

We're Ready for Anything: 80 Rolls of TP!

We're ready for anything from company coming over to the end of the world. I have been told that this level of reserves is necessary. So, we're ready for 2000, but we weren't ready for 1999.

Sickness waved in the new year. Julie's and my valiant effort to make every Christmas party in Bismarck left Brent exhausted. Then, some wimpy germ took advantage of the situation. Being ever generous, Brent gave the bug to Julie, who passed it onto me. One day, I need to teach that the family need not share everything.

Luckily, all bounded back within a few weeks, and we started the year. Life handed us the usual challenges (actually, Brent handed most of them to us, but I'll pass the blame around) until mid April, when some friends from Michigan trekked out to the boondocks to visit. Ann and Dennis Chappus caught up on events, while Dennis flexed his handyman muscle with a few basement-remodeling tasks. While they visited, they took a shine to the green S10. Monday: "Jim, we're really looking for a full size truck. Wednesday: "How much do you want for the S10?" We had made a passing remark about selling it, but an offer surprised us. So, an offer was struck for good friends, and the green truck made its way to Michigan.

I am sure no one else does, but we like to relax after company leaves. Visits are exhausting, even if the company is good. I needed to dig some small stumps out of the front yard, so I decided to try brainpower instead of horsepower. I connected a hose to the outside faucet and soaked the root ball of the stump. The thought was to loosen the stump and simply pry it out. (No comments or eye rolling from the peanut gallery). In any case, after I wrestled with the stumps for a while, I decided my theory has a flaw, shut off the water, and went inside. I opened the door to the basement rec room to find a beautiful waterfall using the family computers to slowly make its way to the floor. It seems the faucet had broken when I turned it on, and had created a small moat around the computer desks. Ignoring the possibility Julie was trying to send me a message about using the computer too often, I dove under the main desk, turned off the main valve (forgetting to unplug the still-running machines first), and then realized I should discontinue sharing the pool with the still-powered floor positioned computer system. Duh! Sickeningly, I took a moment to admire the waterfall before it quit completely. We spent the rest of the month relocating all of our recreation room items to the garage, hiring someone to dismiss the 3 inches of water, inviting the insurance adjuster for a viewing, and shaking our heads often. This might signal a trend, but we don't know for sure. We're waiting for the next crisis to verify the theory.

With the S10 traveling to Michigan, our "fleet" included the Purple Dodge RAM, my '79 Oldsmobile Cutlass ("Old Blue"), and a black '80 Oldsmobile Cutlass we had purchased after the accident in 1998. During a reality check, we decided to

sell the '80 Olds, because it never grew on either of us, and it would bring some cash. I had always dreamed of restoring Old Blue someday, so, we decided to put the vehicle in running order for my use, while Julie took the RAM.

In June, I decided to create more interest at work. After 2 years as Intranet Supervisor, I had helped create and then re-create the Corporate Intranet. So, I did what every Intranet supervisor does next. To paraphrase an old song, I "fought the CIO, and the CIO won". Oh well, they don't call me the corporate anti-poster boy for nothing. The grass suddenly looked greener in another department, so tried my hand as data architect for a product rewrite.

As events unfolded at work, a trip to the auto repair shop brought more reality. The shop figured \$5,000.00 to put Old Blue in running order, but they recommended against it. So,

with some regret, I put a sign on the window, an ad in the paper, and some cash in the bank. Some guy offered my \$400.00 for the vehicle I had bought with \$2,000.00 in a repossession bid in 1988. My second car, a big boat with lots of memories, disappeared from our lot destined for another life. Maybe, one day when I am older and have more time and money, I'll go find a suitable '79 Olds and fix it up. In any case, Old Blue, may you have fun in Nebraska.

Our "fleet" dwindled from 4 vehicles to 1. We started with 2 more than we needed, and ended with 1 too few. Julie noted, no ... decreed, that she needed some transportation. The demands: 4 wheel drive, no minivans, no cars, fuel injection, and 4 doors. We had planned to trade the S10 on the new Dodge 4 door Dakota when it arrived, but our timing stank. The Dakota didn't hit the dealers until 2000, and we needed a vehicle now. We were considering a Durango when someone suggested a Nissan Frontier Crew Cab, a 4WD, 4-door truck. Evidently, Nissan beat Dodge to the 4-door truck punch. I called around town, found one in stock, and we bought it. Thus, we began life as a 2-truck family. No wimpy SUVs for us.



Brent celebrated his first birthday in June, and my parents arrived for the occasion. As if on cue, our local town, Bennington, celebrated Bennington Days. Complete with



parade and horse rides, Brent enjoyed the day with his grandparents and parents. Brent took every opportunity to ham it up for Grandma and Grandpa. On the heels of Brent's birthday, my grandparents, Verne and Hester Huffman, arrived with my sister in July. Brent saw this as a great opportunity refine his attention-getting skills.

For our vacation, we trekked to Michigan to visit with old friends. Along the way, we stopped in Chicago (They say you can also "go" in Chicago, but were stopped most of the time) to wish my college roommate and good friend Charley Williams a prosperous marriage. I couldn't pass up an opportunity to embarrass Charley and new bride Karen at the wedding reception. While in Michigan, Brent decided to start walking, and we enjoyed showing him off to dear friends as we caught up on events.

In September, a re-organization within my company moved my team's project to Colorado. Relocation was out, and the focus changed. Julie and I decided that this was a second call to make some changes, the first being in June. I felt the opportunities at my present employer for Internet-related work were drying up, and we discussed a new position in Omaha. However, Brent's arrival had increased the trips to IL and the length of each one. Our illness in January pointed out the need to be closer to home as well. Finally, some may remember that we had planned to move to Iowa when we left Michigan. So, when an opportunity came up in Cedar Rapids, IA, I interviewed for the management position. Evidently, they liked what they saw, so we packed up and took leave of Nebraska in November.

That brings us basically to the present. The company, Life Investors Insurance Company of America, is a member of the AEGON Insurance Group. I manage web development and client application development in the Individual Division. The company sells various types of life insurance through agents across the USA. They have provided us with 4 months of temporary housing, but we are eager to find a house. As of December, 29th, we sold the house in Bennington to our friends Jim and Dori Settles in Omaha. They hurried up to finish their house when we announced we were leaving. If you are curious, we did finish the house before we left.

As Julie and I considered our options, Julie noted that there is no way we could move without finishing the house. The "Computer Waterfall Incident" pushed back our remodeling plans, but we knew the house would not last another year with its rotting siding and dilapidated deck. As many of you know, the "Farm Progress Show" comes to Iowa every 3 years, and this year was the magic one. I never miss an

Iowa showing. Thus, I invited my parents to go with us, and my Dad helped me reside the house in vinyl. For a simple ranch, it turned out very well. However, I'm sure no one will remember the siding on the house. I have it on good word that our abode will be forever known as "The house attached to a deck".

I'll not apologize for my design. Julie hated the old deck on the house, citing it as unstable and untrustworthy. Although I think that a bit



exaggerated, I vowed my creation would not provoke such words. Before my parents arrived in late September, I tore off the old 8x12 unit and framed up a new 12x20 replacement. I swear I asked for plans from Menards and other lumberyards in town. However, the design posed a few challenges. For one, the garage sits directly underneath the deck, so lots of supports were not an option. As well, the deck is 9 feet off the ground. So, I designed my own plans:

- 6x6 posts for the supports, 16 feet long
- 2x10s for all stringers
- 2x12s for ledger board, all stringer ends, doubled on 16 ft span.
- 2x6s for floor and stair treads

I bolted the unit together with $\frac{1}{2}$ " by 10" bolts, and screwed the floor and the treads down. Many have commented on the design, but the new owners swear that, if a tornado comes, they'll simply strap themselves to the deck. Now, that is construction worth remembering!

With the deck and the siding finished, the position materialized, so I hurried through the kitchen and basement punch lists. We completed the house 1 week before we left for Cedar Rapids. Many thanks to our parents for helping with the projects, and to those that visited. We hope you'll visit us in Iowa. We promise to buy a less "needy" house next time, lessening the work requirements for room and board.

We're planning on being home for the holidays, in case the world ends. But, we've stocked up on toilet paper just in case. Julie notes there is little more important than plenty of TP when the going gets rough. We'll see.

Hope you and your family had a very Merry CHRISTmas,

Jim, Julie, Brent, Watson, and Sherlock Brain.

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