

There's An Adult In My Soup

Kim & Jason Kotecki

illustrated by **Jason Kotecki**



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When I was a kid, my soup was just right,
Yummy and tasty, a veritable delight.
Two cups of dreams and a full pint of play,
A pinch of curiosity for the perfect bouquet.
Passion and wonder and faith it had too,
I'd dare you to taste a happier stew!

But when I got older, my soup it did turn,
Enough to warrant a cause for concern.
It's gunky and goopy and lacking in fun,
It's not nearly as tasty as when I'd begun.
It's bland and it's bitter and tastes just like poop,
The problem is clearly the adult in my soup!





18 Checks

by Jason

I was chatting over email with my uncle recently, and the subject of following one's dreams came up. He expressed how sad it is that so many people wait until they retire before they pursue their dreams and goals. Unfortunately he noted, for many, that day never comes. This is from a guy in his mid-fifties coming off a quadruple bypass operation.

He mentioned that when people retire, the average number of Social Security checks they are able to cash before they die is...eighteen. I'm not sure what his source is, but I have no reason to question this number.

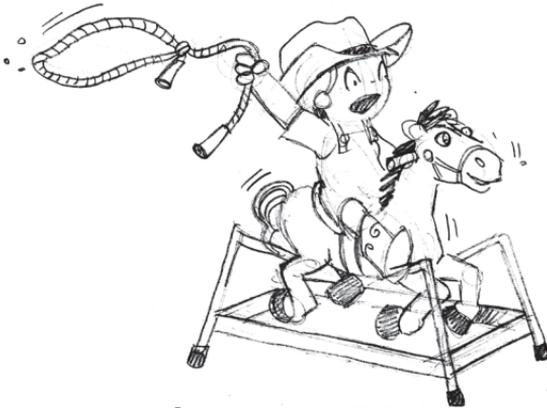
To me, life is too short to spend it living for retirement and 18 checks.

Now mind you, I am writing this from the cool con-

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fines of the Atlanta Bread Company because it is so hot here in Madison that I think I heard the weatherman say something about spontaneous combustion, and Kim and I are too poor to run our terribly inefficient air conditioner. In short, chasing after “the dream” is not always a picnic in Paris. Actually, on some days, it can be terrifying, frustrating, and can even make you question your sanity. But even though it’s sometimes hard to explain why, I wouldn’t change a thing. Not for a million dollars. Not for free air conditioning.

And definitely not for 18 checks.



Crazy Horse

by Kim

Today on my walk, I saw something that sparked a warm memory. It was one of those toy rocking horses suspended on springs.

Did you ever ride one as a kid?

My horse was faded and the springs were very loose from the many rides my three older sisters took over the years prior to my arrival.

When I would go for a gallop, I'd experience a very specific combination of feelings. It was a little bit scary, a little risky because I wasn't in control. It felt like at any given moment I could fall off, because it was pretty shaky. The reckless, topsy-turvy feeling made me nervous, but I always enjoyed it. I wanted the adventure.

Kids have a way of identifying the danger in an activ-

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ity and trying it anyway. Everything is new to them, so overcoming fear is a natural part of their everyday lives.

How is it that, when we grow past four feet tall, fear also seems to grow; and the pros of the adventure don't seem worth the risks involved?

As grown-ups struggling with Adulthood, we "need" comfort.

Everyone talks about the comfort zone, about stepping out, but I don't see very many people actually doing it. I don't think it's a "zone" that you step beyond. I think it's a wild and crazy horse ride. You have to jump on, embrace the adventure, accept the fear, and keep riding.

We all think that we need to stay in control. Well, the fact is that we are not in control. We will never be. The sooner we figure that out, the better we can give our lives to a bigger cause, to surrender to who we were meant to be...not to who we think we *should* be or who society *tells* us we should be.

We all need an adventure. We were made for more than this. I know I was. I know we all are.

Seeing that horse inspires me to embrace that child-like courage that I've left behind. I want to jump on my crazy horse—yes, the one that is rusty and unwieldy.

Giddy up, horsie!



Marshmallows and Motorcycle Trips

by Jason

A few years ago, I had the privilege of addressing a group of elementary and high school teachers at a district wide meeting in Stark County, Illinois. I like talking to teachers. Rarely do they have people standing up for them, acknowledging all the hard work they do, and reminding them of why they got into teaching in the first place.

It was the first day back from Christmas break, and frankly, I don't think anyone was too excited to be there. (At least that's what Kim's teaching experience has taught me.) After I promised that I wouldn't say a word about curriculum, and had everyone complete a short ques-

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tionnaire that I call an Adultitis intake, I am confident to say that we had a pretty good time.

A high school science teacher, Al Curry, was the winner of the Chubby Bunny contest. He stuffed at least five jumbo marshmallows into his mouth and was still able to perfectly enunciate the phrase, “chubby bunny.”

The group enjoyed Al’s confident display of marshmallow domination, and I had a great conversation with him after the presentation. He told me about one of the ways he manages to remain Adultitis-free. Every summer, he and his college-age son go on a motorcycle trip. Their biggest expense is gas, as the duo eats cheap and sleeps in tents. They’ve seen a lot of the beautiful wide-open spaces of this country, including Yellowstone, the Badlands, and scenic Minnesota. The Grand Canyon is at the top of their wish list.

Al related a story about a trip his son took to a leadership camp in Washington, D.C. when he was in high school. According to Al’s son, there were a lot of well-off Ivy League kids there. A discussion came up about what kinds of cars everybody had, and names like BMW and Mercedes surfaced. The kids were aghast to learn that Al’s son didn’t own a car.

“I have an old motorcycle, though,” he sheepishly offered.

“You do?”

“Yep. Me and my dad go riding every summer.”

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That led to an hour-long discussion about the summer road trips. The East Coast kids were mesmerized. According to Al—and I think he's right—his son's new friends were probably not as interested in the stories of the road as much as they were perplexed by the concept of actually having quality time with Dad.

They say time is money. I don't know about that. All too often in today's world, parents try to substitute money—and BMWs—for time, as if they were an equal swap. It never ceases to amaze me that no matter how young or close to adulthood a child is, he or she would always rather have time than money.

No one has figured out how to make more time.

Today is as good a time as any to look at your supply of time and money, and re-evaluate how you're investing each of them. How do you spend your time? How do you spend your money? You can always make more money, yet no one has figured out how to make more time. When it's gone, it's gone.

Brand new BMW: \$35,000.

Ivy League Education: \$150,000.

A motorcycle trip to the Grand Canyon with your son: Priceless.

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Eeyore or Tigger?

by Kim

As I sat typing on Daisy, my Mac, waiting for the car to get some fresh oil, I couldn't help but smile at the psychology lesson that was unfolding right before my eyes. Folks were coming in to drop off their cars for everything from oil changes to big money repairs. To say that "attitude is everything" at the car mechanic's is an understatement.

First, a thirty-something woman came in, acting very Eeyore-like. Although she wasn't elderly, she seemed to be moving at a pace that would get her some significant discounts at Old Country Buffet. Her presence was gloomy and grey, just like America's favorite depressed donkey. The cheery voice behind the counter asked her

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how her day was starting. She responded with a weary, "Not horrible, I guess. I'm just tired." God bless him, the determined optimist joked, "Well, at least you're not sick AND tired."

No laugh.

Shortly thereafter, a baby-boomer gentleman came bouncing through the door with a smile on his face and a friendly salutation that extended to everyone in the

Do you have
a storm cloud
lingering overhead
or a rainbow?

room. It was such a stark contrast, I stopped working to take notice. This guy was larger than life. He brought the sunshine in with him. It was clear in my quick assessment that

he loved living, was confident and purpose-driven, and that he was going to have a great day, no matter what. He seemed be living Tigger's philosophy: "Bouncing is what Tiggers do best."

Which one are you?

Look above you right now. Do you have a storm cloud lingering overhead or a rainbow?

Look on your desk, is your glass half full or half empty (or bone dry)?

The harsh reality is that within three seconds of encountering someone new, you are evaluated. First impressions are made and they're almost impossible to reverse. Sure, life isn't all daisies and roses, but how quickly do

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you bounce back?

Rainbows and storm clouds exist in the same sky. One secret to keeping that rainbow above you is to surround yourself with positive people. As motivational guru Jim Rohn says, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.”

My friend, Rich “the big kid” DiGirolamo, ends all of his emails with, “Make something fun happen today! The world needs it!” And then there’s my buddy, Phil Gerbyshak, the “Make It Great!” guy. He’s constantly encouraging others to “Make every day a Great Day!”

Look around you. Are your “five people” bouncing or trudging through life?

If someone saw you at the mechanic’s, what first impression would you make?

Take charge of your attitude.

It might be time for a tune-up.



When Mosquitoes Attack

by Jason

The other night Kim and I were on one of our walks. It was late, and our steps were guided by the full moon's glow and the occasional street light. We were immersed in a great conversation brainstorming about the business. As we passed a park, my wife, who has a bladder the size of a baby leprechaun, spotted a port-a-potty. She had to go.

Did I mention it was dark? Ink black dark.

My role as husband meant that I was enlisted to hold the door open for her so she could see what she was doing. (Although in my experience, the less I'm able to see in those things, the better.)

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No problem, I was happy to oblige. Except for one thing: over the past several weeks, Mother Nature had given Wisconsin enough rain to be declared a national waterpark. And with lots of rain come lots of mosquitoes, (a.k.a the Wisconsin State Bird.) The bugs don't really bother us on our walks, as long as we keep walking. If you stop to tie your shoe, or say, go to the bathroom in a darkened portable toilet stationed in the middle of a dark field blanketed in wet grass that hasn't been cut in ages, you're in trouble. Those pesky pests swarm around you like they're Homer Simpson and you're a donut with sprinkles.

So here's the picture for you: Kim was in the bathroom, trying to do her business as fast as she could. I was holding the door open while simultaneously trying to keep myself in mosquito-averting motion, pacing back and forth like a nervous expectant father on WAY too much caffeine. And the kicker is that, right in the middle of the whole ordeal, a car drove by. I'm not sure if their bright headlights allowed them to see what was going on, but I'd sure love to know what they were thinking.

We could all use more humility, but I've found that we don't usually have to seek it out. Never forget that you can spend most of your day acting like you're hot stuff; but whether you're a highly-paid CEO, a high-court judge, or just a guy out walking with his wife, life has a way of making sure you don't take yourself too seriously.



Pajama Run

by Kim

Imagine with me for a few minutes...

You're seven years old and lying in bed after a full day of playing four square, drilling on spelling words, and practicing your cursive. Life is good. After getting your goodnight kiss from mom, you imagine what the next day will bring. Then, out of nowhere, like a bolt of lightning, your door flies open with the sound of pots and pans being beaten like the Notre Dame fight song. You pop up, knocking over the water by your bedside. "Pajama Run!" your parents exclaim, as they stand in your room telling you and your sister to get up and get moving!

Woo hoo, a Pajama Run!

You put on your slippers and coat, but are not allowed to change into regular clothes—that's the whole

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point. No wonder mom asked you to wear your new pajamas tonight, you laugh to yourself! Dad will not divulge the final destination, even though you beg him to tell you.

You hop into the station wagon and zoom off to a local ice cream joint, where you are invited to order a sweet treat—in your pajamas! Sitting in the Twisty Station, you and your family laugh as you recall the looks on your faces, how your sister had no idea what was going on, and how funny it was that you spilled your water. You also recall that you *did* notice Mom setting the pans on the counter before bed, but thought maybe she was just getting ready for the morning. Lots of giggles all around! As you eat your sweet treat you announce to your family that when you get big and have a family, you are for sure going to take your kids on Pajama Runs!

This is what I imagined when a woman at one of our gigs described her family's tradition. She shared that this is a fun way that they escape adulthood. She also mentioned that sometimes everyone in her children's small school will go on a Pajama Run together. They all meet at a predetermined place and time. The kids are thrilled to see their friends there, also in pajamas.

There's nothing better than to sit in your pj's out in public, enjoying a banana split, way past your bedtime! It keeps things interesting, playful and spontaneous.

Make a Pajama Run tonight!

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Life As A Daring Adventure

by Jason

Kim and I are in Arizona this week. It's hotter than the inside of an Easy-Bake Oven.

After a speaking engagement in Scottsdale on Sunday, as I signed books for busy moms and teased little kids, I noticed an elderly woman standing quietly in the background. She looked like she was waiting for the crowd to clear out. Once the activity level died down, she and her walker made their way over to the table where I was sitting. "I want to share a story with you," she said eagerly.

Dorothy was her name, and she informed me matter-of-factly that she was eighty. Her wispy, silver hair

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framed her plump face and sparkling eyes.

“Ten years ago, I thought I was going to die,” she started. “So I made a list of all the things I thought I was going to do ‘some day.’ One by one, I started doing them, you know, the things we always say we’re going to do, like visiting someone, making a phone call, writing a letter.”

One of the things Dorothy decided to do was book a flight to meet her brother for lunch. They didn’t see each other very much; he never had the time and she never had the money. He took a half day off (“He never does that!”) and picked her up at the airport. They had a delightful lunch with his wife and family.

“My brother is kind of a workaholic. For the life of him, he couldn’t figure out why I was there,” she said. “I told him, ‘I’m here because I love you and I wanted to spend time with you.’ It was probably the best gift I could have ever given him.”

“And then I surprised my husband when I told him we were going to Hawaii,” she continued. “‘What?! You’re crazy!’ he said. ‘People like us don’t go to Hawaii.’”

A year later, they were in Hawaii.

I could see the childlike joy shine from her eyes as she described traveling to Italy for the opera, another life-long dream. “It was so wonderful!” she exclaimed. “They so love their opera over there. The old theater was beautiful, so opulent—and it was even an opera I knew!”

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"I had so much fun doing all of those things," Dorothy continued. "I'm sure it was one of the reasons I was cured."

Now just minutes earlier, I had been encouraging a roomful of people to make the most of their days, slowing down enough to appreciate life's captivating details, and being brave enough to chase their dreams. But if everyone had had the chance to hear Dorothy tell her story and see firsthand the effervescent life in her blue eyes, my words wouldn't have been needed.

And I'd have been fine with it.

But instead, most people work late into the night, rushing around like pinballs in a noisy arcade game, desperately trying to keep up with an impossible standard, even though something deep inside yearns for something different. Sadly, it often takes a doctor telling you that your days are numbered before you begin to make some changes.

Most people are
rushing around
like pinballs in a
noisy arcade game.

And that's if you're lucky enough to get a warning.

I am more certain than ever that God intended our lives here on earth to be more like the one Dorothy described: exciting, invigorating, and filled with moments of wondrous awe and giddy delight.

I think that when we get to heaven, it might be like returning home from a long trip. The angels and the saints

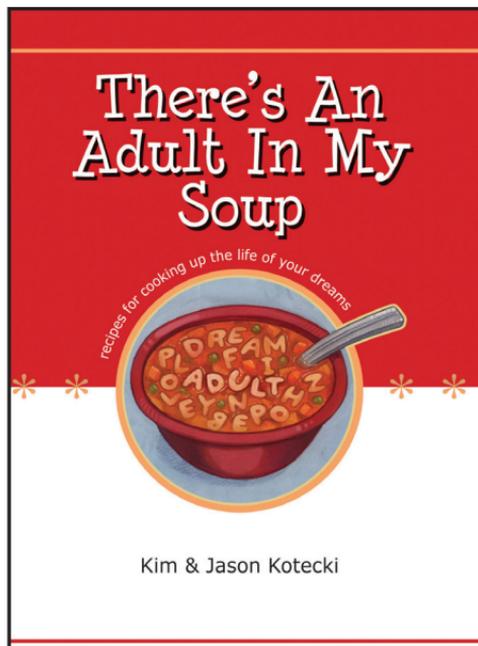
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will crowd around us, eager to hear the tales of our life. “Who did you meet? Who captured your heart? What did you see? Wasn’t the sunset over the ocean great? How impressive was that opera?” These are the questions they’ll ask us, and they’ll even be patient and sincere enough to want to see all our pictures and watch all of our home movies.

How sad would it be for them to hear you respond, “People like me don’t do that sort of stuff.”

Whatever is in your heart to do, do it. Write that letter. Make that call. Take that trip. Helen Keller was right when she said, “Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

Live life daringly. You only get one.



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