

The PACKARD PRESS

A collection of thoughts and stories to educate, entertain, and inspire.

THE WORST VALENTINE'S DAYS EVER

2 Epic Failures Led Me to My Wonderful Wife

February 14th is one of my favorite days of the year. It's our family's "Valenersary" — the date when I married my wonderful wife, AmyLyn, and officially started our family! However, before AmyLyn came along, I didn't have the best Valentine's Day track record. In fact, more often than not, the day was a total debacle.

The first disaster struck when I was in second grade at Pine Forest Elementary School. That year, a pretty girl named Robbie gave me a chocolate and peanut butter rose on Valentine's Day. I took a big bite and thought, "Well, I guess I have a girlfriend now!"

Our budding schoolyard romance didn't last. A few days later, my mom explained to me that at age 7, I was far too young for a relationship, and I broke the bad news to Robbie. Fortunately, as far as I remember, she took it with the resilience and good cheer of a 7-year-old.

The next debacle happened in the eighth grade. That year, I got my first "real" girlfriend, Cindy. But the closer we got to Valentine's Day, the more nervous I became. I wanted to get Cindy the perfect present, but I wasn't sure what it should be. I had been walking her to classes for a couple of weeks, and we chatted on the phone every once in a while. I may have even held her hand once or twice. Was a box of chocolates too boring? Was a fuzzy teddy bear too silly? Would she break up with me if I got it wrong? I had no idea, and the day before the holiday, I felt sick to my stomach.

On February 14th, I turned up to Vidor Jr. High School empty-handed. I was so embarrassed by my failure that I couldn't face Cindy. Instead, I salvaged my pride by scribbling a Dear John letter on notebook paper. Yes, that's right — I broke up with my girlfriend on Valentine's

Day in a note! Isn't that horrible? Even though I'd broken her heart, she still left a teddy bear and a little basket of candy in my football locker. (Fortunately, she's now happily married with a family of her own!)

Both of those Valentine's Day experiences were painful, but I'm glad I went through them. Every hiccup and bump in the road of my life led me toward my wife, AmyLyn.

"Yes, that's right — I broke up with my girlfriend on Valentine's Day in a note! Isn't that horrible?"

I couldn't ask for a better partner. She brings music into our home. She laughs at my jokes. She builds me up and supports me in my goals. I could go on and on about how wonderful she is. I'm grateful every day for our loving relationship and the mutual trust and respect we've grown for each other through the years.

Of course, our life together wasn't always as sweet as "Valenersary" chocolates. I remember a particularly low moment in our first year of marriage. I hadn't yet learned how to budget or manage the household finances, and AmyLyn had assumed that I had all that figured out. I still remember sitting on the floor in our basement apartment, surrounded by unpaid bills and late notices. I was completely engulfed in shame.

I was terrified of what AmyLyn would think of me. I had failed in my role as a husband and provider. But instead of embarrassing me further, she simply knelt down beside me and said, "Let me help." Together, we sorted through the bills, weeding out duplicates and notices. We tallied it all up, and in the end, we owed about \$439.

It still felt like all the money in the world, but when I looked at AmyLyn, she smiled and said, "Michael, it's going to be okay." I knew it then: I'd found a good one! There was nobody that could have gotten down on the floor to lift me up the way that AmyLyn did. I love her for it and a thousand other things.

The lyrics from my favorite Ben Folds song really capture how I feel: "I know that I am, I am, I am, the luckiest."

—Michael Packard



DANCE UNTIL YOU DROP — LITERALLY!

When French Residents Had the Uncontrollable Urge to Dance

In July 1518, a strange mania seized the residents of the French city of Strasbourg (which was then part of the Holy Roman Empire). Hundreds were struck with the sudden and uncontrollable urge to dance — seemingly for no reason. These citizens would dance for days until collapsing from exhaustion, unconsciousness, or, in some cases, death!

This plague kicked off when Frau Troffea made her way into the streets and began to twist, twirl, and shake. She seemed unable to stop and kept dancing until she dropped from exhaustion. Many would assume that after collapsing, she would've stopped, but once she rested, she resumed the compulsive, frenzied dancing.

It continued for a week, and other residents eventually joined her. Civic and religious leaders theorized that more dancing was the solution. So, they constructed a stage and gathered musicians to accompany the dancing and professional dancers to help the residents continue dancing. Yet, this only exacerbated the contagion, and by August, the dancing plague had claimed at least 400 victims.

The local physicians declared the dance a natural disease from overheated blood. So, the only cure was for residents to dance themselves free of it. But it wasn't long until the dancing plague took its toll. Many dancers would collapse from exhaustion or unconsciousness, and some even died from heart attacks and strokes. The strange dance mania didn't end until September, when the dancers were whisked away to pray for absolution.

Many explanations for the dancing plague were blamed on demonic possession or curses, but investigators in the 20th century believed otherwise. They suggested that the affected residents may have consumed bread made from rye flour contaminated with the fungal disease ergot, which produces spasms and hallucinations.

But, the most widely accepted theory is that the dancing plague was a mass psychogenic disorder. These outbreaks can occur under certain circumstances of extreme stress and generally take shape based on local fears. A series of famines and diseases like smallpox and syphilis tore through Strasbourg, which may have triggered the stress-induced hysteria.

It is not unreasonable to imagine how the constant fear of death could form panic that led to a mass psychogenic event. But, whatever the cause of this strange phenomenon, the dancing plague remains one of the world's most interesting mysteries.



VICTORY FOR A DISABLED VETERAN

Packard Secured William's Disability Benefits

It's no secret that our Social Security Disability Insurance system is flawed. It can take hours of frustrating phone calls, stacks of paperwork, and months of waiting to successfully file a claim — even if you have proof that you're disabled. Worse, this doesn't only apply to regular workers. Without a lawyer, even disabled veterans face an uphill battle! William Bower, an Army sergeant, discovered this truth the hard way.

The Army retired William due to his injuries, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA) declared him 100% disabled. He assumed filing a Social Security Disability (SSD) claim would be easy, but he was wrong.

"I tried filing on my own, and I was denied twice. I pretty much literally got screwed over by Social Security," William recalls. "It was blatant. They were leaving out information that I was submitting and just railroading me in the process."

After a year and a half of back and forth, William was tired of fighting. The stress of his medical appointments and mounting expenses kept him up at night. So, he looked for the best-reviewed SSD attorney in his area — and found us.

"I spoke to the paralegal at Packard, Edna, and sent her the documentation I had. Of course, she told me my case was amazing, and she had no idea why they would have denied me the first time around. ... They filed my appeal for me, and the process was actually pretty easy once Packard took over," William says.

Our team quickly secured a court date for William, but we didn't stop there. We kept pushing, and our efforts paid off! William's judge agreed to review his case early, and she awarded his SSD benefits two months before his court date.

"I was finally able to step back, get some breathing room, and get ahold of my life," William says. "My hat is off to Packard, and it always will be. Retaining them was worth every penny!"

William truly deserved those SSD benefits, and we're proud to have helped him through the process! If you know someone who has been treated unfairly by Social Security, please send them to us. We would love to help them out in the same way.

WAYS TO BE KIND

Celebrate Random Acts of Kindness Day



RANDOM ACTS of KINDNESS DAY

When I was a kid, my heart ached with sadness every time we passed a car broken down on the side of the road, especially when it was hot outside. I made myself a promise: "When I'm bigger, if I ever see a driver stranded, I'll stop and help them push their car to the shoulder."

I'm proud to say I lived up to that promise! One summer afternoon when I was in high school, I passed through an intersection partially blocked by a car that had broken down at the stoplight. Cellphones weren't commonplace yet, and the woman seemed at a loss for what to do. I quickly pulled into the nearest gas station parking lot, hopped out of my car, and walked over to her.

At first, she looked nervous, but I smiled and said, "I'm here to help! Why don't you put your car in neutral, and I'll push it into the gas station?"

Immense gratitude spread over her face. "Thank you!" she said. A few sweaty minutes later, she was off the road and in a much better spot to get mechanical assistance.

That small act of kindness was over quickly, but it impacted that woman's day greatly, and I drove off feeling more fulfilled. I still smile every time I think about it!

I'm sharing this story because February 17th is Random Acts of Kindness Day, and I hope you'll take the opportunity to make a small, positive impact on someone's life. It doesn't have to be as physically challenging as moving a car or as expensive as paying for someone's grocery bill. A gesture as simple as a smile or kind word can go a long way, especially if you share it with someone feeling lonely or sad.

There are hundreds of free ways to perform an act of kindness: Write someone a note, recommend them a book, or let them cut in line at the grocery store. You can even do one of my favorite acts of kindness when you renew your driver's license: Agree to become an organ donor. Your simple "yes" could save a life!

For more kindness inspiration, check out Reader's Digest's list of "110 Random Acts of Kindness to Make the World a Nicer Place" at RD.com/article/free-random-acts-of-kindness.

—*Michael Packard*

TAKE A BREAK

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Aquarius
Bicycle
Dream
Equality

Festival
Groundhog
King
Lincoln

Muffin
Pancake
Rabbit
Roses

Curried Steak With Scallion Rice and Peas

Inspired by MarthaStewart.com



Ingredients

- 1 lb flank steak, room temperature
- Kosher salt and ground pepper
- 3 tbsp massaman curry paste, divided
- 1 1/4 cups white rice
- 2 1/2 cups water, divided
- 4 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 bunch scallions, thinly sliced, white and light-green parts separated from dark-green tops
- 8 oz sugar snap peas, trimmed and halved on the bias

Directions

1. Season steak with salt and pepper. Brush with 1 tbsp curry paste, and let stand 10 minutes.
2. In a saucepan, combine rice, 1 3/4 cups water, 1 tbsp oil, and 3/4 tsp salt. Bring to a boil, then stir, cover, and reduce heat to low. Simmer about 15 minutes before adding white and light-green scallions. Cover to steam.
3. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Swirl in 1 tbsp oil. Add the steak, flipping once; cook this for 7-9 minutes, then transfer to a carving board.
4. Reduce the skillet to medium heat, then add 1 tbsp oil and the remaining 2 tbsp curry paste. Cook this for 1 minute. Add 3/4 cup water and cook until reduced, about 30 seconds. Transfer to a bowl and cover.
5. Wipe skillet clean, then add remaining 1 tbsp oil. While stirring, add snap peas. Season with salt and cook this until crisp-tender, about 2-3 minutes.
6. Fluff rice before stirring in scallion tops. Slice steak against the grain, then serve with rice, peas, and curry sauce.

The Packard Family Is Here to Help Your Family

Personal Injury
Social Security Disability
Car Accidents
Special Needs Planning

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- 2 The Dancing Plague of 1518
Packard Gives a Veteran Peace of Mind
- 3 Become a Force for Kindness
Curried Steak With Scallion Rice and Peas
- 4 Understanding Internet Crime Laws

STAY SAFE ONLINE!

Guard Your Privacy and Peace of Mind

We live in a digital world where everything can be found online. Whether it's storing data or gaining access to information, we tend to use the internet constantly. With so many innovations and new technologies being created, it's no surprise that cybercrimes are becoming more frequent than ever.

What are cybercrimes?

Cybercrimes are criminal activities that involve computers, networked devices, or networks. These are typically committed by cybercriminals or hackers looking for ways to steal information, damage computers or networks, or make a profit — whether personal or political.

Some types of cybercrimes include:

- Email and internet fraud
- Identity fraud (where personal information is stolen and used)
- Theft of financial or card payment data
- Theft and sale of corporate data
- Infringing copyright
- Selling illegal items online

As more business transactions, such as paying bills, shopping, and trading, have moved online, cybercrimes have affected more people than ever before. Unfortunately, the ill effects often lead to extreme financial ruin for businesses and individuals.

What happens if you're found guilty of cybercrimes?

Laws have been made to address criminal behavior that involves computers, computer systems, and the internet. In fact, each state has its requirements and potential penalties depending on the type of crime — and penalties may be severe, even for first-time offenders.

The penalties could include the following:

Fines

These range widely, but a misdemeanor conviction can result in minor fees

of a few hundred dollars or possibly up to \$1,000. At the same time, felony convictions can have fines of up to \$100,000.

Jail or Prison

If someone is convicted of a specific cybercrime, they can face jail or prison sentences. The most severe crimes can even result in a prison sentence of 20 years or more.

Probation

Depending on the case, a person can be on probation for a year or more and need to report to a probation officer, pay court costs and fines, or maintain employment.

Though technology can make life a little easier, there are dangers we must avoid. So, create strong passwords, keep your systems updated, and be mindful of the information you're giving out.

