

ALS Is An Awful Disease

Well, ok, what disease is NOT awful? But ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) robs a person of his or her motor skills and leaves their mind intact. So essentially, ALS victims are imprisoned in their own body. And ALS often strikes at a young age, and most people struggle with it for less than 3 years before it takes their life. We watched my husband's father struggle with it for over 2 years. We watched as it robbed him of his ability to walk, talk, eat and pretty much everything else. He passed away very peacefully, a week before Christmas. We were all in the room with him, and a hospital volunteer was playing Silent Night on the harp as he passed. It was beautiful, but it's still hard for me to hear that song. The reason I'm bringing this up is because the most famous victim of ALS, besides Lou Gehrig himself, is Stephen Hawking, and I was sorry to read in the news today that he is very ill.

Stephen Hawking is a brilliant scientist and an inspirational man – he has lived with ALS for over 40 years. Lou Gehrig had it for nearly two years before he died at the age of 37. Gehrig's was a New York Yankees player, and he was forced to retire when he was diagnosed with ALS. His record of most career grand slams still holds at 23 today! We watched The Pride of the Yankees (which tells the story of Lou Gehrig) with my father-in-law after his diagnosis, and that was tough. Same thing with Tuesdays With Morrie... why did my father-in-law want to do that to himself? To get a better grip on what was happening to him, maybe? I don't know.

My father-in-law was a remarkable man. He had the biggest heart of anyone I've ever known, second only to my husband. He was kind, generous, smart, and funny. He knew a lot about everything; especially movies and religion – he had the Bible practically memorized. One of my favorite memories of him was when we took him to the zoo. It was after the ALS had already

taken hold of his body, but his humor was still intact. As we were wheeling his wheelchair over a bumpy bridge at the zoo, he said, “Ahhhh” – not because the ALS had taken away his speech (it hadn’t yet) but because it was a bumpy ride and he was jokingly letting the bumps affect his voice. He was taken from us too soon; I wonder what he would have thought of having 7 grandchildren? He’s been gone longer than I knew him now – over 8 years. His funeral was on our oldest daughter’s first birthday. But anyway... I don’t know why I’m going into all of this now. Let’s pray for Stephen Hawking. ALS is a terrible disease.

This Boyle Madness

Have you heard about the newest media sensation, Susan Boyle? She is a woman who appeared on the European tv show, Britian’s Got Talent and wowed the judges. When I first saw the headlines, I couldn’t imagine how good someone could be to get that kind of attention. I didn’t click on the headlines because they were only videos on cnn.com and I avoid those – I like to read my news when I get it from the internet. But I’m a news junkie, and eventually I caught the Talent clip on the real CNN – and the story unfolded. The woman has talent. She can really sing, and she makes a difficult song seem effortless. There are plenty of people with nice voices, so what’s the big deal? I think it is about the way Susan Boyle looks. When she stepped up to sing, people (and you can see this in the judges’ and audience’s reactions) did not expect her to be a good singer because she does not comply with society’s definition of “pretty”. Simon Cowell, specifically, who is a judge on the show, is known for judging people on their looks first and even making comments about them, which I think is immature and disgusting. But I have to sound off on

this topic because it's been all over the news lately, and this morning, Susan was on The Early Show. For some reason that I can only attribute to the way she looks, the Early Show anchors were treating her like she was mentally challenged – they were talking slowly, etc. One of the Early Show anchors stated, “Let's see if she can sing early in the morning”, prompting Susan to do an acappella version of the song that made her famous, I Dreamed a Dream from Les Miserables. It was wonderful, but maybe that Early Show anchor should be treated as if *she* is mentally challenged – it was early morning in New York, but Susan Boyle was doing the interview from her home in Scotland, where it was 11:30-midnightish! Duh.

I personally think it's an extraordinary story because Susan Boyle is 47 and with a voice like that, I'm surprised she wasn't discovered sooner. I'm sick of everyone picking on her looks and using them to define her as a person. I think it's terrible that society says that people have to look good to have worth. Maybe that's why plastic surgery runs so rampant, but to me, plastic surgery tends to stick out. A lot of times, I can tell when someone's had something done. I think it looks fake and strange, and it baffles my mind that people would risk their lives to get knocked out and sliced open just to change something aesthetic. Not including those who get disfigured, of course – I can't blame those people, and I feel really sorry for them especially after noting how society acts about looks. Good looking people are assumed to be more successful, they're listened to more often, and they're just overall held in a higher regard in society than people who look different or what society deems as “ugly”. To me, ugly is the mean, heartless person who doesn't care about others. I think Susan should be applauded for conquering society's “ugly”. Bravo Susan, for a job well done – I hope you get to fulfill your wish of singing for the Queen!

For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about, [here](#)

[is a link to the clip](#) of the episode of Britian's Got Talent featuring Susan. As one of the judges put it, she is a privilege to listen to! I get chills and tears in my eyes as I watch those snooty judges eat crow while Susan triumphs!

I Quite Understandably Mistook The Photographer As A Zombie

Sure, that's happened to everyone at some point, hasn't it? You mistake someone for a zombie? No wait, that's only Woody Harrelson, an actor probably known more for his advocacy to legalize marijuana than for any movie roles he's had. Maybe he shouldn't smoke quite so much dope, if he truly believes this is an "understandable" mistake – check out the story below:

From CNN.com by Alan Duke

Woody Harrelson defended his clash with a photographer at a New York airport Wednesday night as a case of mistaken identity – he says he mistook the cameraman for a zombie.

The TMZ photographer filed a complaint with police claiming the actor damaged his camera and pushed him in the face at La Guardia Airport, according to an airport spokesman.

"We're looking into this allegation and if it's warranted, we'll turn it over to the proper authorities," said Port Authority of New York and New Jersey spokesman Ron Marsico.

The photographer, who was not identified, captured the encounter on a small camera after his larger one was broken.

Harrelson, who is being sued by another TMZ photographer for an alleged assault in 2006, did not deny his involvement.

"I wrapped a movie called 'Zombieland,' in which I was constantly under assault by zombies, then flew to New York, still very much in character," Harrelson said in a statement issued Friday by his publicist.

"With my daughter at the airport I was startled by a paparazzo, who I quite understandably mistook for a zombie," he said.

TMZ.com posted two videos of the incident, including one recorded by the larger camera before it was damaged.

The first video shows the photographer following Harrelson and his daughter down an escalator and out of the terminal. It ends with Harrelson apparently reaching for the lens.

The second video begins with the photographer accusing Harrelson of breaking his camera.

After Harrelson returns the camera to him, a scuffle appears to ensue.

"Woody, this is assault. Woody, this is assault," the photographer is heard saying. "Woody, chill out. Would you please chill out?"

The photographer continues to follow Harrelson for another four minutes as the actor and his daughter walk to the airport parking lot. At one point, Harrelson again turns toward the cameraman.

"I'm being chased by Woody Harrelson while I'm talking to you," the photographer says as he talks to an unidentified person on a cell phone.

"He hit me in my face, he broke my friggin' camera, he broke the camera in pieces," he said.

Harrelson, his daughter and a driver get inside an SUV and the encounter ends.

In the movie "Zombieland," Harrelson plays "the most frightened person on Earth" looking for refuge from zombies, according to the Internet Movie Database, imdb.com

Filming on the movie wrapped in Atlanta, Georgia, on Wednesday, according to director Ruben Fleischer's Web site.

TMZ photographer Josh Levine filed a lawsuit against Harrelson last year for an alleged attack outside a Hollywood nightclub in 2006.

Video of that incident, which is also posted on TMZ.com, also appeared to show Harrelson grabbing a camera and clashing with the photographer.

Los Angeles prosecutors declined to press charges against the actor, but Levine filed a suit last summer asking for \$2.5 million in damages.

"Woody Harrelson has a history of anger management issues with people and we intend to put a stop to this," Cyrus Nownejad, Levine's lawyer, said Friday.

New York Trip Diary Volume 6 – The World Trade Center Chapter

NEW YORK TRIP – MARCH 20-23, 2009 – TAYLOR: 9 yrs, SAMMIE: 4 yrs, DISNEY: 2½ yrs, CHRISTOPHER: 8 mos

(continued from previous posts)

Sunday, March 22 – I already blogged about this day, but I had skipped the part about us visiting the World Trade Center site (aka Ground Zero) because it just didn't seem to belong in a happy family's trip diary. So consider this your warning; the following post will be emotionally heavy!

On the way there, I was just in visitor mode – on a mission to just get there. I didn't really stop to think about how emotional and how gut-wrenching the experience would be. I'm very glad we went, but man, was it emotionally taxing, to say the least. The site itself is a pit in the earth – not even a hole, they're already begun building new buildings, so really it just looks like a construction site, though if you look carefully, you can see that one piece of equipment has a hook painted like an American flag (click on the pic to make it bigger – actually I don't know that you can see the flag-painted hook in this one, sorry!):



There are fences all around, and it's difficult to even see past them until you go into the World Financial Center and look out a window and down into the site (click on any of my pics to make them bigger):



On the way to the site, we passed (yet another) street vendor, and this time, they were selling commemorative books about the 9/11 terrorist attacks. We flipped through the books, and they actually seemed interesting, so we bit and we bought. Those ended up being a great purchase though, because they contain some pictures of the catastrophe that I haven't even seen on the internet. One of the pictures in the books is of a cemetery located only a block or two from Ground Zero. The picture was taken on September 11, 2001, and the cemetery is covered in an inches-thick layer of ash and debris. We passed that same cemetery on our way to Ground Zero, and it was eerie to see what it looked like on that day. Across the street from Ground Zero, there is a statue of a business man with a briefcase; I guess it's supposed to symbolize the "every man" quality of the victims, I don't know, but there it was and here it is:



Also across the street from the site is a fire station, Ladder

10, which was heavily damaged by the attacks and collapsing skyscrapers – it actually served as a rest station for many wounded firefighters that fateful day, I later found out. The station has a memorial on the side, but we (regretfully) didn't stop long enough to take a picture. But the garage was open, and there was a firefighter who was more than happy to let our kids climb up on the fire engine, and he graciously posed with a picture of them – what a great guy! I wonder if he was with Ladder 10 during 2001 and how many of his friends were lost?



And then there was the museum. I was worried the kids would be bored, but they said it would only take 30-45 minutes to get through, and I can't be happier we went. First of all, the kids were not bored in the slightest. They enjoyed looking at the memorabilia: the damaged items, the kids drawings of support, and even the wall of "Missing" posters that victims' loved ones had posted after the attacks. I figured September 11, 2001 is a day my kids should learn about, so why not start now? We did spare a few details, though, like the one about how people were responsible for all of it. If they had asked, I wouldn't have lied, but we just told them that planes crashed into the buildings. After we were almost through the museum, our almost 5-year-old asked me a question I'll never forget. She said, "Mom, can God put people back together?" I hugged her and explained that sometimes people get to go live with God, and that was good

enough for her at that moment.

At least one thing I found cool about the museum is that they had a section about what Muslim-Americans went through after 9/11: the discrimination, the victimization, and the violence.

One thing I somehow didn't get a picture of from the museum was some silverware from the restaurant at the top of one of the towers – the spoon had a hole burned directly through it.

Here are some pictures of other things they had in the museum:



Above is a picture of an airplane window from one of the planes that hit the twin towers. Below is a picture of what was once an elevator plate labeling a floor in the Trade Center:



And below is a picture of some items that they found in the debris pile, a stuffed lamb they used to sell in the Trade Center – searchers who found him said "If he could be spared, why couldn't the people?" Also

pictured are someone's car keys, IDs, and most eerie, a brochure from a meeting being held in the "Windows on the World" restaurant in the top of the building – note the dates say September 9-11, 2001. The thing on the right is just a melted mass of metal, concrete, and whatever else:



If you're going to New York, I highly recommend visiting the Ground Zero museum. I don't know the exact name of it, but it's on Liberty Street across from Ground Zero. Bring tissues, but if you forget, they have some on the walls, and I was grateful for that. It was a very emotional experience, but I was fine until I saw a letter in a child's scrawl dated 4/2000, before the attacks. The letter began, "My hero is my daddy because he is a fireman..." The letter was written by a kid who lost his dad on 9/11, and that's when I lost it.

I can't imagine what those people went through, especially after seeing what happened to some of the objects that were once a part of the World Trade Center. A very humbling experience; one I will never forget...

God Bless the victims of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 and their families left behind...

The Bus Driver Did WHAT?!?

I read a news item a few weeks ago about Shawn Brim, a bus driver in Washington who stopped his bus, got off and adjusted his side-view mirrors, and then proceeded to punch a nearby McGruff the Crime Dog in the face! What was he thinking? He thought it would be funny, he said. Understandably, everyone failed to see the humor in punching a children's hero in front of a crowd of horrified kids, and the bus driver was arrested.

On the other side of the coin and the world, there was another bus driver whose actions can only be described as heroic. Seems Brim has something to learn from Meher Mohammad Khalil:

LAHORE, Pakistan (CNN) – His job was to drive the bus. But Meher Mohammad Khalil is now being hailed as a lifesaver. When gunmen jumped out of bushes and began spraying bullets at the bus carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team Tuesday, Khalil quickly sized up his options and got everyone to safety.

"First I thought there were some firecrackers going off. Then, when I saw the elite force cars in front of me taking fire, I immediately lost my voice," Khalil told CNN on Wednesday.

"At that time, the other elite car that was with us gave me cover, and then, when I saw he was giving me cover, my courage and my patience returned. I decided to take the vehicle from there, and one way or another, even if I had to drive over someone, I would take this bus and escape."

Khalil returned to the scene of the attack in the Pakistani city of Lahore on Wednesday to honor those who were killed and to place flowers in their memory.

One of the dead was Zafar Khan, a friend and fellow bus driver

who had been in a vehicle behind Khalil.

“My eyes filled with tears that these were people that I was eating with and who died in doing their duty.”

Khalil had been part of a convoy heading to Gaddafi Stadium, where the Sri Lankan cricket team was to continue a match against Pakistan.

Six police officers were killed, in addition to Khalil's friend Khan who was driving a bus with the match umpires.

The Sri Lankan cricketers praised Khalil's quick thinking and action, saying he saved their lives. Six team members were injured by broken glass and shrapnel.

Team captain Mahela Jayawardene wrote on his Web site of Khalil: “He probably saved our lives, showing remarkable bravery in the face of direct gunfire to keep the bus moving.”

Crowds mobbed Khalil as he paid his respects at the place where his life changed in an instant.

“He is a hero, a real hero, a real man of the people,” a man in the crowd said.

Private donors in Lahore have rewarded Khalil with 300,000 rupees (more than \$3,000) – a small fortune for a Pakistani bus driver.

Today, Khalil says all he can feel is pain of the loss of life. And he called on the attackers to recognize that their victims are humans just like them, with mothers and sisters.

“For God's sake, please stop this terrorism and let this nation breathe a sigh of relief,” he said.

You Are Under Arrest... But It's Past My Bedtime

I found the following story amusing. Lots of people have tried to impersonate the police, but this one is noteworthy because of the impersonator's age, his lack of bad intentions, and the fact that he was so successful at it – seems this 14-year-old worked an entire shift as a cop, including a role in apprehending a suspect!

March 3, 2009 (CHICAGO) (WLS) – A teenager impersonating a Chicago police officer played a minor role in an arrest on January 24, according to Police Superintendent Jody Weis.

On Tuesday, Supt. Weis called on the U.S. Secret Service for a review of the security breach, which he called “outrageous, angering, disturbing and unforgettable.”

“In my mind it's almost incomprehensible it could have happened. Unfortunately it did. It's very disturbing, and that's why we want to send a message that this can't happen again,” said Supt. Jody Weis, Chicago Police Dept.

Weis said an internal investigation shows seven Chicago police officers broke department rules during the incident. All districts will be re-trained, according to Weis.

The 14-year-old boy- a former police cadet and apparent aspiring police officer- entered the back door at the Grand Crossing District Station on the city's South Side on January 24. He was dressed in regulation clothing and police say it's not clear where he got the uniform. He had no gun or CPD star, but was issued a radio and was sent out with a traffic officer. He worked an entire 5 1/2 hour shift.

“During that time the subject drove the squad car for approximately two hours, interacted with the public while

responding to at least five assignments, operated the portable data terminal and participated in the detention of a suspect," said Supt. Weis.

The impersonator played a minor role in the arrest of a violation of order of protection, Weis said. The boy briefly held the suspect's arm behind his back.

After the shift, the teenager and the relatively new female officer he was riding with returned to the station, where a supervisor, unidentified, realized the teen was not an officer and had him arrested.

How is it so many others missed the fact the teen was not a cop- and unable to legally drive?

"I don't know. They weren't paying attention- perhaps- maybe they were lax. That's why we did the investigation. Those answers we have to hold tight until we go through the adjudication stage," said Supt. Weis.

For that reason, Weis said, the names of the 7 officers facing discipline, and the nature of the recommended sanctions cannot now be disclosed.

"Based on contract agreements we can't identify the officers and in these situation if we gave out the ranks it wouldn't take a rocket scientist to realize who they actually were," said Supt. Weis.

The boy's name has not been released. He pleaded not guilty in juvenile court.

He is no longer in custody, but is wearing an electronic monitoring device.

One Of The Worst True Crime Stories Ever...

Those of you who know me are aware that I'm a true crime buff. For all of you many (I hope!) new readers – I am a true crime buff! I like to read about true crime, so I guess you could say that I have a hidden agenda when I ask my brother-in-law (the cop) how his job is going. A few years ago, there was an incredibly shocking crime in my brother-in-law's jurisdiction of which he was forced to be a part, and it was terrifying for the entire community.

In July of 2004, Anson Paape decided to have an 18th birthday party for one of his kids' friends named Michael Murray. The party was at Paape's home in what is normally a quiet suburb of Chicago, Illinois. For some reason, he decided to supply the teenage party-goers with alcohol. Even worse than that, he decided to round up some of the teenagers and take them down to his basement for a poker game. The reason I say that the poker game was worse than furnishing the teens with alcohol is because this was a poker game with a deadly twist – Russian Roulette. Paape distributed bullets to each of the teens, and the person with the winning hand was supposed to load his bullet, put the gun to the head of the player to their right, and pull the trigger. As if playing this so-called game (and with teenagers!) wasn't crazy enough, Paape decided to mix it up, and he kept changing the rules. When Michael Murray won the hand of poker, Anson Paape picked up the weapon, held it to Murray's forehead and pulled the trigger before Murray could even react enough to push it away. Michael Murray was killed instantly on his 18th birthday. The other teenagers fled the house, and tracked down some police officers who were on patrol. When they arrived at the crime scene, Anson Paape was nowhere to be found. He was gone for two days before finally being

apprehended, and he was tried, convicted, and will spend probably the rest of his life in prison.

It's an insane story – it defies all reason. I can't imagine what this man was thinking. And what a tragic outcome. Not only did a young man lose his life, but Anson Paape's 5 children are now without a father. They were also witnesses to the horrifying event, along with other teenagers at the party that night. It's just so sad.

The reason I'm writing about this is because I remember when this happened. My brother-in-law had to work overtime to help man the SWAT trailer they had to set up while Paape was on the lam. I think everyone in Chicagoland was relieved when they caught him.

And Speaking Of This Horrible Economy...

A thought occurred to me the other night – didn't Barack Obama promise to bring the troops home from the dangerous Middle East if he became President? Well, it's been more than 6 weeks since he's taken office, and I haven't even heard any talk whatsoever about troops coming home. I realize these things take time, but like I said, it doesn't even seem to be in the planning stages as of yet.

And then I was thinking, what happens when they DO come home, and now we have thousands of able-bodied Americans who just served our country only to come home to find out that there are NO JOBS for them? What will that do to the unemployment rate? And pardon my ignorance, but when do people in the military get paid? Are they receiving paychecks right now

while they're serving, or do they get paid when they come home or both? If they get paid from the government when they come home, that will complicate matters also since the government will suddenly be responsible for paying thousands of soldiers.

I'm not saying that the President is keeping the troops overseas to procrastinate the employment problem. But the fact remains that he *promised* he'd get them home and ASAP. And there is also the fact that the job opportunities are shrinking at a rapid rate. I normally don't get too political, but I haven't heard any of the analysts on tv talk about what to do with the troops for employment should they return to the United States, so I thought I'd throw it out there.

And it needs to be said how incredibly thankful I am to not be personally affected by the struggling economy. My husband is self-employed and successful, and I haven't even thought about going back to work myself yet since my kids are still very little. My family and friends seem relatively unscathed as well; although I did see my former neighbors in the newspaper the other day for foreclosure. What a shame; they were nice people. Here's to hoping the economy improves – and fast!

Springing Ahead

Tonight is the night we change our clocks for Daylight Savings Time. I guess we're ending Daylight Savings – or maybe we're starting it. I don't know and I don't really care. All I know is that I will be losing an hour of sleep. Ok, it's not THAT bad; I do like when the sun stays out later, although there is no sun in the weather forecast for the next few days... But I loathe the idea of losing a precious hour of

sleep. If I remember correctly, the time change throws the kids into a tizzy for a few days every year until their bodies readjust – something else to look forward to.

So anyway, this should serve as your reminder to change those clocks – no excuses about being late to church or theater meetings tomorrow! And yes, you must flip the clocks forward, not backward. Remember, it's SPRING ahead, FALL back. And try not to fret about losing that hour of sleep. As Jay Leno said last night referring to this horrible economy that only seems to be getting worse:

“After losing your job, your 401K, and your house, losing an hour of sleep seems like nothing!”

MISSING

I like to read the news stories on dailyherald.com – probably because they have much more interesting news than my local newspaper. But hey, that's not a complaint since more interesting news = more crime to write about. But I grew up in the Chicago area, so when there are interesting stories on dailyherald.com, I know where the town is they're talking about, which is another reason why I frequent the site. Today's edition had an interesting (but sad) story:

Naperville police are desperately searching for a missing 12-year-old child who allegedly took the keys to his family car and left the home.

Cmdr. Dave Hoffman of the Naperville Police Department said the child is 5-feet, 8-inches tall, about 140 pounds, has wavy brown hair and brown eyes. He is believed to be wearing gray cargo pants and a white T-shirt and a green winter Army

jacket.

Hoffman said the boy allegedly took the keys sometime after 2 a.m., left his house, backed the vehicle out of the garage.

Hoffman added the boy also has a history of sleep walking, but has no history of taking the family vehicle for rides when sleep walking.

The vehicle missing is described as a light blue, 2008 Hyundai Santa Fe with an Illinois registration number of A744198.

Anyone with information regarding this incident is asked to call the Naperville Police Department through 9-1-1 or contact your local law enforcement agency.

Hopefully this kid is going to be alright. Does a 12-year-old know how to drive, especially in his sleep? At that age, it's quite possible that he decided to run away also, but he does have a history of sleepwalking. The article fails to mention how they KNOW he took the keys and left – was there a witness? I know where Naperville is; in fact, I used to live there. It's a nice town, but it's a dangerous world. I am hoping they find this kid safe and sound. It's a sad story, but let's hope there's a happy ending. I know some of you loyal readers know people who sleepwalk and have interesting tales – let's hear them!

**UPDATE* – The kid was found safe and sound at O'Hare airport. Apparently he was not sleepwalking but was trying to run away. How a 12-year-old was able to navigate the expressways to get to O'Hare I don't know – but thank goodness he is safe.*