

GUILTY PLEASURES

The boys are
off to camp

and we're enjoying our freedom, catching up on movies, eating what we want when we want, that sort of thing. Instead of an extended trip this year we did the remodeling, a task

(Georgia) and then picking up US 441 and taking it north to Clayton. The scenic route takes you off the interstate at Macon and then it's back roads through Athens and other smaller towns. It's a lovely drive and since we weren't in a

great hurry it was the preferred route. We stopped for dinner in Athens and it was bizarre being in enemy territory. We ate at a little outdoor cafe downtown and Raphi

pursestrings."

I think we nipped that idea in the bud.

We got to Clayton and drove on to Dillard House a few miles up the road. Dillard House is a charming resort we'd visited on a previous camp trip and I was only sorry we wouldn't be there longer to take advantage of the recreation facilities. I hated to leave the mountains and go back down into the heat but we were needed in Gainesville.

The weather here has been extremely hot and dry. You've probably seen the wildfires on the news. In Gainesville we're dealing with the pall of smoke which is spread across the state from the flames. It's very unpleasant and if the smoke alone weren't enough, the temps in the upper 90's made it unbearable. Finally, this week, we've gotten a good tropical system hovering over us and dumping the kind of rain we've needed.

But enough about the weather. Can't do anything about

it anyway. What we can do something about is what happened a few weeks ago when Howard checked into the hospital for some tests and ended up having an angioplasty. This is the procedure where a blocked artery is opened, ideally before you have a heart attack.

Some of you recall Howard *did* have a heart attack, a major one, in June of 1988. This time when he began suffering chest pains after minor exertion he didn't hesitate but went straight to the cardiologist who ran the battery of tests and then recommended an angiogram to determine if an artery was

JUST THE FACTS

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made easier by the boys being absent. One of the other campers' parents took a trip to Paris while he's gone. They probably got off cheaper than we did.

We drove them to Clayton, Georgia an 8 hour trip if you go by the scenic route, which we did. The easy way is by Interstate through Atlanta to Gainesville

said how attractive Athens was. "This would be a good place to go to school." "Son," I said, "unless you've got a full scholarship and all expenses paid for four full years you're not going to be spending your college years at the University of Georgia. Not while your father controls the



blocked. They saw on screen that one of his arteries looked like a clamp had been put around it squeezing in the middle just like you'd tie off a garden hose.

So they roto-rootered out the artery and kept him overnight at the hospital for observation. Next day he came home, very sore and somewhat shaken from coming *that* close to another heart attack.

It did serve as a wake-up call to get Howard more focused on controlling his weight. I'd been cooking heart-healthy food since that first attack and the result was I lost 40 lbs. As I've pointed out to Howard far too often, it doesn't matter if your diet is low fat and heart healthy if you're a man who's 5'5" but consumes as much food as a man who's 6' tall.

Other than that he's trying to cut back some in his schedule. His cardiologist also told him two blocked arteries is all he (the MD) needs to put Howard on the "totally disabled" list, but we're going to have to think about that. It's a big

step psychologically as well as fiscally.

School Daze--

Remember I mentioned my speeding tickets last disty? I went to defensive driving school last night and I sort of enjoyed it. I didn't go for "comedy school" or one of those other outfits that comes in and does it at a hotel meeting room. No, I opted for the course offered by the local Public Safety Council, a non-profit organization that does education and training programs, distributes car seats, helps sponsor Project Graduation, etc. I'd much rather give them the money. Their course is taught by retired cops and my teacher recognized me from my work as a radio reporter 20 years ago. We played a couple rounds of "where are they now?" during the breaks.

I learned a few new things on defensive driving I didn't know before, reviewed some changes in traffic laws and didn't feel it was a wasted evening. Truth be told, it would be a good idea for everyone to have to take a

refresher every now and then just to get updated on the laws.

Tales of Remodeling--

It's almost finished, and all the major work has been done. The only task remaining is replacing the ceiling fixture in the family room with new recessed can lighting. The boys/hall bathroom is completed and looks very, very nice. All bright and shiny with new fixtures, wallpaper, the works.

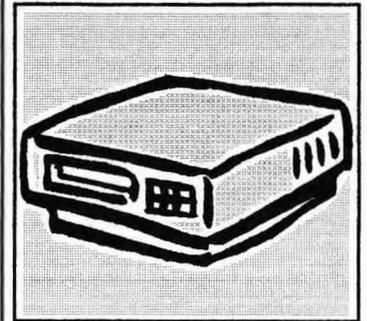
I have been picking up interesting little tips from the various craftsman. I thought I'd share:

From the plumber: Run a tray of ice cubes through your disposal every now and then. Cleans food out of there, especially food which sticks to the blades.

From the tileman: Use vinegar and water as your basic tile cleaner. The acid in the vinegar helps keep grout clean. Follow with a clear water rinse since it's dirty water that does the most discoloration to grout.

Last week we got the kitchen floor tiled and it makes a world of

difference. We also had the dining room and living room tiled so I could put down the last of the rugs I'd bought from "Guido" months back. I have to admit, it looks great. My black furniture against the white tile, with the Oriental rugs--well it's just too stylish for this family. I'm going to have to replace them too I think.



Videos!

I didn't say "Movies" because there hasn't been much I wanted to see. We did catch THE TRUMAN SHOW and very much enjoyed it. Ed Harris is one of my favorite actors. Ever see him in George Romero's NIGHTRIDERS? Anyway, this could indeed be a breakthrough role for Jim Carey and I expect Harris will pick up a "Best Supporting Actor" nomination.//

LA Confidential--I was sorry I missed it at the theater and had been waiting for the boys to take off for camp to rent it. It was worth the wait. Great cast, good story. Outstanding costuming. I'm not sure Kim Basinger's performance was the best I'd seen but then I couldn't remember who else had been nominated for "Best Supporting Actress." I knew Kevin Spacey was one of the best but I was also impressed with the other male leads. What else has Russell Crowe done? He looked vaguely familiar but I couldn't place him.//

Farinelli--This was one of those "rent on a night when no one else is home 'cause you're the only one who wants to watch it" movies. Farinelli is the fact based story of an 18th century castrato--one of the singers who by being castrated as a youth is able to combine the power of a male voice with the range of a soprano. The movie left me feeling unsatisfied, as if too much had been left on the cutting room floor and the wrong pieces put in. Lots of

disjointed scenes and unexplained actions. But the singing was interesting. I understand it was done by taking a (female) soprano singing the parts and then using a computer to enhance the music and make it sound closer to what we imaging a castrato sounded like. Frankly I'd rather have seen a movie version of Anne Rice's CRY TO HEAVEN for a story on the castrati and their lives. Subtitled.//

Fargo--Yes, it took me 'til now to rent it. But it was fun. I warned Howard ahead of time--"They'll be talking Minnesotan."

"You mean ending sentences with a preposition?"

"You betcha."

And they did. Everytime someone would say "Oh yah, Ya wanta come with?" we'd fall down laughing. I also snickered at references to Embers, Old Dutch Potato Chips, The Radisson, Honeywell, White Bear Lake High School ("Go Bears!") Brainerd's love affair with Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, and would jump up and down and point "Hey! That's the exit for France Avenue South!"

All they needed were Nut Goody bars to make it a complete experience.

You Los Angelenos may be used to this, but for a Minnesota girl like me, it was a novel experience. You betcha. And the story was entertaining too.//

Boogie Nights--
Aaargh! It's the 70's! Did we *really* dress that way and decorate our homes in such tacky style? Don't answer this.

One of the quirkiest ideas which grew out of the sexual freedom of the 70's was the concept that porn could be art. Films like THE DEVIL IN MISS JONES and BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR were touted as *real* films not just jerk off material.

Boogie Nights goes from the "innocence" of that time into the 80's when the sex and drugs turned ugly, video replaced film (so the actors and actresses turned ugly too 'cause now any idiot could make a "film") and folks like the Burt Reynolds character who had a "vision" of what porn could be were left in the dust.

Mark Wahlberg was interesting as "Dirk Diggler", porn star, who couldn't act but did have a 13" *schlong*, as he put it, his "one special thing". Wahlberg projected an interesting air of vulnerability in the role. In fact, the entire cast did a good job of showing how people come together to create families to fill voids in their own lives.

A good film and a good video.//

Horseman on the Roof--A romantic French film with a male star whose name I forget but who was very easy on the eye.

The setting is a cholera epidemic in the 1830's in France. Angelo is a 25 year old Colonel in the dispersed Italian cavalry, living in France and fomenting rebellion. Agents of the Austrian Empire are hunting for Angelo and other Italian dissidents, killing them and breaking up their network.

Angelo flees the Austrians but runs right into the cholera epidemic. Trapped behind the quarantine lines, running from assassins, he meets

Jeanette. Jeanette is desperate to get back to her home and she's going to get there with or without assistance.

But Angelo is a gentleman! He abandons his own goals to help Jeanette return home, even when he finds she's returning to the elderly husband she loves.

It's a sweet film where (for a change!) people put morality and greater goals above their own desires. I recommend it. Subtitled.

Grosse Pointe

Blank--This was a very, very funny film. John Cusack is great as the hit man who finds out Thomas Wolfe was right, sort of. The scenes are funny in a black way, there's a cute love story with snappy dialogue and Minnie Driver and Joan Cusack do more (thank goodness) than stand around their men while the action occurs around them. Dan Ackroyd is fantastic as the rival hit man who wants to unionize. I'm surprised Ackroyd didn't receive a best supporting actor nomination.

If you didn't see

it, well worth renting on video.

Exotica--A quirky little Canadian film which I picked 'cause Siskel and Ebert gave it two thumbs up. I was curious what they saw in a film about exotic dancers. Forget **SHOWGIRLS**--this movie is much, much better.

A man goes to a club every other night or so and always asks the same dancer to come to his table for a private performance. Her schtick is dressing up like a schoolgirl in uniform--plaid skirt, black knit stockings, white shirt. But as the movie unfolds layers get peeled away like the clothing and you begin to realize everyone in the movie is connected--the DJ who lusts after the dancer, the customer, who happens to be an Internal Revenue auditor, the man he's auditing, the young girl who babysits for him--everyone. By the time the movie's done it's not a sordid tale of lust for little girls but something very, very different. Sad and disturbing. I recommend it. And the soundtrack was good too.//

Under the Domim Tree--An Israeli film which I'd seen advertised in Jewish media catalogs. It won a couple awards and is suitable for the entire family.

From the 1930's to the 50's Israel took in refugee children in a program called Youth Aliyah. The program still exists today in other forms, serving as a resettlement and foster care program which offers group living to troubled children. But it was founded to save the lives of European Jewish children, and it did. 30,000 of them.

This is the story of a group of teens at one of the settlements in 1953. Some are Holocaust survivors, some are sabras (native Israelis) needing to live in foster care. They are in many ways typical teenagers, and in other ways unique, but their story is sweet and moving as they reinvent "family" in their new surroundings. Subtitled and highly recommended.//

Queen Margot—Another French film, this one with a really high body count. It's

the 16th Century and the Catholics and Protestants are putting a lot of energy into hating each other. Politics entered into the picture and led to the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre where thousands of Protestants were slaughtered.

All of this is graphically depicted on-screen. The movie revolves around Margot, daughter of Catherine de Medici and sister of the King of France. She marries Protestant Henri of Navarre as a peace gesture even though she despises him as an individual. He has his mistress, she likes to disguise herself and pick up strange soldiers in the city (she'd already been screwing her brothers and assorted members of the court).

Anyway, Margot picks up a Protestant soldier named de La Mole, they become lovers and she saves his life the night of the massacre.

The interesting story here is not the love affair between Margot and de La Mole, but how a friendship born in adversity

develops between Henri of Navarre and his estranged wife.

Be forewarned, this film is not for people with weak stomachs but it is interesting.

Out of Sight--Good acting, George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez are easy to watch, it doesn't insult your intelligence. See it.

Armageddon--Now, if you want a film that insults your intelligence this is the summer film for you. Loud, macho, corny, dumb science, emotionally manipulative, way too many last minute hair raising escapes and disasters, you name it, it's got it.

On the other hand, the film did have some good one liners ("The guys don't want to pay taxes. Ever.") and is not a bad way to spend your time during the discount movie hour.

I called my brother because this is his type of movie and he said while he hadn't seen it yet, it's the kind his fiancée refers to as a "Mitch Matinee"--something Mitch will go to see on his own sans

female companionship.

I told him to take Debbie to OUT OF SIGHT instead.

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Mailing

Comments--

Lillian--You think Hillary's winger conspiracy is too stupid to be real? I've got one word for you:

Watergate. Remember bungled break-ins and plumbers? Too stupid for words, right? But as you and I both recall, it brought down an administration. Not that I'm saying Ms. Rodham Clinton's right, just that *nothing* is too stupid when it involves power games in Washington.//

ct. Me: Hey, home improvement is home improvement. A little thing like a lightbulb that works and vertical blinds can make you very happy. Which has become dear Howard's mantra: "Well, as long as *you* like it. What a prince. I need to save the Newsweek article on fancy bathrooms that said you can expect a good kitchen remodeling to cost \$50K. I'm nowhere near that (yet) and I'm doing more than one room! // Hope your health is what it should

be by now.////###

Dengrove--ct. Me: I like the plumber's explanation to your sister of what was wrong with her toilet. Makes as much sense as my discovery today that 10 years ago the contractor didn't bother to caulk my bathroom sink, which is why I now have a major rust problem in a very expensive lavatory.

Don't mind me. It's been that kind of day.//

You may be on target with your comment re: Sharpe and the Regencies. I just finished the first book in Cornwell's trilogy about King Arthur. In this version Lancelot is a complete sleaze more concerned with not risking his pretty face than in being the finest knight in Christendom. I like it. A refreshing change of pace.////###

Hlavaty--The Boy Scout Crackdown was...well, all I can say is I'm still chuckling every time I pick it up. Thank you so much.////###

Schlosser--ct. Lichtman re: Wallets: I

suspect a conspiracy at work here. Once upon a time all you needed in your wallet was your driver's license and your money. Now you've got your phone card, health card, car insurance, at least one credit card--usually more 'cause you're using one for household purchases and one for business expenses, library card, various store credit cards, video rental cards, check cashing id and all the various "buy 10 get one free" cards. Pictures of loved ones? No room.//

Ct. Lillian-- I just took a chance on an offering for some high tech med research stock investigating new treatments for diabetes and renal dialysis. Hey, my Pfizer stock has made me happy the last couple months so I'm willing to try again.//

ct. Dengrove-- For some reason chloral hydrate=mickey finn rings a bell with me. While I'm sure there are any number of drugs like Rohypnol ("roofies") which would do the trick, chloral hydrate was the classic.//

Ct. Me re: laundry disks: I found that I only needed about 1/8th as much

laundry soap when I used the disks. This means one of two things:

1. When the soap manufacturer tells you to use *this* much soap for a load they're lying 'cause they want you to use their product faster and 1/8th works as well as a full measure or

2. The disks work.

I've never tried the disks on their own without soap because with my two boys I wouldn't dare, and the more "delicate" wash is cold water which hinders the effectiveness of the disks anyway.////###

Geib--Suitably sick cover. Reminds me of Gahan Wilson.//

Ct. Lynch re: POSTMAN: Look at the bright side. No one's talking about WATERWORLD anymore.//

Ct. Me: Yeah, when I saw that DOONESBURY strip my first thought was "gee, it's not just me."//

Maybe the condo across from you is haunted?////###

Hughes--Thanks for sharing the wedding

memories. The photos scanned beautifully. // I'll be interested in seeing what you do with your retirement. So far all of the people who've told me "Huh! You'll go crazy not going to work each day" have been 100% wrong. Time will tell, but right now I'm enjoying myself immensely. The stress reduction alone makes it worth it.//

Ct. Me: Howard's latest cardiac episode reminds me of how important it is to do things *now* as long as you've made reasonable provision for the future. That's the other nice thing about my not being employed. I can do things like join Howard at a convention or on a business trip where before it would have been nearly impossible.////###

Brandt--Ah, someone else who's seen *Exotica!* It didn't even hit the theaters in this town.//ct. Me: Raphi's middle school had the top writing scores in the county. Five out of six of the language arts teachers have respectable writing credits, including a playwright and an author of grammar texts. Nice to see that

some quality teachers are still going into the public education system. Good luck to your boss! I'm definitely on her side.

Micah didn't like his teacher this year. He'd had a real star last year and this one was just ordinary. I told him as he goes through life he's going to have some outstanding teachers and some less than inspiring teachers, but it's *his* job to try and get the most out of the experience--"Life is full of difficult people, part of growing up is learning how to deal with them."//

Robe--I'm always on the hunt for wasp nests around the exterior of the house. Give those f#ckers an inch and they'll take over the place. Glad you didn't have a reaction to the stings.// Congrats on Scott's graduation. So he's going to be a Brahma, eh? My brother went to USF for a couple semesters before returning to the Frozen North and I remember visiting him and watching a movie projected onto the side of one of those stark white buildings they have there. This would have been 1971 or so

when the school was new and nothing was out there except Busch Gardens. Now the area is not only built up, it's home to MOSI, the Museum of Science and Industry, a favorite stomping ground for our family.//

Oooh, oooh, I want a "We Hate You, Wayne Huizenga" kit! I'm trying to boycott as many of his businesses as possible, and I need some to add to my list besides Blockbuster. It's not just the Marlins, of course, this is the putz who wanted to pave the Everglades. The home security service that does our alarm was owned by him, but he sold it so I feel better about that--I'm not sending him money each month.//

I aced the comics quiz. I would have been embarrassed if I hadn't. So Howard The Duck is back down to \$20? Howard the Attorney is going to be P.O.'d I kept telling him my comics collection wasn't of "collector quality", i.e. I haven't bagged them all individually and they're still stored in boxes in the closet. But maybe the market will pick up again.////###