

HIS DESK, HER DESK

Written by Marlene Alexander

Tuesday, 25 September 2007

DOLLAR STORE STYLE

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Ever wish your desk could look as spiffy as the ones you see in those magazine layouts?

No desk that is used with any frequency is going to stay pristine for long but, with a bit of help from the dollar store, the humble home office desk can aspire to a subtle sophistication all its own.

For a masculine look, we chose dark colors and two ornamental pieces. The elephant has the look of carved wood and we liked the faux bonsai plant to add a bit of greenery to the workspace. The rest of the items are such as you might find on any desk.

- plastic magazine holder
- digital desk clock
- 4 x 6 picture frame
- tape dispenser
- wooden box with faux leather trim (for stamps, etc.)
- mesh note paper holder
- mesh pencil tray
- Day Runner agenda
- electronic desk calculator
- ceramic mug

Each of the items mentioned above was \$1.00, making a total of \$12.00 spent. Every so often we can be seen standing in an aisle at Dollarama with our mouth hanging open. How did their buyers get their hands on Day Runners that can be sold for \$1.00? You have to nab these finds when you see them because they won't last long and aren't as likely to be restocked as other items.



The same desk, outfitted from the female perspective, might look something like this:



The 8 x 10 inch white board came with a dry erase pen but it was so dry we had to toss it. Instead we bought a pack of three different colored dry erase pens, each equipped with an eraser and a magnet in the lid. A 9 1/2" tall vase holds a spray of faux orchids and the books have been corralled by a pair of metal bookends. These can do double duty as a place to park the magnetized dry erase pens or dress them up with favorite ornamental magnets. The clock has an antique-look face and is approximately 4 1/2" in diameter. It can be hung on the wall but we chose to make a desk clock out of it by using a small plastic plate holder.

A pretty ceramic vase was pressed into service as a pencil holder. We used some tissue paper in the bottom of it to make its depth more advantageous for holding writing instruments. The small decorative gift box is a great place to store tape, stamps or push pins. The painted wooded frame holds a 4 1/2" x 3" picture and a refillable journal and printed "latte" mug complete our lady's desk accessories. Everything here totals \$11.50. The vinyl-covered journal cost \$2.00 at a dollar-plus store and the plate/picture holder came in a set of two for \$1.00.

Create an attractive and useful workspace that suits your own particular likes and needs. You don't need big bucks, only a trip to the dollar store.

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THE TWINS



Written by Frank Hayden

Tuesday, 25 September 2007

The sun came up as usual on January 15th, and the morning was a crisp, clear, high blue day. President Elect Dwight D. Eisenhower was on the verge of his inauguration and the whole country was full of joy and hope.

Too bad some of that joy and hope hadn't trickled down to a few souls at Saint Mary's Hospital.

The day started out bad when Mrs. Stalls gave birth to a healthy pair of twin girls and two hours later she was dead. They still don't know why she died. There were no complications or anything. Everything was classic text book; but yet, she is dead and a couple of twins are very hungry. Sister Mary Ella was doing her level best to console Mr. Stall, but it wasn't working too well. Needless to say, he was distraught and angry because of his loss.

"What am I supposed to do now, Sister?"

"Mr. Stalls, I know you've had a grave loss, but you have a pair of beautiful girls depending on you", Sister Mary Ella said.

"I know all that, but I don't have a beautiful wife at my side helping me raise them."

"It was her time to go back to the Lord."

"Her time to go back to the Lord!!" Don't give me that bunch of clap trap. Why would it be more important for her to sit at His right hand rather than be here with me to raise our two girls? Tell me that, Sister."

"I don't have an answer to that. But, the Lord's plan is what is at work now."

Huffing a strong breath, Mr. Stalls snapped out, "Bull! What I need is an answer-now. What I need is my wife back-now."

Sister Mary Ella reached out a gentle hand to his arm. "Try to calm down and compose yourself, Mr. Stall. So much anger is not good for you. I am sorry if I made you angry. I was only trying to help."

Sister excused herself and continued on her rounds. She checked in on three other patients on that floor and went to the next. By the time she got to the ground floor, it had changed considerably. Oh, everything was clean and all, but it was showing wear around the edges. After she passed the ER, all the noise and hubbub was less; but it could still be heard down the hall where the three 8-bed wards were located.

She visited the first two wards and everything was nice, quiet and under control. The third was the same, except for a small sobbing sound coming from the back corner of the room. Sister Mary Ella walked down the whole ward, speaking and smiling at everyone. When she reached the last bed, there was a small hump in the middle and it was crying. Sister spoke softly to the small hump and patted it gently. The sobbing slowed and the hump moved about trying to compose itself. Finally a small head peeked out from under the covers.

It was a pretty face, even with the head of hair that was pointing everywhere at the same time. She was new. Sister hadn't seen her before. The young girl's eyes were all red and swollen from her crying.

"My name is Sister Mary Ella. What's yours?"

A sob was half controlled and a small voice answered, "My name is Faith....Faith Hudson."

Sister smiled and gently said, "Hello, Faith. How are you feeling?"

A snuffle and a wrenching "Terrible" was Faith's response.

"Oh? How come?" Sister asked with genuine interest and a desire to help.

"I lost my baby last night." The tears that had been held at bay for a few moments flooded Faith's eyes and streamed down her red cheeks in a steady flow of misery. She was heartbroken.

"Oh, Faith, honey. I am so sorry. I didn't know." Sister said with compassion and a welling of tears of her own.

"....a very pretty little baby girl," Faith said softly with a far-away look in her eyes.

Sister Mary Ella placed her hand gently over Faith's and asked, "Do you want me to leave? Or do you want someone to talk to?"

Faith smiled gently and lowered her eyes. "You can stay if you want to, Sister." She sounded so tired and defeated at that moment.

Sister patted Faith's hand and said, "Well, there now. Maybe we can have a nice visit. Where do you live, sweetheart?"

Faith looked off to the side and softly said, "On the streets. I had a nice place under the over-pass at Summer Street. It's probably gone now. You can't leave your place for any length of time or someone will take it away from you."

Sister had seen and heard many things in her years of service, but this truly tore at her heartstrings.

“What about your husband, Faith?” Where is he?”

Faith laughed bitterly and suddenly looked many years beyond her age. “Are you crazy??!!?? I don’t have a husband. Just as soon as I told my boyfriend I was pregnant, he split and I never laid eyes on him again.”

Sister Mary Ella pulled back and looked flustered. “What about your parents? Where are your mom and dad, Faith?”

Another bitter laugh was Faith’s response. “As soon as I started to show, dear old Daddy kicked me out of the house and told me never to come back.”

Sister exclaimed: “Oh my. We’ve really got ourselves a problem.”

Faith looked incredulous. “What do you mean ‘we’? I don’t see anybody but me that has a problem.”

Still trying to take it all in, Sister Mary Ella asked Faith, “How in the world did you live on the streets in your condition all these months?”

Surprised by the nun’s interest and apparent lack of knowledge of the homeless all around the city, Faith answered simply, “Like everybody else out there....I got a meal at the Soup Kitchen when I could and I kept my head down.”

Looking pleased that there was finally something concrete she could do to help this young woman, Sister eagerly asked,

“Have you eaten since you came into the hospital, Faith?”

Faith was tired and feeling every one of her years. She sighed and admitted, “Just a tuna sandwich this morning. It didn’t stay down very long though.”

Looking eager and starting to bustle around, Sister said, “Well, then...first things first. I’m going to get you something to eat.

Do you have any preferences or something you think you could keep down, honey?”

Faith thought a moment and admitted tiredly, “Pasta is plain and it stays down pretty good.”

Already on the move, Sister said over her shoulder, “Ok, then...pasta it is.”

But as she moved quickly toward the hallway, Sister Mary Ella thought, “The kitchens are already closed, so I’ll have to improvise.”

Turning around to look at Faith, she asked “If you could have anything you wanted to eat, what would it be?”

Faith looked surprised, but thought a moment about the question and then lit up. “A Big Mack with lots of extra sauce!! Hurriedly adding, “and an ice cold drink.”

It was decided then. Sister Mary Ella set off on her mission. She thought there was a Golden Arches one block down from the hospital, so she hurried down the sidewalk and was all smiles as she saw the famous sign. Sister slowed her pace as she entered the restaurant and approached the counter. Fishing out all the money she had in her pocket, she placed it on the counter. She asked the worker, “Will this get me two Big Macs with lots of extra sauce, and ice cold drinks, young man?”

The clerk glanced at the dollar bills and handful of change a moment and then smiled at the odd little nun. “Yes, Sister. Is that your order then?”

With a large smile, Sister Mary Ella beamed at the young clerk. “Thank you! Then that’s what I’ll have, please....two Big Macs, extra sauce and two drinks.”

With an answering smile, the clerk rang up the purchase. “Coming right up, Sister.”

Sister Mary Ella acknowledged this very good news with another smile. “Thank you very much, young man.” Shaking his head at her exuberance, the clerk smiled and said “You’re welcome, and enjoy.”

As she accepted the bag of food and drinks, Sister said, “We will, we will. Thanks again.”

Sister headed out the door at a brisk walk. She headed back to the hospital and tucked the contraband bag in the folds of her habit, making quick time on her way back to Faith’s ward. Sister Mary Ella found Faith sitting cross-legged in the middle of the bed, staring out the window. When she heard Sister’s footsteps, she turned toward the sound and grinned when she saw the bag Sister held aloft with the air of a returning conqueror.

She handed the bag of food and drinks to the young woman and watched with a smile as Faith dove into the bag and pulled out the wonderful-smelling burger and the icy cold soft drink. With gusto, Faith began to wolf down the food as if she was starving. And, considering the circumstances, Sister thought she very well might be. She smiled gently as Faith finished eating the first burger. Faith looked up with a guilty expression. “You’re not going to eat yours, Sister?”

With a smile, Sister Mary Ella waved at the additional food. "Oh, that's not for me. I thought I should have a back-up in case you were really hungry. Enjoy, my dear, but slow down. You don't want to be sick again."

You could tell it was hard for Faith to take the gently delivered advice. She still ate quickly, but took time to chew and swallow this time. She ate the burgers and drank the icy cold colas in record time. Sister looked on from the side.

"You really were hungry. Faith, do you want me to go back and get you some more burgers or another soft drink?"

Faith flushed with embarrassment and looked sheepish. "Oh no, Sister. Thank you very much. This will hold me 'til Wednesday, I figure."

Looking horrified, Sister Mary Ella leaned forward in the chair. "Wednesday!?! That's two days away, child."

Faith straightened her shoulders with dignity. "I've gone longer. You just can't think about being hungry.....that's the trick."

Shaking her head at this information, Sister still didn't look convinced. "Are you okay now? Will you be alright until the morning, Faith?"

The young woman suddenly looked very tired. "Oh yes, Sister. Thanks to you, I'll be fine."

Sister Mary Ella felt like she'd fallen down a certain rabbit hole. She shook her head and looked at the young woman sitting on the bed. Faith did have some color back in her cheeks and was looking better than when she'd found her just a short hour before. Maybe the food would help her get through this first night after the loss of her precious baby.

Standing up and smoothing her hand over Faith's hair, Sister said, "Okay, then. You try and get a good night's sleep and I'll see you first thing in the morning. Good night and God bless you, child."

With a small smile on her face, Faith leaned back into the pillows and sighed. "Good night, Sister. And thanks again."

Sister Mary Ella continued to stroke Faith's hair and said softly to the sleeping young woman, "You're welcome, dear."

An idea was brewing and Sister quickly turned away and hurried through the hallways and back to the Nursery. She was barely in time, but caught Mr. Stalls as he was getting ready to leave. He had been staring sadly through the nursery windows and looking at the beautiful twin girls lying so sweetly in their bassinets. They didn't know the pain their daddy was going through as he looked at them and wondered what he would do without his beautiful wife to help him raise them.

Mr. Stalls felt a light touch on his arm and turned to see the nun from before by his side. Pulling his thoughts from the little girls, he turned to face Sister Mary Ella.

She quickly spoke to him, "Mr. Stalls, have you got a minute before you leave?"

Looking genuinely startled by the question, he answered with a weary tilt of his head. "Yes, Sister. What is it you need?"

Sister Mary Ella asked the tired young man, "Did you find out anything about feeding and taking care of your twins yet, Mr. Stalls?"

Looking surprised by her question, he answered, "The nursery said they could take care of them tonight, but I've got to do something by morning. Why do you ask Sister?"

A hopeful look on her face, Sister Mary Ella said gently, "Well, I think I've got a solution for you, if you want to consider it."

A very skeptical look on his face, Mr. Stalls answered with, "And what might that be? Something the Lord has provided, Sister?"

Thinking the tired young man would come around to the idea, Sister continued to talk. "Well, sort of, you might say. There's a young woman named Faith Hudson in the ward downstairs. She just delivered a baby girl last night and the baby died. Faith is very upset at the loss, but she's trying to cope. She is heavy with milk that her baby will never drink. Would you consider using her for a wet nurse, Mr. Stalls? She could provide the mother's milk that your baby girls need."

Mr. Stalls gave her a closed look, but simply said, "Go on."

Sister proceeded to tell him what she knew about the young woman. "I won't lie to you Mr. Stalls. Faith has been a street person. Her boyfriend ran away when he heard of the pregnancy and her parents kicked her out of their house when she came to them for help."

Looking horrified, Mr. Stalls pulled away and said, "A street person? Are you crazy, Sister? She could be riddled with all sorts of diseases!"

Sister Mary Ella spoke quickly and softly in return. "I don't think so, Mr. Stalls. But that could all be checked out by the morning if you would consider this option for your family."

Staring into the nun's eyes and holding her gaze, Mr. Stalls was incredulous. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Stalls...very serious. This could be the solution for both you and Faith."

Now willing to consider this far-fetched idea, Mr. Stalls stared off down the hallway a few moments, glanced back at his precious baby

girls and turned to the nun. "Could they actually check her out for a clean bill of health by the morning, Sister?"

Looking not quite as confident as a few moments ago, she never-the-less met his eyes squarely. "I think so. And, I will do anything I can to help out if you decide to have Faith be a wet nurse for your family. What do you think, Mr. Stalls?"

Still trying to figure out what else he might be able to do, Mr. Stalls turned to the nun.

"If she can be cleared as perfectly healthy, I would take it under advisement. Can you take care of getting her moved to a private room on the nursery floor and all the testing that needs to be done?"

Straightening her tired shoulders, Sister Mary Ella answered simply, "Yes sir."

With a quick nod of his head and extending his hand to shake the nun's, Mr. Stalls replied with conviction, "Okay then. I'll pay for the room and testing, so you have a 'go' for now, Sister. But if anything comes back bad, then the deal is off."

After shaking his hand and watching the man walk away, Sister Mary Ella looked at her watch. It was 3:00pm and everything shuts down here at St. Mary's at 6:30pm. With a sharp nod, Sister set off down the hallway. She would have to call in almost all her markers, but if this worked out, it would be worth it! Moving with determination, Sister snagged a hospital gown from the Nursery Laundry closet and headed for the ward where Faith lay blissfully sleeping. On her way, Sister called X-ray, the Lab., then two doctors and three nurses who owed her. She was like a general on a battlefield planning and coordinating a strategic strike.

When Sister Mary Ella got to the ward, she quickly moved to the bed where Faith was sleeping. Pulling the curtain around Faith's bed, she gently shook the young woman and asked her, "Faith, did you have a shower and wash your hair this morning?"

Looking confused from being pulled from her sleep. Faith blinked and pushed her clean hair away from her face as she tried to focus on Sister's face and question. "Yes Sister. What is this all about?"

Grinning like a Cheshire cat, Sister sat on the side of the bed and looked at Faith. "I might have a solution to your problem, if you're game."

Still looking bemused, Faith tried to gather her wits. "What solution, Sister?"

A very serious expression came over Sister Mary Ella's face. She leaned in and stared Faith right in the eyes. "Do you trust me, Faith?" She asked softly.

Apprehensive but resolute, Faith met her gaze and answered solidly, "Yes, I do."

"Good. We don't have much time and we have a lot of stuff to do before morning. Here. Get undressed and put this on." She handed Faith the pretty hospital gown.

Looking perplexed, but accepting the garment, Faith looked at the gown and then at Sister. "What's going on here? What stuff have we got to get done before morning?"

With a gentle smile, but a determined gleam in her eye, Sister Mary Ella answered with a gently phrased partial answer. "A bunch of tests, x-rays, blood work and exams. Come on, child. Time's a-wasting."

As Sister bustled around the bed, she saw Faith gingerly take off the hospital gown she was wearing. It was painfully evident that she was full almost to bursting with milk "Does that hurt, Faith, honey?"

With an embarrassed duck of her head, Faith answered truthfully, "It's starting to, Sister, and I'm leaking."

"Well then, we'll just have to do something about that right away, won't we?" With a suddenly startled look on her face, Sister Mary Ella darted over to Faith and placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. "Oh, my goodness! No one has given you a shot or any pills today, have they Faith?"

Not sure why this was so important to the little nun, Faith shook her head and told her, "No Sister. Nothing at all."

With a huge sigh of relief, Sister noticeably relaxed and then puffed a stray piece of hair off her forehead. She muttered to herself. "That's good, that's excellent in fact. They were probably going to do it in the morning."

Still not sure where the current conversation had gone or how it had taken such an odd turn, Faith tried to keep up with the nun's reasoning.

"Do what in the morning?"

"Give you something to dry up your milk."

Looking startled and a little afraid, Faith asked with rounded eyes, "They can do that?"

Smiling gently and trying to explain in such a way that she wouldn't frighten the already traumatized young woman, Sister Mary Ella went on to explain. "Yes dear. In some cases, new mothers can't nurse and the milk has to be dried up. It is to protect their health now and help maybe in the future, if they have other babies."

Looking uncomfortable with this new information and the rapidly changing events that seemed to be taking over her life, Faith asked with a wary note in her voice, "What's going on here, Sister?"

Hurrying to comfort Faith, Sister Mary Ella reassured her. "Really, I don't want to tell you all the details at this point, except to assure you that if it all works out, it'll be a very good thing for all concerned. You still trust me, don't you, Faith?"

Faith nodded her head and looked a bit puzzled. "Yes, sure I do. I'm not real sure why, but I'd trust you with my life, Sister."

Looking distinctly pleased and relieved, Sister started to bustle around and make sure they had everything they needed. It was going to be a rapid-fire couple of hours that would test her stamina, patience and faith in Sister Mary Ella's plan. Taking a calming breath and straightening her already stiff spine, Sister looked Faith squarely in the eyes. "Good. Go with the flow here with me for a few hours, Faith, and all will be explained to you."

Sister popped Faith into a wheelchair and off they went. Walking quickly, Sister took Faith straight to the lab for all the blood work that was needed. The technicians were friendly but very efficient. They drew all the vials of blood that they needed and prepared for all the tests that were required.

The next stop was x-ray. Faith was prodded and turned, and pictures were taken from every imaginable angle. Faith was noticeably uncomfortable in the chest area, so Sister stepped out of the room while they finished the last two x-rays. When she returned, she asked the tech if they could use the room a little longer.

Checking the schedule, the tech answered with a ready smile. "Sure, Sister, take your time. Faith here is the last picture show today. So, I'll leave you to it. Be sure and turn out the lights on your way out. Good night, Sister, and good luck to you, Faith honey."

Sister thanked the tech and wished her a good evening. Turning to Faith, she told her to undress to the waist. Producing a funny looking contraption, the little nun cocked her head and examined the workings, glancing up to find Faith watching her carefully.

Sister smiled and said, "Now let's see if we can give you a little relief in the milk department."

Grinning like a much younger child being presented with a gift, Faith politely ducked her head and told the nun gratefully, "Oh, thank you, Sister. That would be greatly appreciated."

Sister helped Faith with the breast pump to relieve her very full breasts. It was a little awkward at first, but they got the hang of it and the process went smoothly. Each rhythmic pulse of the machine noticeably eased the young woman. After they finished with the machine and the bottles of milk they had harvested, the odd duo headed for their next stop. Sister dropped off the milk at the lab. It would be examined to determine if there was anything amiss. They continued on their way.

Sister wheeled Faith into an empty exam room where two doctors awaited them. The doctors examined the young woman from head to toe while Sister Mary Ella stood off to the side and out of the way. She watched the young woman carefully and could see that Faith was starting to tire. Considering herself Faith's personal cheerleader, Sister Mary Ella kept her spirits up and urged her on with words of encouragement. "Not too much left now, honey. Hang in there just a little longer, okay? You're doing great. I'm very proud of you."

Finally, all the tests, poking and prodding were finished and Sister wheeled a nearly exhausted Faith into a private room on the nursery floor. Stroking her hair softly, Sister murmured in her ear. "Okay, honey. You can rest for a little now."

"Thank God! I'm about to fall flat." Sitting on the side of the bed, Faith smiled tiredly over her shoulder at the nun who was starting to remind her of the Energizer Bunny.

"Oh, one other thing, Faith. Do you think you could pee in this bottle for me?"

"Sure, why not? I have to go anyway before I get to bed for some sleep, right?"

Smiling, Sister Mary Ella hurriedly agreed. "That's right. A good night's sleep will make everything look better in the morning, remember?"

They finished up the last needed sample and they got Faith settled in her bed. She turned over on her side and promptly fell into an exhausted slumber. Sister lingered a moment, smiled and then bustled on to the next stop on the lengthy list she'd set for herself and this very important project. Sister Mary Ella took the specimen to the lab and handed it over to the technician on duty in the area. The tech checked in the sample, made some notes and then looked over the other information in the rapidly thickening file. The tech glanced up and told the sister that she needed one more vial of blood for a test that hadn't been done yet.

Looking alarmed, Sister Mary Ella exclaimed, "Oh, my Lord! Can't you use some of the other blood that may not have been used for the other tests? Do you have any left over?"

Checking further in the file and the samples on hand, the tech gave her head a firm nod and reassured the suddenly nervous and anxious nun. "Yes, Sister, that would work. Everything is in order and the remaining blood has not been contaminated or anything."

Very relieved and back on track, Sister Mary Ella rode herd on all the tests, x-rays and lab work that flowed through the large hospital. With unflagging energy and faith that it would all come out right, she moved from area to area all through the late night hours. By morning, she had all the results in a big patient file. She was ready for the important meeting that was looming on her personal

horizon. This could be the solution to four people's lives.

Taking a deep breath, saying a quick prayer, Sister proceeded with file in hand and the head doctor in tow. They briskly headed for the nursery floor.

Round the corner, they looked up the hall to see that Mr. Stalls had just come on the floor. He was there to check on his tiny daughters and to keep the appointment they had agreed to so many hours ago. Calling out with a smile and a wave, Sister Mary Ella greeted the tired new father who was also now a widower.

"Mr. Stalls. How are you this morning?"

Looking like he was girding his loins for another shocking and unimaginable day, Mr. Stalls reached forward to shake Sister Mary Ella's hand. "Fine, thank you, Sister. Have you any information for me?"

With a hefting of the file and a smile at the doctor beside her, Sister Mary Ella told the anxious father, "I have a lot of information for you today, Mr. Stalls. May I introduce you? This is Dr. Corbin. He is the head doctor here at the hospital and he is going to tell us both what the results are for the tests on our Faith. Dr. Corbin, this is Mr. Stalls. He is the young father I was telling you of. His wife delivered twins yesterday and passed away."

Shaking the father's hand firmly, Dr. Corbin assured Mr. Stalls, "I am very glad to meet you. I am so sorry for your loss. If you have a few minutes, I wanted to speak with you. I understand you requested information about your wife and a young patient we have here in the hospital. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Doctor. I want to know what happened to my wife. Why did she die?"

"This is just preliminary, mind you. But it appears your wife died of an aneurism. I want to assure you, she died instantly and didn't feel anything more than a severe headache for a matter of moments. Again, I am very sorry for your loss, Mr. Stalls."

Understanding the words, but not feeling any better for hearing the "official" reasons, Mr. Stalls wanted to know if it could have been foreseen or prevented. He still couldn't grasp that his young and vibrant wife had been taken from him during a time they had planned for with such joy and anticipation. What was he to do without her by his side?

Giving himself a visible shake and coming back to the present, Mr. Stalls asked the question that had been haunting him through the long hours of the empty night. "Dr. Corbin, was there anything that could have been done for her?"

Again looking at the file in his hand, the doctor shook his head. "No, sir. There was absolutely no time to do anything. When the monitors registered the problem, we scrambled to her side with the Crash Cart. We didn't have enough time to get to the hospital room before it was all over. We followed procedure and tried to revive her, but it was to no avail. I am sorry."

Shaking his head and still looking shell-shocked, Mr. Stalls took little comfort in the diagnosis. "At least she didn't suffer. Thank you, doctor. I appreciate your time and letting me know."

"You're welcome, sir."

Standing quietly to the side, Sister Mary Ella waited to ask with care, "Dr. Corbin, may we go to your office and go over these charts, please?"

Almost having forgotten that the quiet nun was there, Dr. Corbin gathered himself. He said, "Yes, of course. This way please."

He walked them down the quiet hallway and turned in to an office marked with a plaque displaying his name. They all entered and the doctor settled in his chair behind the massive wood desk, and Mr. Stalls sank wearily into the chair in front of the desk.

Unable to sit still, Sister Mary Ella chose to stand. She shifted from foot to foot and barely refrained from pacing the room. She was filled with nervous energy, hope and trepidation. Dr. Corbin read quickly through each piece of paper that was in the file. He made a notation here, nodded his head there and then looked up at the two people anxiously awaiting his opinion.

Mr. Stalls had sat quietly during the time Dr. Corbin read through the file. But he was becoming more nervous as the time seemed to stretch out.

Finally, Dr. Corbin finished and said with a smile and small nod of his head, "This is the most thorough work-up I've ever seen. All the results of all the tests show that this young lady is as healthy as a horse. Ever her mother's milk is great."

Leaning forward, Mr. Stalls wanted to be very sure. "Then you are saying that she has a clean bill of health?"

"Yes, very definitely young Faith has a clean bill of health, Mr. Stalls. Now, what is this all about and how do you know this patient? I noticed these results are all dated yesterday and very early this morning."

"Sister Mary Ella met me in the nursery yesterday while I was checking on my newborn girls. She knew of this young woman, Faith, and thought the woman would be a solution to the dilemma I am experiencing with my new daughters. I gave Sister the green light to proceed with all the tests, and told her as long as Faith came up with a clean bill of health, I would pay for all the tests, the room and any other expenses. Sister has kept her end of the bargain and I will keep mine."

Looking impressed, Dr. Corbin turned to the nun standing to the side. "You co-ordinated all of this in less than 18 hours, Sister?"

"Yes sir, I kind of called in a few markers."

The doctor smiled at the little nun. "Congratulations, Sister. You did an excellent job."

Mr. Stalls leaned forward, smiled tiredly and added his thanks as well. "Yes, Sister. You did a marvelous job and my girls and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Sister Mary Ella smiled quietly at the two men and fingered the beads of her rosary. She was thanking the Lord for the results of their mission. What a wonderful outcome for four people who had become so important to her life in such a short period of time.

Sister excused herself and headed for Faith's room. When she got there, Faith was still sleeping the sleep of the innocent

"Wake up, sleepy head; I am the bearer of great tidings."

Faith had a hard time pulling herself awake and focusing her eyes on Sister Mary Ella. She blinked and asked, "What time is it, anyway?"

"It's 7:00 am. Now wake up. You have a job if you want it."

"A job?? I don't remember applying for any job."

"Well, now, to answer all your questions: Mr. Stalls' wife gave birth to twin girls yesterday and then she passed over. Your darling daughter passed over the night before. Mr. Stalls needs a wet nurse to feed his daughters and the position is yours if you want it."

Faith, with her eyes wide in surprise, was trying to take it all in and was having a hard time of it.

Sister was scared for the first time. She hadn't once thought Faith might not want to wet nurse the twins. She held her breath as she watched Faith's struggle with the decision to be made.

"You know, Sister, my heart was broken the other night and I thought it could never be put back together again. The more I think about this, the more I think that feeding the twins just might be the glue needed to repair my heart. I would love to nurse the Stalls twins."

Thus began the intertwining of four lives.

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THE TASTE OF FALL

Written by Sensible Life

Saturday, 06 October 2007

Fall is the time for cinnamon-y baked goods and comfort food, acclimating our palate for that long winter solstice.

This issue, Sensible Life has some nutritious food, treats, and a special hot chocolate mixture that's sure to make your mouth water. First, let's start with something fun –making your own candy corn.

CANDY CORN

To make homemade candy corn, you'll need to start with the following ingredients:

2/3 cup white corn syrup
1/3 cup butter
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 1/2 cups powdered sugar
1/3 cup powdered milk
orange and yellow food coloring (optional)

Mix together butter, corn syrup and sugar in pan. On high heat, bring mixture to a boil, stirring constantly. Then, turn heat low and boil 5 more minutes, occasionally stirring. Remove from heat and add the vanilla. In a bowl, combine the remaining ingredients except the food coloring, then add all at once to the mixture in the pan and stir. If one color is desired, you may add that to the mixture and stir until cool enough to handle (if two colors are desired, divide the mixture and add desired food coloring to each). Mold and shape into creative pieces of candy.

FRIED APPLES WITH A TWIST

Ingredients:

1/2 cup sugar (add a little more if necessary)
1/3 cup butter
1 Tbsp. plus 1 tsp. cornstarch
1-1/2 cups water
4 apples, peeled, cored and halved
1 pkg of red hot cinnamon candies

Melt butter in a 10" skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium heat, then stir in sugar and cornstarch, stirring and mixing well. Add water and apples, then cook, covered, over medium heat for 12 to 15 minutes, or until apples are tender and sauce is thick. Add 1/2 of cinnamon candies and simmer until melted (adding more as desired to taste). Makes about 4 servings.

BREAKFAST SAUSAGE HASH

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, finely chopped
1/4 cup butter
4 cups peeled and sliced cold baked potatoes
1 pound sausage (with sage), browned, drained and crumbled
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
8 eggs, scrambled
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
Salt and pepper to taste

In a large skillet, melt butter and add onions. Saute until onions are opaque. Add potatoes and cook over medium heat until browned, turning frequently with a spatula. Add sausage, and Worcestershire sauce and heat thoroughly. Spread eggs over top and cook, adding salt and pepper, until eggs start to set. Sprinkle on grated cheese and serve.

BAKED MACARONI AND CHEESE

Ingredients

Box of shells or elbows
1lb block of Velveeta cheese
Shredded Sharp Cheddar
Salt and Pepper
Milk

Preheat oven at 350

Layer in a 13 x 9 greased dish in this order:

Macaroni

Velveeta cheese

2nd layer Macaroni

Shredded cheese generously on top

Sprinkle with salt and pepper

Pour milk over that will cover and fill the dish to the half way mark

Bake for 45 minutes or until cheese and milk appear bubbly and browning

Tip: do not over fill your pan or while baking the mixture will bubble over in your oven.

CHICKEN ENCHILADA CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

8 tortillas

2 cups cooked chicken breasts, cubed

1/2 cup uncooked instant rice

1 cup (8 ounces) shredded reduced-fat Monterey Jack cheese

1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained

1 (19-ounce) can enchilada sauce

1 cup frozen corn, thawed

1 cup salsa

2 tablespoons thinly sliced green onions

sour cream

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Spray 9-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Cut 5 of the tortillas in half. Cut remaining tortillas into 2-1/2-inch-wide strips. In large bowl, mix chicken, rice, cheese, beans and 1 cup enchilada sauce. Layer 4 tortilla halves in bottom of baking dish. Top with 1/4 cup enchilada sauce and half of the chicken mixture. Top with 2 tortilla halves; fill in empty spaces with 3 tortilla strips. Spoon corn over tortillas. Spread salsa over corn. Layer with 2 tortilla halves and 3 strips. Top with remaining half of chicken mixture. Continue layering with remaining 2 tortilla halves and strips, enchilada sauce, cheese and 2 tablespoons green onions.

Bake uncovered 35 to 45 minutes or until mixture is thoroughly heated and cheese is melted. Cool 5 minutes. Top with sour cream and chopped green onions.

NEW ENGLAND HOT CHOCOLATE

1/4 cup sugar

1/8 tsp salt

1 tbsp baking cocoa

1/4 cup hot water

1 tbsp butter or margarine

4 cups milk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1 tsp maple flavoring

12 large marshmallows

In a large saucepan, combine sugar, cocoa, and salt. Stir in hot water and butter and bring to a boil.

Add milk, vanilla, maple flavoring and 8 of the marshmallows. Heat through, stirring occasionally, until marshmallows melt. Pour into mugs and top each with a marshmallow (or, if preferred, whipped topping).

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THE LEAP OF FAITH FROM CORPORATE TO NON-PROFIT



Written by Lisa Greer

Sunday, 07 October 2007

On average, 8 babies are born every single day with spina bifida, and there are more than 70 thousand people in the United States who are affected.

This is a health condition that not only affects the child born with it, but affects the parents and surrounding family members, too. It is estimated an additional 250, 000 people are actually touched by spina bifida, so to learn more about this birth defect and the Spina Bifida Association, Sensible Life has interviewed Patty Dissel, Executive Director of the Louisville chapter. Patty has freely shared her knowledge of spina bifida as well as her faith that God has placed here where she should be.

"This is absolutely the most rewarding, the most wonderful, opportunity I've ever had. It's not just a job, it's my mission, and it's my passion -it's what I love to do."

I came from the corporate world with a history in sales and management. I was selling cellular telephones when they were \$2,000 apiece, and never in my mind did I ever think I'd be working with children in wheel chairs.

When the company I was with wanted me to move to Atlanta, I went to another company and they also wanted me to move to Atlanta. Everyone wanted me to take that next step up the ladder and move out of town. I was born and raised in Louisville, all of my family is here, this is my home and I didn't want to move. During this time, non-profit was pulling at my heartstrings, and I kept saying no, no, no, but I knew that I wanted to give back. It was totally God saying "this is where you're going to be". I'm pretty open about being a woman of prayer, and I kept feeling the pull toward nonprofit, but at the time I was going through that boom of dot-com/dot-bomb, and I went through 4 jobs in two years. It was late '99, early 2000, and we all thought we were just going to be drinking champagne out of our shoes with the high speed internet and everything. Before everything crashed, I was in that cycle. I had these headhunters call and offer me ridiculous amounts of money to work for these technology companies. So, I'd go to work for these companies, and 6 months later the doors were closed or they got bought by another company. I literally had one boss who would say, just come back tomorrow and we'll see if you have a job. During that 2 yr period, I had the opportunity to interview with a nonprofit, and I got all the way through multiple, multiple interviews. It was between me and one other person, and they hired the other person. I felt a little threatened, and at the same time I thought, maybe my skills are not transferable. In the meantime, these headhunters were still calling me.

When I lost my fourth job, I hit rock bottom. My resume looked like Swiss cheese, and I finally said, "Fine, what do you want me to do?" I completely gave it over to God, verbally and in my heart. I was very much at peace after that. I have 3 children, one who was pretty young at the time, so I spent the next month enjoying my children and just being a mom, but eventually I had to look for a job. I had no idea what I wanted to do, so I thought I'd do temporary work while I figured it out. We didn't have internet access at the house then, so I went to my church's computer lab. This was on a Friday. I went to a temp website, and there was Executive Director of Spina Bifida Association, and I thought, "What is a temp agency doing with an Executive Director position?" I printed it off, and Monday morning I called Lauri Knable from my church. She has a daughter with spina bifida, and I've always watched this family interact from afar with admiration.

I asked Lauri to tell me a little bit about this, and we talked for 2 ½, maybe 3 hours. She explained that the president of the Spina Bifida board worked at this temp agency and they were using their internet site for free. Then, Lauri asked, "Do you mind taking your resume over?" So, I did on Monday afternoon, and Tuesday morning I received a call to come in at 4:00 that day. I spent 2 ½ to 3 hours in that interview, and was asked to come back tomorrow morning at 8:30. I said, "Sure, but what's going on?" Turns out this agency had been searching for an Executive Director for about 6 weeks, and they were down to their final two candidates, who were coming in that next morning to meet with the board and family members. The day after the interview was the 4th of July and the next day was Friday, when they checked my references. Monday I was offered the job; Tuesday, I got in the car and drove to Connecticut for two weeks on a planned family trip. We came back on Sunday night, July 21st, and Monday morning I walked into the office and said, "Spina whata?" I didn't know anything about spina bifida, and I didn't know anything about running a nonprofit. I had always been in the corporate sales world. That was 5 years ago this past July.

The first 4 board meetings we had three people show. I then knew what had to be done right away, and that was at was to get people to help and get a board of directors. We have literally just cleaned house, swept the foundation clean, and started over.

Over the past five years, we have worked hard to build a foundation of stone, instead of sand. If you look at the history of this foundation on a line graph, it looks like a spaghetti noodle. It's just up and down and up and down. At one point they had a staff of 10 people and at another, the place was bankrupt. So, we started building it slow, and we have put the right people into place. None of this has anything to do with me. It has to do with people who are caring and who have come together and have made a difference. I don't know all the answers; I just know how to surround myself with really good people. And we have a great, great board of directors now. We still have a long ways to go and are moving toward some really big goals, but we're still moving in the right direction. In 2002 this agency was \$33,000 in the red, and in 2003, we were \$8,000 in the red. By 2004, we were only \$400 in the red, and by 2005, we were \$4,000 in the black. In 2006, we were \$1500 in the black, and the only reason we weren't more was because September 20th of last year, we lost our office to flooding. We lost everything, but our computers, which were up off the floor. We were very fortunate. Kosair Charities, who is our major funding and support, had an office across the parking lot from us that was dry and we had 3 little desks in there, and that's where we went. Kosair has been wonderful in so many ways.

God has really had His hand on this agency. He has put the right people in the right places. Every time I turn around, there's another blessing. He has just created one opportunity after another. I'm the instrument; I'm just the tool and I feel very blessed to be here.

THE HOPE AND COURAGE SIDE OF SPINA BIFIDA



Written by Lisa Greer with Patty Dissel, Executive Director of Spina Bifida

Sunday, 07 October 2007

Spina bifida is not a disease, but a birth defect that happens in the first 28 days of pregnancy; a time when a woman doesn't even know she's pregnant.

About 35-40 years ago, about 90- 95% of spina bifida children passed away, many of them from fluid on the brain, called hydrocephalus. Today, 90-95% of these children live, largely due to a doctor who invented a shunt, which resembles a straw piece that goes up into the brain and coils down into the stomach. Now all the sudden, we have a normal life expectancy, and we have adults who are the pioneers of that. There's no one in front of them. They grew up with doctors scratching their heads saying, 'You're not supposed to be here'. Today, because we have a normal life expectancy, these children are mainstreamed into schools and are out there being active and normal kids."

It's not certain why spina bifida happens. It's a very complex birth defect, but what they do know is that if a woman is taking a vitamin containing recommended dosage of 0.4mg of folic acid before conception, it can reduce the possibility of spina bifida by up to 70%. While it's not a 100% preventable, it does significantly reduce the chance.

Spina bifida happens when the fetus is forming, and the neural tube, which is your spinal column, doesn't close all the way. Inside your spinal column are all your nerve endings, or meninges. If it doesn't close all the way, the spinal cord and all of your meninges, are actually on the outside of the spinal column. It can happen anywhere along the spine. If it happens very low, it's a mild form. The mildest form is called occulta, and an estimated 10 percent of the population is walking around with spina bifida occulta and don't even know it.

Depending on where it happens along the spine, you may see a child with braces, crutches or in a wheel chair. If it happens all the way at the top of the spine, like at the neck, and if the brain stem may be exposed, that's called anencephaly, and those children usually pass away. Anencephaly could mean the back of the cranium did not develop, which means there's probably not much quality of life at that point.

There are a lot of secondary medical conditions that go along with it, such as bladder and bowel problems. You and I get a signal to the brain to let us know we have to excuse ourselves to the restroom, but that doesn't happen with some who have spina bifida. You have adults and children who have to use catheters to relieve the urine out of their bodies. Imagine an infant that you have to catheter every two hours. You can't just put a diaper on the baby and expect it to work, sometimes it doesn't.

New parents are scared and overwhelmed. They don't know what to expect, and the doctors really can't tell them if the child is going to walk, or not. You can have two children with the exact same diagnosis, and they will develop differently. We have a family who was told their daughter would never walk, and she runs circles around her parents. One of the struggles the medical society has is that there's not one box that fits all. Everybody is different.

Some have occulta, and that isn't sometimes diagnosed until later in life. We've had children at age 7, 14 and even 40 who were diagnosed with spina bifida. You can't always tell right at birth. If, however, an infant is born with meningocele, or myelomeningocele, 90 % of these children have surgery within the first 24 hours of when they are born. When a baby is born with myelomeningocele, the hole doesn't close and the baby is born with this little sack, and you can't just cut that off b/c that's where all the nerve endings are, so they have to put everything back in so to speak

Within the last 10 years, and really within the last 5 years, there's been more discussion on cognitive differences. There may be no differences whatsoever, or there may be a slight learning disability similar to ADHD or ADD; or you may have more cognitive differences when you get into sensory or processing, but you can have learning disabilities without spina bifida, too. What we do is help the parents and teachers help the child in what is the best way for that child to learn. We have information in parent/teacher packets that tell them how to make the learning environment for the child the best it can be so the child will succeed.

The Spina Bifida association is not the starving child poster. We represent children overcoming challenges. We have one teenager, 16 now, who water skis, snow skis, has played wheel chair tennis tournaments for about 6 years, and has been in wheel chair ballet since she was about 6 years old. She is part of a dance group called The Miracle Dancers.

We are the resource center for our community, for our families, and associated agencies. We are the experts for spina bifida in our area. If we have a new parent with a child with spina bifida, we have the material to help parents and we can make connections to other families if they want and need that. Sometimes you're overwhelmed, and it's really helpful to talk to another parent that has been down that path before.

They can meet that parents' 3rd grader who has done wheel chair karate, and has done this and that, and it gives that new parent a sense of hope. We're not the support group sitting around holding hands and crying; we are encouraging and trying to give access to resources for anyone and everyone involved to help overcome challenges. We want to help that child transition and be more independent, so they can go to school, drive a car, go to college and get a job, and things like do wheelchair sports and adaptive sports. There are so many wonderful things today that kids years ago didn't have access to, such as adaptive rowing, wheelchair basketball, adaptive archery, rugby, tennis. There are ways to make all the different sports you can think of adaptable. Years ago, these children couldn't participate—they had to sit on the sidelines and watch. Now, participation increases their self-esteem. They're getting more physically fit, do better with peers, and they do better in school, which means they'll probably go to secondary education, meaning they are probably going to graduate, get a job and become a contributing member of society.

Perfect example, I just hired someone in the office, Bethany, who is an adult with spina bifida. She is one class away from her Masters degree and is a licensed, certified, recreational therapist. She travels internationally competing in wheel chair fencing and is trying to get to the Paralympics.

The education our association provides is encouragement of life, ability and hope. When pregnant mothers find out they are carrying a child with spina bifida, they go to the internet and immediately scare themselves to death. Often, termination is encouraged, but, how encouraging would it be to meet a woman who is 28 years old who lives alone, drives, is completing her masters and travels the world. I'm so pleased to have her working with me.

We are very active about our education and awareness prevention program, and that is where we try to get the message out about folic acid. We actually go out and talk to middle school and high school students, and we're not talking about babies and pregnancy, we're talking about nutrition and thinking about what you're putting in your body, and developing good, healthy habits. We are dealing with a society that is eating pizza, drinking soft drinks and caffeine drinks, and eating fast food. This is what our kids are growing up on, so we are trying really hard to encourage them to just take a vitamin every day. Our motto to kids is: "wash your face, brush your teeth and take your vitamin every day". We tell them to put their vitamins in the bathroom and not the kitchen, so when they're brushing their teeth, they can take the vitamin at the same time. Getting them in the habit at 12, 13, and 14 will ingrain this habit to carry over when they grow up and go off on their own. Hopefully we're preventing birth defects 10-15 years from now. A lot of people don't know that even if you're older you should still take a vitamin every day, because folic acid helps prevent breast cancer, colon cancer, and they're doing studies with Alzheimer's patients as well.

We also encourage them not to take the vitamin w/coffee tea or soft drinks. It's not the caffeine. Coffee, tea –the dark liquids have what is called tandem, and this can prevent your body from absorbing the nutrients properly. We are not vitamin salespeople, I don't care what vitamin you take. If you take a glass of water at room temp, put the vitamin in and come back 4 hours later, it hasn't even started to dissolve, then it's probably so coated with silicone that it might just passing straight through your body. If you come back 60 minutes later, and it has started to dissolve, then you probably have a decent vitamin on your hands. Some people can't take pills, but you can take chewable Flintstones –two if you're an adult.

Another thing we do is a financial assistance fund. This is basically a work in progress. We don't have a huge amount of money, but it's a start. This fund is designed to help those who have a true financial hardship and they have a vital need. spina bifida can hit at any income range, or race. If you are sitting on the fencepost financially, and you have a child with a disability, sometimes that can just push you right over the edge because the doctor and medical bills are just unbelievable. A week in the hospital can be \$170,000. Our financial assistance fund has helped with medical bills, therapy bills, equipment to make a bathroom accessible, a transfer board which helps one transfer from their wheel chair to a couch or a bed, and we've also helped purchase a basketball chair and fencing equipment. We've also been able to buy some hand cycles for kids. It's like a bicycle, only you're using your hands. It sits low to the ground and you are either pumping your hands or doing the circular motion with them. We had one child who was depressed because he couldn't ride bicycles with his friends. We were able to provide him with a hand cycle, and now his mother says she can hardly get him to come in for dinner. He's a happy, confident kid again.

Many of these things are made possible through events like in our Adopt-a-Ghost® campaign in October, which is a paper ghost that we ask people to adopt for a dollar. This is also a huge awareness opportunity to raise awareness about taking vitamin with folic acid.

Our Ghost Bowl is on Saturday, October 20th this year and is our biggest fundraiser. We actually turn all the lights off in the bowling alley, except for black lights, and you get to bowl for 2 hours, but we don't keep score. We do it close to Halloween so people can dress up in costumes, and we have costume contests. It's very fun and family oriented. We have 3 slots of bowling in the evening this year, 5:00-7:00, 7:30-9:30, and a 10:00-midnight. It's \$50.00 per individual to bowl, which is not hard to get from donors. You can get 10 sponsors for 5 bucks, or 5 for ten. With that, you get admission, a t-shirt, pizza and a door prize. We want everyone to walk away with something in their hands, and we have prizes for different levels of money raised. We also have prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place for the most funds raised. Those turn out to be really nice packages, too. We've had overnight stays at hotels, dinners, plays -we have a very giving community.

Events such as these help achieve financial goals, such as our plan for a clinic for life. Some don't realize what many of our folks have to go through just with seeing doctors. There's now a clinic on the property of Kosair Charities, our largest supporter, that allows you to go to one location for all. It's called an interdisciplinary team. Here, child sees the pediatric orthopedist, the pediatric urologist, the pediatric neurosurgeon, pediatric neurologist, and you have a nurse coordinator so that you have one file for this child. All the doctors are seeing the child in one day, looking at one file, and being able to see what all the other doctors are seeing and saying, but, when they turn 21 that's it. Now you have adults having to go out and find their own adult individual doctors, so you have this adult going into the urologist who is saying, "Isn't that a pediatric disorder?" They haven't been trained in spina bifida for adults, because spina bifida patients were usually just kids. So, now you have the patient educating the doctor. What we envision is that one day we are going to have a clinic for life, so it won't matter how old you are, you'll have doctors that know and specialize in spina bifida.

For more information on this event, spina bifida, or how you can help, visit the chapter website at www.sbak.org . or phone the office at 502-637-7363. To find a Spina Bifida chapter in your area, visit www.sbaa.org .

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POETRY SELECTION:



Written by Christy Fowler

Sunday, 07 October 2007

Enjoy another poem by our talented teen poet, Christy Fowler. This issue, Christy has written a poem, prompting us to reflect on the choices we make.

CHOICES

By: Christy Fowler

Shatter, crumble, crack

Starts so small

Innocence, fun, soft

Yet, so quick

There, then, now

So precious

Diamond, star, light

So gone

Far, lost, never

And with it

Dreams, hopes, future

It's true

Complete, utter, real

You can't go back

Past, then, wishes

Can't believe yourself

Regret, hate, malice

Should have made

The right Choice

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LEGENDS OF THE FALL



Written by Gracie Dane

Friday, 05 October 2007

Since the planting and growing season is pretty much over for the year, Sensible Life wanted to fill this section with some fun fall trivia

For example, did you know that October 30th is National Candy Corn Day? And rightfully so, with Candy Corn being the number one most popular Halloween candy in 2004. This candy dates back to the 1880s and was first made by the Wunderle Candy Company in Philadelphia. The ingredients of this confection were cooked to the right consistency, then men called stringers would walk by the candy molds, pouring the liquid into the trays. This took three passes, one for white, one for orange, and one for yellow. Unique for its day, the tri-color design and corn shape intrigued people, and they flocked to buy them. Candy corn was originally sold in bulk, packed in wooden buckets, tubs and cartons, but the perishable nature prevented them from being distributed far away.

Ever wonder how the jack-o-lantern tradition came about. The Irish lay claim to the birth of this impish icon. Legend has it that Jack O'Lantern was a mean spirited prankster who played tricks on everyone, even the Devil himself. He supposedly tricked the Devil and bargained for his soul never to go to Hell. When Jack finally died and went to heaven, he was told he could not enter because he was too mean and cruel, so he went down to Hell and the Devil, and the Devil kept his promise not to let Jack in. Jack had no where to go and was afraid to leave in the dark, so the Devil tossed him an ember to light his way. Jack hollowed out a turnip to hold the ember, and was left to wander the earth through eternity. On All Hallows Eve, the Irish would practice hollowing out gourds, potatoes, turnips and the like, and place a light inside to ward off Jack and other evil spirits. Once the Irish immigrants came to America and discovered the pumpkin was easier to hollow out, it was used from then on.

How about Jack Frost? This legend is thought to be of Nordic origin. Called Jokul Frosti, son of the Norse god of wind. When Jokul moved to England, he became Jack Frost, and was depicted as an elf-like being who coloured tree leaves and the ground with frost, and painted patterns on windows.

Another tradition that, surprisingly, people know little about, yet many celebrate it every year is Halloween. This pagan tradition has quite a history. The origin of Halloween began around 2000 years ago in Ireland with the Celtic festival known as Shmáinn. Since the first day of November marked the end of summer and the returning home of the herds for winter, October 31st was the day that the Celts believed the souls of the dead also returned to visit their earthly homes.

There are some variations to the history, but the concepts remain the same. Some believed Halloween to be a night of mischief where spirits caused trouble and damaged crops. To ward off these spirits and make the living unrecognizable to them, people would set bonfires and wear masks and disguises in hopes these evil specters would leave them alone.

Once the Romans conquered Celtic territory, this tradition began evolving, and by the 800s, Christianity was a strong influence which attempted to replace this practice with All Saints' Day, also known as All Hallows Eve. On November 1st, and the day before it, became a time to honor the saints and martyrs. The name eventually became Halloween.

A couple hundred years later on November 2nd, All Souls Day was added as a day to honor the dead. Just as Halloween, the people would celebrate by building bonfires and dressing up in costumes of angels, saints and devils to parade around the towns. By the middle ages, the secular won out over the sacred, and Halloween is now celebrated as a worldly holiday. Parades, festivals and trick-or-treating emerged, and the custom of donning masks and costumes remains.

If anyone else has some trivia for the fall, Sensible Life would like to hear from you. E-mail us at editor@sensiblelife.com.

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Flavors of Camping: Fun and easy recipes for the wild



Written by Rexinto with Sandy Cable

Thursday, 27 September 2007

Learning to start a fire, putting up a tent, and setting up my own fishing pole are just a few of the fun things I've been doing on my camping trip. So far, I've seen some interesting flowers and some even more interesting bugs.



My guide has given me some important survival tips, such as hanging food from a tree to keep the raccoons away, and how to clock the sun to find out what direction you are heading in. It's been a real experience, but the best part so far has been the food.

We've received a few great recipes that are quick and easy, and I wanted to share them with all of you before the camping season is over. I've listed a few below. Enjoy!

Salty Sweet Trail Mix

- * 1 Jar of salt peanuts

- * 1 large bag of plain M&M's
- * ½ a box of raisins
- * 1 jar of sunflower seeds

Place all ingredients in a bowl and mix with a spatula. Place in an air tight container to keep the freshness.

Chocolaty SMORES

- * 1 bag of marshmallows
- * 1 box of graham crackers
- * Lots of Hershey's® Milk Chocolate bars

Find a cooking pan, and cover it with foil. Place 2 halves of a graham cracker on the pan with one fourth of a Hershey's® Milk Chocolate bar on each. Place the pan near the bonfire, just close enough to melt the chocolate. Find a pointy object to roast your marshmallow, and place it over the fire to heat up. As soon as the chocolate is slightly melted, place the marshmallow between the two pieces of graham crackers, and enjoy.

Pocket Pizza's

- * 2 pieces of white bread
- * Pizza sauce
- * Pepperoni
- * Mozzarella cheese
- * Butter or olive oil

Use a "pocket pie" maker, and grease the inside with butter or olive oil. Put a slice of bread on each side. Add the pizza sauce, pepperoni, and cheese to center of 1 slice. Close the pie maker and cut off the edges of the bread that are hanging over. Put the pie maker in the campfire and cook until the pie seals and the outside is toasted. Make sure it is hot all the way through before eating.

Hot Dog Jubilee

- * 1 can cherry pie filling
- * 1 package of hot dogs cut into chunks

Heat the pie filling over a campfire until warm, and then stir in the hot dogs chunks. This sounds weird, but it's a great dish.

Other favorites that were mentioned include rice crispy treats, fruit salads, and different kinds of sandwich ideas. Don't be afraid to experiment a little with your parents and see what you can come up with. Who knows... it could be better than PB&J or campfire hot dogs!

A great reference if you're planning on making some yummy campfire food is Camp Recipes for Kids, featured in our book store. It has some fun ideas that the whole family can prepare together. You can also visit <http://www.chuckwagondiner.com/campfire.html>, which is where I got the great Hot Dog recipe.

Remember, when you head out, be prepared, and be safe. Camping is fun, but you should always have an adult with you to make sure

everyone can enjoy the experience without major problems. Plus, they always have the best campfire stories!

On to my next adventure. Where do you think I should go next? Send your ideas to me at rexinto@yahoo.com. I always love to get e-mails from you guys! Can't wait to see what you come up with, and remember, you may even be featured in the magazine.

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APARTMENT LEASES: Know What to Look For



Written by Lisa Greer

Saturday, 06 October 2007

Karen, a college graduate, recently secured her first full time job and was excited to be out on her own and looking for the perfect place to live.

She found a charming house to rent, eagerly signing the lease and moving in right away. Then the trouble began.

First, she noticed some mold inside the drawers of the sink cabinet in the master bathroom. She looked behind the doors next to drawers and noticed the wood behind them was black with mold. She complained to her landlord, but nothing was done about it. Next, she noticed that the master bedroom, an addition built onto the house, did not appear to have proper insulation as evidenced by Karen's ability to see daylight through some cracks in the walls. She complained to the landlord, but nothing was ever done.

Finally, the promise of lawn care was never fulfilled to Karen's satisfaction. The grass would be considerably high before anyone would show up to mow it. Karen complained, but nothing changed. Exasperated, she pulled out her lease to see what could be done about all these problems.

Unfortunately, she had not done her homework up front. Anxious to move into this house, she signed the lease without reading it. She quickly discovered her hastiness had been a huge mistake. Nothing in the lease required prompt landlord response and resolution to problems with the rental property. The only thing she found was lawn care to be provided within reasonable time frames. While that gives a lessee some standard of measurement on performance, the reasonable concept still has to be defined and agreed upon, so Karen was back to square one.

Surprisingly, home and apartment leases are signed every day without the renter ("lessee") ever reviewing the terms and conditions. Many potential renters do not even realize that these terms and conditions can be negotiated. If an apartment owner ("lessor") is not agreeable to this type of open discussion, you may want to look around a bit more before renting from that company, or individual. It is best to find someone willing to work with you to keep you happy and continuing in your business relationship.

The first thing I look for in a contract is open ended expenses. For example, Karen's lease locked her into a one year term, but did not guarantee the rent would not increase during that time. The lease provided for a 30 day notice to warn the tenant of an increase, but there was no cap on the amount that it could increase, nor the number of times per year this could happen. A fair lease would have stated something to the effect that during the term of the lease, rent cannot increase by more than a specified percentage and no more than once annually. This is a good start on planning your budget over the term of the lease since you will know up front that your rent will not increase by more than the specified percentage for the coming year.

Karen decided that she would terminate her agreement and look for another place. When she looked at the termination section, she found that she did have the right to terminate by providing a 60 day notice to the landlord, however, her lease stated until the landlord found a replacement renter, Karen would be responsible for continuing her monthly payments, even if she moved out. In addition, she would be responsible for all advertising fees and costs associated with background checks on potential renters. There was no limit on the number of background checks, nor on the number or type of ads the landlord could run. Early termination could have cost Karen a considerable amount of money, and there was nothing she could have done about it. As a result of these unfavorable terms and conditions, she was stuck in her lease for eleven months before a replacement renter came along.

These are just a few of the many scenarios that could crop up by not reading a lease before signing. Just keep in mind when reading that if you are locking yourself into terms and conditions for any length of time, you'll want to make sure what you are signing up to are terms you can live with for the duration of that time.

Note: Information contained in this section has been approved by legal counsel licensed in the states of Indiana and Kentucky. If you are having problems with a lease, or are getting ready to sign a lease, and you need understanding of the terms contained in the agreement, it is best to seek the advice of an attorney.

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