

A Bunch Of Carny Folks

Last night, I received an email to meet a bunch of friends at the county fair this afternoon. Since I got off work at 4, I just made it to the fairgrounds by the 4.30 meeting time. None of the other people who were invited were able to attend (or just were "too good" for the rest of us...KIDDING). It has been a few years since I have been to the fair. I believe the last time I went was about 4-5 years ago when I was asked to go on the bus for the county high school band show. We never made it. By the time the bus arrived, it was pouring rain and the show was canceled.

I am pleased to say that this evening was great fun with great friends. With rides and attractions provided by Poor Jack Attractions. We came to the conclusion that it is called Poor Jack not because the proprietor is a poor man named Jack, but because Jack is laughing at all the poor folks spending their money.

I am constantly amazed at the daredevil Sammie. She will go on ANYTHING... or at least try. There was one ride that she could not get on because she was not tall enough. But she and her two sisters were just a ball. Even when they had their moments. But with three siblings of my own I well remember having moments of our own.

After depleting our supply of tickets riding the "ocrapus" (is that it?), bumper cars, Goose rode her favorite (Tilt-A-Whirl), among other rides, we spent an absurd amount of money on carny food that was deep-fried, fattening, and delicious. We then played one game. However, I REFUSE to play a game in which you could not understand what the barker is saying. I did treat myself to a chocolate milkshake at the dairystand (a must at the fair). Hopefully, a precursor to the fun I will be having on a trip next month. I did take exception to one thing: Why was it that the bumper car operator told the other

riders to gang up ON ME?!

Busy busy

With a new school year comes not just employment but things going on at my church as well. Okay, I haven't been *that* busy, but compared to just a week ago it seems like it. Also, I have been catching up on my internet reading since I was down for much of last week. It still goes down daily, but they tell me I have a perfect connection and it must be the work they're doing in the area. I can only hope it goes away after awhile proving them right, otherwise I'll be stuck since they'll never find anything with my "perfect" connection.

Monday I took a half-day job, but when I got there I found out the secretary put a teacher's request in for the wrong day. They then proceeded to remove the assignment from my job list so I can only hope I'll get some sort of compensation for it, but if not I least I can have the satisfaction of working only four periods today and getting a full day's pay for it (the norm for middle school is six periods). The teacher came in to work and decided he was too ill to work so I picked up the late assignment. I did not work first period as a result. Then I found out the teacher only has five periods, helping out in the office a 6th period. That is not normal and they didn't have me do it, though I did ask about it. To top it off, the teacher has a student teacher so he did most of the work. Cool.

Yesterday was an easy day too, though when I got there I was a little concerned as the teacher didn't leave any lesson plans. Fortunately I only had to teach one class. The rest were either co-teach classes (you know what that means- the

other teacher does the teaching and I help as an assistant) or resource/study hall. As it turned out the one class they were just working out of a packet, so I just taught the next page of the packet and had them start their homework in class. Of course when I got home I found an email outlining the plans- apparently the system allows for a teacher to upload the plans to the sub-system and have them emailed to the sub. Having never had this happen before, I never realized it could do this so I never bothered to check my email before heading to work. Fortunately for me I had pretty much followed the plans without realizing it! Whew...

Besides work I had my usual small group Monday night and tonight I had rehearsals for both children's drama, which starts up again this weekend, and choir. Since they overlapped, I had to miss a little bit of each. I just wish it hadn't been the first rehearsal as that is one that people shouldn't miss, even in part. Well, that's how it goes I guess. I have two more choir rehearsals next week and will have to miss small group as a result but they understand about that- it only happens a few times a year. I'll just have to make sure they are set on song lyrics as that's kind of my job- I usually set up a couple of powerpoints and bring my computer in. That's one of the nice things about this new computer. I guess I will just have to print something up and drop them off- I'll be in the same building after all. Someone else provides the music by the way in case you're wondering. My small group starts off each week with a couple of worship songs.

Well, that's it for now. Time to get ready for some sleep. It's going to be another early day tomorrow.

Black holes and the end of the world...

Anybody else see a theme forming... And this topics color is black..

Has anyone seen some of the headlines about the new Super Collider? Bunch of doom and gloom coming from somewhere.

Things like "Fear Looms", "Doomsday machine to start", "Collider triggers end-of-world fears", "Black Holes may devour the Earth", "Will Collider destroy the Earth", "Giant wild goat kills thousands".. Ok, I made that last one up. I understand that this is cutting edge science that very few people understand, but does the media have to make the stories so out there. The chance of something like this happening is very small, almost non-existent. The only reason it isn't non-existent is that nobody really "knows" what will happen when they finally get a collision. There are some very good ideas, but nobody "knows" yet. They haven't done the experiment yet.

Tomorrow there is a chance that the collider will create mini-black holes that will swallow the Earth. Tomorrow the Sun could explode and fry the Earth. Tomorrow a big rock could hit the Earth and send us flying out of orbit. Tomorrow a space ship (that's no moon, it's a space station) could blow us to bits. Tomorrow the Sun could rise, and then set and the day will be normal. I have an idea of which of these things will happen, but I don't "KNOW" which one will happen. I'll check tomorrow just to be sure.

May the Force be with you when that space station decides to blow the Earth to bits. We aren't even part of the Imperial Senate....

blue screen of death...

I've been working on Windows machines since the existence of Windows, and I always hated the dreaded blue screen error. It has been quite a long time since I've had one of those, but today I had one. This machine has been fairly stable, the only additions were an extra gig of memory and my cell modem. No programs added or new hardware, except a Windows update yesterday.

The problem with this blue screen was that it flashed and went directly to reboot. Not a chance to read the screen at all. Not that it would have helped, but maybe it would have given a clue. I actually had to cancel a reboot to start from my last known good start. Grumble...

Now back to that blue screen. Back in the day when you could actually tell what happened (early dos for you folks that don't know) it wasn't the terrible trouble it seems to be now. When Windows 3.1 finally rolled in and you could actually do some multi-tasking, the blue screens ominous tone. Since you were multi-tasking, you weren't always sure what task caused the error. Most of the time it was running the multiple tasks that caused the error in the first place. Windows became known for its blue screen of death. For a long time this prevented windows from being used for important functions (think payroll). It took Windows 2000 to finally start getting Windows machines that were fairly stable. I sometimes wonder where computer networking would be today if the early windows machines would have failed with more precise error messages. Would the world of Linux and Unix file servers have taken off as they did. Would Apple have any opening in the corporate world? I really think the downfall of the early Windows machines was that blue screen of death. Even the color made

the machine seem 'toy' like. And the messages, well lets just say it took a lot to be able to get anything out of them. If a stable Windows environment existed from the beginning, would we even have the Virus writers/hackers of today?

I guess we will never know, until the next computer revolution.

By the way, I really think my latest blue screen was caused by the update Microsoft/Windows decided to make yesterday evening.

Mystery Alaska

With Alaskan Sarah Palin's eye on the White House and all the northern exposure in the media lately, we decided to pull out one of our old favorites the other night and watched the 1999 movie [Mystery Alaska](#). It's a pretty good movie and obviously has lots of replay value, at least for us, because we've seen it lots of times. It was interesting watching it this time since I think this is the first time we've seen it since we've moved into a small town, and the movie is all about small town living. The main difference between Mystery Alaska and my small town is the climate, of course.

In Mystery, residents' lives seem to revolve around hockey (and sleeping around, but don't let that give you the wrong idea about the movie. Every small town has its sordid secrets). Boys in Mystery grow up with the "goal" (pun intended) of getting to play in the famed Saturday Game. [Hank Azaria](#) plays a former Mysterian who left town because he was never good enough to play in the game. He becomes a writer for Sports Illustrated instead, although his success in the real world does not make him feel any more acceptance in

Mystery, even if he does arrive in a helicopter. He gets the brilliant idea to bring the New York Rangers to Mystery to play the Saturday Game, and well, you'll have to watch the movie to see what happens. As in any small town, there is a bit of drama, and the movie is successful with its character development as it follows the lives of the most popular residents of Mystery. [Russell Crowe](#), who is not normally one of my favorite actors, is pretty good in this movie as the family man / town sheriff who is growing too old to play in the Saturday Game and must face some tough decisions about what is best for his family versus what is best for Mystery and the integrity of the Saturday Game. [Burt Reynolds](#) is excellent as the no-nonsense judge who also struggles as he raises his teenagers. In fact, perhaps the funniest line of the movie is said to his character by his wife. She is consoling their teenage daughter, and he wants to know what's wrong. "Walter," his wife says, "if you don't leave, I swear I'll tell you!" If you have kids, especially teenagers, you can appreciate the truth and the humor in that line, more so if you see the movie and know the daughter's issue to which she is referring.

Even if you don't like hockey, this is an entertaining film with dramatic moments interspersed with comedy. Its one shortcoming is the fact that there is too much adult content for it to be considered as a family film. However, adults will enjoy the fine performances by the large ensemble cast which make Mystery Alaska a well-rounded, heart-tugging and entertaining film – definitely recommended by this blogger!

Armed Robbery – With a Twist

I'm a sucker for interesting news stories, and the following caught my eye. An armed robber attempted to knock off a store but was chased down the street by some flying bullets and the gun-toting store owner. The owner of the store ended up facing more serious charges than the robber for shooting a gun on a busy street, and he skipped bail and hasn't been seen since. Because he didn't show up to testify against the robber, there was no choice but to let the robber go free... except for the fact that he is an illegal alien, so he's facing consequences for that. And did I mention that the store owner is also an illegal alien as reported in a previous news story about the incident? Crazy story, read it for yourself here:

Crystal Lake, Illinois – *Efrain S. Castanon got lucky earlier this year when he managed to escape his foiled attempt to rob a Crystal Lake business without getting shot by its gun-toting owner.*

The South suburban man got lucky again Monday when that owner, fleeing from his own set of criminal charges, failed to appear in court to testify against him.

This time instead of bullets from owner Rafael Diaz, luck allowed Castanon, 39, of Worth, to evade a possible prison sentence as part of a deal with McHenry County prosecutors.

Under the deal, Castanon was sentenced to one year of non-reporting probation after admitting guilt to unlawful restraint and attempted theft stemming from the failed Jan. 28 holdup of Novedes Veracruz in Crystal Lake.

He also received a six-month jail term, but that is time served since his arrest in January.

Diaz's absence Monday left prosecutors with little choice by

the deal they cut with Castanon, Assistant McHenry County State's Attorney Mary Baccam said in court Monday.

"Rafael Diaz has fled the jurisdiction and is unavailable to testify for the state," she said.

Castanon initially faced up to 15 years in prison after authorities charged him with attempted armed robbery, attempted aggravated robbery and attempted robbery in connection with the holdup.

Police said Castanon was one of three men who entered the store about 3 p.m. that day armed with a gun and attempted to tie up owner Rafael Diaz and his wife while robbing them.

Diaz, authorities said, broke free, retrieved a handgun he kept in the store and chased the would-be robbers out, firing numerous shots in their direction as they fled along a heavily traveled section of Route 14.

Two of the men escaped in a car and have not been found since, but Castanon was left behind and arrested by police.

Because he fired at the men as they ran away down a busy street, authorities charged Diaz, 54, of Crystal Lake, with aggravated battery with a firearm, a felony more serious than those faced by Castanon.

Diaz posted a \$10,000 bond after his arrest and hasn't been seen by law enforcement since. A \$125,000 warrant for his arrest was issued in April.

Although Castanon is a free man as a result of his plea deal, he could remain locked up in the McHenry County jail on a hold by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Spinach and Strawberry Salad

My friend Shirley is compiling a recipe book for our community theater group and says she's short on salads. Since I have to type this recipe into my computer to email it to her, thought I'd share it with you on my blog... just in time for strawberries to go out of season. Oh well, enjoy anyway!

Spinach and Strawberry Salad

makes 4 servings

1 – 5 or 7 oz. package of baby spinach or baby romaine

2 cups sliced strawberries

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup crumbled goat or feta cheese

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup pine nuts, toasted

Combine greens and strawberries, add balsamic vinaigrette dressing and toss gently to evenly coat. Sprinkle each serving with cheese and nuts. Here is a recipe to make your own balsamic vinaigrette dressing from scratch:

Balsamic Vinaigrette Dressing

1 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar

3 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 Tablespoon chopped fresh basil leaves or 1 teaspoon dried basil, crushed

salt and black pepper

Whisk vinegar and olive oil in small bowl. Add basil and season with salt and pepper.

A Break From The Chaos

Well... not really chaos (unless you include Thor... just kidding, but I was never 8-years-old). Opening weekend of The Nerd went very well. There were huge laughs, audiences for each of the three shows (although today's performance was questionable... at 5pm Saturday, there were only 6-7 reservations of which 4 were my family members). The only major thing that I encountered was the absence of real deviled eggs.. sorry Carol.) Also to Chris for the absence... I would find it difficult to eat a hard-boiled egg and have that dry texture in my mouth. And the pop will be waiting for you at intermission from Thursday night onward (put it in my script: **POP @ INTERMISSION 4 CHRIS!!!**)

Let's see... Saturday night the cast was to have an 80's Night Party at the lounge across from the theatre. After about 10 minutes inside, a group of us decided to be a bunch of "godless party poopers" and held our own gathering elsewhere. The highlight of the party had to be the [The Wonderful World of Disney Trivia](#) in which 2 of the competitors knew more about the world of Disney than I and our ever so gracious hosts formed a team (thinking that two heads are better than one). But all in all a truly successful opening... coming from someone who sees absolutely nothing of what is happening on stage.

The Nerd

Since my friend C is in the play called The Nerd (hopefully still is, considering his medical troubles as of late) I thought I would share something I embarrassingly have enjoyed

watching on the internet. Embarrassing because it's not exactly family friendly. In fact, if you have young ones around, do not watch any of these shows. In fact, don't even go to the link I am going to provide. You have been warned. What does this have to do with The Nerd? Well, the one I write about is James Rolfe, otherwise known as the angry video game nerd. He unfortunately reminds me a little about myself playing video games sometimes. I can get really angry after playing a tough game for awhile. This is probably one of the reasons I don't play them much anymore, and when I do they are often easy ones made for kids. Anyway, Rolfe plays really bad video games on purpose just to show us all how bad they are, and to have a little fun with it. Unfortunately, his reviews are laced with profanity during the "angry" moments (just an act I'm sure) which is why I only grudgingly admit to watching them. Besides reminding me a little bit about myself, I am entertained watching video games which is probably why I continue to watch them. I download video game movies from [World of Longplays](#), [Speed Demos Archive](#), [Recorded Amiga Games](#), [TAS Videos](#), and more. This form of voyeurism, watching others play games, comes from when I was a young teen. I enjoyed arcades a little too much. When I would run out of money, I would stay and just watch others play. As far as I remember, I didn't get much strategy tips from this, just enjoyment.

Well, back to AVGN. Rolfe often has themes for the reviews he does. When a popular movie comes out, he will do a series of games based on that movie. Yep, he has recently done Indiana Jones and Batman games. He also does some holiday themes, like halloween and Christmas. From a technical standpoint, they are really pretty good. I have watched nearly all of them (I skipped just one I think- a certain type of Atari game theme which makes his page pretty much not safe for family...). This guy is quite popular too as he has had some knock-off reviewers. One did I think just one video calling himself the Christian Video Game Nerd. He just mimiced one of Rolfe's videos substituting "nicer" words for profanity in places, but

the “anger” is still there. There is also a Happy Video Game Nerd, who reviews some of the better games. He stole the AVGN theme song, substituting his own lyrics. Anyway, if you haven’t done a search yet by now, the Angry Video Game Nerd site is at... Hmm. I talked of one page, but it seems the page has moved. The reviews are now categorized by year so they are not all family unsafe, but still be careful. The site is at Cinemassacre.com.

Another review favorite of mine is a bit more family friendly. Someone took it on himself to review all Nintendo (NES) games from day one of its Japanese release in the early eighties. He calls his series [Chrontendo](#) (click for link). He as also just started chronicling Sega’s SMS system from the same time. I am in the process of downloading episode two of ChronSega right now. If you have broadband, do yourself a favor and download the larger DIVX videos. The quality is much better than the MP4 streams.

Anyway, that’s it for now for this look into the psyche of this substitute teacher. I wonder if I should get a job with Comcast. Still bad pay, but If I work eight hours daily I will start with what I am getting as a sub, plus I will have benefits and plenty of opportunity for overtime pay too...

First full day of the year!

And only day this week, partly thanks to my connection issues which are unfortunately still ongoing. I had no internet at all for yesterday afternoon and evening, while today it’s been intermittent. I wonder if the signal is now too powerful if that’s possible? I mean, it was going through a cable that was chewed or worn to the center wire, so it’s possible that

in the past they have had to increase it to compensate (the cable didn't get that way overnight after all) and now that it's fixed, the signal may be too strong. Just throwing a guess out which is probably completely off. The tech who was here was unable to measure it as his portable reader needed recharging. Since the connection was up and I was getting nice speeds (around 19000kbps on speakeasy.net), he just let it go.

Still in special ed on Friday, but not due to meetings this time. Apparently the teacher had a bad case of bronchitis on Thursday so he wisely opted to take Friday off. It was actually a rather easy day. Four classes (well, three really-one was a typical two-period-long language arts class) were team teaching, meaning that a sub just takes the role of a teaching assistant while the other teacher takes over the teaching part. The other two classes were resource periods. I just gave them a topic to write about in their journals and once finished they just worked on homework. There was also a teaching assistant in these classes (a sub too, by the way) so as you can imagine it was a pretty light day. Next Thursday and Friday I have a job lined up for ELL in another district. This is a teacher I refused to work for last year or most of the year before. I am hoping things have changed since most of the students from that problem class have gone on to high school. I will let you know how it goes, hopefully with other stories throughout the week.