Regrouping and Renewal at Auburn

Academies all across the Northwest experience daily the challenges of secondary Christian education. Auburn Adventist Academy in Auburn, Wash., is a dynamic example of what often feels like a roller coaster ride. During a week when Principal Tom Decker announced significant staffing adjustments, to reposition the school for future balanced growth, students and staff needed a reminder of their collective mission. They got it in dramatic fashion, as 22 teenage students shared their faith journey during the Student Week of Prayer. The Friday evening service was a Spirit-filled experience for staff, faculty, pastors and students. Decker says, "I could count on one hand the number of times the Holy Spirit burst into a room and flooded it with his presence with this intensity." Read more online.

Freedom Dodges a Bullet in Boise
Idaho legislators recently considered a bill (Idaho HB 427) that would allow Idahoans to refuse service to those that they objected to on religious grounds. According to the bill summary, HB 427, which is called the “Free Exercise of Religion Act,” would amend “existing law to provide that a person whose exercise of religion is burdened in violation of specified law may obtain appropriate relief against any person relying upon any government action, enactment or law that burdens a person’s exercise of religion.” While on the surface this may seem like an important safeguard, Greg Hamilton, Northwest Religious Liberty Association president, suggested it would complicate and create an unnecessary encumbrance to existing law, which already provides adequate protections for religious liberty. HB 427 was withdrawn and returned to committee for further study. Read more online.

Global Youth Day: March 15

Adventist youth around the world are preparing for Global Youth Day 2014. This year’s event takes place March 15 when youth will spend the Sabbath being the sermon in their communities. Youth are being encouraged to plan ahead to do things like deliver meals, organize singing groups, give blood, visit shut-ins or volunteer at a shelter. The General Conference youth department has developed a website and phone apps that will allow youth groups to document what they are doing and send pictures in from around the world. Find more information and planning materials online.

Jay Sloop Life Celebration Planned

The extended family of Jay Sloop is planning a special service to celebrate his life. Sloop, who was serving as the Upper Columbia Conference health ministries director, has been missing since May 2013 when on a trip to the Ukraine. The service is currently scheduled for April 26 at 3 p.m. at the Yakima Church, 507 N. 35th Ave., Yakima, WA 98902. More information is available on the Sloop family blog site online.

News on Washington Conference ABC

The Washington Conference has made the decision to own and operate its Adventist Book Center (ABC). When the Pacific Press Publishing Association recently terminated its direct operation of ABCs across the country, several Northwest conferences were faced with assuming this responsibility on their own. The Washington ABC, located in Auburn, will soon reflect a conference commitment to innovative resources and new product lines.
UCA Celebrates Cafe Grand Opening
The grand opening for the new Upper Columbia Academy (UCA) cafeteria was held Monday, Feb. 24, in Spangle, Wash., amid a winter storm that was akin to Christmas. Students and staff alike enjoyed the ribbon-cutting ceremony even though they were bombarded with snowflakes. This event marks the beginning of a new gathering place for food and friendships and a new footprint for the campus, which will open up the campus. Students have been using the new cafeteria since the move-in on Nov. 20. Find more information at GleanerNow.com.

Ordination Committee Presentations Available
The General Conference has released 27 documents related to the January meeting of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC). The documents include the TOSC reports from the 13 worldwide divisions and 10 research papers which have been subsequently revised in light of comments and suggestions during the meeting. The study process is expected to culminate with a report to the October Autumn Council meetings in Silver Spring, Md., and potential recommendation to the 2015 General Conference session. Find an archive of all the presentations at AdventistArchives.org.

Introduce Your Neighbors to The Desire of Ages
Pacific Press Publishing Association is offering a great deal on copies of The Desire of Ages due to the impending release of a new movie this weekend called The Son of God. With its impressive publicity campaign targeted at Christian leaders and churches, this movie is poised to draw thousands to theaters across the country for the next few weeks. It’s an opportunity to share the real story of Jesus in the Ellen White classic The Desire of Ages. The Pacific Press will provide the ASI edition of this book for $2.45 per copy, or $1.96 each within a case of 40. All case orders qualify for free shipping. Find out more at AdventistBookCenter.com.
Feb 27: Regrouping and Renewal at Auburn

Currently at

- Misery
- CAA Plus ELL Equals Outreach
- Prayer Conference Gives Pastors Renewed Revival
- The Adventist Advantage
- God and God Alone Helps Grandview Adventist Junior Academy

And More!

Looking Ahead

February

- 28 – March 9: Islam and Christianity in the Bible, Spokane Valley, WA

March

- 6: Hell and Mr. Fudge, Castle Rock, WA
- 6 – 8: Walla Walla University Days
- 7 – 8: Marriage Conversion Weekend, Ridgefield, WA
- 14 – 16: Northwest Prison Ministries Retreat

More Events

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March

It's a crisp, Montana morning, and Pastor Alan Newbold is heading to his French class. He's not teaching but is there as a student, mingling, ministering and befriending on the campus of Montana State University (MSU). This month, the Gleaner
explores secular campus ministry and an innovative project the Montana Conference has embarked on to reach the 15,000 students enrolled at MSU.
Read the March issue online.
ANNOUNCEMENT: Staff Changes at AAA for the 2014-2015 School Year

February 20, 2014

Dear Staff, Students, Parents and Alumni:

Nearly one year ago I began conversations with Auburn Adventist Academy about taking the role of principal. From the moment I was hired I have relentlessly sought out the reality of the school. The harshest of realities is the financial difficulty AAA has faced over the last 10-15 years. We have faced multiple setbacks on campus in the past, but today we are preparing and planning for a stronger, more sustainable future.

During our staff pre-session meetings in August 2013, I shared with my team the reality of AAA: either enrollment would grow or staffing changes would have to be made. We simply cannot continue to operate in excess of our income.

In order to move toward a more efficient and sustainable program, staffing changes had to be made for the 2014-2015 school year. Most of the staffing changes will occur in our support services departments. Yesterday, one by one, I informed each person who is affected. Each of these staff members was assured that we would honor the contract we have made with them to continue their employment till the end of June 2014.

Auburn Adventist Academy has been extremely blessed to have these staff members serving our young people. They have remained deeply committed to AAA’s mission, its students, parents and, most importantly, Jesus Christ.

Some of these staff members were comfortable with me sharing that they would not be returning next year: Linda Blaser, Steve Heupel, Garlyn Wacker, Jessi Turner and Kevin Ramkissoon. Some staff members have been asked to serve next year in a reduced role: Debbie Coon and Francisco Brito. There are several other staff members who will be affected that have not been mentioned.

These decisions have not come lightly. I have wrestled through them with my administrative team, the AAA Board of Trustees and Washington Conference Board of Education. Each decision has been worked through with great sadness and turmoil. Decisions like this are extremely complex and involve manifold data to be broken down. I cannot explain and therefore cannot defend all the decisions that have been made because some of the data is very personal and confidential.

I remain dedicated to a strong and sustainable Auburn Adventist Academy. God has sustained AAA over its 96-year mission to His young people. It remains His school. I am praying that God will use this to enhance our faith, galvanize our constituency, and rebuild AAA to be a leader in Adventist Christian education.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support of Auburn.

Tom Decker
Principal, Auburn Adventist Academy
Auburn Students Feel Presence of God

Introduction
Auburn Adventist Academy just finished a powerful Student Week of Prayer experience where 22 teenagers shared their faith journey with peers. Concurrently, the timing of the Academy's staffing decisions for next year happened in the same week.

Emotions, then, were raw by the end of the week. Friday night vespers was just the healing salve needed and one memorable experience as teenagers responded to be real with God.

Continue reading about how the Holy Spirit showed up at Auburn Adventist Academy!

Where Do I Fit? by Nicole Hwang, senior from Tacoma, Wash., and Lindsay Hill, senior from Bonney Lake, Wash.

There is a special week at Auburn Adventist Academy in February when a group of dedicated students speak to their peers on spiritually relevant issues. This February, 22 students presented beautiful, powerful messages from the pulpit of Auburn Adventist Academy Church.

The theme for Student Week of Prayer 2014 was Where Do I Fit? The core of virtually every speaker’s message was that we need to focus entirely on God, placing no esteem on ourselves or our desires. We hide ourselves in Him in order to fit into the puzzle that we call life, because this life is not ours — it belongs to God.

Every year this week is amazing, but this time, it culminated into an extraordinary finish. On Friday night, we felt the presence of God almost tangibly, and sensed His Spirit filling every empty place in the room —
including our empty hearts and lives.

As people came to the front to pray with pastors and dedicate their lives to the Lord, a fresh awareness of the peaceful strength of the gospel filled our hearts. Several among us showed their joy in the tears wetting their faces, and an eloquent silence fell over the sanctuary. There are times in life when words are meaningless, and this was one of those times. The hundreds of hearts in that room were opened and knit together in true love as we prayed with each other, seeking earnestly for the heart of God.

Student Reactions

Glynnis Kijak, senior from Auburn, Wash. “I enjoyed hearing Greg Epperson speak for Student Week of Prayer because he was super open and honest. He meant what he said and he was being genuine.”

Josh Johnston, senior from Brinnon, Wash. “This week showed that a lot of students are hungry for the Word and on fire for God. Many students you wouldn’t think of as spiritual are becoming spiritual because of this week.”

Stephanie Martinez, junior from Lynnwood, Wash. “I really enjoyed Karsten Rogers’ talk on Friday night because it really hit me and I even started crying. Pastor Rogers prayed with me and my friends after inviting God to be with us and for the Holy Spirit to help us grow.”

Jillian Hightower, junior from Puyallup, Wash. “Out of all the years I have been here at AAA for Student Week of Prayer, this was my favorite. I really enjoyed both Ahsan Rogers and Karsten Rogers.”

Mikeala Herman, junior from Puyallup, Wash. “Auburn really grew into a family this week at Student Week of Prayer. I could feel God on campus. The talks became more meaningful after the news about staff changes that came out on Thursday. To keep the spiritual high going, we decided to start having group prayer to help people know they are not alone.”

Raquel Landaverde, junior from Federal Way, Wash. “On Friday at Vespers, the Holy Spirit was tangible in the air. I had never felt that before.”

Tony Chirachevin, senior from Thailand “I enjoyed hearing from Ahsan Rogers and Karsten Rogers. They talked from their heart. It was real to them and that made it real to me.”

Salvador (Junior) Antonio, senior from Everson, Wash. “Hearing Marika Miller and Karsten Rogers on Friday at vespers was the most impactful for me. It really hit home. There was a sense of unity in the church at vespers on Friday night. Pastor Rogers prayed with me and it was a really great blessing.”

Marika Miller, senior from Graham, Wash. “Speaking for Student Week of Prayer was a huge blessing to me. I learned that I can’t do anything without God and the Holy Spirit. I can’t believe God used me in this. I was stressed about presenting for Student Week of Prayer, but I felt the Holy Spirit and realized I needed to let go. Everyone was down after hearing about the staff changes for next year, so I sort of set my talk up to speak to those feelings and Karsten ended so well with the call to action and the reminder that all we need is Jesus. It felt like everyone was on a level playing field, everyone was insufficient, and we all knew God was good.”

Rebekah Johnson, sophomore from Puyallup, Wash. “Each speaker was different and I got different lessons from each speaker. They each brought their own perspective. This year felt more honest and I have a lot more respect for the speakers.”
Dylan Turner, sophomore from Burien, Wash. “When your peers are talking, you don’t expect to be that moved, but the talks this week were really moving.”

Matthew Burghart, senior from Centralia, Wash. “It was the most spiritually powerful event that I’ve ever experienced in my life. Students really got a chance to open up to other students, some even for the first time, about their relationship with God.”

Ahsan Rogers, freshman from Puyallup, Wash. “Student Week of Prayer made me think about how to live out my relationship with Christ. It got people out of being stuck — it broke chains. It brought people together.”

Austin Burke, senior from Tacoma, Wash. “God used SWOP to make people realize what they are missing out on. It was a big wake-up call and a blessing to me. Everyone was at peace at the end of it.”

Principal's Perspective: God Meets Us Where We Are by Tom Decker

I went forward to "the altar" at the request of the student preacher during Auburn Adventist Academy’s student week of prayer. A half dozen other ministers joined me as we sat on the front pew and bowed our heads.

"Lord, these are Your young people,” I began praying. “Call them, save them, be God in this place." The student speaker began his appeal for students as I continued to pray for God's Holy Spirit to move. I prayed a short time more and looked up, sensing people around me.

The front of the church was packed with more than 100 students. I looked at their faces wet with tears. Throughout the timeless evening, the pastors in the room went from group to group praying with each small cluster of students. There were seniors who are mature, nervous and well aware of the very large world that will expand in just three months. There were Asian international students from Buddhist and secular traditions. There were freshman who seemed young and small. With each group, I was conscious and aware of the pivotal moment this was in the lives of these students.

The words of my prayers crackled and broke with the emotion of "age" watching "youth" commit to Jesus. The groups went on and on. I look up after each "amen" and saw another cluster of faces looking at me, expectantly, as though waiting for the dedication prayer to confirm their commitment to making Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord.

Joy flooded my heart. Joy flooded my whole being! The prayer circles completed, we found our seats. With the weight of God's presence in the room, 150 of us just sat in silence, bound together by the miracle God had thrust upon us. Staff, faculty, pastors and even students spent the next two hours praying, comforting and counseling with each other.

In nearly 30 years of youth and pastoral ministry, I could count on one hand the number of times the Holy Spirit burst into a room and flooded it with His presence with this intensity. Student speakers throughout the week had set the stage for this night. Their vulnerability, authenticity and transparency made it clear that God would meet us where we are. On this night, during this week, we let Him in. He broke through our pride, secularism, superficiality, fear and hypocrisy. God is present at Auburn Adventist Academy.

Share Your Experience!
Tell us about how Student Week of Prayer impacted you as a student, parent, educator or church community member. Share your story!
Religious Battles in the Marketplace – Is There a Solution?

In August 2013, the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that a small photo studio violated a state anti-discrimination law by refusing, on religious grounds, to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony. In November, the studio appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, asking the Court to protect its owners from having to send a message in violation of their religious beliefs that same-sex commitment ceremonies or marriages are acceptable.

In their petition to the U.S. Supreme Court, the owners of Elane Photography are asking the Court to rule on whether the photographic product they produce is protected speech, and whether they should be required to create “pictures or books that will tell stories or convey messages contrary to their deeply held religious beliefs.” Elaine Huguenin, who has a degree in photography, contends that her work is not simply taking photographs, but posing photo subjects, cropping photos, and creating a compelling photographic presentation.

The Elane Photography v. Willock case is assigned docket number 13-585 and the U.S. Supreme Court has not yet decided whether to hear the case.

The U.S. Supreme Court has scheduled the Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties cases for oral argument on March 25, 2014. In both cases, owners of the privately held secular for-profit corporations are deeply religious and are opposed to abortion. They are offended that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires them to provide insurance for abortion drugs. The corporations are legal extensions of the owners, so they feel that when their corporations are forced to act against their sincerely held religious beliefs, they are also personally being forced to act.

(As an aside, a friend has suggested that this argument might make it much easier for future plaintiffs to “pierce the corporate veil” if the companies are an “alter ego” to the extent that the corporate religion reflects that of the owners. The Supreme Court’s decision could impact corporate law more than “religious freedom” law and I would anticipate that the Court will be very careful in how it approaches this issue.)

Another way to look at the ACA cases is to consider whether an employer may shield employees from government-mandated health services when the employees do not agree with the employer and request those services. Can a secular, for-profit employer follow his or her religious convictions at the expense of the rights of his or her employees in not just this, but any area of dispute?

Setting aside the morality of abortion-inducing drugs, what would it mean if the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that employers could take away government-mandated rights of employees because of their religious beliefs? Could this be expanded to other areas where secular for-profit corporations could discriminate against certain employees on religious grounds? What if an employer required all employees to attend mandatory worship services and somebody who did not share those beliefs objected? What if an employer said that only Bible-professing Christians could be promoted into a company? What if an employer only hired Muslims? What if a secular employer, on religious grounds, refused to recognize same-sex couples, and reaped the competitive financial benefit of this refusal? Would some employers look to discrimination as another way to benefit the bottom line? Would a broad ruling on these two cases could lead to protection of corporations who abuse their employees’ rights under cover of religion? (Note: This brings to mind the fact that some issues, such as abortion and maybe even marriage, might be unnecessarily cloaked in religious terms when they should be addressed as general human rights issues and thus avoid much of this debate.)

Last week in Idaho, legislators considered a bill (Idaho HB 427) that would allow Idahoans to refuse service to those that they object to on religious grounds. According to the bill summary, HB 427, which is called the “Free Exercise of Religion Act,” “Amends existing law to provide that a person whose exercise of religion is burdened in violation of specified law may obtain appropriate relief against any person relying upon any government action, enactment or law that burdens a person’s exercise of religion.”

Idaho HB 427 would establish the Religious Freedom Restoration Act for individual actions, not just government actions. If a person feels that they have been compelled to act against their conscience, they can sue the person who made them commit that act.

The same Idaho legislator who introduced HB 427, Lynn Luker, also introduced HB 426 which applies to licensed professional or occupational licensees – they cannot lose their license if they refuse service or not participate in objectionable activities based on sincerely
held religious beliefs. They can still be sued or fired from their jobs.

In a released opinion, Idaho Deputy Attorney General Brian Kane, HB 426 could “subject employees to personal liability when they are simply doing their job and a court later decides that the state or local government policy burdened their free exercise of religion.” Kane gave an example that if a state prison had a policy of not providing kosher or Halal meals to Jewish or Muslim prisoners, and the prisoners sued, the liability could be extended to those who cook or serve the food.

Further arguments can be made that the Idaho bills are unnecessary because the protections are present under current law and that HB 426 and HB 427 would simply be used as a license to discriminate.

In light of the debate, it was not likely that HB 426 would pass, and as of February 18, Rep. Luker has withdrawn HB 427 and returned it to committee. In a statement, Luker said, “The intent of the bill was to provide a shield to protect the free exercise of religion under the First Amendment in light of the variety of increasing government mandates. However, many misinterpreted the intent to be a sword for discrimination. I respect the concerns that I heard and therefore want to find the right language to balance those concerns.”

At the same time, in Kansas, the Republican majority in the Senate has refused to consider an act (Kansas HB 2453) that passed the House that would have provided legal protections for people and organizations that refused to provide goods and services to gay and lesbian services. It would have protected individuals, groups, and business that cited religious beliefs in refusing to provide goods, services, accommodations and employment benefits to same-sex couples. While Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Jeff King has indicated they would still consider protections for rights of conscience, King and others have pointed out that the bill as written is too broad and might actually encourage discrimination against gays and lesbians.

In Oregon, the state Bureau of Labor and Industries has ordered a dentist, Andrew Engel, to pay nearly $348,000 to resolve allegations that he threatened to terminate a dental assistant unless she went to three-day religious conference on Scientology. The assistant refused because she believed that the conference would conflict with her Christian beliefs and offered to attend a secular conference instead. The dentist refused, and the assistant quit her job.

While the facts are still coming out about this Oregon case, it would be interesting to know what the response would have been if a Scientologist had been required to attend a Christian-themed motivational session.

In the infamous New Mexico Supreme Court ruling against Elane Photography, the court said that people like Elaine must abandon their freedom as “the price of citizenship.” That should not be. But the answer is not to blow up the system with broad bills such as Idaho’s HB 426 and HB 427 which will create even more problems.

A delicate balance must be struck when handling cases where the religious beliefs of employees and employers are at odds. Maybe there is room for exemptions for individual creative works, and for small businesses and sole proprietorships so that Elaine Huguenin is not forced to develop creative materials that violate her conscience and small bakers aren’t forced to make wedding cakes that violate their conscience. Maybe there is room in the Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood cases for the employees to opt in or out of insurance policies offering abortion drugs, maybe aggrieved parties in Idaho should pursue the remedies already available under current law. And in those times when employers do step over the line, and when employees claim the employer was coercive, the remedy should be proportional to the harm caused.

Parties to these kinds of disputes should be well-served if they cooperatively seek solutions by identifying and respecting those specific personal areas which are non-negotiable and cordoning them off, while respecting the freedom of the areas in between where both sides must intersect. Identifying and preserving these areas of respect and finding opportunities for accommodation is not an easy process in today’s ideologically divided world, but the results will be much more profitable for both sides than engaging in perpetual conflict in the public arena. At the same time, the religious rights of the participants on both sides to belief and practice would be honored and protected.

This article was published with permission by the editors of ReligiousLiberty.TV.
Linda asked me to post a few additional details:

She says: — We have one more place that out-of-town guests could stay:

-Apple Country Bed and Breakfast: (http://applecountryinnbb.com/) Phone: 509-972-3409. They are holding the whole house for us until mid-March at which time they will accept reservations from others as well.

-Located about 1 mile west of our house on the Old Naches Hwy (about 7 miles from the church) -They have 4 rooms in their house: 2 upstairs (these have a shared bath – if you don’t want to share then they will rent just one room upstairs) and 2 downstairs as well as a 2-person separate cottage. -When you make reservations let them know you are here for Jay Sloop’s service since they are taking reservations only for us until mid-March

— If possible, we also want to plan for meals for out-of-town guests and thus we need to know how many would like to eat with us.

-Friday Supper: For those coming in on Friday I am planning a simple soup/fruit/bread supper at my house -Sabbath Breakfast: Most of the hotels will provide breakfast, but let me know if you need something – we would be happy to have you here for breakfast as well -Sabbath Lunch: Visitors potluck at our church (you won’t need to bring food – but I do need an approximate number of people coming for those preparing the food -Please don’t feel that you are inconveniencing us at all. I have friends from church that will be doing most of the cooking and while the occasion is difficult – time with family and friends is treasured.

Please email me at: lindasloop@gmail.com as soon as you know your plans and let me know which meals you will be here for and how many will be coming with you. Then I will be able to contact you with further details as we have them.

Thank you for coming and sharing your memories of Dad and for your love and support to all of us.

-Linda
We need to get a post up so you can make your plans.

We would like to invite you to a celebration of Jay Sloop’s life.

We don’t know Dad’s status at this point, and we are not asking that you see Dad’s status in any particular way either. Some people we know, are quite certain that Dad must not still be alive. Others feel that he must still be alive, and that we’ll get some answer soon.

But no matter what you might believe, we are left without him in our lives right now. We’d like to take time to remember who he is and was, what things were important to him, and reminisce on the time he spent with us.

So, we invite you to celebrate with us, the memory of Jay Sloop, as bittersweet as that may seem in the moment.

When: April 26, 2014, at 3:00 PM Where: Yakima SDA Church 507 N 35th Ave Yakima, WA 98902

There may be some changes to the details, though we have set the date definitively. For those of you coming from out of town, here are some details that may make life easier.

— Getting to Yakima: - There are 3 flights into Yakima with Horizon Airlines (Alaska Airlines). If you are flying to Seattle on Alaska you can add the flight to Yakima for about $40 more each way. If you are flying on another airline it is usually quite a bit more to fly into Yakima. - There is also a shuttle from the Seattle airport to Yakima. Check http://www.airporter.com/schedules/schedules-rates-cwa for information on schedules and prices (~$40 each way)

Some options on lodging: - Comfort Suites: 3702 Fruitvale Blvd, Yakima, WA 98902 – phone: (509) 249-1900 [This is the closest hotel to the church (about 1 ½ miles). They only have “suites” available.] - The Oxford Inn (http://www.oxfordinyakima.com/) - Oxford Suites (http://www.oxfordsuitesyakima.com/) These are both near the Yakima River and Greenway (a walking path along the river) and only about 5 miles further away. [Rooms at the Oxford Inn start around $89]

Reserving rooms for group rates is difficult when we have no idea how many people might come into town and need a place to stay. We suggest that you use discounts available to you, such as AAA senior discounts etc. These are often lower than group rates anyway.

If you’re planning on coming with an RV or 5th wheel trailer, there are numerous places for hookups and places to stay. - Suntides Golf course RV park is probably the closest.

Finally, since we have absolutely no idea how many local and out-of-town people to expect at the service, could you please take a moment to let us know your name and how many people in your party to expect. This will help us plan for the facility and all the related details!

Please email/text: gregs@sloop.net, 503.515.7379. Thanks again.

-Greg

This post has been lingering in my documents folder since mid November. I’ve gone back to edit it multiple times since then, and I’ve never been able to get it done and ready to post.

Shortly after I wrote this, Mom started having some serious issues with her hearing, and with the holidays and helping Mom, I’ve not had
time to return to it.

So, it’s really, really late, but I’ll post it anyway.

— Nov 17, 2013

A few days ago, we passed one of those “milestones” – though not one of the better variety – the 14th was the six month point since Dad disappeared. As if the milestone of “six months” isn’t enough, it will also be Dad’s birthday in just a few days.

It’s not a happy occasion – it brings up a lot of issues one ponders: -Will we ever see Dad again? -Is Dad still alive? How likely is it, that he is alive? -What should we continue to do to look for him? -Is there more we should do, or were there things we didn’t do that we should have done? -What would Dad want us to do, in looking for him, and in living our lives without him?

If you were expecting answers to those questions, you’re probably going to be disappointed. I simply don’t have any.

I have some ideas for myself, but each of us reach our views independently and, at least for me, it’s important to allow others to have their own process and honor that as much as I can. We each grieve and feel in unique ways – and we probably cause ourselves a lot of unnecessary angst by expecting others to do things “our way.”

So, I simply feel my way forward each day. Every day brings new challenges and new obstacles to get over. So, we take each one as it comes – and do our best to be true to our ideals, honor Dad, and take care of each other.

— I’m sure there are a million questions you have. The one I hear most is: “Is there any word.”

I just read a card my Mom got, saying that they check nearly every day, hoping there would be some miracle and that Dad would be coming home.

Earlier this week, I had a dream of Dad coming back – and it’s a little disorienting waking up and knowing it’s not really true.

So, let me take a few minutes and tell you what kinds of things we’re working on, and have heard. -As you might imagine – the active phase of searching is really over. While we’re told the authorities went out and re-searched the park mid September, we’re not organizing any searches ourselves. We don’t have many resources in the Ukraine and unless we get some specific information pointing to some specific thing that could be useful, we’re mainly in a “wait-and-see” mode.

-I follow up with our contacts in the Ukraine regularly – and we still have the hotline active where people can call with information.

-Yet with all that – we essentially have no better information as to what happened than we did within hours of Dad’s initial disappearance. Thus, we really have precious little to share – there just isn’t much new to tell you about.

— One other thing that happens regularly is that people discuss what might have possibly happened.

I can assure you that we, as well as all the experts, have pondered very long and hard what could have happened, and there’s just no easy explanation. Each theory we’ve pondered has serious issues that make it seem less than totally plausible.

So, while I wish we had some idea what happened, and why – we just don’t. For now, at least, we’ll have to be content with having little insight because there simply isn’t any to be had.

— It continues to be tough for Mom. She feels lonely, anxious and worried. As in any relationship, there are things that your partner always does – and when they’re gone you get to learn how to handle all those things on your own.

But learning how to handle all those things that simply got done before, while also processing your grief and sorrow make it all that much harder. Despite that, however Mom is doing incredibly well, all things considered. She’s growing in so many ways – and it’s delightful seeing her blossom in new ways.

I’m sure she doesn’t see it much – she’s still reeling from the difficult events, hoping for a better resolution, and simply making it through each day – but we see it, and we couldn’t be more proud.

I was talking with her yesterday, and she was remarking on all the wonderful cards and notes you’ve sent her. There were a couple on the table in the kitchen and I read them – the thoughts were very kind.
Mom wanted me to be sure to say that she’s been so cared-for and thankful for the notes you’ve written. She wanted to be sure we took the
time to give special thanks and recognition for all you have done and continue to do. [You each know who you are!]

So, while it doesn’t feel like nearly enough: Thanks!

[And if I could ask, please continue to give her your love and care. Some of you can give her a hug and let her know you care. Others can
call and have a nice visit with her. I know life does go on, and it's easy to have our lives return to normal - I get that - but her life is still in
tatters. She still needs your care and love. So, do try to keep her in your thoughts, and do remember that she would so appreciate your love
and care.

--- A few tips for interacting with her; I know that Dad's situation is what first comes to mind when you see Mom - but it isn't the only thing
you can talk about. You can tell her, what you've been up to, and ask her what she is working on, or what plans she has.

Questions are good like that: You can ask what she's working on, or other thing about her life and let her lead the conversation where she
wants it to go.

The last tip I'd give is this: Please don't re-hash what you think happened to Dad. Believe me, we've discussed nearly every possible
variation of what could have happened - and, as I have already said, there are problems with all of them. And there have been several
conversations about this specific topic the last few weeks that I know about. One specifically speculated about how Dad might have been
abducted and why.

That left Mom with ugly images and thoughts in her head for days. As you can imagine - that's not the most fun way to spend a week. But I
also don't want to worry you excessively with a bunch of "do's and don'ts" We all make mistakes and everyone is doing their best. Do your
best. Remember how you'd like to be treated, and go forth with good will in your heart. [I'm sure you'll do fine!]

— Finally… I’ve had many comments about the “stories” I’ve told in the past – so I’ve been thinking about what story I might tell next.

For some reason, this one is one that seems appropriate. It’s not really about Dad – but more about the brothers. Well, the _dog_ and the
brothers.

“The dog” was “Tessa” – she came to live with us when I was still quite young. I’d guess I was somewhere between six and eight. That
would mean that Rick and Randy would have been in their early teens.

Tessa was a short-hair red dachshund, and she was a coveted companion. I was, I’m sure, less than kind to her at times. But I always
wanted her to love me and I wanted her to be glad to be with me.

Yet that didn’t always happen, and as siblings do, Tessa often became a focal point of tension. She seemed to prefer Randy especially, and
one of the brothers would often come, get her excited and then she’d run away from me and stay with them.

Yet Tessa was a good thing too. I remember going into Ricks room one morning and seeing he’d gotten some snack – it was a handful of
some precious sugary breakfast cereal [which we only rarely got] – and was eating it one piece at a time. Yet, every other piece went to
Tessa. One for Rick – one for Tessa – one for Rick – one for Tessa…

There is one other mission that Tessa came by that was rather interesting too.

As you can imagine – accidents and no-so-accidents happen often in a family of three boys. And Tessa often came into her own as a healer.

The unwritten rule was: Once you laugh you can’t be injured all that badly and so continuing to sulk and claim injury to the adults was
nearly equivalent to fraud.

So, some trick or conflict would end with someone [usually me] getting some injury. Since I was much younger, the chance of my getting,
what I felt, was “just” retribution was pretty unlikely.

So, my weapon [at least according to my brothers] was to milk injury as far as possible – because if I could involve the adults – I might get
some measure of “justice.”

So it was always a battle of PR. Me: Attempt to play up injury and injustice. My brother(s): Attempt to play down injuries and to keep
wails of outrage and injury to a minimum.
Enter Tessa.

I think it was Randy who came up with the idea. He seemed to have the dog with him everywhere, and used the dog with the most effectiveness – but Tessa became “Emergency Doctor”!

When I was injured in some battle, and wails were likely she would come into play.

I can imagine my brothers casting about, trying to figure out the way to escape that first predicament. What could cause their little brother to forget his injuries, or failing that, at least laugh; because once the victim laughs, the crisis is averted!

Then, I’m sure the first time, the light dawns. Tessa! “What a brilliant idea!” I’m sure they were thinking.

We’ll bring out Tessa as the wonderful heal-all dog and all will be well.

So, the routine was: Someone would rush off to grab Tessa and with the usual older-brother generated sirens and other sound-effects and cries of “Emergency Doctor, Emergency Doctor, Emergency Doctor” – Tessa would be rushed to the scene of the injury to offer “treatment.”

Inevitably, Tessa would provoke some laugh or chuckle from me and, crisis averted, life would return to normal once again.

Even today, the mention of “Emergency Doctor” comes up and we all remember those days from long ago.

Today is Lisa and my 25th Wedding anniversary. [And no, this isn’t a not-so-subtle troll for compliments!]

But I’m trying to take some of the day off and spend it with her. [She’s napping, right this second, so you’re not “robbing” her, and I’m not guilty either. (At least not guilty for that, anyway:)]

But I think of the many years my parents had together up to this point, and the uncertainty about the future, and I genuinely feel for my mom.

It’s been hard for her to contemplate a life alone if Dad never comes home and I really understand that desire to have someone to share your
life with.

So, I guess I’ll just say that my heart goes out to my mom, and I hope that she continues to gain strength and hope – that I understand, at least a little, how hard it must be. And I know that many of the rest of you also want her to know how much you care.

…and I must say, [without this mention excluding any other group] that the people at her “Sunday” church where she plays [Englewood Christian Church] have been incredible! Yes, incredible!

Wow, are you folks awesome or what?!

She’s mentioned how wonderfully caring, loving and enveloping you have been, especially the last few weeks.

Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it! It’s been wonderful to see. Thanks!

I don’t have a story thought out for this post – and doing one will take a lot longer than the nap is scheduled to last – so you’ll simply have to do without.

—

I do have one other piece of business:

I know some check the site regularly for updates, but others of you want to know when we know anything more, but don’t get a chance to check as regularly.

What I’d like to ask you to do is to submit your email address to the list-serv.

The list-serv works like this…

When I have an update, or a new post, or some other piece of news we’d like you to hear, I’ll post a notice on the list-serv. If you have subscribed, and have given us your email – you’ll get that notice delivered to your email box.

Then I can include the update, either in the email itself, or send a link you can follow to the blog.

But this allows us to “push” an update to you, rather than having to check the site all the time … and if you forget, you miss something.

So, please, sign up by following this link and giving us your email address. We won’t share your address with anyone else and you can unsubscribe at any time.

Subscribe here:  http://www.sloop.net/mailman/listinfo/jrs-search_sloop.net

Once you subscribe on the web-page, you’ll get an email asking for confirmation. That’s “normal.” Simply click the link in the email you get, to confirm your subscription, and you’ll be all set. [If you don't confirm, however, you won't be subscribed and won't get the updates via email. It's a two-step process.]

Thanks! -Greg

A few house-keeping things first.

1) Comments – to keep down blog-spam, we disable the ability to *make* or add comments after a post has been up a week. After that, you can read comments, but not make any. There are some technical features we can add that might help that, but for now, that is where things stand.

When the ability to make comments “auto-magically” stops, then they appear to disappear from the post entirely, since they don’t show up in the same place as before. But they are not gone, you can still read them, and here’s how.

**Simply click on the title of any post.** This will open up that particular post alone. At the bottom of the page/post, you’ll see the comments that have been left.

2) I’ll try to be a bit more regular making posts. I needed a break, and life kind of got away from us – you know, all the things that happen in summer. We had all of Lisa’s family in town for several weeks, and visited relatives. Trying to catch back up with work was, and is, still an issue. But I’ll do my best to at least note what’s happening and let you know where we are.
— It has been a pretty busy few weeks.

We have been trying to get some answers about a few things that require local law enforcement to run down some details. It has taken quite a while to get that in order, but hopefully we’ll know more soon. The details may well not give us any meaningful answers to the question of what occurred with Dad’s disappearance, but we won’t know until we check.

I’ve had contact with several people in Kiev – there have been continued false-positive sightings. They run down all the tips we get, but they always seem turn out to be incorrect identifications.

We have been told the Kiev police are/were going to search the park again, with dogs. I’m never sure what to think about this. On one hand, I’m glad to hear about continued effort to find Dad. On the other, I wonder how he could have been missed in the park, given the repeated and very, very through searches that have already occurred. I guess we’ll just see what it brings, if it happens.

Mom has really enjoyed the many kind thoughts many of you have sent. She especially has enjoyed some of the bible promises and encouraging quotes from books and the like.

I’ve talked to her nearly every day since Dad went missing – often more than once each day. And in those conversations she has expressed many of the emotions and feelings you’d expect.

“Why” is the one question that always comes up.

Mom worries that she won’t be able to do all the things that Dad did, and that if he never comes back she will be hopelessly lost.

Sometimes she feels that God hasn’t watched over Dad so well. And I can’t say that I can find any real fault in feeling that way. I think most all of us would have wished God had intervened more and this whole saga could have been avoided. It’s just tough stuff to work
through.

I know that in my own life, I always want to know “why?” It seems that knowing why would make things easier to understand, easier to live with, or perhaps show the “justice” of the situation. [Or perhaps give me license to feel unfairly wronged, because it was unjust.]

But I have found that often [at least in my own life], even when I do know the why, it isn’t really as comforting as I thought. It doesn’t really make me feel a lot better than I did before I knew the “why.” That still doesn’t stop me from wanting to know “why” though. It’s a very hard thing to give up.

Mom is simply working through each day, each hour, sometimes, each minute just one after the other.

A few weeks ago, we were chatting and Mom said, “I just tell myself, I can get through the next five minutes.” One part of me was sad to see my Mom so full of grief, so fearful, so anxious. But the other part of me wanted to cheer. I wanted her to know I was so very proud of her courage to stand up and just work to get through the next five minutes, and then the five minutes after that. The world needs to know, my Mom’s stronger than she thought, she is doing an awesome job in really tough times. She is impressive.

But part of the strength to go through these tough times comes from living through them with people who love you, who care about you deeply and who walk with you.

So, if you would, continue to offer her your ears a lot. Offer her your care and concern. She might need advice, but she, like all of us, generally takes advice a lot better when it’s asked for. [A friend of mine once said: “If they haven’t asked the question yet, they aren’t ready to hear the answer.” And there are no truer words. Even the best, most perfect answer is worse than saying nothing until the hearer is ready to hear it – and asks your advice.]

I’ll just say it once more: I think many of you think Dad is the one who is the strong one, the one with the answers and good ideas, the connection to God. But while Mom is certainly different than Dad, she continues to show incredible strength and connection to God. She’s amazing!

Using the example of Fred Rogers to Tim Madigan:

“Mom, IPOY!”

— So, I’ve wondered what story to tell next…

Dad eschewed lazy days. Hikes needed to be epic. [Well, perhaps not the Rick Sloop kind of epic, but those kinds of trips make “epic” look like a day at the beach…]

One time we; just Dad, Mom and I [Rick and Randy must have been elsewhere] took a few days and went to the Olympic Rain forest. One of those days Dad decided that we ought to do a hike.

When we (mom and I) inquired about the hike, we got an explanation like “Lets do hurricane ridge.” Well, that name doesn’t mean anything to me, or Mom – though the “hurricane” in the name probably couldn’t have indicated a great experience in the works.

We tried to pry more information from Dad about the hike, and honestly, I recall him saying that the hike wasn’t too bad, since it went up a little and then down some. “It’s mostly down.” I think he said.

I know all things are relative, but I wasn’t expecting what we got.

To start, the hike Dad wanted to do was not a loop. He needed to get us to one end of the trail and the vehicle to the other. Dad has done this several times over the years since, but I think this was the first time – so I don’t recall if he dropped us off, drove the vehicle to the other end, and hitch-hiked back – or if he got someone to drive it to the other end. I think he hitch-hiked back while we waited.

Auspicious start isn’t it? Hurricane Ridge, and hitch-hiking to the trail-head to meet your family you left behind. [What, Dad doesn’t strike you as the long-haired hippie hitch-hiker kind of guy either!]

The hike started out reasonably well. It started climbing quite a bit, but not too long, or too steep. But it was quite a trip to the top of the ridge.

We saw mountain sheep [goats] and lots of very pretty scenery. It was an incredible day in the Olympic forest – blue sky, just nicely warm,
and not a drop of rain. And we were, mostly, enjoying it.

We must have stopped and eaten lunch, but I don’t recall that – I recall the last two-thirds of the hike most vividly.

Yes, it was mostly down. And down, and down and down. Have I mentioned steep yet? And down?

We kept hiking and hiking. Mom and I were spent. Our legs felt like jelly – or at least mine did – I suspect if mine felt that way, Mom’s must have been an order of magnitude worse. Switchback after switchback we’d run/stagger/flippy-flop along and then try to stop before you ran off the trail. The legs kept getting more and more floppy and we were staggering like drunks. I don’t think we complained much, we were simply too exhausted.

It was getting later and later too. If I recall correctly, it must have been mid-morning when we started, and it was after sunset when we finally got out; we reached the motor-home just before you wouldn’t be able to see your own feet in the dark.

Mom barely made it up the steps into the motor-home we had then. I recall being just as bushed too. Did I say anything about epic yet?

I asked Mom about it a few weekends ago, and she said her legs hurt so much that, a few days later, she was going up some stairs so slowly and awkwardly that her friends thought she had suffered some severe injury! She says her legs hurt so badly for days afterward that she could hardly walk.

This was not an atypical Jay Sloop outing. He’d take on as much as he possibly could, and was so eager about the experience he’d do practically anything to get you to go along. Sometimes, that would work out well and other times not so well. [Well usually *he* did fine, but the complaints and reticence to go again from his friends and family didn’t always work out the way he wanted.]

As I’ve said before, he loved being out in nature. Hiking, climbing mountains, back-packing, skiing, riding his bike – these were the things he loved. And he so wanted to encourage others to do it too. He’d invite anyone who showed the slightest interest; friends who visited for a meal with us, acquaintances from Church, just anyone who was even marginally inclined. He was certain that if you gave it a chance, you’d like it just as much as he did. And if there was a flaw in his thinking, that was it – being sure that you’d like it just as much as he did. It was, it seemed, unimaginable that you wouldn’t be as excited, as he, to do it all again the next chance you got. He clearly thought, “What better way to enjoy the out-of-doors except by exercising at the same time?”

I was rather astonished to hear him relate how a patient once told him they’d been out “exercising” by snowmobiling. He inquired why they thought it was aerobic exercise, and they said because their muscles were sore from their jaunt on the snowmobiles.

Dad’s response?! [You can just hear it coming, can’t you!?] He said that someone could beat you with a stick and your muscles would be sore, but that wouldn’t make it aerobic exercise. [Did I mention that he wasn’t always the most tactful or the softest touch when he felt strongly about something?]

Every time I think of this exchange, I both cringe and chuckle. It’s such a “rough” way of explaining things – but it was his way of getting his point across – and he intended well in his advice. He certainly lived his life in a way that was consistent with what he recommended for his patients and family.

As I think of what Dad wanted to impart to everyone – it was a balanced lifestyle. He wanted people to have a full spiritual life; a relationship with their God. He wanted them to have physical health;– exercise, and good diet. He wanted them to have emotional health; less stress, and fulfilling relationships with their families. This was what he was hoping to establish with all his health work – healthy spiritual, mental, and physical people – people who would lead fuller, more meaningful and more complete lives.

No, I haven’t fallen off the face of the earth.
But I haven’t had time to get up a new post, and there’s not a lot of new information to report.

I have a new post nearly ready to go up, but I thought I’d start with a few administrative details and get the new post up a little later in the day.

A while back, someone told me that the “comments” were not showing up, and they couldn’t go back and re-read old comments. I’d set the comments sections to “close” after seven days – this helps cut down on the blog-spam I have to purge. But it has an unintended effect too – it makes it so not only is it impossible to post new comments after seven days, but it apparently also prevents you from even reading the comments. [It removes the links to the comments sections...]

PrintFriendly.com: Print web pages, create PDFs
I’ve changed this – you can now leave and read all the old comments. I’ll see if there is some way you can still navigate to the comments, but not make new comments. [Or perhaps I'll just continue to deal with blog-spam! Within a couple of minutes of re-enabling comments, I already have a block-spam attempt! Ugh! ]

Another item: RSS Feeds. I have not used RSS feed readers for quite a while. But as I’ve reviewed the RSS feed-readers, it seems that “Feedly” is one of the best. However, I doubt it’s going to be a great boon for those who aren’t already fairly technically savvy – and it’s the non-tech-savvy who would benefit from using it the most, I think.

But you’re welcome to see about using it. It’s available for iOS [iPad, iPhone etc] as well as Android and MacOS and Windows. Simply search for it in the iOS store, or the Android Play store. Google searches for the MacOS or Windows versions should get you there too.


Ok, I’ll be back when I have the “real” deal up!

-Greg

Today marks a month since Dad went missing.

It, on one hand, seems like an eternity. But it also seems all of a few days.

Let me first stop to tell you what we know, which isn’t a lot. The police continue to do their work. Investigations are often slow. We hope that this one will bring us some good news. It can be hard, some days, being hopeful.
The police tell us they are still investigating – but the word is always; nothing new, no new leads.

All the thinking we, and all the experts, have done give us no real motive for why this would happen. We can’t imagine any reasonable reason for holding him, or for harming him. It’s hard to imagine someone having a vendetta against Dad either.

So, we are left with the same horribly frustrating feeling – no rational sense for why, who, or even how.

That is difficult. We all like to have order, logic and some semblance of the rational when we try to make sense of things. This event has left us devoid of all that – sense, order, logic, rationality.

Yet we continue to have faith that “He is our God, and we are His people.” We continue to pray for a miracle. We would love it, if you would travel with us; praying and asking God for his will to be done:, for his comfort and care for all of us, for Dad, and for all of you too. We all need it.

— I have a few words of thanks I want to give.

Thanks to all of you who have already offered your prayers, your thoughts and care. Thanks to all who offered their time, their food, their kind words, thoughts, hugs and tears. Thanks for your email and posts. Thanks for the phone calls, the letters, the many thoughtful things you’ve done for us.

I should have done this long ago…

Special thanks to:
Tyler Morgan
Jeff Lamberton
Evan Kinne
Ron Miller
{and all their families.}

These folks dropped everything to go to Kiev and help out in the search. They went into a completely unknown environment to help. I’m sure it worried their families greatly. We cannot say “Thanks,” enough.

And while Jeff Sloop is family, I’ll say that I was incredibly impressed with his skill, level-headedness and generosity. His care for “Granddaddy” shows in his immense desire to find him in good health and bring him home. I’m sorry Jeff that you couldn’t – sorry for us all. But take pride in your effort. You did an incredible job, in an incredibly difficult task.

I’ll also say that I’m very thankful for Lora and Lois, [Mom’s sisters] who came to stay with Mom, and help her. She too is incredibly grateful for their time and care.

To Randy: You went and endured the long hours and the stress. You left no reasonable avenue untried. Then you had to leave without having Dad come home with you. That has clearly been very hard. “Thanks” is such a small word. It seems inadequate. Though I don’t know what more one say? Really, “Thank you!”

Christine kept things going at work and home while Randy was away, and I know she worried – probably a lot more than I know. So, “thanks,” to her too for lending us Randy!

Rick and Linda have watched over Mom this whole time too, handling a million details that only someone being there can do. Thanks for all you’ve done and continue to do.

I’m sure there are many others whose names I’ve left out, who I may not know about, or who helped us unseen. I’m sorry I can’t reach out to each of you individually and tell you how wonderful you have all been – we’ve been so very grateful for all your help. Thanks, so very much.

— Now I know this reads a little like an ending – but I don’t intend it that way. I just don’t want to forget to take the time to tell everyone thanks for all you’ve done.

We want all of you to know we noticed, we saw, we felt your care. And we appreciate all of it – such great helpings of care – we could never begin to repay. We just accept them, grateful to have such wonderful friends who care so much.
Thanks!
— So, let me tell another story.

…I don’t recall exactly how old I was for this story, but I had to be in my late teens.

It’s in the same place I’ve discussed before – due south of “Sourdough gap,” not too far from the summit of Chinook pass.

We had a “father-son weekend” backpack trip with a group from church. It was a short trip, a weekend – hike in Friday night, and back out Sunday. It’s not a long hike, but the trail isn’t good either. There is lots of very heavy brush and slide alder etc. Much of the way, it’s no better than a deer trail – if that.

…So, we arrive in the car, just as it’s getting dark Friday night.

This is typical Sloop fashion – at least these Sloops. Lisa and I can tell you about all the times we’ve finished our hike-in, when backpacking, in the dark – by headlamp. We light the lantern to find a marginally reasonable spot to pitch a tent, and drop off to sleep, exhausted.

[The upside is, when you wake up in the morning – it’s like a surprise – you’ve not seen anything farther than perhaps 30 feet around the tent. But hiking in the dark, tired and late, isn’t the most fun you ever had. Just ask Lisa. J ]

Dad and I get out our packs and things. We get ready to go, and realize that, yes, it’s getting very dark, so even hiking very fast we’re never going to get there before it is pitch black. And when you’re hiking underneath such a thick canopy of brush – even a full moon isn’t going to help much. [Not that I recall any full moon.]

We look around the car. Hmmmm. No flashlights. No headlamps. No lantern.

Ah! A candle though! You know the kind, a stick candle. It was probably half used – with no more than six inches left.

What Dad had a candle in the car for, I’ll never know. And matches… I suppose we *were* backpacking, but even then – having matches was practically a miracle.

We didn’t have any wind-shield for the candle – so the whole idea seemed crazy to me, but we thought we’d try it. We’d hike the one and a half to two miles to the lake from the trail-head by candle light.

So, I hold the candle, and we get out the matches. We light the candle and then carefully walk along.

As you can imagine, a candle doesn’t give off much light – especially to the person behind. So, I’d walk half sideways, holding a hand in front of the candle to try to shield it from the wind and the breeze of walking.

Dad would follow along behind, trying not to stumble over too many things – trying to stay out of the spring/creek that runs along through there. I’d try to watch to be sure he got enough light while trying to watch where I’m going too.

Through all this, I’m trying to be careful not to fall down; Not only because I didn’t want to fall down, but I didn’t want to get burnt by the candle. And worse, wanting to be very sure I didn’t fall, drop the candle and start a fire in the brush. I’m sure starting a fire wasn’t likely, but it seemed there were more than just a few things that could go wrong in any given second.

It seemed incessant that the candle would flicker and nearly go out. I’d hold my breath, try to shelter the candle more, and stop to let the flame grow full again. Then we’d start moving once more.

We had the candle go completely out at least six times during the hike. We’d stop, in the blackness, find each other, make sure we were close enough, dig out the matches and Dad would light the candle again. Often, the match would blow out before the candle lit, and we’d try again [and again.]

As we got near the end of the hike, the supply of matches we had in the book was getting pretty low, and the abrasive strip to light the matches on was getting pretty worn too. I, if not Dad, started to worry about getting stuck in the middle – where we weren’t to our destination and not at the car either, when the matches or candle ran out.

The wax from the candle was by now almost entirely coating my hand and we were down to less than an inch of candle left.
Finally, not a minute too soon, we crested the ridge where the trail goes downhill to the lake, and the trail improves a lot too. It’s a very short walk to where everyone was camped – a few hundred yards or so. We’d made it – or almost.

A few minutes later, with only one more re-lighting ceremony, we arrived where everyone else already had gathered. We were right on time – Sloop time, anyway.

The fire was going and I think everyone else had their tents pitched and ready. We found a place to put ours [in the dark] and then sat around the fire. We cooked dinner and I recall roasting some marshmallows. Dad probably even ate a few – though I don’t recall for sure.

The rest of the weekend was uneventful. We hiked out Sunday morning, so there wasn’t any risk of needing the candle again.

But we had a comfortable time, and it’s one of the last times I recall being out with Dad before I got married. It’s one of those times you remember – a last time before a turn in life changed things so what was, is not the same again.

But Lisa and I have come back quite a number of times to this same spot, both with Dad and without. [I’ll have to tell about the summer we were newly married and went with cousin Janet.]

Remembering these places are impossible without thinking of all the quiet, peaceful times we have spent: Skiing. Backpacking. Day hikes. Some alone; some with Dad. Some with much of the family. Some while young. Some not.

In all of it, I see Dad and his love of the time outdoors. I see now, how he was different, more relaxed, taking life a little slower – though still more driven than I probably appreciated. But the times Dad got away from work, from caring for his patients, and spent them outdoors – I’m sure those were some of his most cherished times. I’m glad I got to be with him for at least a few of them.

I’m glad I did, and I’d still love to have the opportunity to do so again.

-Greg

[Posted with almost no editing – so excuse the inevitable typo’s and grammatical mistakes. I may come back and edit it later, if I get time. So, don't be surprised if it changes some.]
It's funny, but I actually made this post Thursday night. This morning, after some extra sleep, it dawned on me that I might not have made it so the world could see this post. It's interesting what sleep deprivation will do to you huh?

I have no real news about the criminal case the police have started into Dad’s disappearance. I continue to pray for Dad’s return, even when that possibility seems remote.

Right after riding his bike, perhaps even before, Dad’s favorite thing to do was go cross-country skiing. We started long before it was popular. I’m not sure how we came to know about REI back then but it was in the early days of REI. Like I said, I remember the tar and creosote smell, and the old original building back in the early 70’s. [It’s too bad there wasn’t a way to move that smell to the new building.]

I remember a few of the early trips to REI when I was quite little. I vaguely remember getting the cross-country skis – but I mainly remember longing over the Toblerone Chocolate. Such cute triangular packaging, and they smelled wonderful.

One of our favorite places to go when we go into the woods is around the area where the Pacific Crest trail crosses Highway 410, or the Chinook Pass highway. The view of Mt. Rainier is incredible from the summit, and all along the pacific crest trail from Sourdough gap to Pickhandle point is incredibly beautiful.

If you’re interested, you can find it in Google maps, here:

I remember many winters cross-country skiing into the area just below placer lake to a little cabin. We only occasionally got to go into the cabin since we didn’t have a key or really know anyone who did, but we’d often ski up to it and eat lunch outside.

I was quite a lot younger and less stout than my brothers so skiing up to the cabin was a pretty tall order. I remember just slogging through it many, many times.

That ski trip isn’t what many people think of when they think cross-country skiing. It’s NOT rolling hills and endless kick and glide. It is steep going up, and often icy and treacherous going back down. And this was in the days when you didn’t have wax-less skis that climbed well in any snow.

Back then, you used a torch and melted some gooey tar stuff into the base of wooden [not fiberglass] skis. [I really don’t know what the gooey black stuff was, I just remember it bubbled like a witch’s brew, and looked and smelled quite a lot like some kind of tar.]

Then you’d have several kinds of waxes, of varying softness you’d rub on the bottom of your skis. The wax had to be soft enough to “catch” the snow when you stepped down on the ski – that would give you grip. Then when you slid forward on the ski, the snow would release, and you’d glide.

Well, that was what was *supposed* to happen. And, if you picked the right wax, I’m told it would happen. But it seemed, in my experience, that you were just as likely to run across the Easter-Bunny, the Tooth-Fairy and Santa Claus all at the same time, as to get the
wax just right.

Either the wax was too hard and your skis slid nicely, but gripped nothing, or you got too soft of wax and the snow would just glob up on the bottom of your skis and you’d never slide anywhere. If it was bad enough, the ski wouldn’t even stand flat for the ball of snow on the bottom.

If the skis didn’t grip, you’d have to stamp each foot down as you went up the trail. You’d carefully place your poles behind you, pushing hard with your arms, and gingerly step forward. About 90% of the time, as you’d take a step, the ski you were standing on would suddenly start sliding backwards. If you were lucky you didn’t fall down and lose more ground than you’d just covered in that step. If you were unlucky you got to dig yourself out of the snow, dust it out of your pants, boots and gloves, struggle to your feet and try that whole process over.

Ok, I’m probably wrong, it wasn’t 90%, it was more like 95% of the time.

Climbing with too soft of wax was usually pretty great, unless it was way too soft – then it was terrible both ways. But once you got to the top, and were prepared for an easy trip back to the car, it was infuriating! You’d be trying to slide and glide and no matter what you did, you couldn’t get the skis to slide. They’d just stop. And then you’d stand with one leg up in the air to scrape the snow off the bottom of the ski. Usually this maneuver would end with you falling over.

Being young and less physically skilled, I can remember how frustrated and discouraged I’d get. The socks would make my ankles itch and hurt. I’d get wet. I would be so exhausted and tired. I probably spent more time laying in drifts and eating snow than actually skiing.

But Dad would stay with me, and encourage me to get up and try some more. I can’t say I remember these early trips with fondness. But I think Rick and Randy both enjoyed skiing a lot. As I got older, I started to enjoy it more too.

Dad clearly loved skiing. Every weekend we had the opportunity, we’d be up skiing. I know many times he, Rick and Randy skied far up the valley and enjoyed the incredible sights.

The quietness of the snow-covered forest is incredible. When the sun was out, the snow would sparkle and flash. The air was crisp and clean. Green evergreen trees, covered with snow. Blue, blue sky, flashing sparkles as the snow reflected the sun and sky – it was simply spectacular.

…and eating snow. There’s something just incredible about it. I still like it today – it’s probably the first thing I think of when I see snow!

I may not have always loved the skiing, but I’ve always thought snow was simply amazing for its beauty. In my opinion, there’s just nothing that compares!

On one of these outings I had a bird eat out of my hand for the first time. It was right near the cabin on a sunny winter day. A hungry Gray Jay was eager to eat the crust of my PBJ. I didn’t realize it until later that they will practically take the whole sandwich out of your hand, unbidden. But at the time, it was an awesome experience I shared with Dad on a day where I, mostly, enjoyed the skiing.

Even earlier in my life, I recall a few years when we got very little snow in the mountains. I only vaguely recall the finer details – I was probably six to eight years old at the time.

Usually the Chinook Pass highway closes at Morris Creek at the beginning of the winter. The road is quite exposed and many snow avalanches come down over the road. So, they close the road in November or so, and reopen it in the spring.

Yet that year, the road stayed open. Except for the very top of the pass, there just wasn’t much snow.

But I remember going somewhere, I think near the summit, to a place where there was a big hill. Rick and Randy built a jump at the bottom of the hill and spent what seemed like hours climbing up, skiing down and flying over the jump in our Nordic, wooden, cross-country skis.

There’s another “feature” of the old wooden skis that only a few managed to discover. The tips of the skis are definitely breakable. And once you’ve broken the tip of your ski, it doesn’t ski so well anymore – at least not on the top of the snow.

Randy, if I recall correctly, broke more than one ski over the years. We ended up buying an emergency plastic replacement ski tip at, where else, REI. I don’t think any of us even knew such a thing existed, or that you’d even need one, until it happened to us the first time. But it did allow the poor victim to get back to the car without too much trouble.
Once back home, I remember Rick and Randy fashioning and gluing a lamination patch and sanding the patch+ski down. I don’t recall exactly how well that worked, but I don’t think it was so great, because I don’t recall seeing those skis for long.

Going out skiing was one thing the Sloop boys did regularly with Dad. And I think the memories we all have are of quiet, astonishingly beautiful scenery spent with Dad.

I know that while Randy and I are not around to go skiing with Dad anymore he has continued to go up and enjoy the snow with Rick and Linda and their family. I’ve heard he’s started using snowshoes as he worries about falling more than he used to.

Years past he would have scorned snowshoes – they weren’t his idea of the thing to use. But now that it is snowshoes or nothing, it’s amusing that snowshoes aren’t so bad anymore. I’m sure that’s an adjustment, yet it’s an indication of how much he loved the snow, being out in nature and the pleasure that it brought him.

I’d love to get a chance to go enjoy the snow with Dad again. I’d probably even have fewer excuses about why we couldn’t go – we’d slow down our lives, I think. Perhaps we wouldn’t take so many things as given and stable. We know now, more than ever, they aren’t.

-Greg

I don’t have any news about the criminal investigation that’s on-going in the Ukraine. I’m not sure if we’ll get any information, and if we do, it may well just be “We are still investigating…” which doesn’t tell us a lot either.

So, we continue to wait. We continue to pray too.

But we have been showered with wonderful treasures since we came home. I almost feel guilty, since I think my Mom deserves them more than I/we do.

I’ve had contact with friends I rarely get a chance to talk to. [Mostly my fault...]

I’ve had cards and letters that have been incredibly touching. We’ve had notes and texts that are so very kind.

Last night we had just climbed into bed, trying to get some extra sleep [though it was 10p, so it wasn’t exactly early] and “ding-dong” the doorbell rings!

Who in the world is ringing the doorbell at 10p – and unannounced, we wonder. I throw on some clothes – no need scaring the person at the door – and wander out to the front door. I open the door, wondering who I will see? A neighbor? A horribly misguided door-to-door salesperson?

Well, there was not a soul in sight when I opened the door – but there was a beautiful Orchid there. It had a note attached. [Yup, that's it up there!]

It was a gift from some unspecified friends from the church we attend here. They call it “being ROILed” – where the ROIL is some acronym. We’ve participated in the past, giving gifts to others – but I, for the life of me, can’t remember what the acronym stands for.

The idea is to “sneak” up to the unsuspecting recipient and deliver a gift without being seen – an anonymous, small charitable, caring act for them.

And tonight, I’d been working at a client’s until nearly 7:30p – everything took way longer than I thought it should...like five hours longer. <ugh>!

We’d met at noodles for a simple dinner – and while we ate, Rachelle worked on science, prep’ing for a test tomorrow. [I don't ever recall having to learn that much when I was in fifth grade!]

Lisa had a few things to do on the way home, so I took Rachelle in my car. When we turned onto our street, we noticed something on the door-step from a couple of blocks away.

Rachelle immediately says “So-and-so” was turning on to the main street as we turned in. Ms. So-and-so issued a non-denial-denial when I texted her my suspicions. But again, we had a very nice thoughtful gift. Something for each member of the family – including Rosie, our darling little mini-dachshund.

[And for those of you who aren't good friends of ours, or who don't go to our church - I'll let you know of a little "heresy." We take Rosie to
church - not just occasionally, but most every week. So, that she would be treated too, only seems fair and especially nice that they remembered her.

So, I’m so touched – wonderful friends, true caring, such gentle and empathetic friends. Lisa started to tear up when she saw the card.

What inadequate words there are to express our feelings. But “Thank you” will have to do.

We love you all too.

-Greg

Last night we were all sitting in the living room with Mom. It was Lisa, Rachelle and I, along with Rick & Linda, Randy & Christine with their kids Katie and Jacob. Sasha and Josh were there too, along with Stella [A great-grandchild.] We missed Jenny and Jeff – though Jenny had joined us the evening before via skype [and when that eventually failed, facetime.]

Many of us had had a difficult day. There are so many things that remind us of Dad and that brings up the uncertainty we have about him...all the questions one has: What happened? Why? How could that happen, or how could we have prevented it. Why us? When will we see him again?

You know, all those hard questions that there aren’t any great answers for right now.

But that doesn’t stop us from wanting answers. It doesn’t stop us from thinking about it. And it is hard feeling these feelings and watching others struggle with many of the same feelings.

Yet, even with the hard emotions, this weekend was a really incredible experience where we enjoyed the friendships and care with all these truly precious people who are part of our family. We feel incredibly fortunate, incredibly blessed.

I got to sit at dinner and hear the grand-kids talk about their camping trips with Granddaddy [Jay] and all the crazy things that happened. [And I’m sure I only know the smallest part of it.]

In closing, let me say. While it’s one of the hardest weekends I’ve had in a long time, it was one of the most rewarding too.

I wish I was closer to all the kids – Jenny, Jeff, Katie, Jacob, Sasha. Each is so wonderful to watch and brings their unique personality.

[Sloop Grand-kids: Should you ever need something, someone to talk to – I’d be honored to be the person you come to. I wish the best for each of you.]

I wish I were closer to my brothers too. It’s not, at all, like we’re estranged – but life and a million other things that, at the time seem terribly compelling, always seem to come between us and really connecting. I’d like to change that too. So, I’ll try. I may not succeed, but I’ll try.
Anyway – the summary is; Along with many sad times, we also really had some enjoyable and very meaningful times too. It would be really nice to keep doing that, and even better if we could do it with Dad too.

-Greg

Rick had a few things he felt were important to post here, and then Randy did some editing. I’m just going to post their thoughts here – with no editorial control from me.

-Greg

As we come to the end of our search activities and rely on what the police and SBU are doing in the criminal investigation, mom is trying to “reintegrate” – go to church – and the store and the gas station – trying to take up life again. So I thought I’d share a few ideas on what to say (or not to say) upon meeting. These ideas could apply more generally to other family members – but especially to mom.

Greetings The one greeting that we all use all the time is “How are you Sharlene?” But there is no good answer to the “how are you?” question. Should she say “Terrible”?, or “OK”?, or “Great”? None of these answers seem appropriate. And further, the question “How are you?” invites a discussion of all those deep and awful emotions that grip her (and us) in a time like this – and you might be the 24th person to ask this question today! Revisiting those emotions over and over each day – and putting them into words over and over – just makes recovery harder. In fact, our own speech has the single largest impact on our emotions- even larger than the words we hear others say. This is one reason Paul says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8 (or we could just as well say “speak about such things!”) So even though it is second nature to ask this “how are you?” question, consider trying a different approach.

So what do you say when you see mom?? You can’t just pretend nothing has happened! Maybe better greetings would include “So good to see you…”, “We’ve been missing you…”, “We’ve been praying for you…”, “We’ve been praying for Jay…”, “We’ve missed your music…”, “So good to see you playing again…”, (mom is a musician – organ and piano — and you can probably give this greeting honestly even if you don’t like organ music!) etc., etc. Then she can respond “Thank you so much” but not be forced to repeat everything that has happened. And of course you can always tell mom your favorite Bible text. These are so encouraging.

What would be best NOT to say. I would recommend avoiding, “Did you think of this…”, “Did you try that…”, “What about calling so and so…”, “What if you tried…”, “If only…”, etc etc. First, mom has not been directing the search or making decisions about what to do next. Further, almost every imaginable idea and possible solution has already been explored. While those discussions and findings have not been posted on the blog, be assured that the investigation has been both exhaustive and comprehensive. While these questions or suggestions may be well intentioned, they reopen inappropriate feelings of guilt that maybe she did not do enough. She has those thoughts anyway, and part of the healing process is to get beyond these issues.

What can you say about dad? You can always say things like “Jay delivered my two kids…”, “He was the best doctor I ever had…” (only if it’s true of course!), or “I loved to hear his health talks – they were so practical!” or “Jay was so encouraging to me when…” or “Remember that time when…” (recollections of a good memory).

Speculation And lastly, this might seem obvious, but don’t speculate on what happened… “How Jay died…”. We don’t know what happened or how he might have died. At this point we do not even know for sure that he is dead. So these imaginings are never good ones to think on.

Thank you for what you have done. People have been helping in so many ways. And the support from everyone, those at home and those far away, has been amazing indeed and truly appreciated. So, thank you for all your prayers – your encouragement – your friendship. These mean more than ever in the rough times!

Financial issues. Many people have called and offered to help financially. Thank you for your offers, but we are able to cover our expenses within the family. If you wish to contribute in a financial way, Adventist Risk Management is keeping a separate fund for the development of Kyiv Adventist Medical Center. This is the reason that dad went to the Ukraine to begin with. It has been on a bumpy path for the last several years, but has been getting close to opening. If you feel that you would like to help with this project you may make checks payable to:

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists [Mark them as donations to the Kyiv medical center.]

Mail them to: Att: Bob Kyte Adventist Risk Management 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring MD 20904
Today does not bring us any new news in finding Dad. We’ve looked everywhere, followed every clue. We’ve done all we could, but still no word on where Dad might be.

Yet today marks a change in where we are. Randy wrapped up all the remaining sightings and such yesterday. The park has been searched over two or three days by another even more experienced set of people than ever before. Multiple dogs were brought in to see what they might find, and all these efforts have turned up, essentially, nothing.

Last night, Randy boarded a flight back to the United States and home. We had booked a ticket for Dad on the same flight, and hoped that some new lead, some critical piece of the puzzle would, perhaps, fall into place, and that Dad would be able to come home.

Yet, that ticket we’d held for Dad went unused.

So, where does that leave us?

It leaves us simply not knowing what happened or why. We are told the police and SBU are still pursuing a very active investigation. We still don’t know, with any certainty, if Dad is alive or not, or being held by someone or not.

So, at this point, we let the police investigation run its course. That could be long, or it could be short – we have no way of knowing.

But for now, there’s really not anything left for us to do. We’ve done all we can possibly do ourselves. We have no reasonable approach, left untried, to locate Dad.

I continue to hope. I continue to pray, and wonder if somehow Dad might still come home. I also have my doubts and down days [or even minutes or seconds.] But I’m not turning the corner on Dad yet. I won’t “forget” about him and assume he is dead. Until we have uncontestable proof, I’ll still continue to hope.

I’m not sure how everyone else will view things and I’m content with however they hold it. The way I hold things isn’t the “right” way –
it’s just “my way.” We all see things differently, and I may see them differently than I did even ten minutes ago.

But clearly we’re entering a new part of this journey.

Does this mean the journey is over? Does this mean I’m giving up? Does this mean I’m not going to write here any more? Does this mean that we don’t need your care, and enjoy every minute of your company?

The overwhelming answer is emphatically “No!”

We are not done. We have not given up. We will continue to need your support, care, love and companionship. I will continue to write as long as it feeds us both in nourishing ways.

Mom needs you too.

We have more to say… We have more journey with you… Won’t you be my neighbor… Won’t you come along…

-Greg

PS. I’m likely to post more information and more complete follow-up later today. We would encourage you to check again later today and tomorrow – we’ll have more information and direction on where we go from here.

Also, you might consider adding the blog to an RSS feed. [If you know what such a thing is….] This would allow you to be alerted by the RSS reader when we post up new information, rather than needing to check “manually.”

If there’s enough interest, I can work on a “how-to” on setting up an RSS reader.

I’m working on a post, right this very second.

It’s not all baked yet. A little more time in the oven is needed. Check back in an hour or two. I’ll have something by then.

-Greg

You’ll have to excuse me a bit. I’ve had a lot less time to proof this than I’d like – but I simply have no more time to spare tonight.

I know that another search of the park is ongoing with dogs and people, and so far nothing has been found to give any indication as to where Dad might be.

More follow-up also occurred with the police and the US embassy.

Finally several more “sightings” were pursued and they turned out to be dead-ends. [I must say that in nearly every case we’ve been offered help, with sightings, offers of assistance etc, they’ve been very generous attempts to help. The people of Kiev have been so wonderful to us, giving of their time and empathy, their care and so very much wishing they could bring Dad back to us. We are so very grateful!]

But the bottom line is that we still have no more idea what happened to Dad than we did yesterday, the day before, or frankly two weeks ago.

So, we continue to hope and pray.

— On that note, we have decided that we will spend another day fasting and praying. We’d invite you, if this is something you’re impressed to do also, to join us. From now to tomorrow evening, we will take special time to meditate and consider our relationship to God and to each other.

Please don’t feel you need to join us – we’d love your company in our journey, but we also realize that this particular part of the journey may not be one you feel called to. We respect that, and wouldn’t have you feel we’re calling you to do anything you’re not comfortable with, or don’t feel called to do.

— So, I’ve been telling stories, and I’ve been pondering what story I might tell next. I was pretty unsure until I remembered this one…
Bikes have a long history in our family. I’ve probably incurred more injuries purely on bikes in my childhood than all the rest of my life combined.

And Dad always liked bikes. He even has a tandem bike – that’s a side-by-side tandem. I just saw it this last weekend parked and forlorn…

In case that didn’t make sense I’ll try again – most tandems (a bike two people can ride at the same time) are long, and the two riders sit one behind the other. But this tandem is one where there is one regular short frame with a bunch of odd modifications and two seats, two handlebars etc, all side by side. But this story isn’t about the tandem – I just mention it so you know how much he likes bikes of all kinds, and probably best of all, company on his rides.

Dad tells the story, and I also recall it, that one night we were riding his bike home from some function at the church. The church is about two miles away from home, and it is substantially up-hill all the way home. At both the start and the end of the trip there are steep hills too.

So, it’s very dark out, and I’m riding along on the rack on the back. I was quite young at the time, I’d guess five or six years old. I don’t
think that bike child-seats existed back then – so yes, it looked third-world – with me simply sitting on the rack behind Dad’s seat and holding on, so one didn’t slide too far forward or back, or get tipped off the side.

As the rider on the rack, you had to watch your feet too, because if they got swung around, they could go in the spokes and that wasn’t so good for me, the bike, or Dad who was riding it. [Yes, I know that first hand. And yes, it did hurt – quite a bit actually. But that’s not this story, so don’t get me distracted or we’ll never get done!]

So, we’re riding along and it’s very dark – long after the sun had gone down – and evidently I instructed my Dad that he clearly wasn’t going fast enough – and that he needed to go FASTER. [I mean really, I’m sitting on this uncomfortable wire rack, trying to keep my feet from getting munched by the spokes and this is just taking *forever* and we need to get there faster!]

Dad was rather amused, I think, and tried to convince me we *were* going fast. No, said I, this is NOT fast. Dad replied that it WAS fast. We argued about exactly how fast, “fast” was – but Dad insisted that we were speedy. If I recall, I then insisted we needed to go “speed-fast,” and a family phrase was born.

To this day, I’ll still hear about things being “speed-fast.”

— Another bike story:

We fairly regularly rode our bikes to Church. I’m sure this was the trifecta – this way Dad could ruin his good suits and clothes, get his vaunted exercise and enjoy life and cycling all at the same time.

Dad has a way of ruining nice clothes by doing all sorts of unusual things in them.

I once watched him tear out the inside of his suit-pants leg, all the way from the crotch to the knee, while heaving around a set of ramps we used to load the tractor on the flat-bed truck. The ramp caught the inside of the pant-leg and snagged. Since the ramps were so heavy, the rest was just gravity taking hold. Other pants hems were eviscerated by bike sprockets and chains. Once he tore out a suit-jacket as he ran up the steps at the hospital. As he rushed by the handrail, the end somehow slipped into the suit-coat pocket and the jacket was no match for his momentum.

Thus, the nice clothes wouldn’t be the slightest impediment to riding a bike to church.

As I said in the last story, there is big hill right near the church. Going home, it would be uphill, but going to church would be downhill.

But it’s not all downhill. The main street goes downhill, and then you’d have to make a right turn, climb a short steep hill and arrive at the church, mostly at the top of the ridge.

But, this block has a funny feature. Between the two streets – the downhill and the uphill one – is a street that cuts the block in half, with a quarter-circle. So, if you took the quarter-circle, you’d miss some of the downhill and some of the up-hill. Missing the downhill wasn’t such a great thing, but missing the sharp climb was quite nice – especially with a little boy hanging on the back. [Yes, the same wire rack, same spokes and same precarious perch.]

And if you really got up some speed, you could zoom part way up the steep uphill portion and that would make it easier.

So, we veer right off the main street onto the quarter-circle. But this was spring-time.

In the winter, on hills, the sand and gravel trucks would come by and drop grimy, sandy grit on the road -which was probably a good thing when it was snowy and icy, but not so good when it wasn’t.

We were going too fast by then, I guess, to make much difference, and so there wasn’t much we could do as we started to slide. The bike is tilted to the right to make the turn, and we’re sliding left. Closer and closer, we get to the left side of the road. We tilt lower and lower, right knees getting closer and closer to the pavement.

Fortunately for our skin and clothes, we slammed laterally into the curb before our bodies started dragging along the pavement.

The force of the impact with the curb was almost exactly equal to the force of the bike and us, and so it simply pitched us straight up again, and then the bike tilted clear over and dumped us onto the lawn on the far side of the curb. It really was a gentle landing in nice luscious, green spring grass.
I fully expected us to just get back on the bike and continue as though nothing had happened – that would be the Jay Sloop way, after all. But such impacts aren’t so kind on bicycle wheels. They looked more like figure eights, than straight and true wheels.

As I recall, no one came out of the houses there to chat with us, like they did the time I lost a lot of skin doing something very similar on this very same corner – so we simply hid the bike in their bushes, [Yes, really!] and walked the two or three blocks to church.

After church we returned in the car to retrieve the mangled bike and head home.

What we remember after times like these is interesting.

On one hand, I remember feeling close, amused and mature, engaging with my father in banter that evening.

On the other, I couldn’t ever really understand the fascination of biking everywhere where the risk of scraped or mangled body parts was so real to me. I mean, I like riding a bike – but not if I’m going to crash and burn. I suppose the number of times he’d crashed and burned like that was only a few times in thirty or forty years – while mine was a good half-a-dozen over just a few years. So, I’m sure that impacted my perception of the risk involved.

But while I dreaded the bad stuff that seemed so imminent, I recall times spent with Dad that I didn’t get very often. I remember bright sunny mornings – green grass and flowers. I remember the warm night, riding home from some church function, just Dad and I.

And clearly amnesia must have set in, since my daughter can tell you of the many times I’ve come home banged up and bleeding from my adult misfortunes while biking and skating. So, I’ll take the easy way out and claim the daffiness is just genetic.

Well, that’s all I have for tonight.

Thanks for all your kind emails, posts, cards and calls. We love you too.

-Greg

I don’t have an update from Randy for Tuesday…

I do know that on Sunday, they went to the main subway transfer station and held up a poster with a large version of the flyer on it. They would also hand out a regular size one if someone wanted one.

Many people stopped by and expressed their desire to help and offered their condolences. Randy believes that more than 200,000 people went through the stations and would have been able to see their signs.

Randy had a number of appointments today [Tuesday] with various people, but I’m not exactly sure who or what transpired.

But still the bottom line is that we still have not yet located Dad.

Thanks for keeping us in your prayers and thoughts!

-Greg

It’s been both an “up” day and “down” day for us.

In fact, we can be both up and down, all in the span of probably 90 seconds or so.

But I don’t have time to write. We have not yet located Dad and we continue to search, pray and do our best.

I’ll take time tomorrow to write more.

We thank you for all the nice notes, emails and other ways you have let us know you care.

Thanks!

-Greg
We don’t have any great news or lots of activity from yesterday. There are few leads on where Dad might be, sightings etc.

Yesterday was a quiet day in the search. Many of you following, are also Adventist, and realize the significance of Saturday to us.

Others of you who are not Adventist may not realize the significance of Saturday for us. [What religious label one puts on people, means little to me. I know there are many who know us, or know Dad and who offer their kind words and thoughts who have no organized religion, or are Baptist, Mormon, Catholic, and a myriad of others – I don’t think God puts much stock in our religious affiliation, and a lot more in where our hearts are, and how we respond to his calling of us.]

So, if you’re not acquainted with Adventists, and Saturday – I’ll just give a short description, so perhaps things make a little more sense. Saturday is, to us, God’s day of rest. If you’re aware of how devout Jews observe Saturday that’s pretty close to our observance of “Sabbath” too. From sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night, we try to step away from the rush and bustle of the world, and take special time to spend with God. That generally means not doing work for our own benefit or profit, and not doing many of the things we’d
do any other day of the week.

Again, it’s intended to be a time when we just step out of “regular” work-a-day life to take special time with God to reflect and communicate with him.

Ok, so enough with the mini-theology lesson.

— So, Saturday, we tend to step away from the usual work-day events.

This wouldn’t prevent us from looking for Dad, and it didn’t today either. But given that there’s less and less we can do directly, and more and more that the police are doing – we did take less time actively working on the search, and more time with God.

I know that Sergei and his wife, Randy and others spent time walking the area and checking if posters were still up etc.

They also followed up on reported sightings. These can verge into the ridiculous – but they do need follow-up. In one case, a reported sighting was followed up on, and the person reporting having seen Jay Sloop described his appearance as “someone in their 30’s with a beard and smoking.” Randy commented, wryly that being lost a week did the most unbelievable things with your age, appearance and habits. [Dad, being in his late 70’s, clean shaven, and having never smoked in his life. And one would expect to see him torturing puppies or something, before he smoked.]

We have not heard much if anything from the police. We’re not sure if we will hear anything substantial – at least detail wise – so we may not have lots to tell you in the coming days with any real detail.

I’ve been thinking about some times we spent together with Dad and here’s one trip that comes to mind.

Here in Yakima, we spent quite a lot of time in the mountains. We’d go up on the weekends to cross-country ski, or hike – depending on the season. Spending time outdoors in physically tough exertion [read: death-march, by my definition] was “normal.”

One such trip was to Surprise Lake. I don’t believe I’ve been back since this trip, so I’m sure my recollection of it is probably not accurate. But it’s the recollection of the boy-me, I’m guessing 10-12 years old.

It seemed an endless hike, hot, dusty and all while carrying a heavy pack and climbing up, up, up.

The trivia we recall is interesting too: We came across a bull snake eating a frog. A large frog was only partly in the snake’s mouth, with most of the body and legs still hanging out. I was, and still am, a total softie, and wanted to rescue the frog – but that tendency doesn’t seem as strong in the rest of the family, so I kept my mouth shut. [I don’t care for snakes very much, and like frogs, so that certainly increased my pity for the poor frog.]

However we carried on, and the “death-march” continued. We did eventually arrive in camp, and stayed a couple of nights. [If I recall correctly we went out on Friday and stayed through Sunday morning.]

I don’t recall much of time in camp – I think it was mostly the parts with lots of adversity that I recall best.

So the final morning we were planning to stay rolls around. We start working on breakfast and breaking camp. I may recall this wrong, but I think this is how it happened … we started to eat our hot-cereal [not a Greg favorite anyway] and it just tasted off.

After several queries about what was odd about the cereal, we learned that there had been a complication that was fixed in a particularly Dad-Jay way.

As it turns out, the amount of cereal needed for the trip had been insufficient. So, when Dad added all the cereal to the pot of water he had, it was not enough to thicken the cereal sufficiently and it was like soup. [And I’m sure that wouldn’t have gone over well either.]

So, Dad’s solution? Presto! Add mashed potato flakes and it’s now “normal” – at least in consistency. We were very unimpressed. I’m not sure how much this bothered my brothers, but I am a fairly picky eater. There are certain things you don’t mix together, and foods should NOT be liberally mixed together on the plate either. [They *can* touch, but they shouldn’t be holding hands!]

As you can imagine, this “solution” to runny cereal wasn’t my idea of a “good” fix. As I recall, it wasn’t considered a good fix by either of my brothers.

To this day, Dad still defends his solution by claiming that it couldn’t have been all that bad, since everyone ate their portion. Bah! It was
that or nothing, and with a death-march imminent for the return trip, not eating wasn’t one of the better options.

The trip out must not have been quite as bad as the trip in, since I can’t recall much of it. I guess it was downhill.

[I don’t know if everyone else’s mind works as mine does, but it would be nice if all the really good things were what we remember, instead of the bad things. As Charlie Brown says…”Good things last eight seconds, bad things last three weeks.”]  

So, we were planning to meet Mom who was going to meet up with us and spend some more time in the area. She was planning on bringing more food and we’d enjoy the rest of the day together.

[For those of you who know Mom, you’ll be fully aware that she isn’t the outdoorsy type. So, she wasn’t along for the backpacking portion of the trip. I’m sure she is eternally grateful, especially after hearing our story.]

I don’t know if Mom was running late, or we were running early, or exactly what happened – but when we got to where we might meet Mom, there was no Mom to meet us. This wouldn’t have typically been much of an issue, except that we didn’t have any food, we were tired and feeling a little put out – at least I was!

We drove to a tiny little store on Highway 12 where there was a pay-phone where Dad could call Mom and see where she was, and when to expect her. [In the days, long before ubiquitous cell phones. (and birch-bark for lunch.)]

While Dad was making the phone-call, I decided to see what was available to eat in the store. I couldn’t have had much money, and given Dad’s focus on good-health and eating right, donuts probably weren’t an option – even if I’d had the money.

So, while I can’t recall much of the thought process selecting my delicacy, I picked the cheapest loaf of plain bread I could find. Though it wasn’t quite doughy white bread, it was certainly close. And no, we didn’t have butter or peanut butter available. It was just going to be the delight of plain slices of bread – one slice, right after the other. But when you’re hungry, even hot-cereal with mashed potatoes mixed in seems palatable! Plain bread, some miles and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of calories later looks positively delicious!

When I arrived back at the car, I was horrified to find my brother Randy – who seems to have little care for how something tastes and isn’t the slightest bit picky about what he’s fed – had gotten out the dry cup-o’soup packets, and was finishing up dumping the dry powder into his mouth!

Gulp, cringe, shut-my-eyes to shield myself from the sight! To make things even worse, it was split-pea soup! I hated peas – I can still remember gagging and feeling I was absolutely going to die, one time when Dad felt I needed to eat some. The flavor is horrible, they pop in your mouth, the consistency is awful – ugh!

So, Randy was dumping dry soup powder, split-pea no less, into his mouth and eating it. His lips were a nice, very attractive, powdered, blotchy green.

<Shudder!> It still gives me the willies thinking about it.

Well, when I arrived on the scene with a nice fresh loaf of bread, it was amazing how friendly my brothers became. It’s a shame I didn’t think of the “Jacob and the birthright story” in the bible just then, because that could have been a very good return on a measly loaf of bread.

In a very few minutes, the loaf of bread was gone.

But even more amazing was Dad. I don’t recall if he got back to the car before the whole loaf of bread was consumed or not – but I do absolutely recall what he brought back.

As I’ve said, Dad was pretty serious about eating right. And since he didn’t fix our meals, I just never considered what he might bring from the store for us to eat. [Figs and parched corn, perhaps? Something “healthy” was likely in any case.]

I still remember being astonished that he bought CANDY BARS for us. I didn’t see it as a fancy candy-bar, just “Big Hunk.” But my Dad, having purchased a candy-bar?! A candy bar for me to eat?! I’m not sure it could have been any more startling if the angel Gabriel had stopped by to give it to me! Yeah, a candy-bar, from Dad! Unthinkable!

We ate the bread and candy-bars and eventually Mom showed up with even more attractive food.
But I still remember the mashed potatoes, the green powdered lips, the loaf of bread and the candy-bars!

And it’s surprising how the little things stick in our minds, and how we can sometimes break the way we see each other, and act in new, delightful and surprising ways.

So, do something nice, new and thoughtful for those you love and care for today.

— We continue to search and pray. We ask that you keep Dad in your thoughts and prayers too. If someone is holding him, I hope they take him doughnuts today.

We will leave it in God’s hands – he’s in charge.

-Greg

(The “pillow” and “blanket” are fiberglass props – that’s no softie pillow Dad’s sitting on.)

I don’t have a substantial update for you today – not enough time, and too little remaining brain-power to crank out something better.

So, I'll simply stick with the bare minimum.

No great news – we still have not found Dad.

We followed up some reported sightings and spent some time walking areas around the place we know where Dad last was. There were a
some other things done – but that’s the general feel of it.

I’ll take more time tomorrow to write some more.

This is really, totally and completely in God’s hands. Realizing we are powerless and that God is the one in control is hard – but it’s clear we’re not going to solve this ourselves. So, we keep asking for his intervention, and to help us realize his direction and the will to follow where he leads.

-Greg

So, as I said in my mini post, much has changed.

Right at the top, let me say that just about 24 hours ago, Randy went down to the police station and had a chat with the lieutenant who is in charge there.

Randy, and those with him, were rather startled to hear that the police have changed the classification of the case to a criminal one. They have decided this isn’t a missing person case. They said believe that this is either a kidnapping or a murder.

More importantly, Randy was told that this wasn’t just a local police matter now, but had been upgraded to a state case and that the SBU [what was the KGB years ago] was involved now.

Randy said there was a stack of documents on the table, and that the officer said this was the file on the case. I’m not sure why, but Randy wanted to take a photo of the cover sheet, and they said he could.
I’m not sure what to think. I like that they are taking the case more seriously and that, evidently, many more resources are available, and that we’ve turned a corner. But I don’t exactly like the sound of “criminal case.” Yeah, who would.

Randy and the people from the Union office and volunteers have been following up all the fragments of information they have had – reports, rumors, claimed sightings etc.

These have, repeatedly, turned up nothing credible.

We are continuing to gather video feeds and review them.

We look forward to the state security services aggressively putting the resources that the state has, which are vastly more than we have [save God] to work in figuring out what happened and getting Dad back to us.

— So, as long as I’ve been telling stories, let me talk a bit more about REI and down-jacket related events.

Dad hasn’t been doing any mountaineering for a while now. I get altitude sickness so easily and that’s no fun, so I’ve not been climbing for quite some time either.

But “back-in-the-day” we did climb together more than a few times. [Yeah, I know, “back-in-the-day” we had to walk to school, barefoot,
in the blowing snow, uphill both ways with only birch-bark for lunch. Well, it’s not quite that kind of story."

We’ve climbed Mt. Hood, a couple of times together. I have a large [probably 18x20”] print that Dad gave to me of me standing in the sunset on Mt Hood. It’s a beautiful print and a very nice picture. It’s framed and hanging up in our house.

Well, that trip [at least I think it was that trip] was rather exciting.

We’d decided to sleep on the mountain, mid way up. Hood is really a one-day climb for the south-side – but I tend to feel less sick if I have more time acclimatizing and it’s a shorter day if you don’t do it all in a single day. [Good for older men and wimps like me.]

We got up and it looked like a reasonable day. A reasonable day in the northwest, on the mountains is a day when it’s not raining, blowing 50+ mph and not too cold or ugly.

So we started climbing. Clouds covered the top section of the mountain and we thought this would clear as the day progressed. In any case, we’d just come back if it got too bad. [Yeah, right.]

Well, it didn’t get any better, and in a few hours we were going up the summit chutes, which are not too far from the very top in what seemed like a hurricane.

The wind was howling, we were in the clouds and could barely see the ground. There was so much moisture in the air, it would condense and freeze on everything – making what is called rime ice. It would even condense on your eyelashes and if you blinked, the two sets of eyelashes; bottom and top, would then freeze together and you couldn’t re-open your eyes. Goggles would help with this, but we didn’t want to stop to fish them out. So, you’d just pull your hand out of your glove and melt and pull the ice off your eyelashes and you’d be good to go, at least for a few more minutes.

Why we didn’t turn around, I’m not sure. It’s that allure of the summit, I guess. I’m sure it’s caused more than a few accidents and induced bad judgment in lots of climbers. Perhaps one could claim we used bad judgment too, I’m just not sure – you generally think you’ve done fine, until something goes wrong.

Well, we did reach the summit and while you couldn’t see a thing – not even the ground under your feet – we were happy we reached the summit.

So we started down. But white-gray snow, white-gray sky, white-gray clouds and wind at unbelievable levels makes for vertigo – where does the sky and clouds end and the ground begin? The wind had been blowing us up the chutes to the summit. Now it was blowing directly in our faces. Even though we were now going down, one almost had to exert effort to go down against the wind.

Well, a long 30-45 minutes later, and after having gone somewhat off-course in our trek down, we break out of the clouds. I now know, first hand, how easy it can be to get lost on Mt. Hood.

We gathered our tent and other gear we’d left behind at camp and trailed out to the car many feet below us.

It was nice to spend some time with Dad. I’m not as much a mountaineering kind of person as Rick – I’m certainly not up to the insane levels of torture he goes through. But it was a way Dad and I could do something together. We both love the mountains – especially mountaineering and being out in the brilliant, sparkling, awe-inspiring mountains. The snow soaks up the sound, and it’s so very different, even when you’re in the same place, sans snow and ice.

This is one of only a few climbing experiences we had together and it was a good one. Sure, sitting in the sun on the lawn probably would have been a lot more pleasant – probably a lot safer too. But Dad wasn’t the kind to pick “safe” over what he thought was important. [He certainly wasn’t the one to shy away from pushing you through the hard-stuff he thought would help make you stronger and better, no matter how much complaint and whining he heard. I’m pretty sure there’s more than a few of you who experienced that – at least the pushing part, I’m probably the only one who whined so much. (I’m sure the brothers would confirm the whining part! {and look, nested parenthetical asides! that’s my specialty!}) ]

Dad is, and was, the kind who wasn’t easy on himself, when he felt something needed to be done. He didn’t give others the easy way out either. He’d tell you fairly bluntly what you ought to be doing – he wasn’t bossy, but he wanted to make a difference, he wanted to help. He cared a lot. Going to the Ukraine and the many, many hours he donated to helping people change the way they lived and their health, spiritual and physical were just part of who Dad is and was.

You couldn’t steer him away from what he felt was right. Sometimes it was not the best idea – like climbing Hood in that weather – but he
always pushed himself as much as anyone – probably more. But he would push you pretty hard too.

We’re different in that way – but I know he pushed me and others because he cared, and he cares a lot!

So, this experience in Kiev is just a lot like the way he lived and loved those around him. It’s tough. It’s hard, and we’re beyond where we wish we were – we’d rather be sitting on the lawn in the sun sipping a cool drink and enjoying the leisure.

But he would be still thinking about all the stuff that he wanted to get done, all the ways he could help you be a better self, and how he wanted everyone to know, see and feel the God he saw.

I know others have said it, but we’ve also thought it and commented among ourselves – *if* Dad is being held by someone, one can be sure they’re hearing about Dad’s loving, caring God – and that he’s doing his best to push them to live a better life too – regardless of how scary or hard that might be. I hope, if that’s the case, that he’s more tactful than he’s been with me at times. He may be right, but sometimes he’s less than the most gentle in expressing it.

[Remind me to tell you about the patient who had been out snowmobiling and claimed that was “exercise.” Tact, and gentle? Hmmm.]

So, please – continue to pray. We know that God is able to bring about *any* outcome. We will do our best to help, and do our part. But though God doesn’t need reminding, please let us keep doing it anyway. I think he’ll handle our “whining” better than Dad did.

-Greg

Posted 2013/05/24 10.45a PT / 8.45p Kiev time

Lots has changed since my last post. I didn’t want you to think we’d gone away – but I need to take a few minutes to organize some things – so rather than completely leave you hanging while I do so, here’s a intsta-update

1) We have not yet found Dad. 2) Lots has changed.

I’ll be back in the next few hours with a more complete update.

-Greg

Posted 2013/05/24 6.45a PT

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A Snowy Grand Opening for New Cafeteria

The grand opening for the new Upper Columbia Academy cafeteria was held Monday, Feb. 24, amid a winter storm that was akin to Christmas. Students and staff alike enjoy the ribbon-cutting ceremony even though they were bombarded with snowflakes. This event marks the beginning of a new gathering place for food and friendships and a new footprint for the campus, which will open up the campus. Students have been using the new cafeteria since the move-in on Nov. 20.

Kathy Marson

administrative assistant for communication
I sit here in moribund misery. The valiant efforts of my body to repel an unwelcome viral intruder are greatly appreciated. Yet I am flopped unceremoniously in a chair. A pile of crumpled tissues mounts beside me, evidence of a fruitless effort to stem the relentless tide. This is not how the weekend was supposed to start.

Great plans — a dinner date with friends, Sabbath fellowship, delightful hours with a grandchild — have all been placed reluctantly back on the shelf. I am a carrier of an enemy I do not wish to share — hence my self-imposed quarantine in the basement-cave of recovery.

A stack of books sits awaiting my attention, but my puffed and bleary eyes have little interest in reading. Instead, I lean back in the recliner and wait for the next sneeze. O wretched man that I am, who will save me from this mortal flesh?

I feel strangely akin to Emma Lazarus' "huddled masses yearning to breathe free." But this shall pass in a few days. I will be up and around with my usual verve and vigor. The inconvenient moment will be forgotten like morning frost.

Yet in the midst of my superficial suffering, I am cognizant that for many the frost never dissipates. It, in fact, has turned to a shell of ice that is no mere inconvenience, no passing trifle. Their challenging circumstances turn my temporary speed bump into a matter of little consequence.

Come to think of it, I cannot recall a passage of Scripture in which the writer complains of a runny nose. “The Spirit bade me to make haste to Corinth,” said the apostle Paul, “but the enemy of souls delayed my departure with an insufferable ailment common to man.” No, that has apparently been edited out. God’s Word has bigger fish to fry, and so do God’s people.

The woman who can barely move with the symptoms of fibromyalgia; the nonsmoker who discovers he is inexplicably riddled with lung cancer; the nerve-damaged back that affords no relief from pain; the 13-year-old girl who lives daily with the horror of an abusive father; the single parent whose resources of time and money are never enough … these include some who are most eager for a better land. They know they are in great need. They are more than ready for a permanent solution.

The rest of us sense that present discomfort is fleeting, that good times will come quickly again. And we are at risk of the greatest disease of all — being rich with things that are not truly of eternal value. When Jesus cautioned about the difficulty of a rich man entering heaven, He spoke to us.

Ellen White notes that Jesus sometimes left whole villages healed of sickness and physical malady. Yet always the eternal purpose was paramount. He healed their bodies so He could heal their minds and hearts. This is where the promise of Scripture lies — not on physical healing, but the promise of abundant life now and forever.

In the meantime, please pass me a tissue.

+ Read more from Let's Talk
+ Read more from March 2014

Steve Vistaunet

North Pacific Union assistant to the president and communication director
CAA Plus ELL Equals Outreach

As globalization and technology perpetually shrink our planet, parents whose native language is not English desire for their children to learn the language of the global market in hope that their children will remain competitive and relevant as they enter the work force. This phenomenon has supercharged the business of English instruction, both abroad and at home. Though this climate has helped Columbia Adventist Academy (CAA) in Battle Ground, Wash., to launch its foreign exchange student program — otherwise known as the English Language Learning (ELL) program — the focus has proven to be ministry-based rather than a business opportunity.

Since the program’s inception three years ago, CAA has hosted between six and 10 Japanese students each year for three-month stints. Each exchange student who attends CAA enrolls in mainstream English, math and science classes but also takes two special ELL classes — one on academic English acquisition and an ELL Bible class teaching the basic principles and beliefs of Christianity.

Abbey Ashton, CAA junior, has witnessed all three years of the foreign exchange program, and she has seen many positive relationships develop with the exchange students through the years. Personally she feels that “it is an outreach that [she] can do.”

In fact, the CAA community as a whole has embraced the ELL program. Parents have opened up their homes, making the exchange students feel like family. The student body has befriended them, benefiting from a rich cultural exchange. The faculty and staff have worked tirelessly as a team to ensure academic success and meaningful language acquisition. All have provided a warm, inviting environment, introducing Christ to young men and women who have never had the chance to meet Him before.

With each passing year, this ministry continues to grow and add new dimensions to the school. This year, for the first time, two students — Kenya and Yuki — are enrolled full-time, earning credit for the whole school year. As the ELL program grows, the CAA community hopes to plant seeds deep in the heart of Asia without ever leaving the United States.

Jeremy New

Columbia Adventist Academy teacher
Prayer Conference Gives Pastors Renewed Revival

Stories of renewed relationships with Jesus are common among more than 700 Adventist pastors, leaders and members who attended the North American Division’s Prayer Conference in January.

Within this crowd were 50 pastors and 10 leaders from Washington Conference. Donors funded the way for Washington pastors to attend the prayer conference and have a place to stay in Monterey, Calif. The investment of time and effort to arrange for 50 pastors to attend a national event paid off with continuing stories of revival among leaders.

“The prayer conference retooled our thinking about prayer and prayer fellowship,” says Bruce Koch, Washington Conference stewardship director and pastor. “We came back with good resources [for our churches] and a revolutionized way of doing our ministries.”

Pastors are sharing their prayer conference experience and already implementing prayer ministries within their churches.

Eddie General, Greater Seattle Filipino-American pastor, led his congregation in a worship model he experienced at the prayer conference. “Our key Bible passage was Psalm 23,” says General. “It was a great experience worshipping God by corporate memorization of Psalm 23 and singing hymns about it.”

Rick Casebier, Olympia Transformation Life Center pastor, found a renewed passion for prayer. “We were challenged by Dwight Nelson’s appeal for three key ingredients for transformational revival: desperation, urgency and expectancy,” says Casebier. “We are already encouraged by what God will do in the months ahead in answer to united, persevering prayer.”

Vince Saunders, Bonney Lake and Voice of Hope pastor, appreciated the opportunity to reconnect friends and colleagues. He attended a breakout session by Pavel Goia, a pastor from Lexington, Ky., where seminar attendees learned that “prayer is not about solving problems; it is about a relationship with God.”

The prayer conference included preaching services by Dwight Nelson, Freddie Russell, David Levy, John Ashcroft and Washington Conference’s own Kevin Wilfley. In addition there were breakout sessions on prayer, Bible study, discipleship, personal witnessing, victorious living and much more. Prayer Conference participants had ample time for prayer in small groups, in large meetings and in private.

“God is growing our prayer life and taking us to new heights,” says John Freedman, Washington Conference president. “This was a mini-revival for our pastors, and we hope to see this revival continue in our churches.”

Heidi Baumgartner, Washington Conference communication director, with Kevin Wilfley, Washington Conference spiritual growth coordinator

Heidi Baumgartner

communication director

Heidi Baumgartner serves as communication director for Washington Conference.
The Adventist Advantage

After four decades of denominational ministry, Martin Weber now serves as the Seventh-day Adventist representative at Logos Bible Software in Bellingham, Wash., where he collaborates with Adventist authors and publishers to bring the Adventist advantage into Logos’ unique digital “ecosystem.” Visit www.logos.com/SDA.

“Don’t curse the darkness; light a candle.”

End-time Adventists can find value in that time-honored advice. As the world’s moral midnight deepens around us — greed, lust, war, oppression, rebellion, unbelief — God has entrusted our church with a saving message of grace and truth and a healing lifestyle of love and hope. But let us beware of arrogance because Jesus warns, “To whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48 NKJV).

Seventh-day Adventists are significantly advantaged over those of other religious groups — but do we appreciate it or even realize it anymore?

Our pioneers certainly did. Electrified with the blessed hope of Christ’s soon coming and their discovery of the Sabbath, the sanctuary and other fundamental Bible truths, they sacrificed their possessions and themselves for the sake of our Adventist message and mission.

So what has happened to us in 21st-century America? About half of our kids and grandchildren abandon the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some congregations are becoming hospices rather than maternity wards. Why?

Is it petty legalism on one extreme and a lax liberalism on the other? Traditionalism for some but loss of denominational identity for others? Institutionalism for some administrators but congregationalism for lay professionals impatient with cul-de-sac church committees? Authoritarianism at the top and autonomy at the bottom of our denominational hierarchy?

“No worries,” some say. “The church is going through!” Exactly what this means we shall discuss in an upcoming column. Meanwhile, ponder this: Does the treasure of truth God entrusted to Adventists give us immunity — or greater responsibility?

In this monthly column I hope to facilitate a conversation that includes a searching and fearless moral inventory of where we are as Northwest Adventists versus where God wants us to be. This won’t be a gripe session — we’ll be solutions-oriented, in view of our Adventist advantage. Rather than condemning the darkness around us and among us, let’s strategize about how Christ’s light of loving truth might illuminate our communities through our churches.

Here’s where I’m coming from, in terms of personal perspective: I believe that among all faith groups, Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely positioned to meet the needs of our confused and hurting world. That’s quite a statement, but I think it can withstand scrutiny.

Well, exactly what is our Adventist advantage? Here are seven core elements:

1. Sabbath rest in Jesus, who invited us to rest in His finished work on the seventh day of creation week and then again on the Sabbath after securing our salvation at Calvary — Seventh-day Adventists celebrate life and new life in Christ every week.

2. Our sanctuary message proclaims that when Jesus rose from the dead, He went somewhere to do something for His people. Specifically, He entered heaven’s temple to serve as our real-time High Priest in touch with our daily need for pardon, purpose and protection (Hebrews 7:25).

3. Our view of life after death doesn’t reduce us to disembodied spirits floating off by ourselves; we’ll all go to heaven together at Christ’s triumphant return as a newly embodied community.

4. Our concept of final events facilitates closure, in which sin will be eradicated and not eternalized in hell. This follows a judgment that explains and vindicates all God’s dealings as wise and loving.

5. For a postmodern world craving identity through a shared story, we offer the Great Controversy narrative that encompasses our fundamental beliefs in the timeline of God’s own story with us.

6. A holistic life healthier and longer than non-Adventists, as National Geographic magazine celebrated by proclaiming Seventh-day Adventists as one of its “Blue Zones” of optimal wellness.
7. A messenger from God who gave our church eight natural remedies that comprise our holistic lifestyle; Ellen White also envisioned both our health and educational systems — astonishingly now the largest and finest in the Protestant world.

No other denomination offers a theology, worldview and lifestyle that compares with ours. Indeed Adventists are enormously advantaged. So why are we prone to preoccupation with trinkets and trivia, arguing about wedding rings and music rhythm while the world desperately needs our living, loving message and mission?

After four decades of denominational ministry, Martin Weber now serves as the Seventh-day Adventist representative at Logos Bible Software in Bellingham, Wash., where he collaborates with Adventist authors and publishers to bring the Adventist advantage into Logos’ unique digital “ecosystem.” Visit www.logos.com/SDA.

+ Read more from Perspective
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Martin Weber

Adventist product manager at Logos Bible Software

Martin Weber, DMin, served as pastor, editor, author, evangelist and police chaplain across North America and taught pastors on five continents with the General Conference Ministerial Association.
God and God Alone Helps Grandview Adventist Junior Academy

During the summer of 2013, leaders from Washington's Lower Yakima Valley churches and the Upper Columbia Conference met to discuss the fate of the Grandview Adventist Junior Academy (GAJA). The meeting was called because funds were dwindling and the churches that support the school had barely enough funds to keep their church doors open, let alone sufficient funding to keep the school afloat. So leaders met to close the school.

In its hay day, the school had nearly 70 students, four teachers and a bus that delivered 20 or so students from the surrounding towns of Sunnyside and Prosser, Wash. It offered an educational system up to the 10th grade. But over the past several decades the area churches and the school have suffered a steady decline as demographics have shifted.

Things began to rapidly take a turn for the better in September 2013 when the English and Hispanic Grandview congregations united and combined forces to tackle the situation. One of the decisions was to invite Steve Green, a bilingual artist, to put on a benefit concert for the school. Green accepted and agreed to donate half of his usual commission to help in the cause. The concert was set for Jan. 18, 2014.

The expenses were substantial and the logistics for a large concert can be overwhelming and labor-intensive. Through key decisions to offer the tickets online and networking with other local churches, the group forged ahead. They were apprehensive that they would make money for the school on the eve of the concert. It is then that God showed His hand.

On the evening of Jan. 18, the auditorium began to fill. By the time the lights went out and the performance was about to get underway, the auditorium was only about 60 percent filled. But before the end of the first act, the count was nearly 700 people in the auditorium, which has a 750-seat capacity. The school took in several thousand dollars that night through ticket sales and offerings.

Following the concert, money continues to flow in to the school, making the total more than $12,000 to date. For a church of about 20 active members to step out in faith, there is no doubt that God and God alone made this a great and humbling success.

Don Alexander

Grandview School Board Member