't even started any work yet. Going now to eat breakfast.

Your Brother, Arnie

**NOT APPROVED FOR NEWSLETTER USE*

(Editor's Note: EVERYTHING anyone sends me is subject to Newsletter publication)

March 3, 2008

Dear Lynn,

Began the day by walking with Isaac to Barb Wood's first English class at 7am. He was to give his testimony and I asked if he or she would mind if I sat in the back and listened. He did great (with some prompting from Barb) and answered a few questions. Barb asked me to say a little about myself. I told them about you guys and what I did for a living. Then they each told me something about their families. The class had four 9th grade boys. Miguel's dad is a snack distributor, Cesar's dad is a doctor, the next boy's dad was a lawyer and the 4th, an engineer. All but 3 of the mom's stayed at home, the other worked in a lab, one of the mom's is a lawyer but chooses to be at home. I told him it was a higher calling to be at home. Then went back for breakfast at 7:30 at the little place next to the hotel and work at 8. My Spanish is getting better, but the hired guys don't know what to do with us. They need to pour 6 or 7 more columns and some concrete girders before we can do the work we had planned. We try to help, but mostly we just get in their way. So we try to keep busy by hauling sand, gravel and cement up to the roof. All of the concrete gets mixed by hand right on the roof. The form boards are taking longer because they asked us not to use any power tools in the morning as it disturbs the classes. The school project has been a very inefficient use of our time and talents, but the trip has been amazing.

During the day, we took breaks from the heat by playing soccer on the concrete playground. I played for 1 recess 30 minutes and 1 PE class about 30 minutes. Segundo was the Substitute PE teacher today and he has been working off and on as the translator on the job. He asked me if I wanted to go play in a pick up game of soccer. He plays 3 nights a week. These guys are all in great shape. He is about 30, married to Ana and has a baby named Samuel. Segundo and Cesar (the same guy who took us to the river) volunteered their time at the jobsite. I talked Cesar into going with us to play soccer even though basketball is his game. I told Tim and Andy that I was going to play soccer with Cesar and Segundo at 6pm. They were sure I had misunderstood, as Cesar never plays soccer. I rode with Segundo (he also has a motorcycle but he is much safer than Cesar). We went by Cesar's house (which is beautiful and sits at the



top of a hill, Segundo says he is pretty wealthy). We waited a few minutes and Cesar came out ready to go.

We drove through the streets of Ometepepec with me on the back of Segundo's motorcycle taking pictures while Cesar rode "horses" (wheelies) through town. I asked Segundo if it was weird having an Americano on the back of his bike. He said yes and that he would get teased. I said sorry. He said it was okay. Segundo's English is really good, Cesar's english is pretty limited but he just comes up to people and hugs them and usually lifts them off the floor. I really felt a connection with Cesar immediately when he loaned me his motorcycle, but then I noticed



that he declined communion after Tim spoke about having right relationships with your neighbor. We are a lot alike, I think. Want to make sure we are doing things right and keeping it real. Anyway, back to soccer. We arrived at this dirty, dusty, grassless field. It was very intimidating walking out there. Their custom doesn't seem to be one of introductions. Segundo said if I wanted to play offense to just find a spot and try to stay out of the way. Cesar just avoided me. I ended up playing forward. Every person there was very good. There were at least a half dozen guys my age or older. They split the older guys and younger guys and we played 15 on 15. We played really hard the first 15 minutes and I thought I was going to die from sprinting. Then our team scored. The other team had to take their shirts off as a penalty. That is why they play so hard in the beginning. The field is much larger than American Soccer. The ball hardly ever goes out of bounds. I had a weak shot on goal in the first 1 minute, and a couple more chances later in the game. Afterwards, since I didn't die or embarrass the game too much, a few of them talked to me in broken English and me in broken Spanish. They asked if I was coming back. I said yes but I wanted to take a picture of everyone together and I would send them copies. They said bring your camera.

This is getting too long, so I am going to break it there so I can check to see if you sent anything.

Love Arnie

March 4, 2008

Buenos Noches Lynn,
Most of the group is going fishing tomorrow. John, Cody, Hannah, Chloe and I plan to take it easy tomorrow and maybe work a half day with John and then cut out some crafts for Barb. We hope to spend a little time walking around town too. John will probably work a full day. He is feeling the pressure to get some things laid out so we can get something accomplished. I hope he has low expectations. I think he will regret not going fishing. We will be leaving a lot of ministry opportunity behind for others anyway. Had a pretty rough day but made it through okay. Hard to try to keep yourself busy when you can't find work to do.



Let me see if I can remember where I left off with the family next door to the hotel. I was sitting out on the step of the shop waiting for everyone to return from the prayer time when Andres came out and pulled up a chair. He had a toy Sawn off shotgun. He seems happy. We talked a little (in Spanish) about Alaska and I learned that he was 13 and had 2 sisters. The household consists of (I think) a woman named Patty with two daughters and a son. The eldest daughter, Melvis is married to Jon? and has two sweet little children, Mikey and Ana. The house, restaurant, kitchen, and small adjoining store are about 2,000 sq. ft. I believe there are 8 people living there. The house part can't be more than 1,000 sq. ft. but it looks as though they are adding on to the second story. Her next daughter is Neredia and is 18. She is good friends with Andy and she went swimming with us last week. She can understand a few English words. What strikes me is how simple the lifestyle is. I am sure they would trade places with me, but I bet they would want to trade back pretty soon, and I may not want to trade back. I do want to whittle our pile of stuff down when I get back.

Didn't meet any new people today, but had a nice time at dinner when Andres (not the same one as from the breakfast place, but Ruby's son). She has been doing the lunch and supper cooking for past couple of days. She is beautiful and her husband Andres Sr. comes up to wait (patiently) until we are all finished and then she puts food away and washes the dishes. The girls usually help for a little bit, but she does most of the work. I showed little Andres, who is six, and Ruby pictures of Alaska and our family. He liked the pictures of the wildlife and the snow and the dog sled teams. They didn't

have a word for dog sled, I guess.

Well, I better get this in the mail so you have time to write me back if you want.
Love, Arnie

March 8, 2008

Good Morning Lynn,

This is going to be a quick note. Head over to the job at 7 am. Friday was a good day. Finally had enough work to keep us all busy. We have enough columns poured that we could start installing the panels. That means drilling a lot of holes into the roof and the columns for rebar which slides into the wall and holds it in place until the cement is added. Three loads of steel finally arrived. It was supposed to be here Monday. Perry was to have been working on welding up trusses all week. I am sure he will get as much done as he can now. He has been worried about his welder since it was the only bag missing when we arrived in Zihuatanejo. It arrived Wed via DHL.

Not sure if I mentioned it earlier but Cesar (Pronounced Cesa), the music guy, told me, through an interpreter, that since he came and played soccer that we need to play basketball. He wanted to schedule a game between us and the teachers of the school. I said no initially, saying no one in our group would want to play. I mentioned this at the next meal and there was pretty good interest. Especially from Bill, so I told him to set up a game and we would come.

Anyway, at the 2 o'clock meal, Barb said the game was on for 7:30 that evening at a public court downtown near Cesar's house. Several people said "We can't play basketball and some (especially Bill who has been working very hard) said I am pretty worn out. I said "Too bad, we agreed to play, we are going to play." We planned to have a quick meal and then Barb was to meet us to escort us the 10 blocks into downtown. Well things got later because a load of steel arrived at 6:15pm so Andy showed up to drive us there. He was driving the jeep. We all hurried down and piled into the jeep. 11 of us plus Andy, Suzie and a friend of theirs named Jerusalem. We all loaded up for the five minute drive through town. Quite a scene. I don't think we would have stuck out that much, but Perry's whooping in Spanish and barking like a dog was kind of hard to ignore.

We arrived in roughly about one piece and divided in teams. Only three teachers showed. Segundo, Barb, and Cesar, but they also had the other Mexicans plus Chloe and Perry. Not enough of us knew anything about basketball so the first half hour was pretty rough. I think a lot of people (Andy, Perry, Segundo, et al) thought it was like football and you just ran up and hit people. It was rough. It was like watching a live production of "West Side Story". All seemed to have fun though. Bill did well as no one

could stop him once we got him the ball. It was hard for us to control the ball enough to get it to him very often. Everybody took a few shots. Some were closer than others. Perry hit the rim with his first shot. We had to stop the game to straighten it. His second shot missed just about everything and bounced into the street into the open window of a cab. I thought that was pretty funny. He had to pay a 10 Peso cab fare to get the ball back. Barb was really tough and you can tell she has played some ball. We played under the lights for about an hour and then gave up the court to the serious players who had been waiting and watching our game. The losers had to buy "Frescas" for the winners. There was a little shop just down the street so we had a nice time just relaxing out in the cool air. When it was time to go, everyone realized that Barb and Andy had left in her car. Some asked "Who is going to drive us home?" I held up the keys Andy had given me and said, "No problem, I can get you home." The trip home was much less crowded, as surprisingly there was a pretty big group that chose to walk. We drove past Cesar's as he wanted to escort us home on his motorbike. So after me almost sideswiping Cesar's car parked on the narrow street (I was trying to get over to let cars go around me and I was still trying to figure out the clutch) he gave Cody a ride half way. Then Cody jumped in with us so Cesar could ride some "horses". We made it back to the hotel in the same number of pieces we started in and Cesar offered rides to the girls and let me, Cody and Isaac take it for a spin. This is great place to have a bike. Pretty uneventful Friday night but I think I will remember it for a long time.



Have to get to work. I love you. Arnie

March 8, 2008

Hi Lynn,

Nothing of importance happened today. Yesterday, I gave one of my extra tape measures to Andres who is the 13 year old son of the lady who fixes our breakfast. Then I headed down the block to start work at the school. Before I got to the corner Andres came running down the street waving what looks exactly like a .357 Pistol. He decided to give me one of the two pellet guns in his collection in return for my gift. I was touched. He also gave me a fresca bottle 1/4 filled with plastic bb's. I was a little nervous walking around town with a very realistic looking toy. No trouble yet but I am still looking. Love, Arnie

March 9, 2008

(Lynn compiled the following from a "chat" session)

Hi Lynn,

I still get headaches in the afternoon. No coffee shops here. There was an espresso place where I got a really bad coffee in Acapulco on the way down. They served Instant Maxwell House for the first few days then they switched to some kind of chickory with hot milk. I can barely drink it. The other morning they brought out fresh squeezed orange juice for most of the group, but Perry and Sheryl got this beautiful orangeish, reddish juice that was absolutely ice cold. Sheryl couldn't place the flavor but said it was the best juice she ever had. We asked in confusing broken Spanish what kind of fruit juice this was. She couldn't make us understand her answer so she went in the back and brought out an empty V8 Juice Blend bottle. I thought that was pretty funny.

Very hot today. Started at 6:30am with Isaac and I going for a short hike up to the top of the hill to see the 80' tall concrete cross. Then we walked towards downtown to try to find a coffee shop. I found a day-old donut shop and bought a couple. Isaac thought they didn't look good enough to risk it. I ate one and brought one back to the room for Chloe.

Church was okay this morning but it was too hot. I got a lot out of the beginner's Sunday school on Genesis. Anita is really a good teacher and made us participate. Church and Sunday School goes from 10am-12:30pm. Then we walked back to the hotel and some of us walked down to get the van. I drove us up to the river. Andy gave directions but he didn't want to drive the big van. Everything went fine. The roads are pretty rough and steep, but we made it up and down them okay. Had a great time at the river and I can now dive from the same height as Cesar but not very good form. Had to drive back fast as we were running late. Made it back in time for church this evening at 6:30pm.

I love you, See you soon. Arnie

March 11, 2008

About 5:25pm I told John that I was leaving for soccer at 5:45pm. He decided he wanted to mix a half batch of concrete to spray on the walls. Got it about half mixed when we both remembered that it was church night and they were supposed to be cleaned up and at the church at 6:30pm. I left him at 5:45p and said good luck. I am not sure how it turned out. Haven't had time to talk to him either. I went and got Darrell and



Sheryl to stop what they were doing and help him. He also had Ike, Cody, Chloe and Hannah.

After the soccer game tonight, Segundo drove me to the bank to get some pesos to pay the hotel. After the bank we went to get some ice cream. I asked if we could get some for Ana and go to his house for a little while. He thought that would be good. Had a very nice visit for about 45 minutes. Ana was very nice and fixed me some oatmeal. It is like a soup and they serve it in a mug with some cookies. Pretty interesting. She speaks almost no English, but I could understand some of what she was saying so Segundo didn't have to translate her so much. While I was there, Ana told me her brother and his wife had a baby boy. He was born yesterday. They live in the house next door. He was beautiful. They had him at home. As I was leaving Ana said some of our friends were at the house on the other side of them. Perry and Sheryl were coming out just we were leaving. The prayer group had apparently broken into small groups and went to people's houses to pray then they made their way back to the hotel. I just walked back with Perry & Sheryl. They really liked it (the prayer time, not walking with me). Being able to see the houses where people live makes them more memorable. Did I say that Chloe and Hannah are spending the night at Suzie's? Isaac wasn't sure if he was going to allow it. Hannah has been a little doll and very respectful to Isaac. She gave me a shoulder rub at the table one night. Then she gave Darrell a really good one and he paid her 150 pesos. That's like a dollar a minute! I think I will give Darrell a shoulder rub tomorrow.

Darrell, Hannah, and Chloe went over to the University to an English class so the students could practice conversational English with them. Heard they were a big hit. Darrell said the boys (and the girls) liked her blue eyes. Only the boys asked her for her phone number. She didn't give it to any of them. She has played a lot but I think she has learned there are many ways to be happy. She hasn't even unpacked her Ipod. She has really hit it off with the foreman on the job. Francisco is one of four brothers who do construction. He is the



Maestro (Boss). He is married with 2 kids. Maybe 35? They are always teasing each other and splashing water. He calls her Floha, I think. It means lazy. On the way to soccer, we drove by the market like you read about on the Internet. We had a few minutes so we stopped to look around. It is almost as big as Fred Meyer but it involves over 100 to 200 families at least. Would take me hours to write about it, it is amazing. It is open every day. They slaughter cows, pigs and chickens there every day so people can buy fresh meat. All of the meat is sold every day as most people don't have freezers. They also have amazing looking fruit. Will take whoever wants to go tomorrow morning. I asked Ana about good Mexican vanilla. She said you can't buy it in Ometepec. You have to get it at the Walmart in Acapulco. People in Ometepec use artificial because it is cheaper, I guess. The market looks crowded, but they keep it clean. Segundo used to be a health inspector and said it is very sanitary. I am so tired and sore from mixing concrete and also running around at full speed embarrassing America (playing soccer).

Love, Arnie

March 13, 2008

From Lynn:

Please be praying for everyone as they travel back from Mexico. Arnie just called (10:30 pm) and they had landed in Seattle for the night. About half of the team is extremely sick with vomiting and diarrhea. They've started taking the prescription medicine and are hoping it kicks in soon. They're exhausted after such a long day of traveling and it will be a long night.

Update: Chloe just called (11pm) and is feeling better after taking the medicine so hopefully the others will also. They said Darrell was feeling the worst and Cody had it, but not as bad. Arnie was just coming down with it. As for the others, Chloe didn't know when she called.

Thank you, Lynn



Grand Dreams

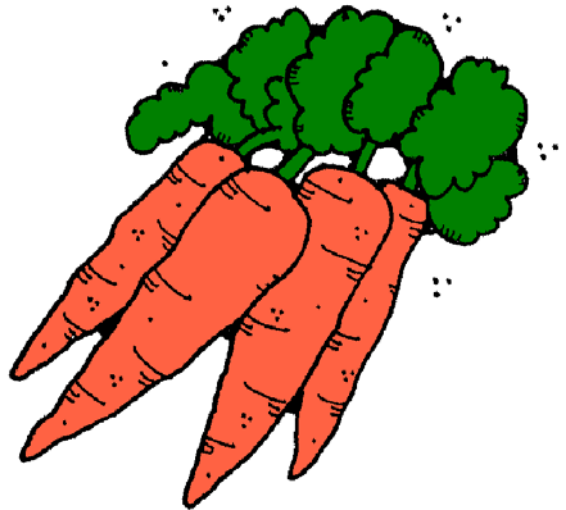
by Jane Misner

Once upon a time a city girl from Phoenix, AZ came to Anchorage, Alaska looking for a future. She had very little notion how to get along in the wilderness. She had the amazing good fortune, however, to meet a man, who not only got along in it, but thrived. Perhaps he saw in me potential I could not see myself. Maybe he recognized a strong back able to till the soil that dream gardens are made of- gardens he kept buried away in his mind. He was wise enough not to describe these dreams to me until he wooed the city girl into the wilderness. Please understand, I would never suggest he had slave labor in mind. After all, I came along on this adventure quite willingly.

In 1986 while I was student teaching at Dimond High School, he introduced me to the benefits of gardening. He brought carrots to school to feed his students and other teachers. They were unbelievable, juicy, sweet, good-sized. I was hooked. As time passed, I was treated to all manner of fresh vegetables from a small, but very productive garden in his back yard. Did I want more? Indeed. We married in 1989 and gardened joyfully in our little backyard plot till 1996.

As I write, I remember fondly those easy going days in that “little” garden. Then we migrated south to Kasilof in the middle of winter. Hmm... another wise decision on his part. If it had been summer, my reluctance to leave the bounty might have overcome my adventurous spirit.

On to my introduction to gardening on a grand scale. It's a good thing I was not aware of it back in 1995, but I believe Darrell's dream all along may have



been to purchase a large piece of land and build a garden to match. We spent the following summer cutting down trees as Gus Wiley's crew put in the road to the property we bought. In November the road reached the home site and Darrell moved into our quaint built-in day visqueen "hut". It was sixteen feet square made of spruce slabs criss-crossed. Wrapped in clear plastic, the hut met local building codes just as soon as we covered the lean-to style roof with blue tarp. The army blanketed entrance flapped in the breeze. Neil Houser spotted our place from the lake one day while he was out icefishing; he was sure hippies had moved into the neighborhood.

Darrell stayed there all week until Friday, when he drove to Anchorage to pick me up at school. Off to Kasilof we journeyed; I expected all manner of weekend adventure. Each day we got up before daylight, ate oatmeal heated on the barrel stove, crawled past the bulldozer parked in the living room of the "hut", and ventured out into the cold to tackle the great unknown.

Ed Mossey, had bulldozed all the alders he had cleared off the roadway-about a mile's worth it seemed to me, Darrell insists only 100 feet- into an area the size of KCC's parking lot. I'm not kidding; the resulting heap of tangled brush impressed me. Amidst all our available acreage, this was the piece of ground that Darrell declared the perfect garden spot. As anyone with his heart set on a real garden will tell you, that pile of alders could not stay. You just can't grow anything with a mess of brush intruding on potential garden space. I would gladly have set the whole twisted mass on fire and be done with it, but Darrell wanted to get the good top soil out of the roots and branches. Besides, wood loaded with dirt makes a lousy burn pile.

Darrell advised me that patiently cutting the alder and rounding it up into a smaller burn pile would give us many hours of memorable activity through the winter (translate: build muscle and backwoods character, both of which, I'm now willing to admit, I needed). We hauled sticks and roots all day, every Saturday, November to January, until I thought my arms would fall off. You have probably observed they are longer than the average person's. Years later Darrell noticed

it and got a bobcat and grapple before my hands started to drag on the ground.

Sundays, however, we always quit early enough to get to the 11 am service and hear Pastor Knox preach. I'm not sure if people remember our early days attending KCC that winter, but we were not any more tidy than our garden was at the time. Suffice it to say, if you don't remember our scruffy dress, noisy bunny-booted entrance or smoky aroma drifting from the back pew, it's because you wisely chose to avoid us. When service was over we retreated to the hut for more clearing until it was time to drive back to Anchorage. Another week at school for me while Darrell kept busy in Kasilof on the property. That was a long and busy time. At the end of January our routine changed. I took a sabbatical from Dimond and we cleared land all week long. I was starting to get the hang of it.

Darrell's dream was no longer a secret he kept from me. Now that I was a bit more conscious, it dawned on me the scale on which he hoped to garden. To me this "garden" appeared to be at least five times the size of our Anchorage plot. It began to take on the proportions of a "farm". But fortunately I was not farm-wise, so, future demands the garden would make were not on my mind. This still looked like a great adventure.

You might think that just clearing a plot of dirt will ready your garden spot, but even after all those weeks of rigorously cutting alders, stacking and burning them, there was more to do. Darrell spread all those ashes from that one huge burn pile across the proposed garden plot- except for the future potato patch. How did he know where that was going to be? He tilled them into the existing soil, breaking up the ground underneath so ashes and dirt were all mixed together. When the weather warmed up in May we seeded all the same wonderful things we'd grown in Anchorage. Now, the gardening dream could become the grand reality we strove to achieve.

WAIT...STOP RIGHT THERE. I'd like to say that is just the way it turned out. But my garden dreamer was a sensible man. I think he knew we couldn't be content to live in the hut forever just because we had home grown carrots to

eat. Instead, we spent that first summer, not gardening, but building our real house. No hippies we, well, not Darrell anyway. I do still think about those good old days. The garden got its real start the following summer. And it has been a blessing to us every year since. The ash pile, however has a place in my heart that goes way beyond condensing that mile-high pile of alders that we first faced back in 1996, but as Pat Shields would say, “That’s another story.”

Nice little tale, Jane, but I think Pat wanted gardening tips. Here’s the soil mixture I have used for many seasons. It has worked well so far.

GOOD DIRT

- 10g PEAT (use gallon size garden pot)
- 2g SAND
- 2-3b PERLITE (use 32-oz yogurt buckets)
- 3b STEER MANURE
- 2c FISH FERTILIZER (yes, cups)
- <1/2c 8-32-16 FERTILIZER (that’s “less than” for math challenged)
- 1c LIME
- 1 1/2 c GYPSUM
- 3Tbs EPSOM SALTS
- 3Tbs CALCIUM CHLORIDE (very hard to obtain in small packages) **Optional**

Okay, Darrell, now, don’t you have watering to do?

Johnny Hart: Not Caving In

by Joe Maxwell

"This article first appeared in (March/April 1997) issue of *Today's Christian*. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188."

Editor's Note: *Cartoonist Johnny Hart, a devoted Christian whose award-winning B.C. comic strip appeared in more than 1,300 newspapers worldwide, died on April 7, 2007 at age 76. Today's Christian interviewed Hart in 1997.*

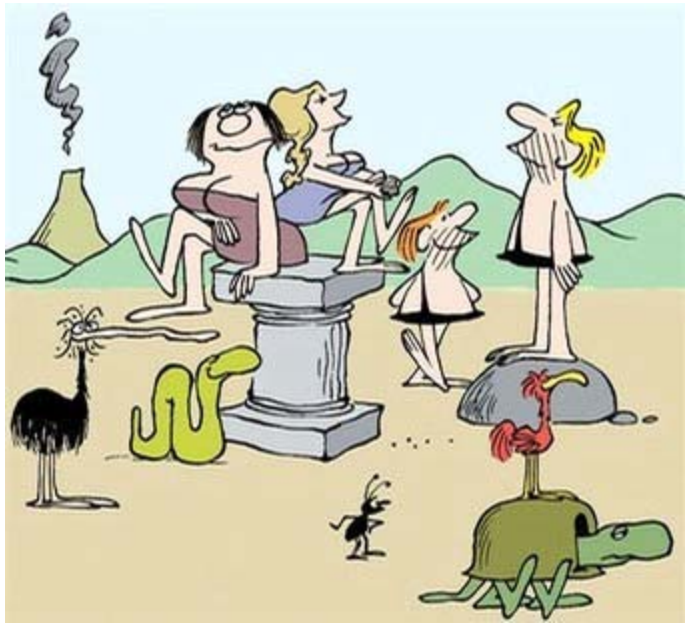
Johnny Hart's house is about a half-mile from any paved road. His mind, meanwhile, is several millennia away: back in the cave man days—dwelling with his friend, B.C. The two of them took up residence together several decades ago, with the consent and support of Hart's wife, Bobby. Then came another comic strip pal, "The Wizard of Id." Today, there's a communal cheer in the leafy woods where the Harts reside in rural New York State.

Johnny often rises at four in the morning, trying not to wake the wife of his youth (they've been married 44 years). He sneaks into the cool pre-dawn as geese honk down the hill on his lake.

He winds about a quarter of a mile around his lake ("As the crow walks," jokes Johnny), past his boat house, through some woods, up another hill, and—*voila!*—there in his studio they wait, his old pals.

"I wash my face and brush my teeth and it's dark out and I get to watch the sun come over the lake and it's really very blissful and fun," he says.

Johnny spends early mornings with his two-dimensional friends. B.C. is more than just a paper-and-ink



Johnny Hart's BC characters

cartoon. With the mirror-like quality of the lake by Johnny's studio, B.C. *reflects* Johnny. No, Johnny does not always pick up his pen and draw, rapturously ripping paper from his artist's board, discarding one idea for another. Those days are gone now, as unnecessary as practicing lay-ups might be for Michael Jordan.

Instead, most mornings Johnny collects his ideas, then he'll draw a week's worth of strips in a mere matter of hours, deftly moving from a pencil sketch to a final, inked version. Johnny—like Michael—has moved to the higher stages of his star-studded game; he wishes he could tell friends and inquirers that he doodles for hours every morning, but it just isn't so. Johnny's mornings often materialize into a high grade of sheer nothingness.

"I know how I waste a lot of my time," he cracks while hanging around his studio one cool day. "I just sit and think, who knows what, and it all gets logged up there, and I guess I draw on it. Sometimes I don't go home until six or seven o'clock at night, and sometimes I don't eat at all. That's what's wrong with me: my brain is plodding, and very often it's *plogging*, too!"

As casual as Johnny seems, his life is anything but laid back. From his earliest days struggling in tough New York City for his break in the cartooning world, to his mid-career rocket to fame, creating several working auxiliaries of himself, to his more recent recommitment to the Christian faith of his youth, Johnny has never been one for sitting on a stone and plogging; that, he leaves for B.C. or his caveman friend, Wiley.

On the contrary, Johnny is busier than ever carving out, if you will, a career he hopes glorifies God. His work has reaped rewards but also heavy costs.

Preaching in panels

Today, the gray-haired "gag man" (his own description) draws a caveman with ever-growing convictions. Hart believes the Lord put him into the cartooning world for a reason. Every prudent chance he gets, he takes advantage of it.

On Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter—and many days between—Hart's characters offer messages reflecting the cartoonist's own firm belief in the gospel message. "I find myself trying to put the gospel into practically every strip I create without being obvious about it," he says.

Hart says he wants to create a "spasm" in his reader, putting a new twist on an old truth. He's been creating nationwide twitches for years now, and his peers often have paid him homage:

Best Humor Strip in America, six times (The National Cartoonist Society)

The Reuben—Cartoonist of the Year (The National Cartoonist Society)

The Yellow Kid Award for Best Cartoonist (The International Congress of Comics)

Best Cartoonist of the Year (France's highest cartooning award)

The Sam Adamson Award, twice (Sweden's international award for graphic artists)

The Elsie Segar Award (King Features Syndicate).

In many ways, Hart is a preacher, only his congregation absorbs his message via America's mainstream newspapers as he brings light into the often dark daily news. People who don't read the Bible or attend church services often do read Johnny's comics.

He was gratified when a woman wrote to say that a "Wizard of Id" strip kept her from committing suicide. "The strip had no real mind-jarring message," says Hart, "so I just knew that [it was] God [who] had used it to reach that precious soul."

B.C. vs. The Times

Johnny's work stirs more than a love for life. For some, Johnny's bent has become too religious and/or political. While other cartoonists' characters get away with blatant statements reflecting non-Christian views, over the past few years a different standard has been applied by some newspaper editors to Johnny's cartoon figures.

For four years now, The Los Angeles Times has refused to run certain "B.C." strips containing witty Christian messages during holiday seasons. In March 1996, when the Times refused to run his Palm Sunday strip, a national uproar ensued, reaching even the Washington, D.C., talk show circuit. The strip had Wiley—a brooding, poet-wannabe in B.C.'s cast of characters—sitting against a tree, tablet in hand, writing a poem entitled "The Suffering Prince":

Picture yourself tied to a tree,
condemned of the sins of eternity.
Then picture a spear, parting the air,
seeking your heart to cut your despair.
Suddenly—a knight, in armor of white,
stands in the gap betwixt you and its flight,
And shedding his 'armor of God' for you—
bears the lance that runs him through.
His heart has been pierced that yours may beat,
and the blood of his corpse washes your feet.
Picture yourself in raiment white,
cleansed by the blood of the lifeless knight.
Never to mourn,
the prince who was downed,
For he is not lost! It is you who are found.

Spokeswoman Gloria Lopez of the Times says Mr. Hart's strip isn't the only one that has been pulled. Other examples of edited strips she cited include "Doonesbury" and "The Far Side." Says Ms. Lopez: "The bottom line is the editors reserve the right to edit."

Johnny believes such treatment is symptomatic of the battle for America's soul, and he likes the idea that his recent flaps with the Times "have gotten Christians up in arms. That's what they all need."

A lifechanging TV link

Johnny admits that for years he was anything but serious about his own walk with God. He sought pleasure, enjoying the luxuries his successful career offered.

Johnny had made a commitment to Christ in his earlier years, but never lived it out. "Bobby and I had backslidden and fallen into a life of drinking and partying," Johnny recalls. They ran with the "Hollywood types," yet he was becoming less and less satisfied.

Then Johnny had a satellite dish hooked up at his estate. A Christian father-and-son team installed it, and temporarily lived on-site with the Harts. The two workers were always flipping the dish to a Christian channel, "constantly using PTL as their test pattern," quips Johnny. And the cartoonist began viewing the shows as well.

"I became interested by osmosis," says Johnny. "PTL was always on."

Challenged by what he was hearing, Johnny and Bobby began looking back into the Scriptures. Today, he cracks, "I use TBN (the Trinity Broadcast Network) as a night light."

With time, the couple's commitment to the Lord solidified. "Probably the biggest realization—and it came to me very subtly—was that the Bible is the Word of God. I didn't have an 'experience.' Everything in my dealings with God has always been very gradual. I attribute that to my own spirit muddling things: personal resistance; me interfering."

Nevertheless, Johnny and Bobby now have set their lives on a course of service. Both teach Sunday school at the Presbyterian church in the small town of (get this) *Ninevah*, New York.

Faith not rocket science

Whether or not the press ever starts showing more respect to outspoken Christians, Johnny doesn't plan to change his ways. He'll keep exploring the rock-solid truth that finally was hammered into him and his Stone Age friends. And he does more than deliver the message through his comic strips. As opportunities arise, Johnny shares personally the hope of Christ with fellow cartoonists as well as executives at the news syndicate that represents his work.

Perhaps a caveman with convictions can help awaken Christians to challenge today's prevailing culture: it's not rocket science after all. Sure, some matters of faith are complex, but many are as straightforward as ... as if they were chiseled in stone.

Johnny would tell you that. You see, years ago he barely passed high school and went

no further in his formal education. Says Hart: "I have always been stupid ... I don't have a good memory, so when I read anything, whenever I get to a word I don't know, I stop and look it up. I've looked up every word in the dictionary almost twenty times."

His lack of eloquence continually discouraged him. Even when his career was skyrocketing, he would sit down to read "just a normal book," he says, "and in one paragraph I'd have to look up five words. And I'd think, man, will I ever have a vocabulary?"

Today, it is his eloquence that has incited both his troubles and his tremendous career.

Johnny Hart says he still feels "inadequate" as a verbal communicator. But he's hard on himself, he admits, "because I've been given a gift and I don't want to just fluff it out and use it indiscriminately. ... I still have the same fervor today for each strip to be the funniest and best strip ever, just as I did when I started."

And so, at four a.m. on many nippy New York mornings, Bobby Hart senses her husband slipping out of bed. Through the frosty woods he goes, up a hill to meet his muse—a caveman who transcends time. Sitting together, a caveman and craftsman share life, and even at times a visit from pal Wiley, who might wax poetic on how his two friends seem one as they watch the sun rise and offer praise to the Son.

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TOASTMASTERS

Have you ever said, “Oh, I could never stand up before a group of people and talk”? I’d be terrified. I’d be tongue-tied. I’d probably stutter and shake. No, giving speeches is not for me.” I know I did, but I also knew that it was important for me to just take that first step. Perhaps it is time for you to find out that public speaking isn’t as daunting as you think.

Or perhaps you already speak in public. If so, I would guess you are hoping to communicate something to your audience. It’s hard to know how well you have done because one does not usually receive specific feedback on speaking skills. When listening to others speak you probably appreciate it when they speak clearly and succinctly and personalize the talk in a way that grabs and keeps your attention. It helps when they don’t use distracting ah’s and um’s as fillers between thoughts, easily incorporate gestures and vocal variety, pause at times to give you the opportunity to think about what has been said, and tie all the points together at the end. Perhaps you would benefit from a friendly evaluation of your current speaking skills?

Learning to be a better communicator is the overall purpose of ToastmastersTM. And what better place to learn than in the wonderfully supportive environment of the local Toastmasters group! Gaining confidence and the ability to handle leadership roles through training and participation provides help for both individual conversations and group presentations.

In Toastmasters, with every speech, you receive one or two positive suggestions for improvement along with recognition for those things done well. The positive encouragement gives you the strength and desire to give another speech and you are never made to feel like a failure.

So, come on and join us! You are more than welcome to attend several meetings before paying any dues. Allow Toastmasters to demonstrate how it can help you learn to communicate better in any setting. You really can become a better and more effective communicator. What are you waiting for? Remember that “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Soldotna Toastmasters meets Monday’s from 12 noon to 1 pm in the basement of the Church of God in Soldotna and/or monthly in the evening in Kenai. For more information please contact Darlene Rozak or Traci Davis. We would love to meet you there!