

'Tis the season when the animatronic reindeer emerges from its cardboard cave to grace our front lawn. During assembly, Doug insisted that the two parts stored inside the body cavity were baby deer, and stood them up on the grass. I explained that they were actually the antlers (of the one and only deer in the box.) We have this conversation every year. Doug probably can not remember this because his brain storage capacity is clogged with useful information like the entire theme song from the Beverly Hillbillies and the license plate number of a car seen speeding on Mallard Drive in East Hartford in 1970 (#424ESM).

This year, Doug and four Penney High School buddies celebrated their 50th birthdays at our place. Events included the ZGO (Zimmerman Golf Open) tournament, with holes like Johnny-on-the-Spot (port-a-potty) and



Desperate Housewives (wisteria.) There was also a Fluffy Bunny contest - always a classic. It involves cramming one marshmallow after another into your mouth without swallowing, but after each one, contestants must pronounce "Fluffy Bunny" in an intelligible manner. (People who have done this once rarely do it again, as the melting marshmallow goo is disgusting.) Young'uns entertained themselves by pelting the Birthdays with water balloons. Historical photos were shown, with plenty of plaid and 70's hairdos. The Boys reminisced about playing Little League for Cy's Parking Lot and later for PanelRama, when fans had to hold their noses and no one would retrieve fly balls that landed in the Hockanum River because of the floating raw sewage. As the evening progressed, a few parents were shocked to discover that their 21 year old children have been spending their college years perfecting their beer pong skills. To everyone's surprise, Doug was the Last Man Standing at 2:00 a.m. The next/same morning, he managed to wake up after the others had already dealt with most of the post-party carnage. Alas, they left him the task of separating recyclables in 10 trash bags from Fluffy Bunny spit-up.

Doug got a high-powered leaf blower for his birthday, and decided it would be a good idea to use it to dust the living room. He discovered it is capable of blowing window panes right out of the frame. The Electrolux never did recover from being used to suck up chunks of cement. (Once I was describing a complicated home improvement project I had in mind to Max, who works at our local hardware store. He just looked at me, shook his head, and said "Poor Doug." I want someone to say "Poor Bet." But it's never going to happen, so I just softly say it to myself every now and then.) Speaking of malfunctions, when a sparkplug sproinged out of the 1988 Mercury Glacier (really a Mercury Tracer without heat), Doug had to ride the scooter to the van pool stop for a month. The worst part was being taunted on a daily basis by small children waiting for the school bus. While climbing, he got a sunburned tongue and frostbitten face and thumb. During electrical repairs, he stabbed himself in the forehead with a pair of needlenose pliers, adding to scars from prior screwdriver and ice axe stabbing incidents.

Doug went on a mountaineering expedition to Mt. Rainier. They attempted the challenging, non-tourist Liberty Ridge route, but a three day fog and snow storm forced a retreat. He did complete a 21-mile marathon traverse of the Mt. Washington Presidential Range that lasted 17.5 hours straight, with 8,000 feet of vertical climbing and 10 summits along the way. He said the end was like a death march. Afterwards he debated whether to go home or to the hospital. He was so dehydrated and fatigued that when he yawned, his mouth locked open.

My year was more of an ongoing yawn. I mostly hunkered down and worked and volunteered a lot, traveling to CO, NY, PA, TN and WA for work, writing a weekly newspaper column on environmental topics (www.ourbetternature.org), and maintaining a bluebird trail with 70 nestboxes. We went camping in the Shenendoahs and northern Pennsylvania. Best Stops: Reptile World and the Yuengling Brewery. Best Movie: Pan's Labrynth. Best Video Clips: Snake News on www.stupidvideos.com. Best book: unfortunately nothing I couldn't put down. Best Conversation (between a three-year old and her father, overheard in the livestock barn at the Woodstock Fair): "*I want a cow!*" "*Honey, we can't get a cow, they are too big.*" "*But I WANT A COW!!!*" Best Excuse to avoid chores (from a 11 year old girl): "*I can't do that right now. I'm making a daisy chain.*" We hope many "Bests" come your way in 2008!

