

The Good of Life through a Viewfinder

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It may be I have a case of selective memory, but Stewart Pittman's *karma* essay made me sad. Having been out of the news business for a few years now, I might have forgotten the sense of all-bad-news, all-the-time that dominates many days in TV news—but I don't think so. When I speak to my current students and to high school and middle school kids, here's what I tell them about the news business: It's like you are attending a lot of weddings and a lot of funerals, but there is also a lot of life in between and we should not forget about it.

The first story *I* ever shot as a professional was at an Anchorage, Alaska hospital—the shooting and editing were horrible as I look at it today, but I'll never forget the goofy clown-faced magician (an air force officer by day) who brought smiles to the faces of sick kids. He did simple tricks with ropes and cards, but I can still hear the giggles in the rooms. Here are some of my other memories—and I like to think *these* make up my karma in the news world.

- The joy of an apple grower as he walked through a people-packed market in Tokyo and saw *his* red and shining Washington apples in Japan for the first time in over 30 years. Right there next to the famous Fujis – Wenatchee Valley apples stacked in big boxes with *Washington* written on the side. A little piece of the trade wall came down right there.
- A newly minted presidential contender named Bill Clinton walking around a huge conference table in a downtown hotel. He shook the hand of *every* journalist in the room, not just the reporters'. We all witnessed the look-you-in-the-eye charisma for which he became famous in the coming eight years.
- Floating over Seattle in a Goodyear blimp and getting to *pilot* for a few minutes with a huge ship's helm-like wheel.
- Flying over amazing natural wonders in Alaska, Washington and Oregon: the hazy blue 100-ft face of a glacier, 14,000 ft. Mount Rainier with its own mammoth glaciers, a 3000-mile long pipeline snaking like a metal river across remote Alaska.
- Being aboard on the decommissioning cruise of the *USS Pintado* in Puget Sound (and realizing I could have never made it as an elite submariner – 4 hours was enough!). I squeezed through tiny berthing bays, walked amongst torpedoes and was told that the sailors preferred to sleep under these rather than in the too-short bunks.
- Tears welling up in my eyes behind my viewfinder, as I watched a 10-yr-old boy at a food bank with his mom at Christmastime. Out back in the parking lot was a new bike – as he ran to it he was gleeful – “a bike, a bike....then new I wanted a bike!” The staff at the food bank laughed at me when I walked back inside wiping my eyes, but their smiles at my emotions made me proud. My heart is soft, but sometimes I put up some big walls to protect myself.
- Rocking and rolling along the coast off of Westport, Washington in a Coast Guard ship that reminded me of the toy Weebles – back and forth and back and forth, seemingly going over at any moment. The reporter and I howled with laughter as

- we were tossed around. Maybe I should have had a clue when we all clipped into harnesses and were then clipped *onto* the boat in the pilothouse. We were in for a ride—better and wetter than any amusement park ride ever experienced!
- Listening to nano-technologists, molecular biologists, relational therapists and neuro-scientists at the University of Washington as they spoke of cutting-edge research and showed us around the wonders of their labs. Those blue-hued images from deep inside bodies mesmerizing and awe-inspiring. I always walked away from these stories thinking “wow – cool!”
 - Thousands of Boeing workers in an immense hangar cheering the rollout of the 777 airliner (and recently the 787) – this was their baby. Their pride filled the air and when the speeches were over they touched the skin of the fuselage and wings as if it were a dream come true. Imagine spending years at a computer and then seeing your work in all of its *real* glory—those images on your screen turned into an airplane.
 - Standing at Mile-Zero of the Alaska pipeline and simply thinking “wow...that thing goes a long long ways.” I thought of the thousands who worked on this dream —toiling in the dark and cold of winter and against great odds to build an oil pipeline across a huge expanse of wilderness.
 - Running from a wall of tear gas during Seattle’s WTO demonstrations—all while on the air—and thinking “get me out of here,” but also thinking about the passion of the mob protesters and their freedom to express themselves.
 - And finally, listening to a brother in his fifties talk about his sister, “she had a smile as wide as she was tall—and she was six-foot one.” Yes, it was after his sister had died in the crash of Alaska Flight 261 in January of 2000 and he cried and we cried. I have rarely felt so privileged to be there to hear and hear that one sentence.

A long time ago an old friend – a pastor named Bruce Larson said, “go into life and your work thinking—‘hit the ball to me.’ In other words, don’t fear what is coming at you—you are prepared. Even in the hard stories—and yes, in nearly 20 years in the news business I have seen plenty of bodies, tears and funerals—there is responsibility to be respectful, to speak some word of comfort, to pray if that is a part of who you are. Yes, I too am asked, “have you seen bodies and stuff?” And I always say “yes, but the greatest part of being a photojournalist is that I’ve heard thousands of stories, celebrated hundreds of triumphs, and laughed and cried and *felt* along the way. I *do* have tough images seared in my memory, but I like to think I might have said, “I love you” a few more times because of seeing life at its most fragile.