

A College Student Could Have Done Better

Recently a fellow blogger mentioned a dorm fire at the university where his youngest daughter is to attend. While I'm sure that much was learned from that particular tragedy in order to safeguard future students, it gave me a flashback to my own college days when there was a fire in the dorm where my friends lived. That particular dorm building was 28 stories high, and I was hanging out somewhere around the 25th floor on the night when the fire alarm went off. Obviously, we couldn't use the elevators to evacuate the rather large building, so we had to use the stairwells. I remember that after descending flight after flight of stairs, the monotony of the flights started to mess with my head a little bit, and by the end, it became difficult to even move my legs in the motion to go down the stairs – maybe a testament to just one of the challenges faced by those in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001? Luckily in our case, however, the fire was not threatening to our welfare, and we all made it out of the building safely. When we got out, we gathered around to watch the flames being extinguished – and much to our surprise, the flames were licking the part of the building where some of my best friends lived. Turns out, the fire had started in my friends' room (not where I was hanging out that particular night) and demolished it. The couch where I had crashed many a night had turned to just ash and a metal frame. I found it interesting that the firemen gave us a walk-thru of the room afterward – apparently something they do on college campuses? They taught us about the 'flashpoint', where the fire must have started and how hot it was there, and they also pointed out various objects from around the room and explained the temperatures it must have been in the room for the fire to have that effect upon that particular object, etc. – very informative! So anyway, the point of this post

is **that** building – it's called Watterson Towers, and it's located at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. Not the pertiest thing, ain't it?



First off, the thing is HUGE; it houses 2200 students. Illinois State University is a college campus located amongst farm fields in central Illinois – a far cry from Chicago – and Watterson Towers is the highest building between St. Louis and Chicago – a distance of nearly 300 miles. Also, the design of the structure is... well, it's bizarre – for lack of a better adjective. I think a college student could have done better at designing a building, hence the title of my blog post. It has been rumored that the [designer of Watterson Towers committed suicide](#), but I'm not sure if this is true or not. Click on the link I supplied above to read more about this – someone asked if the designer committed suicide because he thought the towers would eventually collapse, and the person who asked the question mentions that firefighters told them that if there were a fire at Watterson, students wouldn't make it out alive – go figure since I and hundreds of others are proof that that theory didn't pan out – thank goodness! Obviously those rumors are overblown, at least some of them, cuz I can't find any info about the designer or his fate. But the bottom line is, it **is** a very strange design for a building, especially one that is to house college students. Sadly, more than a few students have jumped from the windows of Watterson over the years to escape the pressure that

college students often needlessly feel.

More than a decade after residing in Watterson, it's still interesting for me to research the building and its design. It's amazing to me to remember that college kids used to get up early to stand in a line reminiscent of heavily-sought after concert tickets to get a room in Watterson. Seems like any of the other dorms on campus would have been much safer and cheaper, for that matter... But Watterson was where it was at – at least when I was in school. It was the most centrally located dorm, and it had the largest rooms by far. I can understand how space would be an issue when you are rooming with someone (or multiple people, as could be the case in Watterson's huge rooms) you might never have met. So anyway, here is the breakdown of the design of Watterson – it is almost maze-like when you're inside, and I still think a college student could do better at the design part! Just imagine Move-In day! 2200 students, all their stuff, and their parents! And remember, it's a 28-story building, but there are only FIVE elevator stops – and if your student does not reside on an "elevator floor", you must carry their stuff up or down flights of stairs to reach their rooms! To those who are uninformed of Watterson's design, Moving Day must play out like a cruel joke!

From Wikipedia.com:

Watterson is composed of 10 houses, each considered its own residence hall. The houses are named after the first ten men to hold the office of United States Secretary of State. The entire building is divided into two towers. Each tower is divided into five houses. Each house is divided into five floors. Each floor divided into four suites, except on the third floor, which is divided into two suites for elevator access. In the North Tower, the houses, from bottom to top, are Jefferson House, Randolph House, Pickering House, Marshall House and Madison House. In the South Tower, bottom to top, the houses are Smith House, Monroe House, Adams House, Clay

House, and Van Buren House. The houses are located across from each other, joined by a breezeway only on the third floor of the houses.

The building's unique design prevents it from having full elevator service. Of the 8 elevators that operate in the building, there is a maximum of nine stops, eight of which students have access to (maintenance level is for staff only): Service Level, Formal (Lobby) Level, Smith-Jefferson Breezeway, Monroe-Randolph Breezeway, Adams-Pickering Breezeway, Marshall-Clay Breezeway, Madison-Van Buren Breezeway and the Informal Level. Each breezeway level is the third floor of each house. A resident who lived on Clay 4 would stop at the Marshall-Clay Breezeway and then need to walk up one flight of stairs to reach his room.

And that's the simplest of the directions... if a student was assigned to Randolph 1, he or she would have to get off at the Monroe-Randolph elevator stop, then walk the breezeway, then descend the two flights of stairs until they got to Randolph 1... it seems that ISU should have offered a degree just for those who figured out the navigation of Watterson Towers! And oh yeah, I forgot to mention that Watterson's elevators were notorious for breaking down! In the two years that I attended Illinois State, I got stuck in the Watterson elevators *twice* myself and heard of **many** others who met the same fate! I wonder if they've fixed any of the problems plaguing that building in the last 10-15 years?

You Dirty Rat(s)

According to Wikipedia.com, James Cagney never actually said the line, "*You Dirty Rat*". The closest he got was saying

“Come out and take it, you dirty, yellow-bellied rat, or I’ll give it to you through the door!” in Taxi. But *rats*! That’s not the point of this post.

Seems I couldn’t resist adding to the Food Chain Gang – we’ve added two pet rats to our family, Bobby and Oreo – the kids chose the names. It was kind of an impulsive activity to do today, pet shopping, but it was not an impulsive decision, the type that should never accompany a new pet. We’ve been talking about getting a rat for some time now, but if it ended up being the wrong decision for our family, we didn’t want to *be like rats leaving a sinking ship* and ditch the responsibility. So we’ve been thinking about it a lot, and today just seemed like the right day to do it.

Rats are friendly, intelligent, non-biting rodents who make great pets. Rat owners compare their companionship to that of dogs, believe it or not, and from what I’ve seen so far, I see what they’re talking about. I think rats haven’t caught on as pets because many people don’t like the way their tails look, and they still have a negative stigma from a few incidents of centuries past, namely the Black Death outbreak and the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. I did some research about both of these historical tales – not that they influenced my decision to get the rats as pets; the research was just for fun. But I found that the Bubonic Plague, aka the Black Death was most likely transmitted by fleas rather than rats. True the fleas would travel on the rats, but they more commonly preferred larger hosts such as dogs or cats and used rats when larger animals were unavailable. The Bubonic Plague was attributed to causing the demise of one quarter of the Earth’s population of human beings at that time, it’s hard to blame people for taking it out on rats. And the Pied Piper story is basically a legend that tries to explain the disappearance of over 100 children from the town of Hamelin in Germany just before the year 1300. Most likely, the children were recruited to newer European settlements, possibly by a man in

“pied” clothing. In the legend, there is a rat infestation in Hamelin, and the Pied Piper leads the rats out of the town to a body of water where they all drown. The townspeople neglect to pay the Piper for his rat removal services, and he returns and leads their children out of town. Some versions claim they went to a cave, some say another village, and there are even a few versions that say the Piper had ill intentions toward the children – in one they meet a fate similar to the rats. I enjoyed some of the rat research I read and wanted to share it. If you want to continue the research on your own, I’ve added to the level of the cheesiness (and length) of this post by putting some common sayings involving rats in *italics* – try looking them up; the origins are interesting. But anyway, back to our new little friends.

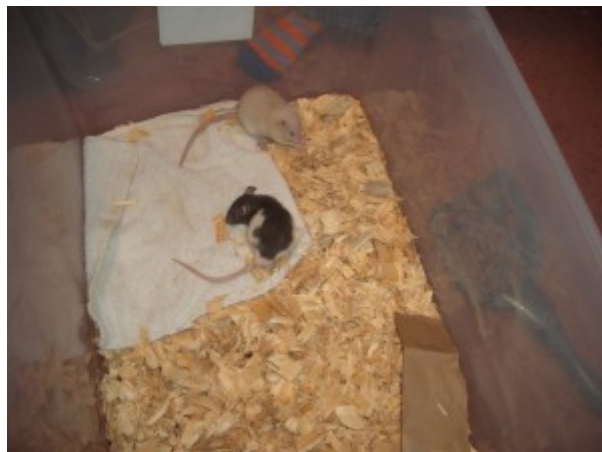
When we were at the pet store, I didn’t want any part of picking out the rat. I felt like they are only in pet stores to become snake food (which is why I won’t join the *rat race* and work in a pet store, as much as I’d like to do the other work in the store), and I didn’t want to have to see the ones that wouldn’t get saved. As it is, I went over there to take a glance, saw little Bobby, who was about to be put back in the snake food tank, and that’s what prompted me to say, “Maybe we should get two.” The pet store sent the rats home to us like this, a brown bag lunch for snakes, thus proving my point:



The rats my family chose for us are 4 week old brothers. They

are adorable, incredibly tame, and I've already really bonded with Bobby. He cuddles me and sits on me and grooms himself – rats are actually very clean animals. The entire start-up for this type of pet set us back about \$25.

\$2.99 per rat + \$3 for bedding + \$9 cage + \$3 food (for about 3 weeks worth) + \$2 water bottle + tax. We are going to be resourceful about toys and use my kids' toys for the rats – we've already found that they like to crawl through these foam tunnel blocks they have. And we were very resourceful when making their cage as well. Instead of trying to decide between the \$19 glass aquarium and the \$24 hamster cage (I was concerned about the heaviness and the breakable glass of the aquarium and worried the rats would escape the cage), we opted for secret option #3 – a large \$9 transparent Rubbermaid bin with a lid in which we poked air holes. Overall, I'm very happy so far with the new pet decision, and my major concerns have not come to fruition which were: 1. that our Jack (Jerk) Russell Terrier mix would try to hunt the rats, and 2. that the kids would unwittingly hurt the rats. But our dog has not even noticed that the rats are here yet (she's almost 11 and her sense of smell is failing faster than I thought – that makes me a little sad), and we laid down strict rules for the kids about handling the rats. I was also worried about having yet another chore to do around the house, but I was promised help from both of the enthusiastic new pet owners (there's a sucker born every minute). Here are the cuties – Bobby is the beige one and Oreo is the gray and white one:



Speaking Of Blagojevich...

In my previous post about Governor Rod Blagojevich of Illinois, I forgot to include a [funny clip from the Daily Show](#) featuring Mr. Blag... Mr. Blavo, um Governor Smith.

And if you have trouble pronouncing his Serbian surname, here is a pronunciation guide from wikipedia.com:

[Milorad “Rod” R. Blagojevich \(pronounced /blə'gɔɪəvɪtʃ, born December 10, 1956\) is an American politician from the state of Illinois.](#)

Psychic or Fraud?

I don't really believe in psychics. I believe that some people may have a gift where they are psychologically in tune with others and / or nature; leading them to be able to predict happenings or events with some accuracy. For instance, I used to be able to tell who was calling when our phone was ringing (in the days before caller ID). It's not that people called us at regular times or intervals, but I could just "feel" who was on the other end of the line. Not that I think I'm psychic or anything; I think I just learned the behavior patterns of the people who called our house. So I believe that people can have what could be called psychic abilities, especially if they practice and hone their skills, but I don't believe anyone can see the future or anything like that. And I don't believe the self-proclaimed psychic Sylvia Browne possesses any special skills other than the abilities to defraud and manipulate people, if you want to call those

things abilities.

While flipping channels and feeding the baby the other day, I came across the Montel Williams show. Apparently Montel is on his way out after 17 years of being on the air. During the episode the other day, he got teary-eyed as he bid his weekly guest Sylvia Browne good-bye. It got me to thinking; does Montel believe that Sylvia is psychic, or did he just like his audience's reception of her? After a few internet searches on wikipedia.com and youtube.com, I was armed with evidence that Sylvia Browne is a fraud (not that I really needed any, but I found plenty anyway). Here is the first example where Sylvia tries to tell a greiving woman that her missing boyfriend is in water. The woman is confused because her boyfriend was a fireman killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and no trace of him was ever found. Watch as Sylvia tries to cover her tracks, backed up by Montel, I might add, with some lame excuse about how the boyfriend might have drowned when they were extinguishing the fire at the World Trade Center. What?!? That doesn't even make sense!

Not only that, but she was on Larry King Live a mere 8 days before the September 11 attacks and didn't say a word about the impending doom. After the attacks, she claimed that she had dreams full of fire in the weeks before the attacks – yet she failed to mention such premonitions on her September 3, 2001 appearance on Larry King!

One more example is the case of Shawn Hornbeck, a preteen who went missing in 2002. Sylvia Browne told Shawn's devastated parents that he was abducted by a dark man with dreadlocks and murdered, and she also provided details about where they could find his body. Four and a half years after his abduction, Shawn was found with Michael Devlin, a white man who had abducted Shawn – a far cry from the so-called "dark man with dreadlocks" who "murdered" him. In this case, it's a very good thing she was wrong – those parents got their son back alive, but one can only imagine the pain they felt when this so-called psychic told them that their son was dead.

There are plenty more examples of this woman's fraudulent behavior – I'm just not going to waste my time writing them nor your time reading them. If you want to see more, go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and do a search for "Sylvia Browne". For fun, you can add words like, "wrong", "fraud", or "lie" to your search and see what you come up with. There is also an interesting site called stopsylviabrowne.com that's maintained by one of her biggest opponents. He talks about his experience encountering Sylvia, how she hired a private detective to research him, and his experience at one of her live shows.

Well, enough of that, like I said, I consider the woman a fraud, therefore she's not worth any more of our time to go through the hundreds of instances that prove she is full of BS. I don't know how she can live with herself when she toys with the emotions of the grief-stricken. I suppose she could tell herself that she is helping to give them closure, but if that's the case, I would say to her, "Stop fooling yourself lady, you're causing more harm than good!"

RIP Caray

Recently Skip Caray passed away, a son of famed Chicago Cubs announcer Harry Caray. Skip was actually famous for his work announcing the Atlanta Braves rather than the Cubs, but his death in the news made me think of his father and everything he brought to Cubs games.

Since I didn't watch many Braves games, I wasn't really familiar with Skip's work, so I looked him up on wikipedia.com and found the following:

Skip Caray's broadcasts were characterized by his witty and sarcastic sense of humor, a personality trait that endeared him to most fans, but alienated him from others. For example, during a particularly long losing streak in the 1980s, Skip declared at the start of a game against the Pittsburgh Pirates "And, like lambs to the slaughter, the Braves take the field". More recently, in a game against the Florida Marlins, the Braves had loaded the bases, to which Caray quipped, "The bases are loaded, just like (Marlins manager) Jack McKeon probably wishes he was." During the 2004 season, Caray frequently made fun of Braves relief pitcher, Jung Bong, declaring every time the opposing team got a hit against him, "that's another hit off of Bong". In 2008, a player popped a fly ball so high that Skip said "That would've been a home run in a phone booth."

Sounds like a funny guy, and I'm sure he'll be missed by legions of fans, much like his late father, Harry Caray, the voice of the Chicago Cubs.