

Welcome to the Wilderness!

Ever play Musical Chairs when you were a kid? Guess what -- we're all playing it right now... Ready, FREEZE!

Pretend we just had a 7.9 quake, like the one in 1989. (In other states, substitute hurricane, tornado, flood, or perhaps a terrorist event.) Assume that everyone makes it out of the building without severe injuries, but the quake (or other event) knocked a few homes off their foundation in your neighborhood, and one caught on fire.

Now there's a fire raging out of control, and sadly, your house burns to the ground before you can get there to pull anything out. Everything you own in the world ... is now in your car.

What would you want to have saved? More importantly, what will you need to rebuild your life? Do you have a list of all of your accounts and assets in a safe place? Your insurance company will need to see evidence of every single item you want replaced. Did you store a videotape of your home's contents somewhere safe?

Phone lines are down and will be for several days. Cell phones and the internet are out, too, because there's no electricity, and won't be for weeks. No gas or water, either. I forgot to mention, it's December and it's freezing...

How will you survive? How will you contact your loved ones? Will you be able to help anyone else who is hurt?

You can't drive anywhere, because overpasses have collapsed and fallen debris has clogged many roads.

Without power, running water, or the ability to communicate, you are now, effectively... in the wilderness.

Not only are you in the wilderness, you are ON YOUR OWN, because no one can come to help you. Just like after hurricane Katrina, the police, fire departments, and hospitals are overwhelmed with much bigger problems.

Do you have first aid supplies, or basic tools, or emergency clothing in your car? Do you know how to administer CPR or first aid? Do you understand the legal implications of administering aid?

If you have kids or elderly parents, will the school or care provider take care of them until you can get there? After three days, schools typically release kids in their care to county protective services. Is this OK with you?

If both you and your spouse are incapacitated, does the school know your backup plan? Do you know the school's plan? Do your kids know your plan? Is there any guarantee that school officials won't go home to take care of their own families?

Let's assume you walk all the way home from here, which for me is about 20 miles. You find neighbors with whom you can take shelter. How do you know if a dwelling is safe enough to enter? What subtle signs of danger should you look for, such as standing water, which might be electrified?

Do you know where to look in a home for drinkable water when water lines are broken? (Water heaters, toilet supply tanks) Do you keep a few weeks supply of any medications you need to survive with you? (Insulin, etc.)

The government has caches of supplies stored throughout the area. Do you know where they are?

When the power is out, credit cards won't work. Do you have a stash of cash somewhere safe and accessible?

After a week without power or water, if people start raiding homes to take what they need by force, what will you and your neighbors do? Do you know a HAM radio operator living nearby? (You can get certified in 8 hours.)

Do you use extension cords in your home for other than temporary uses? I didn't realize that fires are often caused by these cords, because they are not designed for long-term use. Eventually they spark, causing fires.

OK, you can relax, a little. Answers to all of these questions and more can be obtained by taking a CERT class, which stands for Community Emergency Response Team. I just completed the 20-hour CERT course in six nights at West Valley Community College in Saratoga. The City of Saratoga gave me a vest, hardhat, and a backpack to create what is called a "go kit."

I keep my Go Kit in my car, since my car is usually where I am, but importantly, I don't park my car in my garage. Can anyone guess why? Yes, this is in case my garage collapses or burns. I also keep a more extensive emergency supplies kit in my home, where I can access it quickly and easily.

Please do something today to prepare yourself, not only for your sake, but for those around you. For more information on where to take the CERT class in your community, go to www.citizencorps.gov/cert/ or www.nvoad.org or ask any local fireman or policeman.

My CERT instructor was **Jim Yoke**, KI6HKZ, Emergency Services Coordinator, Santa Clara County Fire Dept, 14700 Winchester Blvd, Los Gatos, CA 95032 sccfd_esc@yahoo.com 408-887-7818.

2008 Intl. Speech Contest: I'm Too Busy!

Do you ever feel like you're in over your head --- like you cannot competently handle any more "action items"? Fellow TM and guests, I often feel this way. The demands of my job can sometimes be overwhelming.

[begin tossing & catching one bean bag] I am the lone tech writer supporting over 100 engineers, many of whom are not that comfortable communicating in English, let alone communicating ...

I also have a wife & three daughters (a 19 year old from my first marriage, and a 7 and 5 year old from my 2nd) **[begin tossing & catching 2 bean bags]**, and each of them is usually in a different phase of hormonal insanity.

In addition to my crazy job and my crazy home life, I am fairly active in various volunteer activities at my kids' school and in the community at large. Sometimes I just get overwhelmed.

[begin juggling 3 bean bags] I want to scream "No more! I'm too busy!" Can you relate? **[stop juggling]**

When I find myself yearning for an easier job, or an easier role as a volunteer, or an easier wife..., and I feel like I'm drowning, I keep myself afloat by thinking about what I want most in life.

Have you ever stopped and thought about what it is that you want most?

Some people want fortune or fame or power. Some people just want to become a competent communicator. But what I want most is simply this: to leave the planet a little bit better off than I found it.

If I die today, what have I done to increase the odds that your great grandchildren will know a less polluted, more peaceful world? This question influences choices I make with regard to my time.

My desire to leave the planet better off than I found it is also why, on top of everything going on in my life, or rather, underneath it all, I am trying to become a successful screenwriter.

The problem is that, like any serious artform, screenwriting requires a fair amount of time and effort, as well as a bit of luck. And I'm struggling to find enough undistracted time to give it my best effort.

In fact, I am convinced that **THE MOST CREATIVE THING I WILL EVER DO** is create the time I need to write a script that is worthy of a decent budget, a talented film crew, and the time and attention of a wide audience.

I figure I need only 3 or 4 weeks, if I really focus. It will be difficult, but I am confident that I can git'er done, because I have overcome difficult obstacles in the past.

For example, I managed to focus and graduate from college in only 4 years, **[take a hit on a pretend doobie]** despite all the parties I attended..., and despite the distractions of being young and healthy and "good lookin'", I managed to focus my attention on one girl, get married, and build a family. Twice.

It might seem like a relatively simple undertaking to block out 6 to 8 undistracted weeks, but this is turning out to be the most difficult challenge I've ever faced.

Difficult, because to succeed, I must face a lot of fear. Mostly, fear of having nothing to show after all of my effort, since luck plays a significant role.

I also have to overcome complacency. I am 3 for 3 on healthy, happy, beautiful daughters! And my wife is a reliable partner. This is 90% of everything that matters to me. My job pays my bills and enables me to save a chunk for retirement. And volunteer stuff makes me happy. So why reach for this goal?

Why not just kick back and relax? Because, my friends, more than I fear failure, I fear that if I never give this dream my best effort at least once before I'm too old, I will regret it. Besides, all I need is 10 to 12 solid weeks.

Something inside me knows that I cannot NOT go for it. It's like I'm having a crisis or something. By the way, I'm turning 50 in September... a coincidence? Seriously though, six months should be all I need.

In summary then, I'm too busy. But I will make it happen. I'm always going to be too busy. I don't have time for speech contests, either, but over the past eight years I have never NOT entered a Toastmaster contest. This is my 16th contest in a row.

One thing I've learned from Toastmasters is that being too busy is not a problem. It is a development opportunity. **[begin juggling 3 bean bags]**

So I encourage you all to embrace being too busy. It'll make a story worth telling some day. Mr. Toastmaster.

Eulogy for Jack Pingree

Only 5 people from NHS '76 showed up. Everyone else at the service knew Jack from college or his job. Quite a turn out (about 150), with an open bar and food for 3 hours afterward....

During the service, the minister said that "In our faith, we don't eulogize the dead, but I will allow a little time for anyone who wishes to say a few words."

When the time came, no one offered much beyond a single sentence or two, and this seemed wrong to me, so at the last possible second, I went up and offered a few paragraphs...

I hesitated because I didn't think it was appropriate for me to do so, since I didn't know Jack that well, and there was not a single empty seat in the room (a third of us had to stand around the perimeter), and I thought others should speak first, but it pissed me off that no one else was saying much of anything, if at all.

So I went up there and spoke. And I managed to make everyone laugh and cry. Later at the reception, no less than two dozen people came up to me (one by one) and thanked me for expressing what they were thinking or feeling, so I'm glad I followed my gut and took the risk. Here's the eulogy I gave, if you care to see it:

I didn't know Jack as well as many of you did. But I remember him very well. I'd like to share what I remember. Jack and I became friends mainly because of mutual friends we shared. I have a hunch, though, that he had a bigger impact on me than I did on him.

What I remember is that, for the most part, Jack was soft spoken, patient, kind, and polite... ..all of the traits that will get you shunned by the "popular people" in school. (This got a BIG laugh! Emboldened, I continued...)

Jack was not one of the popular people, and neither was I; however, I wanted to be, and in my constant quest to get the attention of girls, I did not hesitate to sacrifice any friendship, if I thought doing so might get me laid.

(Another HUGE laugh!) This is probably why Jack was somewhat wary of my friendship, but I do have a sense that he was at least mildly amused by me.

He even had a hand in some of the stunts that our mutual gang of friends pulled. But what stands out for me is that even in a rowdy, drunken mob of adolescent pranksters, Jack was always a gentleman. In his way, he served as a conscience for those of us who sometimes lacked one. He was a leader, if anyone cared to notice.

As the years have passed, and life has handed me several lessons in humility, I now recognize that Jack was a humble person. And I now regret some of the arrogant choices I made back in high school. I've learned that you never gain something without losing something else.

Back then I was too girl-crazy to get to know an "introvert" like Jack. A guy who, by all accounts, had a wealth of knowledge to share. Now all I can do is learn about who he was from his friends and family.

(Emotions getting the better of some now, and the people crying are starting to make ME emotional...)

I am certain that if the tables were turned, and Jack was saying a few words at my funeral, he wouldn't have ANY regrets about the way he chose to interact with me.

(And the more emotional I became, the more emotional everyone became...)

Jack seemed to know instinctively what matters most, and he chose a career that reflected his character. The last time I saw him was actually around the year 2000. He didn't see me, because I was watching him from my living room in California.

I was watching the news, and I literally freaked out when I realized that the person being interviewed by CNN was none other than Jack Pingree. There he was, a respected expert on marine wildlife!

At that moment I was proud of him, and I thought, I should give him a call. But I didn't, and the years passed... I've had my hands full raising three daughters. Yes, God has a sense of humor...

(I glanced over at the pastor as I said the previous, and everyone roared!)

Now I get to protect my girls from the kind of boy I was. And hope they meet the kind of boy Jack was.

(Major tears in the room. I am forced to pause while I fight back my own...)

When Bob sent me a message last week, letting me know that Jack had passed, I was suddenly filled with regret. Jack never knew that he was someone I respected and admired.

(At this point I had to stop. I walked back to my spot, unable to utter the closing I had intended, which was...)

I figured the least I could do is come here today and let the people who cared about him the most know how he impacted my life. Besides, I thought, maybe there will be some loose women at the memorial...

(Most of the people I spoke to later said I should have gone for it and included this... Go figure!)