

# Tongue in Cheek: Nephews, Birthdays & Other Scary Things

**M**y nephew just turned 10. Which can mean only one thing. I'll turn 40 soon.

Which is a bit unusual to admit, since I'm currently 33, and I have been for a while now. If you're familiar with Christian tradition, I've always said that if 33 was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me. That's my story, and I'm sticking to it. And my significant other has been trained to always get a cake that reads "Happy 33rd."

But I'll soon add another decade. So I wondered, can I maintain my solidarity with Jesus at 40? Does standing firm with Jesus trump violating one of the Ten Commandments? The one that reads, "Thou shalt not tell a big honking lie?"

And what will I be in gay years? Will I be 72? Or will I suddenly start going to the gym again, bulk up, and start going out dancing with 20-somethings? (You know you've seen the guys who do this.) My visible abs went missing a few years back. Should I finally send out that search party for them?

How could I answer this multitude of questions? The answer was simple. Delay thinking. Preferably by making my life at the moment as complex as possible.

You see, my nephew asked for one thing for his tenth birthday: a trip to the beach with Uncle Kevin. I was only too happy to oblige. Besides, the kid is waging a terrific war against his cerebral palsy, and when he's not being a totally obstinate pain of a second grader, has the sweetest demeanor you could imagine.

But my nephew spends part of the summer with my mom, and Mother is most definitely NOT a beach person, but she is a history buff. After diligent non-age-related research, I found Ponte Vedra Beach. No shark attacks this summer, and not too far from the historic towns of St. Augustine and Fernandina. My significant other, Derek, and I could take the nephew to the beach in the morning, not worry too much about the nephew actually becoming some fish's lunch, and we could look at historical places in the

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afternoon with Mom.

When Mom and my nephew arrived very late due to hurricane-related flight delays, I should have known this was a sign of things to come. For instance, Mother is also NOT a big fan of animals in the house. No sooner had we sat down in the den to visit for a few minutes before bed, than Miranda, one of my cats, decided to plop down on the rug in front of us, hike up her hind leg in the air, and enthusiastically lick herself clean in those hard-to-reach spots. Fortunately, my mom appreciates my twisted sense of humor. I smiled approvingly, looked at everyone, and said in my best proud-parent voice, "You know, it's hard work to get to all the tasty places." Derek put his head in his hands, while Mom giggled.

When we arrived at the resort, which was lovely, Derek realized that he was getting more than he'd bargained for. I'd been too cheap to book a suite (and in my defense, it hadn't been clear that Derek could go ... that's my story, and I'm sticking to it).

So my nephew and my mom shared a bed right next to Derek's and my bed. And no, sleeping with the mother-in-law was probably not at the top of either Derek's or my mother's to-do list. But a family that snores together, stays together. And on the upside for Derek and me, how many other mothers would share a hotel room with their son's significant other? Certainly not Derek's, whom I've never met. (Hey, maybe I could next focus on misguided fundamentalists as another distraction from my upcoming birthday!)

It worked out pretty well, though. Every morning, Derek and I took my nephew to the beach, leaving Mom to get

ready at her leisure. At the beach, my nephew loved collecting shells. Every shell. On a beach with thousands of shells. When I told him there were plenty of shells, and he could stop collecting long enough to go in the water with me, he looked up at me and said, "I just can't help myself. I see shells, and I have to collect them!" I think he could be a shop-a-holic someday. Just wait'll I teach him about shoes.

Back from the beach, we'd find Mom doing her morning walk through the air-conditioned hotel, and then I would help my nephew shower (me in a swimsuit, of course - no Michael Jackson moments here). I learned that showers went by with much less complaining if we set it to song. "Wash! Wash! Wash! ... Wash your (insert name of body part here) now!" with a reggae inflection was a big hit.

Dinners were also an adventure. I taught him how to eat Alaskan snow crab legs. There's something wonderfully primitive about bonding over food you have to rip apart with your bare hands. He'd snap open a leg, and I'd grunt. Then I'd break open a claw, and he'd snort approvingly. It was like a cave-man dinner with Ug and Gar, while Mom and Derek politely ignored us.

We returned home from the beach well-fed, tired and satisfied. Which, coincidentally, was exactly the same way Miranda looked.

And I'd had nary a thought of my upcoming birthday. Which, I realized, was probably exactly the way it should be.▼

*Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or KevinIsom.com.*

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