

TWENTY SOMETHING  
by thomas henning

20.s

## Action Counts

When I was growing up, there was this property on the way to school that kids would use as a shortcut. It was local legend that the old man of the house sat on the porch that overlooked his lawn, which was the short cut, with a rifle, and would shoot at you if he saw you. Now, this man never left the house and thus was never seen by the neighborhood kids. Also, we never knew of anyone that actually got shot at, but we were young enough that we believed.

Strangely enough, this never deterred us from taking our lives into our hands to shave two minutes off of our commute to grade school. I remember walking with my younger brothers and formulating the battle plan. "We are going to walk down the driveway and when we turn the corner, we run. Weave through the trees for protection and I'll see you on the other side." Sometimes I would grip one of my younger brother's hands and just pull him behind me as I darted to the other side of the lawn. Occasionally he would lose his footing and trip, but I never stopped. There I would be with a book bag in one hand and my brother in the other, running like an Olympic hopeful as my brother bounced behind me like a rag doll, terrified to make a noise (thus attracting the murderous old man's attention).

I remember tripping once. Like a scene from a bad war movie I was trapped in enemy territory. Disoriented, with my book bag out of reach, I remember saying to my brothers, "Run, go on without me." I had stopped, dropped, and rolled right into an oak tree, and thought that today would be the day that I would meet my maker. On some level, I was fine with that. From a young age, I had wanted to have a conversation with the entity who had such a perverse sense of humor as to gift me with an Iowan father and a Greek mother, and then have us live in a rural New Hampshire town filled with Finnish Lutherans. I mean, I was ready to sit down and ask the hard-hitting questions.

The one thing that inspired

me to save myself was that it was Wednesday, which meant that it was Welsh Rarebit day in the cafeteria. Now, Welsh Rarebit day actually meant saltines with melted Velveeta over it, but I was nine years old, and at the time it was nirvana – that and the carrot cake muffins the goddesses known as the lunch ladies would make. Faced with the fact that I might never sit down to Welsh Rarebit again, I decided to save myself.

What was really helpful was all the training that I had received at the hands of my father. You see, my father had served in Vietnam, and had learned a few tactical maneuvers he willingly shared with his young boys. By the time we had reached double digits, we knew more than thirty ways to kill someone. My brother Michael's favorite involved the nose and a bone piercing your brain – very Steven Seagal. (Along with the proper mercenary training to protect ourselves had the Sandinistas actually attacked the U.S. in the late '70s/early '80s, we also learned hand-to-hand combat, how to read moss on trees, the old dodge and crawl technique, and how to make a tasty gnat and ant pate if trapped in the forest past dinner.)

So, there I am practically making love to an oak tree, legs in the air and ass to the sky, when I channeled my favorite action hero: I asked myself how Kelly – of Charlie's Angels – would handle this. So I rolled to my feet, tossed my hair, and dove for the book bag. No shots fired. I rolled again, making sure not to get grass stains on my pants in case of a close-up. I looked to the left, looked to the right, smiled, another hair toss attempt, and started to make a run for it. Just then I noticed that the porch was empty, vacant, no sniper in site. My theme music came to a crashing halt. My stop, drop, and roll was for naught. I had been tricked, duped, and played. I continued to run, just in case he was lurking, but deep in my heart I knew that he was not.

I never took that shortcut again. The thrill was gone. It was now just some geriatric's lawn that I would tear

up to make up for time lost watching morning cartoons. Welsh Rarebit was never the same again, either. I had been disillusioned, and there was no going back. I continued to watch Charlie's Angels, though, because it continued to inspire me. Kelly and Sabrina were my heroes, as was Barbara Gordon, a.k.a. Batgirl. Loved her. Anyway, I digress. There could be a whole series of articles on my love for female action heroes.

My point is this: throughout life, we stumble upon these myths that add adventure to our lives. Things that make our hearts and pulses quicken and add dimension to our lives. Some are innocent, and some are not so much. I think it's great to have those little myths that help us to escape, even for a couple of minutes. They make our lives a tad more colorful. I think it builds character and compassion to step outside your box and experience something you wouldn't normally have the chance to, appreciating the things you take for granted in your life. Life is short, play hard, isn't that the saying? I say life is short, chances to really live it are shorter, so don't play hard, play harder, and if you ever find yourself in a bind, remember: stop, drop, roll, and toss your hair with a smile. ▼

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## Wanted: Twenty Something Columnist

Columnists... they grow up so fast.

Why, it seems like just yesterday that Thomas was bursting with the need to document the joy, the angst, the je ne sais quoi that is being 20something. (In actual fact, it was yesterday, and it'll be a few more tomorrows, too.)

But he stands on the brink of 30somethinghood, ready to traverse new landscapes, and we find ourselves with a hole in our hearts, not to mention our pages.

Who can step into these shoes? Someone with a finger on the youthful pulse of the community; someone blessed with the gift of wordcraft; someone unafraid to commit to deadline. Someone with... did we mention je ne sais quoi?

If you think yours is the voice to fill the void, send an inquiry to  
editor@mountainpridemedia.org.