

How Sweet It Is

Two different family members sent me an email forward with the following video because they knew I'd love it. They were right! The following is a touching story about the unlikely but very true friendship between a dog and an elephant – you have to see it to believe it!

Superbowl Poll

The big game is only weeks away. Will you be doing anything to celebrate the occasion? Do you know which big game I'm referring to? If not, then disregard the following poll...

[poll id="6"]

Cute And Cuddly? I Think Not.

Did you hear the one about the Chinese man who found himself in a dilemma? His son's toy fell into the panda enclosure at the zoo, so he jumped in after it. The panda attacked him, and because the creatures are so coveted in China, he didn't fend off the animal because he feared he would injure him. He survived the attack, as did the other 2 victims of this particular panda. But as the below article notes, in China, there is no "3 strikes, you're out" policy for pandas because they are so highly regarded. Particularly amusing is the tale of the drunken tourist who was also a victim of this malicious panda. Read about Gu Gu the not-so-nice panda here:

(CNN) – Gu Gu is not your typical soft and cuddly giant panda. Zhang Jiao was attacked by Gu Gu the panda when he fell into the pen at the Beijing Zoo on Wednesday.

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For the third time, he's tasted the flesh of an unwitting intruder in his pen at the Beijing Zoo.

His most recent victim was 28-year-old Zhang Jiao, who told CNN he fell into the panda pen Wednesday while trying to catch a small toy thrown by his young son.

“My son and I were playing with a panda doll, throwing it to each other, when I dropped with the toy” into the pen, Zhang said.

The barrier around the pen is about 5 feet tall, but on the other side is a drop of 9 to 10 feet, and Zhang says he could not climb out.

That’s when Gu Gu went on the attack.

The 240-pound giant panda sunk his teeth into Zhang’s left leg before moving on to the right leg.

“The panda is a national treasure, and I love and respect [him], so I didn’t fight back,” Zhang said. “The panda didn’t let go until it chewed up my leg and its mouth was dripping with my blood.”

Zookeepers needed to use tools to pry open Gu Gu’s jaws.

Zhang said he never imagined a panda could be so vicious.

“I always thought they were cute and just ate bamboo,” Zhang said.

According to Dr. Wang Tianbing, who treated Zhang, his wounds were severe, especially the damage done to the muscle and ligaments in his left leg.

“Normally, we think the panda is very tender animal, but actually it’s a bear, not a cat. If the animal thinks it will be hurt by human beings, it is very dangerous.”

Wang should know. In 2007, he treated another one of Gu Gu’s victims, a 15-year-old boy who climbed into the pen to get a closer look. A year earlier, state media reported that a

drunken tourist tried to hug the panda, who bit him. In an odd twist, the tourist reportedly bit back.

But being an endangered species and much-loved national icon means there's no "three strikes and you're out" for Gu Gu.

In fact, there's a possibility Zhang may face charges for entering the panda pen.

Zoo officials did not respond to CNN's request for an interview but are reportedly considering new measures to keep tourists out of Gu Gu's pen.

A panda's mouth dripping with blood? That sounds like a horror movie!

Three Blind Mice... Err, Rats

Our new pet rats are great, and Oreo is becoming a real friend. Bobby Jack, however, seems very nervous all the time. He squeaks and sneezes a lot, and he uses his nose to try to burrow into my hand when I hold him. We are thinking he might be blind. I don't know that much about rat behavior; these are my first pet rats. But it just seems like Bobby Jack can't see. Are there vision tests for rats? I guess I have some research to do about rat blindness, squeaking, and sneezing...

Diving For Victory

For those habitual readers of my blog who couldn't make it to our regular game night last night due to the blizzard, you missed an 'event' – one of the funniest things I've ever seen. I've been chuckling about it all day! But before I get to that, I will start at the beginning of the evening.

One of our guests showed up with a dog. Not just any dog; *our* dog Beesly. If you've read my blog post called Pet Roll Call, then you know that Beesly is an escape artist. But imagine our friend's surprise when he came across Beesly a few blocks away from our house as he was walking over for game night. He was glad he remembered her name, and he brought her back to her grateful family who didn't even realize she was missing. Maybe we should have named her Houdini...

So then we played some games, including a new one a friend brought called Left, Right, Center. I really liked it; especially because it was very simple and easy to learn. And then we brought out Pit. We don't play Pit very often because it's not really appreciated by some members of the game night crew. It's a very loud game that is played at a frenzied pace. I really like to play it, but I don't think I've ever won a hand of Pit. My friend had the same issue, but last night while we were playing, she finally got a winning hand. In Pit, when you have a winning hand, you are supposed to ring a little bell, much like a bell you'd ring for service at a front desk of a hotel or at a store. My friend (who shall remain nameless; I don't want to embarrass her, but I'll give you a hint – her name rhymes with "feral") was **extremely** excited to have a winning hand, but there was one problem – she couldn't reach the bell from her seat. So what does she do? This sweet, very quiet, normally passive person lunges... no wait, let's be honest. She *dives* across the table for the bell. I mean, it was a feet-off-the-ground, laying-on-the-table, horizontal, head-first dive across our dining room

table, and *she landed on my arm* in the process. She was immediately embarrassed and apologized profusely, maybe because I was crying. But mine were tears of laughter because her behavior was so shocking – my arm was fine. I guess Pit is such a crazy game that it can bring out the insanity in anyone. And by the way, she did win the round ☐ So congrats, _____, on winning your first round of Pit. Please forgive me for publishing this story on the internet, but I thank you for giving us such a fun memory.

I'm sorry it snowed, but I'm glad our absent friends stayed safe. We missed you a lot, and we really hope to see you next time!

Free Rice!

A great friend told me about a website where you answer trivia questions for fun, and every correct response you give earns free rice for starving people!

So close that pointless solitaire game you were playing and go to <https://www.freerice.com>. You start donating the rice by taking the vocabulary quiz in the middle of the page. If you want to change the category of your questions, click 'subjects' at the top of the page. You can do math, language, chemistry, geography, all kinds of subjects.

If you're the type of person who enjoys this kind of thing, why not learn something while helping to feed starving people? Win-win!

Hannah's Wish

Our 4-year-old daughter Samantha is having her first sleepover tonight. She's been here when her older sister had friends sleep over, but tonight it's her friend, just for Sammie. Four years old is a little bit young to have a sleepover. And tonight is the second sleepover in a row since older sister Taylor had a friend sleep over last night. I don't usually condone two sleepovers in a row because that would make for a very crabby Sunday. But this is a special sleepover.

Sammie's friend, Hannah, is an extraordinary little girl. She was born with a condition that made her spine grow into her brain. My daughter knows her from preschool, and then she was invited to Hannah's 4th birthday party – that's where we learned of her condition. In the weeks after the party, Sammie called Hannah to see if she could come over and play, but Hannah could not – she was scheduled to have brain surgery in early December, but it was postponed because she suffered a seizure and was also diagnosed with asthma. Then she underwent the brain surgery just before Christmas, and Sammie called her to see how she was doing. For an entire week after the surgery, Hannah was bedridden and in constant pain. She couldn't come to the phone, much less go anywhere to play. Now she's feeling better, although her symptoms are starting to reappear. So crabby Sunday, shmabby shmunday – my kids are having 2 sleepovers in a row.

Hannah's recovery wish was to sleep over at Sammie's house. And even if it involved a 4-year-old with a double sleepover, what parent would be able to refuse Hannah's wish?

Flavor Poll

Since I'm on the subject of Girl Scout cookies (per my previous post), I'm going to conduct a flavor poll. Girl Scout cookies are very popular. So many people enjoy them that I would consider them a slice of Americana. So what's your favorite flavor?

[poll id="5"]

And thanks to Jamiahsh for giving me the idea for the poll!

It's Cookie Time!

It's that time of year again – my daughter will be one of thousands of girls selling the yummiy famous Girl Scout cookies. I'm not selling them online, but rather using my blog to post info you may need to help you decide how many boxes of what kinds you'd like to order. [Click here to meet the cookies](#). If you'd like to support the wonderful cause of Girl Scouts and get some delicious snacks at the same time, just let me know how many boxes of which flavor you'd like – they're \$3 per box. Thanks for your support!

Boy, Was His Face Red...

I received an interesting email forward today about a letter someone wrote to the editor of The Arizona Republic newspaper. I checked it out on snopes.com to make sure the

story was true and not just someone with too much time on their hands making stuff up. The story was true, although the letters that were reprinted in the email had been embellished somewhere during the course of the email forward. Here are the reprints of the letters written to the editor:

A letter to the Editor;

Question of the day for Luke Air Force Base: Whom do we thank for the morning air show?

Last Wednesday, at precisely 9:11 a.m., a tight formation of four F-16 jets made a low pass over Arrowhead Mall, continuing west over Bell Road at approximately 500 feet. Imagine our good fortune!

Do the Tom Cruise-wannabes feel we need this wake-up call, or were they trying to impress the cashiers at Mervyns' early-bird special?

Any response would be appreciated.

Tom MacRae, Peoria

The correspondent received a response from Col. Robin Rand, commander of Luke AFB's 56th Fighter Wing, in the pages of that same newspaper the following day:

Luke Air Force Base was asked to respond to a letter writer's question about a "morning air show" he observed recently ("A wake-up call from Luke's jets," Letters, Thursday):

The "wake-up call" witnessed the morning of June 15 was a formation of F-16 jets from Luke Air Force Base lining up for a memorial service in Sun City at the gravesite for Air Force Capt. Jeremy Fresques, an officer assigned to Air Force Special Operations. Fresques gave his life in defense of our country while serving in Iraq.

It is unfortunate that at a time when our nation is at war someone would believe we have less than honorable and professional reasons for such a mission.

The commander of the fighter squadron was given the difficult duty of informing the family of Capt. Fresques on Memorial Day that the officer, a husband, son and Arizonan, had died in

Iraq.

On behalf of the men and women at Luke Air Force Base, we continue to keep Jeremy and his family in our thoughts and prayers.

Col. Robin Rand

Luke Air Force Base

Four days later, the newspaper also published a response from Lt. Col. Pleus himself:

Regarding "A wake-up call from Luke's jets":

On June 15, at precisely 9:12 a.m., a perfectly timed four-ship of F-16s from the 63rd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base flew over the grave of Capt Jeremy Fresques.

Capt. Fresques was an Air Force officer who was previously stationed at Luke Air Force Base and was killed in Iraq on May 30, Memorial Day.

At 9 a.m. on June 15, his family and friends gathered at Sunland Memorial Park in Sun City to mourn the loss of a husband, son and friend.

Based on the letter writer's recount of the flyby, and because of the jet noise, I'm sure you didn't hear the 21-gun salute, the playing of taps, or my words to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques as I gave them their son's flag on behalf of the president of the United States and all those veterans and servicemen and women who understand the sacrifices they have endured.

A four-ship flyby is a display of respect the Air Force pays to those who give their lives in defense of freedom. We are professional aviators and take our jobs seriously, and on June 15 what the letter writer witnessed was four officers lining up to pay their ultimate respects.

The letter writer asks, "Whom do we thank for the morning air show?"

The 56th Fighter Wing will call for you, and forward your thanks to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques, and thank them for you, for it was in their honor that my pilots flew

the most honorable formation of their lives.

Lt. Col. Scott Pleus

Luke Air Force Base

To his credit, the complainant, Mr. MacRae, tendered a written apology which was published in The Republic on 9 July:

Regarding "Flyby honoring fallen comrade" (Letters, June 28):

I read with increasing embarrassment and humility the response to my unfortunate letter to The Republic concerning an Air Force flyby ("A wake-up call from Luke's jets," Letters, June 23).

I had no idea of the significance of the flyby, and would never have insulted such a fine and respectful display had I known.

I have received many calls from the fine airmen who are serving or have served at Luke, and I have attempted to explain my side and apologized for any discomfort my letter has caused.

This was simply an uninformed citizen complaining about noise. I have been made aware in both written and verbal communications of the four-ship flyby, and my heart goes out to each and every lost serviceman and woman in this war in which we are engaged.

I have been called un-American by an unknown caller and I feel that I must address that. I served in the U.S. Navy and am a Vietnam veteran. I love my country and respect the jobs that the service organizations are doing.

Please accept my heartfelt apologies.

Tom MacRae, Peoria

Well, anyway, I just thought it was an interesting email forward. And it was thought-provoking and even contained some valuable life lessons: don't jump to conclusions and appreciate everything in life. God Bless our troops!