

The Columbian
Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by James Ramsay, 9, Vancouver, Silver Star Elementary School



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2007

The rubber band man takes off

If you are a regular reader of this column, you know that I make it my business to report on Stuff That Guys Do. A good example is the sport of snowplow hockey, in which guys driving trucks use their snowplow blades to knock a bowling ball past trucks driven by opposing guys. This is not to be confused with car bowling, in which guys in

low-flying airplanes try to drop bowling balls onto junked cars. I've also reported on guys going off a ski jump in a canoe, and on guys trying to build a huge modernized version of

a catapult-like medieval war weapon and then using it to hurl a Buick 200 yards.

These are guy activities. These are activities that, when you describe them to a group containing both males and females, provoke two very different reactions:

Male reaction: "Cool!" Female reaction: "Why?"

The answer, of course, is: Because guys like to do stuff. This explains both the Space Shuttle and mailbox vandalism.

Today I want to report on another inspiring example of guys doing stuff. There is a guy in Van Nuys (rhymes with "guys"), Calif., who is planning, one day soon, to roll down an airport runway and become the first human in recorded history to take off in an airplane that is powered by a rubber band.

I am not making this up. I have met this guy, a 44-year-old stunt pilot whose name happens to be George Heaven. I have also seen his plane, which he designed, and which is called the Rubber Bandit. Do you remember the little rubber-band planes that you used to assemble from pieces of balsa? This plane looks a lot like those, except that it's 33 feet long, with a wingspan of 71 feet and an 18-foot-long propeller. The body is made from high-tech, super-lightweight carbon fiber, so it weighs only 220 pounds without the rubber band, which weighs 90 pounds.

This is not your ordinary rubber band such as you would steal from the supply cabinet at your office. This is made from a continuous strand of rubber that is a quarter-inch wide and 3½ miles long; if you stretched it out, it would extend for 24 miles, which means that — to put this in scientific terms — if you shot it at somebody, it would sting like a mother.

The rubber band has been folded back over itself 400 times, so now it forms a fat, 25-foot-long, python-like rubber snake on the hangar floor at the Van Nuys Airport. When the big day comes, a winch will wind the rubber band 600 to 800 times, and everybody involved will be very, very careful. You have to watch your step when dealing with your large-caliber rubber bands. I know this from personal experience, because one time a friend of mine named Bill Rose, who is a professional editor at The Miami Herald and who likes to shoot rubber bands at people, took time

BARRY, Page D7

DAVE BARRY is a columnist for the Miami Herald. His classic column was originally published Aug. 3, 1997. He is currently taking a leave of absence from writing his weekly humor column. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.

WATER BOY TEAM PLAYER

Jacob Ellithorpe supports Prairie football squad, but he's not in it for the game



Photos by TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

Jacob Ellithorpe, the water boy for Prairie High School's football team, says he cares at least as much about what's happening on the sidelines and in the stands as he does about what's transpiring on the field. During Prairie's recent loss to Washougal, 42-25, Ellithorpe used the moments between Matt Haly's swigs to survey the student section at Battle Ground's District Stadium.



Prairie High School's football coach, Terry Hyde, talks with players during a timeout while Ellithorpe offers water to the team.

"The football players tell me he's the best water boy, ever."

Ashlie Arola

Jacob Ellithorpe's sister

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

Nobody cheers the water boy. Jacob Ellithorpe understands that much about football. He just isn't sure why he should care. "Sweat," the 16-year-old proudly proclaims, a burst of musk escaping as he opens the door to the boys locker room at Prairie High School, hours before kickoff on a recent Friday night. He walks through the stench, grabs an empty cooler and carries it to the ice machine. Players loaf, listening to country music, while an assistant coach tapes their joints. The coach turns and barks at Ellithorpe, "Don't fill it all of the way up. ... They've got ice at the stadium." A few minutes later, a different coach asks why he hasn't filled the cooler with ice yet.

Ellithorpe sits on that compromisingly half-full cooler in the hallway outside the locker room, waiting for the varsity players to get ready and the team bus to leave for Battle Ground's District Stadium. The freshman Falcons meanwhile finish practice. Ellithorpe, a junior, gets up and holds the door for the younger boys. Most don't acknowledge him. He sits back down. Then one of the stragglers says, "Hey!"

Ellithorpe looks up eagerly, only to have the boy command: "Pull my shoe off." Ellithorpe hurries over to yank on the cleat. The boy doesn't bother to thank him afterward.

While football is for the strongest and fastest kids, everybody knows that the water boy isn't. That job typically gets assigned to the injured, the ineligible and the athletically inept. Ellithorpe — 5 feet 8 inches tall, 150 pounds — acknowledges that he "runs like a girl." He doesn't even like to watch the game that closely. He prefers staring at the antics of the crowd. But he wants to be part of a team. He wants to do something good. That's how he justifies spending his spare time in a place that smells like an old wet shoe.

Michelle Krieg, coach Terry Hyde's daughter, met Ellithorpe at Evergreen High School before he transferred to Prairie. Krieg wants her special education students to learn how to read and do math, but she also looks for ways to fit them into the mainstream. Nothing makes a person more American today than football. So when Hyde and Krieg's former pupil, who struggles with attention deficit disorder, both ended up at Prairie,

WATER BOY, Page D11

Kerouac classic reads differently today

By CHRISTOPHER REYNOLDS
Los Angeles Times

Jack Kerouac slept where? Fifty years ago this month, the Beat Generation writer's novel "On the Road" hit bookstores, its story told in breathless, jazz-inflected cadences, its plot lifted from the author's life. It follows two friends and their assorted pals on four cross-country road trips, their adventures packed with enough fast chatter to make Aaron Sorkin's

More travel stories, D4-5

head spin, enough drink and drugs and casual sex to satisfy a platoon of rock stars, enough discovery and enthusiasm and motion and exclamation points and careening overloaded sentences to give any reader a pang of wanderlust.

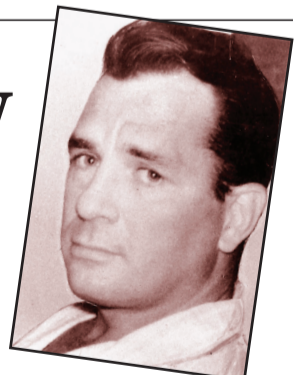
But have you looked at those pages lately? If you do and you're older than 30, Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty

(Kerouac's names for himself and his mercurial friend Neal Cassady) might seem more desperate and doomed than you remember. And the North America they're exploring might seem far away indeed. (For details, consult the blog www.littourature.blogspot.com.)

As you check this 21st century charting of Sal's travels, remember that it was 1948 and 1949 when Kerouac and Cassady made the trips that domi-

nate "On the Road," 1951 when Kerouac wrote the bulk of the book and 1957 when Viking published it. Cassady died at 41 in 1968, Kerouac at 47 in 1969. In both deaths, alcohol was implicated.

KEROUAC, Page D7



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Jesse Gunnels, 17, left, a junior defensive tackle, was unable to play for the Prairie High School football team recently because of a mild concussion he suffered during practice the day before the game. So Gunnels was asked to help water boy Jake Ellithorpe carry a cooler filled with water and ice.

"I just like doing it for the football players. I just like to be helpful. It's fun to be helpful."

Jacob Ellithorpe
Prairie Falcons water boy

Whatever the score, water boy Ellithorpe is happy just to have the opportunity to be helpful to his Prairie High School classmates.

Photos by TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian



Water boy:

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Krieg asked her father if he needed an assistant.

"It's fun to be down there (on the field)," Krieg says. "It's exciting. To me, it would be the same as playing. Because you're involved. ... Kids that participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to get invited into a group. Those that don't, they are less likely."

Ellithorpe's primary job is to keep water bottles full and ready for players to squirt the liquid through the holes in their face masks. His spotlight moment is when he gets to run onto the field during time-outs to pass around the drinks. He might not ever get a mention over the loudspeakers, but he's learned from coaches how important it is for him to do his part.

He's been told that athletes essentially are water-burning machines. Two-thirds of their bodies, and 95 percent of their brains, are made of

the liquid. It's the fuel and lubricant for every human process, from running and tackling to executing plays or analyzing defenses. Each part of the game therefore hinges on hydration.

Ellithorpe's role is one of the many underappreciated aspects of the high school football spectacle. Parents volunteer their Friday nights to rip tickets into stubs and sell sweatshirts and sodas. Band members study and rehearse the rousing music they play. Referees absorb ridicule from both sidelines. Without the fans, it's just a scrimmage. Somebody has to clean the stadium afterward. Someone has to transport the team back to the school as well as take the kids to the game in the first place.

The bus driver on this particular night is Dave Coghlan, who enthusiastically greets Ellithorpe as he loads the coolers and water bottles. Coghlan asks, "So, you're in charge of all of the equipment?"

Ellithorpe responds, "The water." "I did that 20 years ago," Coghlan says. "When I had hair."

He rubs his bald head and reminisces, "Yeah, that was fun."

The players quickly fill the bus. They are quiet, trying to concentrate on the game. Coghlan recites various safety procedures, before adding: "And win tonight!" He extends a double thumbs-up sign. The team roars back its approval.

Upon arrival at the stadium, Ellithorpe and a couple of the injured players carry the equipment from the bus to the field. One of them grabs a cooler out of Ellithorpe's hands, stacks another one on top of it, and as he carries the heavy load remarks: "Dude, it helps to get stronger."

Sweat beads on the wispy moustache hair of Ellithorpe as he finishes filling the water bottles. He takes off his Prairie High School hat and sweatshirt to reveal a Prairie High School T-shirt underneath. The stadium lights illuminate his yawn.

He likes to toss the ball with his father, Vern Balkowitsch Jr., but when he flashes his hands open to a couple of teammates playing catch, the universal sign for "throw it to me," they don't. So he puts his hands in his pocket and turns back to the water bottles.

During the game, many of the players treat him with the same

disregard they'd reserve for a faucet. Most just yell "Water!"

Prairie falls behind to Washougal 14-0 early in the second quarter, when junior wide receiver and cornerback Myles McDonald comes to the sideline and asks Ellithorpe for a drink. Ellithorpe pats McDonald on the back and says, "You're doing a good job." McDonald replies, "Hey, you, too."

After Washougal scores again a few minutes later, boosting the lead to three touchdowns, McDonald is back for more water. He grins when Ellithorpe innocently asks, "Is it almost halftime?" He politely says, "Not yet."

At the break, Ellithorpe finds his stepmother, Sonja Balkowitsch, in the crowd, and they watch his sister, Ashlie Arola, dance as part of the halftime entertainment. Balkowitsch says that Ellithorpe's involvement with the football team and the unconditional friendship he has with his sister, and his sister's friends, has helped to boost the teen's self-esteem. Ellithorpe now has a girlfriend. He tells Balkowitsch that he's going to ask the girl to the homecoming dance. He also giddily tells his stepmother that when he was walking around the grandstand, looking for her, another girl slapped him on the backside. Balkowitsch

says, "He's just come out of his clamshell."

When the game continues, one member of the crowd is watching the water boy. Physical education teacher Wade Janssen spots the teen on the sideline and comments, "In my class, at first, he wouldn't say a word. Kids teased him. They don't do that anymore. ... Now look at him. He wouldn't have just come up to other students like that and started talking to them a couple of years ago." His sister, Arola, adds, "The football players tell me he's the best water boy, ever."

That's why, regardless of score, Ellithorpe appears unfazed by the action on the field. He's not motivated by points, wins or a remote shot at glory. He sometimes doesn't even know who's playing.

"I just like doing it for the football players," he said. "I just like to be helpful. It's fun to be helpful."

His satisfaction comes from merely carrying a cooler, heavy with ice and water, from the spigot to the sidelines with a teammate. As he does this, one of the hurt players, Zack Uskoski, says to the two, "Good job, guys." The player with Ellithorpe scoofs and scurries away to play some more catch. Uskoski looks at the water boy and earnestly adds, "I'm serious."

"He's just come out of his clamshell."

Sonja Balkowitsch

Jacob Ellithorpe's stepmother

SUDOKU PUZZLE SOLUTION

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