



Tall Tales from the Editor

Focus or Salute

I was off to town for an eye exam, something I hadn't done for, oh, I don't know . . . before bin Laden became America's most wanted, but after the embarrassing debacle with Florida and the 2000 presidential election.

My canine friend, Barney McGee, was jumping around the back seat of my green Ram pickup with a little more gusto than normal. He always gets excited when I say, "Hey, Monster Boy, do you wanna go for a ride?" The word "go" makes him focus on one of his favorite pastimes, kind of like I do when I hear the words "ice cream" or "girls."

These days I have to strap McGee into the seat belt. I never would have thought I'd resort to such a thing, but I never had a dog who wanted to race oncoming cars from the back seat, either.

I'm told that the doggie seat belt is an important safety factor for your pooch. Just like for humans, a belt will keep your dog from going through the windshield if a quick stop is necessary or you run into something. In McGee's case, it also keeps him in the back seat as opposed to trying to push me out of the driver's seat so he can size up an oncoming vehicle to see if it's worth his time to race them from inside my truck.

I know I could strap him in the truck bed, but I like talking to McGee. He's usually very agreeable with me. That is, until he spots an oncoming vehicle of his liking.

For my eye exam, I went to my neighbor, Kurt Wilkening, O.D., at Eyecare Associates in Medford. This was my first exam by Kurt; I thought if I was going to need to learn braille, I wanted to hear it from someone I knew.

I was focused on eliminating things that might be contributing to my migraine headaches that seem to be never-ending since the radiation treatment I had for my reoccurring prostate cancer earlier this year. My eyes seemed like a good place to focus on first.

I zipped right through the first part of the eye exam with much better results than I had received zipping through my school exams at Avon High in Indiana. I wasn't sure if my buddy Marty "Chickslayer" Wilson and I would ever graduate from study hall. Neither of us had much of a focus on school—except for girls, becoming rock stars, and more girls. You might need to add girls a few more times to get the real picture.

Anyway, back to my eye exam...

Kurt suggested we get a picture of my eyes—a laser-generated digital photo, to be exact. That way, we'd have a baseline to see how healthy or sickly my eyes were in the future.

Tiffany was the assistant who set me up for the photos. She explained that, one eye at a time, I was to look into this large, metal box—an "optomap" that was hooked up to a computer. I was to look straight at this small green spot, move my head around until I could see a red circle going around the green spot. I was then to tell Tiffany when I had everything lined up, focus straight ahead with eyes as wide open as I could, and she'd snap the picture.

"You blinked again, J.D.," she'd say. Just like in the seventh grade, I would take the test "over and over" again. Didn't the British band The Dave Clark Five have a song by that title?

Finally, Tiffany had to tape my eyelid wide open. I never would have thought I would have found taped eyelids so pleasurable. "Ooh, I like this taped eyelid," I muttered as I looked into the optomap again. Flash! A bright green light lit up my brain and she said, "We got it. Let's tape the other eyelid." Hmm, I'm going to have to talk to my bride Sioux about the pleasures of

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eyelid taping.

When I removed the tape, it didn't remove my eyebrows like, say, a wax job would. That was a good thing, because Tiffany pointed out that they'd have to charge extra for custom-designed eyebrows.

When Kurt showed me the digital photos on his computer screen, I was reminded of an old black light poster. You could see everything: blood vessels, arteries, optic nerve, etc. Kurt pointed out that there was no plaque buildup in my eye arteries; in fact, my optic nerve looked as healthy as a 16-year-old.

"Right on," I said. Finally—something that wasn't falling apart or listed as a recall flaw on my 1951 body.

"This is totally cool," I told Kurt. "Upper management (my bride Sioux) has told me often that I have the mind of a twelve-year-old, and now you tell me I have the optic nerve of a 16-year-old. Well, that must explain the girl-watching. And with the State handing me a driver license and telling me I could buy beer legally, I think it's now clear, even to my pubescent mind, why I get into so much trouble."

Kurt wanted to know if he could ride along in the back seat. Scoot over,

Barney McGee. (I'm sure he would love to share his back-seat seat belt with Kurt.)

But wait—let me focus on this scenario for a minute: Do you think a judge would buy this as my defense for some sort of rule infraction I may or may not have committed? "Your honor, I should be tried as a juvenile because I have the mind of a 12-year-old and the optic nerve of a 16-year-old. I just can't explain the graying hair or all the wrinkles."

The next morning, I was sitting on the couch in our living room sucking down my second very large cup of coffee. I was trying to get the sandman out of my eyes and focus on the day ahead of me. As I stared into my morning elixir, I gave thanks to Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu. Who is he? you might ask. He was a French naval officer who in 1720 focused on bringing coffee trees to his estate on the Caribbean island of Martinique. If not for de Clieu's determination, those of us who require coffee to start our motors each day might never get up to the speed of a banana slug.

At that time in history the Dutch trading empire controlled the major coffee plantations of the world and the trade routes. That's called a monopoly, kind of like the oil companies today. Oil is the No. 1 commodity in the world; coffee is No. 2.

It's a long story, but de Clieu got some cuttings from the King of France's coffee tree in Paris, the only coffee tree in all of Europe. (Of course, the King knew nothing of the heisted cuttings.) De Clieu set sail with his future in hand as well as everyone else's whose

future included addiction to caffeine. (Did you know that around 90 percent of Americans consume caffeine in some form or another?)

After five years, de Clieu's one surviving coffee tree had yielded 2,000 new coffee trees. He then sent seeds to other French colonies and, eventually, the Dutch monopoly was broken. That meant that the average person could afford to drink lots of coffee and focus on the day ahead of them.

I'm surprised that we don't have a statue of Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu next to that other French work of art, the Statue of Liberty. When the American Revolution finally got underway, it wasn't tea or Pepsi that our founding fathers were slurping. No, a lot of those revolutionary folks stayed focused and wired with coffee.

So remember, focus...and salute Gabriel Mathieu de Clieu.



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The voices in my head may not be real, but they have some good ideas!



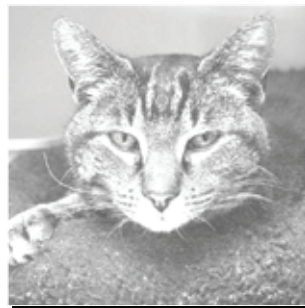
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Whisp - #K1082
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