

Why do I live in the woods?

Back in June I started to post about some wildlife adventure. I never got back to it, but the story was strange enough, so I will keep it in this post.

As I sit here listening to the rain hit the ground outside, I am reminded of all the good things about living in the middle of nowhere. I really like the time I have by myself, and being away from the hubbub of the world is a welcome relief. I'm just sitting here enjoying a peaceful day.

There were turkeys and deer in behind the house this morning. Even the dog's barking did not hurry them on. They kept their pace, eating, smelling and doing whatever those animals do. Like I said, a peaceful day.

The place here is full of memories. Memories of my girls growing up. Memories of family. This is a place of laughter and tears, it lives.

I've had some problems living in the woods over the years that most people won't see, but they were worth it to me. It is my little place of refuge from the world outside. Yes, I think I could be a hermit, if there was just some way to make a living at it. I don't feel like the hunter/gatherer type. I like a few creature comforts. Heat, food, internet... But the isolation... I could live with that...

The sound of the rain, what a calming affect that has.

I had a little adventure with the local wildlife today. A chipmunk decided that the airfilter on my truck would make a good place to rest. It may have been, but wasn't after I started the engine. Poor little thing. The truck didn't care for it either. Sad for the chipmunk and sad for my wallet. It was quite a bill to get the truck running again. Something I

could have done myself, if I had just realized what it was. The sad part about this. It happened before. The last time it was only a nest, no little animals. Same symptoms, same hurt to the wallet. All I can say is I should have known.

Proud Of Your Boy

This marking the day before the 2nd anniversary of Ma2's passing, I have made a promise to myself to annually honor her memory around this time. To paraphrase one of my favorite quotes: She's really not gone as long as we remember her. May sound sappy to some but Emily really was like a second mother to me. A strong, courageous woman... in fact the strongest and most courageous I have ever known. I can still remember our last conversation over the phone. We were to meet the next day to discuss my new found friends and my then anticipation of going to the big city. Unfortunately, she had just found out that she was going to be returning to Columbus for another extended stay at the James. Little did I know that this would be the last conversation we would have. She was so determined to beat the leukemia. I believe her words were: "I'm going to kick this thing in the ()" I knew that if anyone could, it was her. She also told me how proud she was in how far I had come in my theatrical ventures and pleaded with me to not give up. That I had finally allowed myself to let my candle be uncovered by that bushel basket. "He knows what he is talking about."

Proud of Your Boy. I believe that I have posted about the "lost song" from Disney's *Aladdin* that was shall I say a prayer sung by the title character to his mother. I believe that the mother was written out in order to better portray the hero as being a "worthless street rat" with only his companion

Abu by his side. I think it is much more than a simple prayer. I believe that deep down inside us all there is that little bit of ourselves that feels a need to prove to someone (be it a parent, other relative, close friend, mentor, whatever... perhaps even ourselves) that we are more than the sum of our parts. That we will get over these "lousin up, messin up, screwin up times."

I am so glad that with the release of the Platinum Edition DVD, the song was pulled from the archives. It really is a gem as sung by Clay Aiken. That tells you how long it has been since its release... he hasn't really been in the spotlight for a few years. I was lucky enough to be able to work on the piece while Emily was still (physically) guiding me.

I LOVE the orchestral accompaniment and the screen playing scenes in the background. HMMM...

Love you, Ma

Not THAT MGM Lion...

Have you seen that MGM lion video? When I asked a friend about this the other day, he apparently thought I was referring to the lion that roars at you from the screen in the beginning of some movies – not THAT MGM lion! I'm talking about the shocking video of the lion turning on his trainer at the lion exhibit in the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. Notice I didn't use the word "attack". Animal experts (including Jack Hanna, my favorite animal expert) who have reviewed the footage have agreed that it wasn't an attack, but rather retribution or perhaps rough play from one grumpy lion. The fact is, had the lion been attacking, it would have been over in a matter of seconds with a tragic outcome for the trainer. The trainer escaped uninjured, and watch how the lion follows him out of the enclosure, giving him "yeah, you'd BETTER run" looks all the way out:

Personally, I do think the lion was playing rough. He might have gotten a bit irritated at the trainer, but if he had truly wanted to hurt him, he could have killed him in seconds flat, which is why extreme caution should always be used when handling exotic animals. I wish the video showed what was occurring between the lion and his trainer just before the incident. Seconds before, the lion seems relaxed, but then the camera pans away until the lion lunges for the trainer's leg. What I find truly amazing about the video is the female lion's reaction. She follows the male lion around the enclosure throughout the incident, seemingly trying to get him to stop stalking the trainer. Just after the male lion's first lunge, the female even jumps on his back and gives him a little nip. A penny for... scratch that – I think I'd pay a lot of money for the thoughts of these lions!

Scary as these incidents are, I'm happy to report that this one had a positive outcome – the trainers are fine. I wonder if that trainer will be working with that male lion again?

A day at the fair

Last Monday, I spend a good portion of the day at the Fulton County Fair. I will have to say that this is a very large county fair. It is also a real county fair, with all of the farm implements, crops and of course animals. There are food merchants galore, but I want to talk about just one of them.

[Let's talk about Bayou Billy](#). A wonderful little establishment that was set up on the grounds of the Fulton County Fair. Unfortunately, I did not see that little fair listed on the website's event list. Did they just miss it. Will that particular food wagon show up at other sites that may not be

on the event list? I really need to know. I may become a food wagon groupie.

Yes, the food was that good. I know one other semi-tangenteer that would like this food too. C – it had some real spicy kick too it. Especially the habanero pepper that was placed on top of my sandwich (by request). I'm going to be looking for more places that they will show up and may make a road trip or two. Yep, it was that good.

I found out from the website that you can order some of their sauces on line. I may have to do that for a game night.

Oh the rest of the fair? I had fun as usual. Played a game or two, but didn't win anything. Shot a bow for the first time in many years. I think I need practice. A great day with family and friends.

Quite A Beard You Have There, Young Man

This facial hair is now starting to get to me. Maybe if it was not the first time I have grown a beard in 8 years, I would be more accustomed to it. Perhaps it is because I seem to need to grow it in the summer. (I always knew I was a bit odd, but...) But it has been the source of many comments... both complimentary and otherwise. Those who like it never cease to amaze me. "It makes you look very distinguished and dignified." (Not too distinguished, I hope. I would not want to spoil my sterling reputation ;)) "It really becomes you."

(Ok) "Keep it. Dye it white and you would be an instant Santa." (There's a thought! At least it would be in season and would really be a conversation piece.)

The flip side has also been interesting. “You look like an old drunk!” (I’ll remember that the next time someone is casting a bearded drunk). “I can’t wait until you shave that thing!” (Which makes me only consider keeping it after October 18th). “Hey, Grizzly Adams!” All in good fun. Good for laughs.

However, last night, I got the ultimate compliment. Who remembers the tv series [Family Affair](#)? A lady I have known for ages told me that I resemble Sebastian Cabot who played the domestic Mr. French (was not aware that there were two) to Uncle Bill, Cissy, Buffy (who was played by one of the earliest child actor tragedies I remember... could be earlier ones), Jodie, and (of course) Mrs. Beasley. Mr. Cabot also played St. Nick in one of the remakes of *Miracle on 34th Street*. Never short on flattering me, my customer also gushed about having found my “niche in community theatre.” Who am I to argue?

Perhaps I shall take a snapshot of the before and after shaving and post them. Provided of course the naysayers do not continue voicing their disgust.

Disney’s First Day Of School!

My almost 4-year-old daughter Disney joined her sisters in the profession of “student” the other day- it was her first day of prechool, and she LOVES it!!

Here is the cutie on her first day:



BLACK Raspberry – A New Meaning

Labor day weekend was a busy one, but it was packed with lots of fun family time. On Saturday, we packed up the kids and drove out to South Bend Indiana which is kind of a hike but worth it as you'll see in a minute. They have a nice little zoo there, the Potawatomi Zoo, and our Toledo Zoo membership gets us in free in South Bend also. There is also [Megaplay](#), a fun place for the kids (and adults!) to play. But this is the

first time we've been to Megaplay when my son is old enough to play there, and he thought the ball pit (perhaps one of the last remaining in the world?) was just about the best thing he's ever seen! After Megaplay, we were all starving, and some research on the internet before we left told us that a favorite place of ours on the way back from South Bend (Dakota's in Elkhart Indiana) had closed. So we were left to find something new, and that we did – there is an excellent BBQ place right across the street from Megaplay. They had the best dessert I think I've ever had: pig ears, which is some kind of fried dough with butter and brown sugar or something else yummy sprinkled on top. I'm not normally a dessert person, but I probably would have taken on all 4 of my kids for a pig ear. It wasn't necessary though, since I ate theirs while they were in the bathroom ☐

Last time I blogged about Megaplay, I think I mentioned how the strip mall where it's located looks like it's from the 80's. I don't know how else to describe it, but every time I'm there, I feel like I've been in a time warp. It's difficult to explain, so I tried to take a video, but it didn't turn out. Next time...

Sunday was kind of a restful day, and each of our two oldest daughters had friends over. They were well behaved friends, and we had fun.

On Monday, my husband had to work unfortunately, and rather than try to pass all day with all 4 of my kids at home, we took off for the Toledo Zoo. I know, 2 zoos in 1 weekend? But what can I say, I am a zoo addict. The only problem was that the zoo was MOBBED – probably the most crowded I've ever seen it. Good for the zoo, but not for the mom there by herself with 4 kids trying to navigate a large double-stroller through the crowds. We couldn't get near the great apes to see them, and the rest of the animals weren't doing much of anything except for the hippos. Toledo has an underwater viewing glass on the hippo exhibit, and their two extremely

large hippos kept swimming past. One opened his mouth underwater, and the other one rose out of the water, opened his mouth REALLY wide and shook his head back and forth; it was great. The hippos made the entire trip worthwhile. Not that a trip to any zoo could ever be a waste of time for me. Even if I can't see that many animals, there is just something about zoos that make me feel happy and peaceful. Besides, the kids got to play on the playgrounds for a long time, so they were happy too. The only problem was we had such a big day that all of the kids fell asleep on the way home. And the 4:00 nap did not set them up to go to bed at a decent hour to get enough sleep for school on Tuesday after their long weekend. Oops...

We got back home only 10 minutes late (there was traffic! Labor Day, who'd a thunk?) for our dinner date with Dad. Last week we discovered that Friendly's restaurant has kids' nights, which means that kids eat free with purchase of adult meals. That means for our family of 6, we leave with a bill of just over \$20 to eat out, and that includes all we can drink (kids too, and they don't have to get water – they love this!) AND dessert for all of us. But while we were eating, the lights kept flickering; they went out but came back on again. But then they flickered again and went out for good (we still don't know why, there was no storm or anything). But luckily we had already eaten, so we didn't really have anything to worry about. The kids were a little frightened, and of course all of a sudden the 3 girls had to use the bathroom, which had the employees scrambling for a flashlight for us to use. As I held the flashlight for my kids in the bathroom, we had a little talk about Amish people and how they live and how maybe the rest of us are too dependent on electricity. I made a bad joke about my black raspberry sundae since I was eating it in the dark, and that's where I got the title for this post.

So overall, a great weekend, though I should add one thing.

At Friendly's, my husband overheard a college-age kid at the next table mutter something rude after our family prayed before our meal – "Jesus freaks". I feel badly for him that he has to think that about people who appreciate taking time to thank God for their blessings throughout their days. We were quietly minding our own business, so his comment was completely unnecessary. We do our thing, he can do his. I didn't even say anything when he and his friends were casually tossing around the f-word during their meal, even though my kids were sitting right next door. But people are people, and as I said, I feel badly for him. Besides, God gave us an opportunity to really help someone before we left the restaurant, and I hope that maybe our kindness can show the light of God to others. Maybe the mutterer was still there to witness God at work.

Hope your Labor Day, your "last hurrah of summer", was safe and happy. Here are some pictures from our wonderful weekend:



Ok, and I have to include the following pictures for the Star Wars fans. Megaplay has all these life-size cardboard cut-outs of Star Wars characters hanging up. Sorry the pictures aren't better, but I took them from far away since I was trying to fit as many into the pictures as possible. Look for them high on the walls, near the ceiling:



And my favorite of the cut-outs – I've always liked Marvin the Martian:



Where everybody knows your name.

I don't often mosey into a bar, plunk down my cash and drink a beer or two. In fact, going to bars is generally foreign to me. Before the Ohio smoking ban, I couldn't stand to be in one for more than 30 minutes. But, I occasionally enjoy a quite evening at a local establishment. The reason is quite simple, I know the bartenders. Since we have all been involved with the theater, I've known them for years. I knew them before

they tended this specific bar.

Anyway, every once in a while, I will stop, get a bite or two to eat, and enjoy a drink. Then more often than not, I sit with a water while watching Jeopardy. I happened to be there this evening, since after my eye exam, I wanted someplace dark to sit. It started out as a nice quite early evening.

Then one theater person came in, and shortly left. We talked a bit, but he couldn't stick around too long. Then another theater friend came in, and we talked 'shop' for quite a long time. More theater people came by and everyone ordered their dinners.

To me the surroundings seemed like a friendly family dinner. We laughed, sighed and some even shared a song or two. Yes, I was in that place where everyone knew my name. Fun evening.

Now for me, this will never be a weekly event. I still tend to like quieter places. I have been, and probably always will be a 'small group' person. The fewer the people, the more I like it. Yes, that goes down to sitting by myself. I've never had a problem being alone. I guess growing up in a larger family helped me cherish the alone time. Good thing that I honestly like myself. □ From the years I spent with my wife, I learned to like that one on one time. Time to get to understand and know one other person. Time to listen and sometimes to share. Smaller groups allow some of this sharing, as we can all be part of one conversation. Everyone can be included

Larger groups, the conversations scatter in the wind. They tend to break up into those smaller groups. The unfortunate thing is that sometimes people are left out of any of the small groups. And no one seems to notice it. Except those that are left out, and those that choose to remain aloof. This happens in many large gatherings. No known cure, it is human nature. The extroverts have no trouble adapting. The introverts have trouble joining the gathering or like to

observe. And then there are those, like me (now), I can join the group, or I can sit on the outside looking in. I have no trouble joining a group (after many years of theater), but I've always enjoyed watching people.

(I think my randomness tonight is flowing well. I went from a topic of dinner and bars on to personality types.)

Back to the bar...

I was a joiner/observer this evening. I enjoyed my salad (yes, I was slightly healthy tonight, ordered deep fried mushrooms later), my drink and the company. I watched, I listened and I learned a thing or two. I interjected, talked and shared one or two things.

I enjoyed the similarities and shared the differences. I said many times that my theater family helped me in troubled times. I was not troubled today, but the theater family gave me an hour or two of fun. Today was a good day to live.

So Much For Verisimilitude

One of the most difficult tasks in filming *Superman: The Movie* was the casting of the Man of Steel, himself. The list of possible candidates was a veritable who's who of 1970s top box office draws. Everyone from Burt Reynolds to Paul Newman to Dustin Hoffman... even Muhammad Ali? That one is even stranger than the candidate I was going to blog about. Can you possibly imagine "The Greatest" in the role.

Another contender for the dual role of Superman/Clark Kent was an actor who had (and still has) close ties to Warner Brothers Pictures. Clint Eastwood had already established himself as a different kind of action-hero. Can you imagine Dirty Harry

rescuing a fluffy white kitten from a tree. He would be more likely to growl at the little girl and send her running in tears to her mother. Instead, we got an excited little tyke exclaiming to her mother that a man swooped out of the sky and rescued Frisky. Her reward... a slap for telling more lies.

As for Mr. Eastwood's take on the offer made nearly 35 years ago: "it's not for me. It's meant for someone, just not me."

Thank goodness for that. He did agree that Christopher Reeve nailed the role. Incidentally, Clint was also offered the role of another iconic character back in the day. Read [this](#) to find out which one.



What Could Have Been

Exporting Fun

Here in 2010, everyone knows that it's becoming more and more common for the United States to export jobs to countries where the labor is cheaper in cost.

Locally, my area used to be well known for producing no less than three types of goods: automotive products, toys, and candy. Because of the free-falling economy and other things, the demand in the automotive industry has plummeted, and I don't have a desire to go into further detail about that in this blog post. Fortunately, all seems to be well in our local candy factory, and the sugary sweet aromas still float upon our breezes every day. But much like many of our automotive-oriented factories, business at the local toy factory is not going so well. What once was a thriving complex of bustling office buildings, manufacturing

facilities, and distribution warehouses crisscrossed with train tracks and semi trailers for shipping has become an almost ghostly graveyard of quiet emptiness.

Recently, I had the opportunity to glimpse the inside of one of the old manufacturing facilities for a company called Ohio Art, who is probably best known for creating the timeless toy (or so it was once thought to be) – the Etch-A-Sketch.



Who can blame a struggling company for trying to cut costs just to stay above water, and Ohio Art cut its costs (and almost a hundred jobs) about 10 years ago when they moved their production lines to China. Now the sprawling complex, split down the middle by the aptly named "Toy Street", sits mostly empty with the company leasing some of the large space to other companies while other areas are used by local organizations. I couldn't resist the opportunity to snap a few pictures, especially for those of you who are ghost hunters. I'm not really inclined to believe in paranormal phenomena, but for the two days I worked in the abandoned Ohio Art warehouse, I could have convinced myself that we humans were not alone. Beyond the creepiness that comes from being in a humongous (and I mean HUMONGOUS) abandoned manufacturing facility, there were plenty of strange noises: creaking, clanking, dripping, whooshing, you name it. There were random tickles on my arm, brushes on my back, and taps on my shoulders (many of which were later attributed to rogue cobwebs and the like, but those explanations ruin my ghost story don't they). Not only that, but when production was

moved across the globe to China, many old machines, mechanical parts, and things like employee safety signs were left behind, seemingly testaments to the millions of toys that were birthed here and long forgotten.



The emptiness of Ohio Art is a sad thing; not only for the surrounding community who lost all those jobs and for the executives who had to make those tough decisions, but also as a sign of our country's fledgling economy. If you'd like to read more about how Ohio Art's production line was moved to China (and about how conditions aren't always what they seem for Chinese workers), I found [the following article](#) pretty interesting, and you might also:

Ruse in Toyland: Chinese Workers' Hidden Woe

By JOSEPH KAHN

Published: December 7, 2003

SHENZHEN, China— Workers at Kin Ki Industrial, a leading

Chinese toy maker, make a decent salary, rarely work nights or weekends and often "hang out along the street, play Ping-Pong and watch TV."

They all have work contracts, pensions and medical benefits. The factory canteen offers tasty food. The dormitories are comfortable.

These are the official working conditions at Kin Ki as they are described on paper – crib sheets – handed to workers just before inspections.

Those occur when big American clients, like the Ohio company that uses Kin Ki to produce the iconic toy Etch A Sketch, visit to make sure that the factory has good labor standards.

Real-world Kin Ki employees, mostly teenage migrants from internal provinces, say they work many more hours and earn about 40 percent less than the company claims. They sleep head-to-toe in tiny rooms. They staged two strikes recently demanding they get paid closer to the legal minimum wage.

Most do not have pensions, medical insurance or work contracts. The company's crib sheet recommends if inspectors press to see such documents, workers should "intentionally waste time and then say they can't find them," according to company memos provided to The New York Times by employees.

After first saying that Kin Ki strictly abides by all Chinese labor laws, Johnson Tao, a senior executive with the privately owned company, acknowledged that Kin Ki's wages and benefits fell short of legal levels and vowed to address the issue soon.

He said that the memos might have reflected attempts by factory managers to deceive inspectors, but that such behavior "did not have the support of senior management."

William C. Killgallon, the chief executive of Ohio Art

Company, the owner of Etch A Sketch, said that he considered Kin Ki executives honest and that he had no knowledge of labor problems there. But he said he intended to visit China soon to "make sure they understand what we expect."

Etch A Sketch is the same child's drawing toy today that it was in 1960, when Ohio Art first produced it in Bryan, Ohio. But efforts to keep its selling price below \$10 on shelves at Wal-Mart and Toys "R" Us forced the company to move production to China three years ago.

Today the same toy is made not just for lower wages, but also under significantly harsher working conditions. Kin Ki's workers, in fact, are struggling to obtain rights that their American predecessors at Ohio Art won early in the last century, though the workers are without the aid of independent unions, which remain illegal in China.

China now makes 80 percent of the toys sold in America, according to United States government figures, and no industry here has come under greater pressure to adhere to global labor codes. Kin Ki and most other big producers open their doors to foreign inspectors to assuage concerns that products used to entertain children in rich countries are not made under oppressive conditions in poor ones.

But that goal conflicts with price pressures in commodity industries like toys, where manufacturers command no premium for good labor practices. China alone has 8,000 toy makers competing fiercely for contracts by shaving pennies off production costs.

Kin Ki stays competitive, workers say, by paying them 24 cents an hour in Shenzhen, where the legal minimum wage is 33 cents. When the Etch A Sketch line shut down in Ohio just after the Christmas rush in 2000, wages for the unionized work force there had reached \$9 an hour.

Chinese workers say the company also denies them legally

required nonsalary benefits and compels them to work 84 hours a week, far more than the legal maximum, without required overtime pay.

"I keep this job because my parents and my daughter depend on the money I earn," said one migrant worker, who if named could lose her position for talking about the company. "No one likes to work in these conditions, but I have no choice."

Etch A Sketch has had rare longevity in the toy world. Baby Boomers used them as children and now buy them for their own families by the millions.

The toy survived into the electronic age because of nostalgia and clever promotions. But its appeal has continued, in part, because it keeps getting cheaper to own. It sold for \$3.99 when it was introduced. If it had kept pace with the consumer price index over its 43 years, it would retail for \$23.69 today instead of \$9.99.

Mr. Killgallon and his brother, Larry, who is president of Ohio Art, said in an interview that their efforts to reduce costs ran out of steam by the late 1990's, in part because of soaring health care expenses.

The logic of overseas production grew irresistible, as wage rates and shipping costs fell and quality improved, they said. An Etch A Sketch made in China and delivered to the company's warehouse in Bryan was found to cost 20 percent to 30 percent less than making it in Bryan. Moving the full line to China meant laying off about 100 people.

"We tried hard to make this work in Bryan," Larry Killgallon said. "But we looked at the numbers and we realized that we had to move."

Since early 2001, Etch A Sketches have been made in the village of Da Kang, a dusty enclave on the outskirts of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. Once a farm region, the area has

been overtaken by white-tiled factories and itinerant laborers. Landlords scrawl their phone numbers on the walls of old farm homes, like commercial graffiti, for workers who want to rent rooms. The village planted roses and marigolds to beautify the roadside, but the fallout from factories and construction sites has colored them gray.

High walls surround Kin Ki's production lines and warehouses. Dormitory windows are covered in chicken wire. Workers must enter and leave through the guarded front gate.

The factory, workers say, operates with the intensity of a military campaign. Production starts at 7:30 a.m., and, breaking only for lunch and dinner, continues until 10 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays are treated as normal workdays, so a work week consists of seven 12-hour days.

That far exceeds Shenzhen's regulations. The authorities have set a 40-hour, five-day work week, like the United States. Local rules allow no more than 32 hours of overtime per month, which must be compensated by paying time and a half on weekdays and double time on weekends.

Kin Ki set a much lower pay scale, workers said. It pays just 1.3 times pay base for any overtime, weekday or weekend. Workers say their monthly paychecks would more than double, to about \$200 from around \$85, if the company paid legal wages.

The work itself can be draining and tedious. Unlike Ohio Art's factory, Kin Ki uses few machines to offset manual labor, and it needs three or four times the number of workers casting plastic molds, painting parts, and attaching the strings and rods that operate the drawing mechanism of the Etch A Sketch. But Kin Ki workers say it is the pay, not the task, that upsets them.

"Most of us would work long hours willingly if we were paid according to the law," said one employee. "The way things are

now, we can shut up or leave."

Some workers took action against the factory last June and July, refusing to work unless the company raised wages. They also demanded that the daily diet of boiled vegetables, beans and rice be improved and supplemented more often with pork, fish or some other meat, which they say is served just twice a month.

The company responded by raising wages by a few cents a day, workers said. The canteen allotted each worker an extra dish each day, though no more meat.

But managers made "fried squid" of two workers they singled out as strike leaders, workers said, using a popular term for dismissals.

The company acknowledged having significant labor problems. "I know that I need to increase wages and to comply with the law," Mr. Tao said. "I have the intention of doing this and will raise all wages in 2004."

He also acknowledged that workers had gone on strike. But he denied that Kin Ki had dismissed the two ringleaders. He said they "were well known troublemakers" who left the factory of their own accord.

Whatever Kin Ki's intentions are now, company documents show that it has been paying below-regulation wages – and seeking to fool foreign clients – for years.

One memo preparing workers and supervisors for an inspection in September 2001, urged workers to help the factory "cope with clients."

"Foreign clients made unattainable demands during previous inspections, including on limiting overtime," the memo said. "But when you think about it, you come from all over the country to make money, not to rest."

A more recent memo, issued to prepare for an inspection that took place on Nov. 26, urged workers to memorize false numbers for wages and working hours to reflect Shenzhen's regulations. The memo promised bonuses to workers who responded as directed when approached by inspectors.

Workers said the elaborate ruse had one happy result. Because few of the employees have legal work contracts on file, the factory must pretend that its work force is smaller than it is when inspectors visit. On such days most of the factory's 850 workers get a rare treat: a day off.

On Nov. 26, with an inspection under way inside the plant, workers congregated in their rented homes or food stalls to eat, chat, smoke and gossip.

"I thank the inspectors for one thing," said a Kin Ki worker from rural Sichuan. She was crouching over a bucket of cold water in the warm afternoon sun, washing her hair. "I needed a rest," she said.