



Time for a Good Story

Duck Soup

By Carole Runo

When Will Something Be Accomplished?

HERE WE ARE fully entrenched in the early winter days of a new year, but I'm still thinking about how wonderful the autumn was for me.

I spent the entire month of September in Maine. The cottage I lived in is about 20 feet from the sea, just across a lovely patch of lawn. Waking up each morning to the sound of the waves was almost as good as it was to go to sleep each evening with that very same sound in my ears.

And then there were the seals, the lobster rolls, the great books to read, canasta games and martinis at 5 p.m.! You get the idea. As Mainers like to say, "Life as it should be."

October brought five days in Cape May to celebrate my birthday. The Virginia Hotel is our place to be. Phil and I spent our Columbus Day weekends there for many years. Now, the girls and I are making it a yearly visit. The Blue Pig, the Ebbet Room, the relaxing walks and the stay on the beach (when days in October can be warm and sunny) all make for a special getaway!

But when all this wonderment was over, just as Christmas was approaching, it was back to reality for me. The television went back on, the newspaper was read and it seemed I was right back where I started a few months previous. Many things had not changed at all, and I thought a few things to myself.

Has any conclusion come to the Benghazi terrorist attack? Who is to blame? Are American veterans still waiting to be treated across the country in veterans' hospitals? Is anyone responsible? Is the IRS being punished for intimidating innocent people and lying about it, and then losing information? Are all those undocumented immigrants still congregated on our southern borders? If not, where did they all go? What is really being done about violence against our citizens and the police? Any news? I do know the Ebola scare is still out there. Are we at risk?

It is becoming very scary to live in America. Is another do-nothing Congressional hearing going to be held? WHY? Nothing ever gets accomplished.

You see, our government uses stall tactics while hoping that we American citizens forget about the older problems as newer ones "hit the news." They count on that. I must admit, I do push some of those issues to the back of my mind because so much negative "stuff" is happening. Sometimes, I can't keep up!

I read recently that, "a country without borders is not a country." I agree! And, a country without a government that protects its laws and its people is not a government.

The beautiful autumn of 2014 ended abruptly when I was hit with the reality of the mess we are in. Now more than ever, God bless America. Are we still permitted to say that, or did I miss something else? ☺



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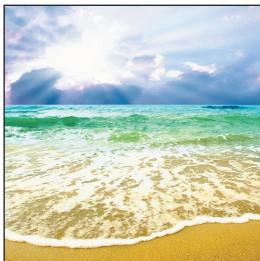
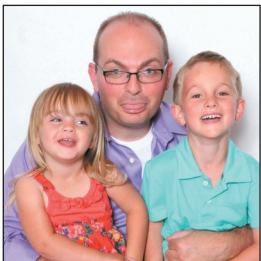
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Adventures in Fatherhood

The Daddy Diaries

By Brian Ersalesi

Once Upon a Mattress

IT'S BEEN A strange winter. As I write this toward the end of January, there really hasn't been that much snow. (After last winter, all I can say about that is *PHEW!* I actually smile when I see my snow blower sitting in the garage all prepped and ready while knowing that I haven't used it yet!)

Despite the minimal snow, it has been cold, icy and grey, and not really the kind of winter that beckons the kids outdoors. So far, we've had one day with enough snow to build one paltry-looking snowman. He looked great the day we created him in early January. Unfortunately, that was followed by a few warm days and, as it melted, the snowman lost one of his eyes, and his carrot nose tilted downward making it look like he was smoking an orange cigar. As if the indignity of losing his face wasn't enough, his entire body began to tip to one side. The "Leaning Tower of Snowman" then got hit by a deep freeze and became immortalized in this sad looking state for weeks.

So, what do you do when it's cold and dull and you just don't feel like heading outdoors? Actually, we found quite a bit to do. I recently experienced a change with my work schedule and, for the first time since 2002, I'm now free on weekends! This is a pretty amazing change and my kids are thrilled! So far, I've let the kids choose our "weekend adventures," as Henry calls them.

Our main indoor activity is a simple one, and it's one that I believe is often overlooked. We play!

We play cards, we play checkers, we play Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, we play dolls—we just play. Kids, at their core, are pretty simple. They don't need constant electronic stimulation with an iPad. They don't need to constantly "do" something. Don't get me wrong, both Henry and Charlotte love when they get to use the iPad, but just giving them time to play creatively and imaginatively is important. And, most of all, it's fun!

For example, Henry is always Batman, and I've played every Batman villain. I'm the patient when Charlotte uses her doctor kit to give me a checkup. Both kids really enjoy it and, I'll be honest, I've

come to enjoy it, too. You see, I'm someone who isn't good with too much downtime. I've got to constantly be doing something. So, the concept of slowing down and playing was initially a tough one for me. I am working on it, though!

But, by far, the best indoor adventures we've had are what we call "Sleep-in Theatre." Jen and I recently got a new mattress and rather than toss the old one, we set it aside. Now, when we're ready, we just move the old mattress onto the floor of the family room. We then spend the night on the mattress in sleeping bags watching movies and eating popcorn. The kids love it and it's something they keep asking to do again. As the winter soldiers on, I'm sure there will be many more nights at the sleep-in! ☾



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Dinner and a Baby

You don't have to give up dining out when you have a toddler. You just need a new game plan.

By Courtney Carrelha

LET'S FACE IT, dining out becomes a completely different ball game when you add a 16-month-old to the table. My mother had told me and my husband early on to take our son out with us, so he could learn how to behave in social settings. But after one traumatic trip to a steakhouse—napkins flew, screams filled the room and death stares came from every table—we decided not to venture out much. We felt as though we were suffering from what we call PTCTD (post-traumatic child tantrum disorder). The truth is, my mom was right. Learning to eat out needed to happen, but it wasn't just our son who was in need of a lesson. We realized that we needed a game plan. Here's how we do it. You can, too!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Thankfully, there are many child-friendly restaurants in the area. Pick a location that has a kids menu and a

changing table. Noise isn't always bad either. It helps your child blend in.

ORDER EARLY

The days of ordering drinks and browsing the menu are over. Come ready and give the waiter your full order as soon as possible. Every second counts when you're eating out with a toddler, so don't leave yourself open to meltdown.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Routine or not, we all know the times of day when our children are angels, and the times we wonder where they came from. This probably was the biggest change for us. We now welcome the early bird special with open arms!

BRING BACKUP

Although most kid-friendly restaurants will have crayons, pack your own artillery! Every child is different, so

find the toys that work best for your kid, and don't rely on what the restaurant has to offer. Snacks are also important. Sometimes the "waiting" period is just too long, so consider the snack your child's appetizer.

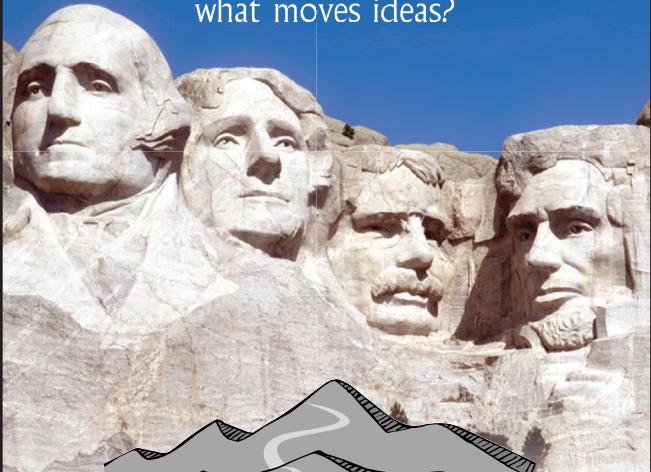
PAY BEFORE YOU PLAY

This might be the craziest tip, but also the most helpful. We've all been there, trying to make eye contact with the waiter because you need the check ASAP. Breakdowns happen in a matter of seconds. If your bill is all taken care of, you can enjoy your meal and not go into panic mode when there is nothing left to satisfy your child's attention.

Like anything in life, practice makes perfect. Our son has taught us that eating out isn't as easy as just randomly selecting a restaurant and placing an order, but we wouldn't change our new life for anything! ☺



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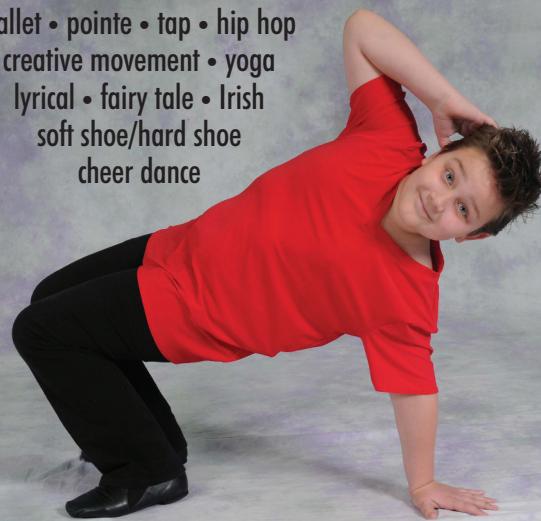
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