

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

Have you seen the market lately? Of course you have. How can you miss it? Our media bombards us with messages of daily economic turmoil, and the minute by minute fluctuation of the Dow. Television is a wasteland of the same nightly iteration: another down day on Wall Street and continued economic insecurity. It would be nice to wish it all away, but we are in the midst of an economic storm that was a long time in coming and will be a long time in going.

As a result, I've been working a lot. My industry is banking. Yes, banking. I'm working under a lot of extra added pressure as our national financial institutions seemed to fall like dominos with seemingly no one knowing which domino will tip over next. Fortunately, the good news is that my own institution is doing well. But this means more clients seeking support, understanding and assistance from a stable bank, an island in the stream of a rough and tumble, white-water economy. I shouldn't complain. But man! It's exhausting.

This leaves little energy for other aspects of life, even the important things, like my kids.

A couple of weeks ago, I dragged myself home after an exhausting day on the thrill ride of modern banking, tie and shirt collar loosened thoroughly, brief case in hand, bags under my eyes, secretly wishing to be get away for awhile, but instead feeling a deep relief upon seeing the great loves of my life, my wife and my children. I slipped out of my suit coat and into my place at the dinner table grateful to be home and surrounded by my loved ones.

"Daddy," my daughter beamed, "I can't wait to go on our campout. I just love Friday nights decorating the cabin!" I mustered a queasy smile and said something like that's great honey, but felt my stomach sink at the thought of squeezing a campout with my daughter into my life of economic crisis.

My daughter and I always attend the additional Friday night on campouts. I wondered how I could get away or muster the energy to shift gears and be an attentive dad on a campout. My bones felt tired and I wanted to simply forget the upcoming campout. But my Illini tribe, both Guides and Princesses, have a long, storied history of attending campouts on both Friday and Saturday nights. It's an extended stay and we get the most out of every campout.

Friday nights on any campout really make it a special experience. I've written about this. Take a look at an old Rumblings of mine "Friday Night Magic." (See www.yigp.org, Smoke Signals, September 2007.) Friday night at a campout is a heart warming tradition. Even all the Illini wives know the drill. They see the thrill brewing a couple of weeks before camp reaching a crescendo of excitement the night before heading out. Nightly at the dinner table little braves and little princesses pelt us with questions like what we will do, when we will leave, all with a near-delirious delight.

And now, here I was dog tired, beat up by this crisis in our economy, and my daughter was beginning the anticipatory excitement for our next campout and our traditional Friday night fun and magic. But all I wanted was a far away cave with a bed and a soft pillow. A bunk in a cabin was the last place I wanted to be.

But the campout was a couple of weeks away. I thought by then surely I would dig out from under, screw on a good attitude and be in the moment for my daughter. In fact, I planned ahead and emptied my calendar for the Friday of our campout. I took the day off. That was the plan at least, to

take the day off, decompresses, maybe get in some golf, pack with deliberateness, and be ready for my daughter.

Fast forward a couple of weeks and the Friday of our campout arrived. I had hoped to spend a leisurely morning playing golf with some dads from our tribe before heading up to our camp at Sherman Lakes. After golf I had envisioned a lazy lunch with my wife before carefully packing the van and heading out for a slow ride to Michigan to camp with my daughter.

So much for plans. The weight of the economy changed all that. I cancelled my tee time with tribal dads and went to work. There were clients, wringing their hands over the economic turmoil, who needed my time and attention. In fairness to their plight, I spent hours with them and the morning turned to afternoon, and the campout seemed farther and farther away.

When long last work was done, I raced home, scooped up all our campout stuff, not being sure I had grabbed everything, stuffed it all into the van, buckled my daughter into the middle row of seats and zoomed away to pick up young Princess Little Rose and her dad, Pale Leopard. I handed the keys to Pale Leopard. "Please just drive." I asked. "Get us to Sherman Lakes." I hopped in the passenger seat, borrowed some aspirin from Mrs. Leopard, sent out some last minute emails and then sat silently for a few moments in a daze, settling in for the long ride to camp with much on my mind. Thank goodness Pale Leopard drove because I would not have made it past the village limits in my mental fog. The girls were giggling in the back seat, the DVD overhead began playing some movie and I drifted away.

Upon arriving at camp, and, after another fine meal compliments of our Illini Chefs Big Bear and Shinning Moon, I sat in my chair around the campfire staring at the bright stars shinning like stage lights from above. It was then a pleasant thought crossed my mind: Crisis? What crisis?

I was now among old friends. And I was also with new friends, the new dads I've only recently got know who have become my Illini buddies. The girls were in the cabin decorating for a Halloween Spook Fest they planned to hold on Saturday night when the rest of the Federation campers arrived. My gnawing concerns about our economic ills subsided. Looking up at the stars, feeling the warmth of our fire, I realized this economic storm shall eventually subside. It's a big problem, but just another problem that should not derail us from the greatest asset in our economy – family.

In the personal balance sheet of each of our lives, our most treasured asset is always home, spouse and children. And every investment you make in your family is one of time. Our true well being, our vitality as dads and men, is not measured by the size of one's wallet or 401K. The measure of a man is his generosity with time, which should be showered on his children and spouse.

This campout, which I felt to tired to attend, was devoted to time with my daughter: swimming, canoeing and walking around camp holding hands as we enjoyed a blissful weekend together. As we sat in the dinning hall after breakfast Sunday morning, I hugged my daughter, because I was thankful for the great weekend we spent together. In a few years, when we are out of this economic turmoil, she won't remember the financial crisis; she'll simply recall her time spent with dad.

Spending time with our kids is wonderful for their development. But it is also a great antidote for our crazy world. Our Federation provides the opportunity; all you need to do is simply show up. I just spent a terrific weekend with my young daughter, enjoyed the camaraderie of some great guys and recharged my batteries. Crisis? What crisis?

Tom Estey, Federation Chief Silver Cloud