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JANUARY IN OXFORD – SANS STUDENTS

House Director Journal – Back at it!

January is a strange time in Oxford... lots of time, but few students! They call it J-Term, a time for a concentrated class (online or in person) or Internship or just staying home for the month. And during most of this month, I've been doing my "Baker Mayfield commercial"... one guy alone in a big house.

I spent the last 3 weeks of the year in Cleveland where my friend Roger put up with me as a house guest. I got to see friends and family, go to a couple parties (Thanks, Jimmy and Margaret!), work a couple Jackpot Casino events and play some trivia... most of the things I missed about Cleveland that I didn't have to miss! Finished it up with a Playhouse Square Tour for 24 people... all great fun!

But I made it back to Oxford in time to see the first Sunday of NFL playoffs and began knocking around this big old house! The good news is that the guys who came back for New Year's did a pretty good job of taking care of the place... the House was relatively clean and very secure. And I kept the season going by plugging in the Christmas tree in the front window every night.

Townies are interesting people... and when you get right down to it, when school is out of session, Oxford is just a small town in Southwest Ohio. Most of the people who live here make their living from the university or the housing and services that 16,000 students require. Good people, and not as much of a "love / hate" with students as you might expect. My new "home bar" is Circle Bar... just a hole in the wall with no sign and in the alley 2 blocks from the house. Always make me feel welcome and some interesting folks.

One of them is Dennis who "works" as a stand-up comic and refers to his lovely wife Barbara as his "meal ticket"... she works for the University. Dennis and I hit it off right away, and he invited me to play "Pickle Ball" with a group at the Rec Center every Monday-Wednesday-Friday morning. For the uninitiated, this is like ping pong where you are standing on the table... court is the same size as badminton with wooden paddles and wiffle softballs. Great fun, good people, and I have survived 3 sessions so far ... could become a habit!

The other thing that Dennis and I are going to have in common is that I am starting a Storytelling Group at the Oxford Community Arts Center (which used to be known as "Ox College"). If you are familiar with The Moth on NPR, you know what I'm talking about... if not, worth finding and giving a listen. Folks tell "stories that are affirmed as true" in front of a live audience. I have performed at Storyclub Cleveland (another good thing to check out) and it wasn't that much of a jump from my monthly Writer's Group to propose this new event... starts soon... stay tuned!

I'm also keeping busy with some blackjack gigs, played a relatively nippy 9 holes of golf, and I'm working as a Substitute Teacher in area schools. I don't travel far, but if I want to sub, I can work every day. My general rule is to avoid "ankle biters" (all motion and emotion and don't want to wipe anyone's nose or butt) and high school (they already know everything). But Middle School and I get along just fine... you can catch their attention and if I need to intimidate them (not often) I can!

The best days are those when I can actually teach a lesson or engage them in a discussion. On one occasion I got to help a group of 6th graders fill in a chart on the characteristics of the 5 major religions... great questions and participation.

Another day a 7th grade class was reading aloud the screen play for “Brian’s Song”, the story of Brian Piccolo and Gale Sayers when they played for the Chicago Bears. The story is set in 1964 and it quickly became obvious that they had few reference points. There were only 14 teams and they were not even on TV every Sunday. Players had “regular jobs” in the off season and they didn’t understand going to “pay phones” to call their wives. I tried to explain the racial tension of the era and that having a black and white player room together was a revelation.

But the most interesting part was that they did not understand “stage directions” from the screen play. Here are 13-14 year old kids, raised on videos who did not get it when it said, “Fade to Black” or when the camera was to “pan” the room, coming to rest on different places and faces to enhance the story. Now that was a fun day of substitute teaching!

So as you can tell, I’m keeping busy, but I don’t want you to think I’ve been ignoring the House. I’ve had the cleaners in to set new standards for the next semester... a little bit of “come to Jesus” there but it was time. Some of the guys were in for the College Football National Championship game... LSU was their “adopted” team, so that was fun! Numerous calls and emails with Stefan and the Alumni Council about issues in the house, ranging from raccoons in the attic to our “Make the House a Home” fund raising campaign. And a couple days ago, I got a phone call and the screen read, “Tom Webb”.

It was Needle... at least that was his nickname in college. He was on the front porch with his wife Mary Ann and I welcomed them in and gave them the tour. We were in the same graduating class, and Needle and I were the forwards on the infamous basketball “D Team” that featured Bob Hope (his real name) and Mick McGough at guards and Dave “The Stork” Schuster at Center. I also remember Jeff Pandora and Steve Zegree were on that team... sorry if I missed other names. We were an odd assemblage that made it to that season’s playoffs... and then got drilled by the Delta Tau Delta “D Team” that was actually their “B Team” for purposes of tournament seeding. Needle and I agreed that it was OK with us that they were the Frat thrown off campus last year for excessive hazing!

I had a great time with Needle and his lovely wife, reminiscing and brining him up to speed on our current status. I had probably seen Tom only once since we graduated... we were still trying to pinpoint when as they left. But it was “Old Home Week”, great to see him and thoroughly enjoyable. I look forward to any Alumni who want to stop in... just let me know you are coming... like I said... I keep busy!

Now it’s on to the second semester... the only person more anxious to see the guys than me is our cook, Jackie. They’ll be arriving over the weekend and classes start on Monday. Let’s roll!