

BUSTED! --- Aug.10, 2005

Remember last month's culvert-bumping incident? BUSTED ... we got the dreaded letter. "Our rental car was damaged while on rental to you" (Huh? Me? While I had it?) "Was anyone killed?" (I can answer that one!) "Tell us what happened." (Must I cross my heart?)

For the record, (and a little self-defense?) at the time of the culvert-bump, I did a quick "alternative situation analysis." Think about it. If I had not bumped that culvert, we would have missed our flight. Figure, an extra day car rental, one night's stay at a hotel, extra meals, an airline reschedule fee, and the purchase of additional clothes (Susan said "What's your point?"). Do the math ... more than the cost of a bumper repair ... had to be! (Good financial insight, huh.) And honestly, I looked (glanced) at that bumper and I didn't see a thing.

There's both positive and negative news about the ALS. (Can there be anything positive about ALS?)

On the positive side, there are still no signs of diminished arm or leg movement, I'm learning to cope with that palatal lift thing to improve my enunciation (it helps a tiny bit), lung capacity is remaining strong and generally I'm feeling up-beat.

The negative stuff is not too severe, but very annoying. In fact, it's down right frustrating when I can't get the McDonalds' counter person to understand that I'm saying "I want hot mustard with those chicken nuggets." Bummer! I can no longer sleep on my back ... saliva accumulation causes awful choking. In addition, I

have started being a little more selective on the types of food that I eat. (Things that are crumbly, i.e. hamburger, nuts and cake, don't go down too good ... causes more choking.)

Susan, however, is convinced that I have the real pill and not the placebo. One of the side effects of Minocycline is sensitivity to the sun. Well, I've got one heck of a tan going. In fact, I've been thinking about changing my ethnic origin. And in case you didn't already know ... I was born a poor black child. (Don't puff up ... that's an old Steve Martin line!) Anyway, I'm DARK!

Of course, you might decide that the tan is from being on the lake. We did spend some time bobbing around on the Lake Michigan side of the bridge. Sun was bright, fluffy white clouds lingered overhead, water was warm, calm and clear (you could see the bottom in 10-20' of water), a light breeze, perfect for swimming (skinny-dip?).

I learned something else about the affect of ALS. (I guess it should have occurred to me, but it didn't.) I decided to dive off the swim step on the boat. Uh-oh! Guess what, I haven't been swimming since the ALS diagnosis. All those muscle things in my throat are dead, remember? The automatic trap door that closes when you do things like dive in a lake, it's broken! It didn't close! Water rushed up my nose and filled my mouth! I almost panicked! I popped out of the water and turned toward Susan, sputtering, my eyes bulging! She knew something was wrong. Susan yelled, "I'm not that good a swimmer, come back!" (What, is she going to do jump in to save me? Can't you see the headlines?!) Think about it. I was hunkered down in my spectacular dive pose (Okay ... in my mind's eye anyway), knees bent, hands together, pointed over my head, then the lunge ... the boat went one direction, I went the other! Susan yelled "come back!" I'm try-

ing! I'm trying! YOU COME BACK!

We explored the shoreline and learned another boating term. "Props in Rocks". Yep, here's what happened. We're cruising along gawking at the sights when Susan yells "ROCKS!" Quick like I am ... I gunned it! (Wrong thing to do.) When you gun a boat the pointy end rears up, the flat end sinks down. For those non-boaters, the flat end is where the drive sticks through. The drive has a delicate propeller (prop) and something we now know is called a "Skag". (Skag, that upside down dorsal fin thing that sticks down below the prop.) So when you gun it, the prop and skag dig deeper. (Horrible sound!) Anyway, there's good news. The boat repair place keeps new ones in stock. And they're repairing the old one so we'll have it handy for the next time. (Next time?)

Whiling away our Up North days, stomping through the woods my mind wandered to my dad. He's been dead a long time now but something about this place reminds me of him. He could eloquently spew out many dad-isms. One of them was "plant a tree; it will be there for generations to enjoy the shade long after you have gone." Hmmm, I thought WE ought to plant a tree.

I'm ready! (A chance to use my tractor for something besides garage filler.) I used the backhoe attachment for the digging, the bucket for moving the dirt, and neighbor Cliff for the hard work ... ballast. (Look closely, you can see him hanging on the back of the tractor.)

We ended up with a Blue Spruce. Now not all Blue Spruce trees are created equal. Only a few are actually blue. (Think green Christmas trees.) The one we got is blue. It's a small tree, only about five feet tall. The tree guy said to dig a hole about



Note the 2x6 boom, (see the bow). Also note the "C" clamps, and our neighbor Cliff, acting as extra ballast on the rear of the tractor to keep it from tipping.

3 feet in diameter and about 24 to 30 inches deep. I'm on it!

The problem ... moving that tree into the hole. The tree guy said it weighs about 450-500 pounds. This should be a snap. I rigged a 2 x 6 board with "C" clamps holding it onto the tractor bucket. You know, kind of like a boom on a crane. See the picture. Look at that bow in that 2 x 6! My concern ... if that thing breaks, will the piece staying with the bucket flip back and hit me on top of the head? Nice tree, huh.

One last thing. I'm a little embarrassed to say this out loud but in July I was honored by the industry we serve at a surprise luncheon. They raised a pocket full for money to kick off a "Mike Justice Foundation". The Foundation will support college scholarships and ALS research.

I am humbled and feeling not worthy of such an honor, but the money is earmarked for good stuff, so I'm not complaining either. I'm told that the foundation is structured so that there will be no administrative costs. 100% of the funds raised will be distributed. Sounds neat, don't you think.

But here's the real story. The luncheon included a little ribbing. Someone wanted it to be a roast. But remember, my record of living life on the edge consists of my not wearing a seat belt for 3 blocks. But they dug up something anyway.

INFOMERCIALS! (Talk about garage fillers!) Now I don't think I'm the only person with this affliction. And I suspect there are many of you who are closet infomercial buyers, you just haven't come out!

Buying things from infomercials in the middle of the night ... there's something about it ... at the time ... watching in some kind of half sleep/daze ...the products seem like absolute necessities!

At the luncheon, they mentioned SOME of the things I have wisely purchased. But had they only consulted ME ... I could have really filled them in.

For example, the Round Dancing Made Easy video tapes. (We've never watched them!) Or how about the little finger vibrator thing. The infomercial said you could keep it at your desk, then when things are a little stressful at the office, all you have to do is slip it on your finger and touch your temple, neck or

wherever. (Hmmm interesting thought ... wherever!)

Then there was that ionized water sprayer for washing your car. You don't have to dry it, wipe it down or anything. (I NEVER wash my own car ... but it sure looked like something I needed!)

I find that I don't feel so guilty if I buy two of some things. Electric scissors, you know, Susan will surely want her very own pair.

I was watching at 2:30 A.M. one morning when I saw this fantastic sand wedge. Everyone on the show who tried it had the most beautiful shot out of the sand trap. I had to have one! But whoa! Susan will really appreciate it if I order her one, too!

Speaking of golf, there was this really neat golf club that has a hinge/pivot half way up the shaft. If you don't do your practice swing correctly, on the up swing, it folds down and hits you in the butt. Now, don't you know that thing has helped my game! (I wish I still had it. I think we sold it in a garage sale for 50¢.)

I also bought this exercise device guaranteed to give me fantastic abs. (Yeah right!) It looked like a Star Wars fixed wing Fighter. (Wonder what happened to that thing?)

A few nights ago, you know, 3 A.M. channel surfing. There it was, a computer program that lets you invest in the stock market like the pros. And it's foolproof! It's got red lights and green lights. They had all sorts of people who were making "bank" in their spare time. I could use some bank ... and won't Susan be impressed! Guess what, their East Indian order desk does not understand my ALS accent. Couldn't get my order placed! Damn!

Next week we're off on an Alaskan cruise. Can't wait!